Navigating Uncertainty: Challenges, Aspirations, and Perspectives of Potential Afghan Migrants in Pakistan

PARIM-II Final Report

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Executive summary

Building on prior research on potential Pakistani migrants, the PARIM-II project delves into the migration intentions, drivers, and information-seeking patterns of Afghan migrants in Pakistan, particularly those living in the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's districts of Haripur, Mansehra, Mardan, and Peshawar. Its primary goal is to inform the development and implementation of a migration information campaign that will provide accurate information to individuals, promote informed decision-making, and mitigate the risks associated with irregular migration. The following key lessons are drawn from the PARIM-II research:

Migrant Profile: The typical potential Afghan migrant in Pakistan is a Pashtun male under the age of 35, married, with primary to secondary education, and earning a low income (less than EUR 167 per month). While intentions to migrate are high (93%), the tendency to migrate irregularly is comparatively low (41%). The typical individual considering irregular migration is slightly younger (between the ages of 18 and 25), with up to a secondary level of education, and a higher likelihood of working as a daily wager. On the contrary, women with irregular migration intentions are between 26 and 35 years old, typically do not participate in the labour force, and lack formal education. Irregular migration intentions are more prevalent in the Mardan district for both genders.

Drivers of Migration: Push factors such as the threat of forced return to Afghanistan and limited livelihood opportunities in Pakistan are significant drivers of migration aspirations among Afghan nationals. Many potential migrants perceive their current situation as intolerable due to economic insecurity, lack of employment opportunities, and the uncertain legal status as refugees or asylum seekers in Pakistan. The threat of forced return exacerbates their desire to seek better opportunities elsewhere.

Furthermore, misconceptions about the cost of irregular migration and the availability of legal pathways persist among potential migrants. While some believe that irregular migration is a cheaper and more accessible choice than legal avenues, others are unaware of the existing legal options available for migration. This misinformation contributes to the inclination towards irregular migration and emphasises the importance of providing accurate and accessible information on legal migration channels and associated costs.

Regarding migration destinations, Europe, particularly Germany and France, emerged as the top-choice destination, followed by UK and Canada. Interestingly, for female respondents, the Gulf Cooperation Council countries ranked as the second most favoured destination after Europe. The primary driving factor behind these destination choices was the economic opportunities available in the chosen countries.

Role of Social Networks and Credible Messengers: Social networks, both local and abroad, play a significant role in influencing migration decisions and providing migration-related information. Friends and family within Pakistan and Afghanistan are often instrumental in encouraging or even pressuring individuals to consider migration. Conversely, social networks abroad play a crucial role in providing relevant migration information.

Financial support also emerges as a crucial aspect, with friends and family within Pakistan playing a substantial role by providing loans or direct contributions to facilitate migration. Contrary to findings in other research, institutional actors such as NGOs and governmental institutions are considered valuable sources of support in migration planning. Reliance on NGOs (61%) surpasses

that on friends and family (28%), highlighting their significance in assisting potential migrants.

Moreover, there is a surprising level of trust in governmental institutions, with embassies (52%) and local police (23%) being perceived as sources of assistance for irregular migrants facing challenges during their journey. The role of migration agents, although prominent as a source of migration information, is not as pronounced as expected.

While the role of returnees is not as significant as other sources, it must be noted that potential Afghan migrants may not always have close contact with Afghan returnees in their everyday lives. Understanding the dynamics of these social networks and leveraging them for information dissemination is fundamental for effective communication strategies. Recognising these networks' influence and reach, efforts should be made to maximise their potential as channels for delivering accurate and timely migration-related information. Engaging with community leaders, religious figures, and influential individuals within these networks can enhance the credibility and effectiveness of campaigns. Additionally, using digital platforms and social media channels can broaden the reach of messages, especially among younger groups who are more digitally connected. By using the power of social networks, stakeholders can better engage with potential migrants and address their information needs in a targeted and culturally sensitive manner.

Knowledge on Migration and Risk Awareness: Our research reveals that potential migrants show diverse levels of knowledge and awareness concerning migration risks, rights, and available services. While some individuals have a comprehensive understanding of the challenges and opportunities associated with migration, others may have limited awareness or misconceptions regarding these aspects.

A lot of respondents expressed scepticism about their knowledge levels on migration. This scepticism presents an opportunity for the campaign, as individuals with lower awareness and confidence in their knowledge are more likely to be receptive to campaign messaging. Higher levels of education corresponded with increased confidence in knowledge about migration, migrant rights, knowledge of preferred destination, and the accuracy of knowledge on migration options. This suggests – as one might expect – that targeted messaging may be more effective for individuals with higher education levels.

Respondents with 'definite' intentions or those who reported being 'most likely' to migrate irregularly exhibited greater confidence in their knowledge levels on migration topics. While this means that these individuals are probably less likely influenced by information campaigns, it also means that individuals who were uncertain about their intentions to migrate irregularly may be more receptive to campaign messaging due to their lower levels of information on relevant topics.

Regarding the perceptions of risks encountered by irregular migrants on their journey, the three most cited concerns were hunger and thirst, risks to life or health, and mistreatment by border authorities. However, there were significant variations in the perception of these risks across districts. Notably, while the risks of hunger/thirst and life/health dangers are relatively minimal in Haripur, mistreatment by border authorities and incidents of kidnapping are notably elevated in this district.

When it comes to challenges expected at the destination, these included acquiring legal protection for irregular migrants, employment issues, and finding accommodation. While the lack of legal protection is the main source of concern for the entire sample, those planning irregular migration expressed greater concern about finding accommodation. This highlights the importance of providing up-to-date

information on legal protections, employment opportunities, and accommodation challenges as part of the campaign messaging.

Overall, these insights underscore the importance of tailoring campaign messaging to address the diverse knowledge levels and risk perceptions among potential migrants. By providing targeted information and addressing specific concerns, the campaign can effectively engage and enhance individuals' ability to make informed decisions about migration while mitigating potential risks and access support services throughout their migration journey.

Level of preparation for migration: A considerable proportion of potential migrants indicated no preparatory steps prior to embarking on their migration journey (54%), a trend notably pronounced in Haripur (74%) and Mansehra (59%). This lack of readiness underscores the necessity for comprehensive guidance and support systems to help individuals in effectively navigating the complexities associated with migration. When queried about the primary challenges encountered in preparing for migration, half of the respondents cited financing migration, followed by difficulties accessing pertinent information (27%). Despite the lack of preparatory actions and challenges in preparing for the journey, a significant majority (93%) expressed readiness to travel to their intended destination (fully, adequately, or somewhat prepared).

These findings highlight a lack of awareness among prospective migrants concerning the requisite steps and potential challenges awaiting them at their destination. Without adequate knowledge and preparation, individuals may encounter heightened risks and obstacles both during their migration journey and upon reaching their destination. The absence of preparatory measures underscores the critical need for targeted guidance and support for prospective migrants, encompassing essential aspects such as acquiring necessary documentation, understanding legal frameworks and rights, accessing healthcare services, securing accommodation, and identifying employment opportunities.

Preferred sources of information on migration: Developing communication strategies that effectively engage potential migrants requires the use of a wide range of media that are tailored to their preferences and accessibility. Analysis of preferred information channels reveals a significant preference for social media (62%), followed distantly by communication with Family and Friends Abroad (24%) and TV News (16%). Notably, 10% of respondents expressed uncertainty about available information channels.

Preferences about communication channels varied across regions. While social media emerged as the preferred channel overall, this trend is particularly pronounced in Haripur (80%). In contrast, face-to-face interactions are favoured in Mardan and Peshawar, a preference also observed among the younger demographic (aged 18 to 25 years).

In this context, it is critical to acknowledge the language and cultural variety of the target communities. Communication materials should be designed in multiple languages, including Pashto and Dari, to enhance accessibility and ensure cultural relevance. Incorporating local idioms, symbols, and images strengthens connections with audiences, fostering inclusivity and understanding. Establishing feedback mechanisms and monitoring systems is crucial for assessing the efficacy of communication efforts and refining strategies based on audience feedback and evolving needs. Continuous data collection on engagement metrics, audience demographics, and community feedback enables ongoing assessment and optimization of

communication channels and messaging approaches. By remaining adaptable and responsive, communication strategies can effectively meet the evolving needs of potential migrants amid changing circumstances.

Message Framing: Our research shows that potential migrants prioritise information on migrant rights (44%), available services (37%), and integration opportunities in destination countries (24%) over migration risks and costs. This preference varies across age groups, with younger individuals (18-35 years) placing greater emphasis on migrant rights, while older cohorts (>36 years) focus more on accessing migrant services. Significant variations also exist across districts, with individuals in Mardan prioritising information on migrant rights (67%), while in Haripur the focus is on migrant services (52%) and in Mansehra on finding employment opportunities (35%).

Stakeholders stress the importance of providing information on documentation, legal pathways, and financial resources, indicating a need for tailored campaigns. Regional disparities further underscore the necessity for context-specific approaches, particularly in areas like Mardan, where heightened concern for migration risks and costs is observed.

Furthermore, potential migrants intending to migrate irregularly prioritise information on agent selection and migration costs and risks, underscoring diverse informational needs. Financial challenges, perceived lack of legal pathways, and awareness of migration risks emerge as key concerns. While some perceive irregular migration as more affordable (41%), a significant proportion expresses awareness of legal pathways, particularly for humanitarian visas (45%).

Messaging campaigns should address these concerns, striking a balance between negative and positive messages to offer concrete support and highlight opportunities for regular migration. Effective migration campaigns should consider demographic and regional dynamics, aligning with migrants' interests and tailoring messaging to diverse informational needs.

Role of Migrant Resource Centres: Migrant Resource Centres (MRCs) are essential for providing potential migrants with correct information, direction, and assistance during their migration process. Among the whole sample, 376 individuals reached out to the MRCs for assistance. Notably, most of these interactions came from individuals in Haripur (168), likely due to its proximity to the MRC in Islamabad. Additionally, it is noteworthy that 74 individuals engaged with an MRC in Mardan through social media, a substantially higher number compared to other districts. The extremely favourable answers on the value of MRC support are particularly remarkable, especially from individuals who, regardless of age group, are likely or very likely to move within the next two years.

Considering these results, MRCs should increase their outreach initiatives and community engagement while offering tailored support systems to address specific issues and concerns. This calls for strengthening the capacities of volunteers and employees as well as forming strong alliances with international organisations, governmental authorities, and other stakeholders.

By promoting outreach initiatives, tailoring support systems, building capacities, encouraging partnerships, and putting strong monitoring and assessment procedures in place, MRCs may firmly establish themselves as trustworthy information and assistance providers for potential migrants. This, in turn, empowers individuals to make well-informed decisions and pursue migration pathways that are safe and dignified.

1. Introduction

While traditionally acknowledged as a significant emigration country, Pakistan's role as a host and transit country cannot be overstated, particularly concerning the Afghan population. Up until recently, Pakistan has been among the world's top refugee hosting countries, owing to the significant presence of displaced Afghans. Since the outbreak of the ten-year-long Soviet-Afghan war in 1979 and the following civil war in the 1990s, millions of Afghan refugees have found refuge in Pakistan. While some returned to their country over the years, many others remained in protracted displacement, often without refugee status or legal recognition.

The Taliban takeover of Afghanistan in August 2021 prompted other 600,000 Afghan people to flee to Pakistan, adding to the about 2.5 million already present in the territory. The American withdrawal and the Taliban takeover led to a widespread concern at the international level of increasing irregular migration from Afghanistan, with particular repercussions on neighbouring countries such as Iran and Pakistan, which not only host the largest groups of Afghan nationals but may also be often seen as transit points to migrate further to Europe. The announcement of the Pakistani government in October 2023 to forcibly repatriate all nationals without formal registration – a measure that would particularly affect the 1.4 million Afghan nationals irregularly present in the country – has put further pressure on Afghans, caught between the hammer of going back to a country undergoing serious humanitarian issues and human rights violations and the anvil of continuing their irregular journey to other destinations, with all the risks that this entails.

Against this background, research has been conducted under the wider project *Awareness Raising and Information Campaigns on the Risks of Irregular Migration in Pakistan* (PARIM-II). This project aims at developing migration information campaigns based on concrete research findings, to raise awareness among potential irregular Afghan migrants from Pakistan about the risks and consequences of irregular migration and inform them about potential legal pathways or their rights in the country. In doing so, the project intends to contribute to (1) increased safe legal migration from Pakistan, (2) reduced irregular migration from Pakistan to the EU and other countries and (3) improved access to information (i.e., on humanitarian admission programmes), thus providing concrete support to Afghan nationals in Pakistan.

The results of the PARIM-II project, which are discussed in this report, draw not only from extensive qualitative and quantitative research conducted in the field between August 2023 and January 2024, but also from the previous project (PARIM-I), which looked instead at the migration intentions and information needs of Pakistani nationals wishing to migrate out of the country, including through irregular channels.[1] By outlining the results of the current project and combining them with the previous one, this report aims at bringing together, analysing, and discussing the entire research component in a targeted way, providing insights for the potential information campaigns and communication strategies in this area.

The primary target group of the project – and main beneficiary of the campaign – is potential Afghan migrants in Pakistan, especially those that seek to leave the country and migrate to Europe irregularly. We employ the IOM definition of "migrant",[2] thus including also those individuals moving for a whole

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[1] Ayesha Qaisrani, Katharina Hahn-Schaur, and Maegan Hendow, "Irregular Migration Dynamics from Pakistan and the Role of Information Campaigns: PARIM Final Report" (Vienna, 2021).
[2] IOM, "Glossary on Migration" (Geneva, 2019).

variety of reasons, even when in need for protection such as asylum seekers and refugees. The locution "potential Afghan migrants in Pakistan" refers therefore to the secondary movements of Afghan nationals from Pakistan, regardless of their date of entry and permanence in the country. As emerged from field research, the profile of potential Afghan migrants in Pakistan is similar to that of other potential migrants, in Pakistan[3] and elsewhere.[4] In line with other empirical findings, our research also reveals that potential migrants tend to believe that they have good or enough information on the migration process in general, as well as on the specific situation at the intended countries of destination. Family and friends abroad or within their own community are usually perceived to be the most reliable and trustworthy sources of information, although the literature has shown that the information they share might overlook the risks and challenges of irregular migration and overemphasise the socio-economic conditions in the countries of destination. For this reason, migration information and awareness raising campaigns can potentially provide useful and reliable information on migration, guiding or supporting potential migrants in their decision-making process.

The report is organised as follows: After the introduction, Chapter 2 will provide an overview of the policy and institutional landscape regarding the reception, stay, and return of Afghan nationals in Pakistan. Drawing from both theoretical and practical sources, Chapter 3 will look at migration information campaigns for migrants in transit, with particular attention to existing measures and campaigns raising awareness on irregular migration in Pakistan, including ICMPD's own work at the Migrant Resource Centres. After delving into the methodological underpinnings of the research (Chapter 4), Chapter 5 will draw from empirical findings to outline the profile of the potential Afghan migrant from Pakistan, analyse the main drivers of migration at structural, social, and individual levels, and investigate the migration decision-making process. Finally, drawing from previous research on the topic and the empirical findings, Chapter 6 will outline the main characteristics of use for such an information campaign, delving into the framing of the message, the choice of messengers, and the channels most likely to reach potential migrants.

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[3] Qaisrani, Hahn-Schaur, and Hendow, "Irregular Migration Dynamics from Pakistan and the Role of Information Campaigns: PARIM Final Report," 2021.
[4] IOM-DTM, "Comprehensive Profile of Afghan Potential Migrants in Afghanistan 2016" (Geneva, 2017); REACH, "Iraqi Migration to Europe in 2016: Profiles, Drivers and Return" (Geneva, June 2017).

2. Contextual background

2.1. Background

In the PARIM-II Background Report, we have already provided an overview of the migration trends and patterns of Afghan movements across the Pakistan-Afghan border.[5] Based on desk research, the report included a detailed discussion on the reasons and drivers of Afghan migration towards Pakistan, their demographic profile, socioeconomic situation, geographic distribution and integration levels in Pakistan, their legal statuses, and access to services etc., as well as the potential drivers for their onward migration from Pakistan. Building on and complementing the discussion in the Background Report, this section offers a snapshot of the legal, policy and institutional architecture that governs the reception, stay, and return of Afghan nationals in Pakistan. This information further contextualises the environment in which Afghan nationals make their decision regarding stay in Pakistan, onward migration, or return to Afghanistan. Since the publication of the Background Report, there have been some considerable updates in the policy scenario concerning Afghan nationals in Pakistan, which this section also updates on.

2.2. Legal and policy context

Since the 1970s, Pakistan has been hosting Afghan nationals escaping war and conflict in Afghanistan. As of June 2023, estimates suggest that about 3 million Afghan nationals live in Pakistan, of which 1.3 million are registered with Proof of Registration (PoR), 800,000 have an Afghan Citizen Card (ACC),[6] and another 800,000 are undocumented.[7] The country has been an exemplary case of hosting a huge population group in protracted displacement. However, despite the long history and high concentration of Afghans seeking refuge in Pakistan, the country has a fragmented legal and policy infrastructure to guide its refugee governance approach. It is not a signatory to the 1951 Global Refugee Convention, nor its 1967 Protocols, hence is not legally bound to uphold the right of non-refoulement under international law protocols. There is no national refugee law that governs its approach towards refugees, and policy developments in the area have largely been ad-hoc. Critics claim that the country has deliberately adopted a 'policy of no policy' to address the situation, to allow itself the flexibility to deal with the situation based on national security, geopolitical interests, and the foreign affairs situation.[8]

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[5] Ayesha Qaisrani, "Migration Insights: Understanding Onward Migration Dynamics among Afghan Nationals in Pakistan," PARIM-II Background Report, 2023, https://www.icmpd.org/file/download/60522/file/D2.1-Background-report-16-08-2023-Final.pdf.

[6] The ACC was introduced in 2018 for undocumented Afghans as a result of cooperation between National Database and Registration Authority (NADRA), Ministry of SAFRON, and IOM. It is a document that would allow undocumented Afghan citizens to emerge from irregularity and stay in the country regularly, provided that they register their presence by Pakistani authorities.

[7] UNHCR, "Afghanistan Situation" (Operational Data Portal, 2023), https://data.unhcr.org/en/situations/afghanistan; EUAA, "Pakistan - Situation of Afghan Refugees: Country of Origin Information Report" (Valletta: European Union Agency for Asylum, 2020), https://coi.euaa.europa.eu/administration/easo/PLib/2022_05_EUAA_COI_Report_Pakistan_Situation_of_Afghan_refugees.pdf..

[8] Noorulain Naseem, "US-Pakistan Cooperation on Afghan Refugee Management" (Stimson, 2023), https://www.stimson.org/2023/us-pakistan-cooperation-on-afghan-refugee-management/; Alimia Sanaa, Interview: The precarity of Afghan migrants in Pakistan, Podcast, November 22, 2023, https://www.himalmag.com/afghan-migrants-pakistan-refugees-sanaa-alimia/; Ayesha Qaisrani, "Bridging the Gaps: Migration Management and Policy Options for Afghan Refugees in Pakistan" (Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, 2021), https://library.fes.de/pdf-files/bueros/pakistan/18612.pdf.

Yet, this policy flexibility leaves Afghan nationals in Pakistan in an ambiguous legal state, with no pathways to long-term legal integration in the country.[9] Up until 1999, Afghans arriving in Pakistan and registering with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) were given a prima-facie refugee status giving them protection, a legal identity, and right of non-refoulement, without using the term 'refugee' as the idea was to treat them as 'temporary guests'.[10] The open reception approach in Pakistan was complemented with significant aid funds given by the international community to Pakistan to host the displaced population, which has declined considerably since the 2000s.[11] In 2005, following a census of Afghans, those who had arrived before 1999 were given PoR cards with limited validity. These cards were meant to serve as their legal identity in Pakistan, while allowing access to some services such as health and shelter.

In absence of a comprehensive national policy or legislation, matters related to Afghan nationals in Pakistan are handled in an extemporaneous fashion, based on political or humanitarian needs, but focused largely on matters related to identification, registration, and repatriation.[12] The welcoming approach that was adopted between the 1970s and the 1990s changed with the turn of the century towards a more closed-door approach, focused on the repatriation of Afghans. Post-1999 Afghan arrivals fall under the jurisdiction of Pakistan's Foreigners' Act of 1946 and the Foreigners' Order of 1951 and are not provided with a protected status. The Foreigners Act of 1946 additionally empowers the Government of Pakistan to specify the terms of entry into the country according to section 3(2) of the Foreigners Act, de facto restricting the entry of those without proper documentation into the country and limiting the possibility to seek temporary refuge in Pakistan.

A few international agreements offer guiding frameworks for international cooperation on the management of Afghan refugees in Pakistan, mostly concerned with 'durable solution' of return and a narrow focus on integration within the Pakistani community. A Tripartite Agreement was signed between the Governments of Pakistan and Afghanistan and the UNHCR in 2003 which focused primarily on the management and repatriation of registered Afghan nationals, and also introduced the Refugees and Host Areas (RAHA) Initiative for promoting social cohesion among the host and refugee communities. In 2012-13, a regional quadripartite framework called the Solution Strategy for Afghan Refugees (SSAR) between Pakistan, Afghanistan, Iran and the UNHCR was agreed upon. Again, the framework's main objective was to guide the return and reintegration of Afghans in Iran and Pakistan as a means to a durable solution.[13]

The temporariness of the legal status in Pakistan has since long erected structural barriers for Afghans to access economic opportunities, long-term residence, education, health, accommodation, property or business ownership as discussed in the Background Report, which adversely affect their living standards in the country.[14] And while Afghans commonly experience some forms of discrimination at the hands of law enforcement, up until recently, Afghan nationals had largely enjoyed a high degree of social integration because of common ethnic and linguistic ties with some demographic groups within

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[9] Muhammad Zubair, Muhammad Aqeel Khan, and Muzammil Shah, "Analysis of Pakistan's Policy Towards Afghan Refugees: A Legal Perspective," *Global Political Review* 4, no. 3 (2019): 28–38.

[10] Alimia, Interview: The precarity of Afghan migrants in Pakistan.

[11] Zubair, Khan, and Shah, "Analysis of Pakistan's Policy Towards Afghan Refugees: A Legal Perspective."

[12] Qaisrani, "Bridging the Gaps: Migration Management and Policy Options for Afghan Refugees in Pakistan."

[13] Ministry of SAFRON, "Annual Report 2020-21" (Islamabad, 2021).

[14] Ayesha Qaisrani, "Migration Insights: Understanding Onward Migration Dynamics among Afghan Nationals in Pakistan," PARIM-II Background Report (Vienna: International Centre for Migration Policy Development, 2023), https://www.icmpd.org/file/download/60522/file/D2.1-Background-report-16-08-2023-Final.pdf.

Pakistan.[15] However, since the mid-2010s, the government has adopted a more security-oriented narrative, which along with compounding domestic crises such as rising inflation, domestic unemployment, natural disasters leading to humanitarian catastrophes, and political volatility, has slowly eroded the public trust in the Afghans.[16]

The precarity of the legal status of Afghans was recently put to a test as Pakistan's National Apex Committee issued a decision on 3 October 2023, to repatriate all undocumented and 'unlawfully' resident migrants, giving them an ultimatum to leave the country by 1 November 2023.[17] This order disproportionately affects Afghan nationals in Pakistan as the biggest group of foreign nationals in the country. Those being found present after the deadline are being forcibly removed. This plan, titled the 'Illegal Foreigners' Repatriation Plan' and introduced under the pretext of heightened security risks, has led to a haste and fearful departure of more than half a million Afghan nationals from Pakistan from September to January,[18] making it the largest repatriation[19] of Afghans from the country since their arrival. It especially affects the 600,000 Afghans who entered Pakistan after the US withdrawal and subsequent takeover of Afghanistan by the Taliban in August 2021. These arrivals were not given any protected status and arrived on temporary visas or undocumented.[20]

A special task force has been created to undertake this repatriation order in the absence of clear legal or administrative structures. This puts Afghan nationals at additional risk of detention and deportation in a hostile environment. Media reports show that even Afghans with valid documentation are being harassed and detained due to the current situation.[21] In addition, the government has imposed a restriction on the amount of their own money, assets, or cattle/livestock that returnees can take with them from Pakistan. It has also established a hotline for locals to report on irregularly present Afghans in their neighbourhoods and has imposed fines and penalties on Pakistanis who rent housing to or employ 'illegal foreigners'.[22] (More detail on the impact of this decision is provided in section 2.4).

[15] Asif Javed et al., "Socio-Economic Inclusion of Afghan Refugees in Pakistan" (Islamabad: Sustainable Development Policy Institute, 2020), https://sdpi.org/socio-economic-inclusion-of--afghan-refugees-in-pakistan/publication_detail.

[16] Abid Hussain, "'What's Wrong?': The Silence of Pakistanis on Expulsion of Afghan Refugees," *Al Jazeera*, November 22, 2023, https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/11/22/whats-wrong-the-silence-of-pakistanis-on-expulsion-of-afghan-refugees; Katja Mielke et al., "Figurations of Displacement in and beyond Pakistan - Empirical Findings and Reflections on Protracted Displacement and Translocal Connections of Afghans," TRAFIG Working Paper 7 (Bonn: BICC, 2021), https://zenodo.org/record/5841876.

[17] Asif Shahzad, "Pakistan Orders Illegal Immigrants, including 1.73 Mln Afghans, to Leave," *Reuters*, October 3, 2023, https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/pakistan-orders-all-illegal-immigrants-leave-after-suicide-bombings-2023-10-03/.

[18] IOM, "DTM Pakistan — Flow Monitoring of Afghan Returnees – Bi-Weekly Report" (Islamabad, 2024), https://dtm.iom.int/reports/pakistan-flow-monitoring-afghan-returnees-bi-weekly-report-1-15-january-2024#:~:text=Cumulatively%2C%20since%2015th%20September%202023,the%20origin%20to%20the%20border.

[19] We employ the term "repatriation" to include both those Afghan nationals that have been officially deported from the country by the Pakistani government and the Afghans that have left the country as a direct consequence of the implementation of the plan.

[20] Michael Kugelman, "Why Is Pakistan Expelling 1.7 Million Afghans?," *Foreign Policy*, November 1, 2023, https://foreignpolicy.com/2023/11/01/pakistan-deports-million-afghans-undocumented-migrants/.

[21] Zehra Munir, "Expulsion from Pakistan Makes Afghan Refugees a Political Football Once More," *Financial Times*, January 18, 2024, https://www.ft.com/content/f382c168-ae25-4300-91fd-ef744a58522e.

[22] Ibraheem Bahiss, "Pakistan's Mass Deportation of Afghans Poses Risks to Regional Stability" (International Crisis Group, November 13, 2023), https://reliefweb.int/report/pakistan/pakistans-mass-deportation-afghans-poses-risks-regional-stability.

The situation is evolving, threatening the status of PoR cardholders. Earlier reports have shown the government's intention to repatriate all Afghans through a phased approach. The current operation as outlined by the Illegal Foreigners Repatriation Plan and already approved by the Federal Cabinet is under Phase I of the 'Illegal Foreigners' Repatriation Plan', which targets those without valid visas or documentation. In Phase II, the plan is to repatriate those holding Afghan Citizens Cards (ACC), and Phase III will focus on the repatriation of PoR cardholders.[23] However, informal conversations with some relevant stakeholders have revealed that the decision to remove PoR cardholders is on hold, and the validity of PoR cards has been extended until June 2024.[24] Nevertheless, the situation between the two countries remains tense, particularly in view of the recent border disputes, which might result in the further repatriation of Afghan migrants from Pakistan.[25]

2.3. Institutional context

Despite significant gaps in the legal and policy framework governing refugees, institutional architecture designed to address issues concerning Afghan refugees is well-developed in Pakistan. The Ministry of States and Frontier Regions (SAFRON) serves as the primary governmental authority responsible for Afghan refugees in Pakistan. The Ministry's office of the Chief Commissioner of Afghan Refugees (CCAR) collaborates with international humanitarian agencies, including the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), for the 'management and repatriation of Afghan refugees living in Pakistan', including the provision of health and education services.[26] The CCAR is also tasked with granting approval to other non-governmental organisations (NGOs) operating in Pakistan for the welfare of Afghan refugees. Under the CCAR, Commissionerates of Afghan Refugees (CARs) are established in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Balochistan, and Punjab, along with an Afghan Refugee Repatriation Cell in Karachi, which is responsible for managing refugees within their respective provinces. While the Ministry of Interior in Pakistan has authority over the visa regimes related to refugees and the validity of their legal status,[27] CCAR serves as a coordinating body between the MoI and international organisations to deal with those Afghans that are granted temporary protection in the country.

Due to the protracted displacement of Afghans in Pakistan, numerous international organisations have been involved in providing services to Afghans in the country for many decades. UNHCR has been present in Pakistan to assist Afghan refugees since 1979, leading to the formalisation of a Cooperation Agreement with the Government of Pakistan in 1993. SAFRON and CCAR coordinate its activities within the country. The scope of UNHCR's work in Pakistan involves providing humanitarian assistance and emergency relief, registering asylum claims, providing education and training, and promoting livelihood and social inclusion. However, funding cuts through diminishing foreign aid in the 1990s has led to the cutting down of some services, such as food ration stamps, while at the same time reorientation in their approach, including promoting return and repatriation as a durable solution. UNHCR is also responsible for providing education in refugee camps. Initially up to primary level education was imparted in these refugee schools, following the Afghan national curriculum, but efforts

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[23] Asia Displacement Solutions Platform, "Deported to What: Afghans in Pakistan," Briefing Note, 2023, https://reliefweb.int/report/pakistan/adsp-briefing-note-deported-what-afghans-pakistan-october-2023.

[24] This conversation took place on 13 January 2024, with a research analyst working with a renowned think-tank in Islamabad, closely following the developments in the situation of Afghan nationals in Pakistan.

[25] N.A., "After Rise in Terror Incidents, Pakistan Targets TTP Sanctuaries in Afghan Border Region," The News International, March 18, 2024, https://thenews.com.pk/latest/1169594-after-rise-in-terror-incidents-pakistan-targets-ttp-sanctuaries-in-afghan-border-region.

[26] https://ccar.gov.pk/about/.

[27] Zubair, Khan, and Shah, "Analysis of Pakistan's Policy Towards Afghan Refugees: A Legal Perspective."

have been underway to offer secondary level education as well.[28] To a certain degree, it also facilitates scholarships for Afghan students for tertiary education.

The International Organisation for Migration (IOM) is a key player in the field since 1981 and, like UNHCR, works under the Cooperation Agreement with the Government of Pakistan to register and record undocumented flows of Afghans to and from Pakistan, and operationalise and support the return of Afghan nationals.

Other international actors active in providing funding or other forms of support for Afghans in Pakistan include the European Union, International Rescue Committee, Caritas, Danish Refugee Council, Norwegian Refugee Council, and governments of Germany, Japan, United States, Denmark, Switzerland, and Australia, among others, including through their development agencies. Countries like Belgium, Hungary, Italy, Poland, Spain, Switzerland, and Sweden have also made contributions for technical and vocational training of Afghan refugees through the Support Platform developed in 2019.[29]

Besides the international community, local NGOs and civil society actors also play a crucial role in providing support to Afghan refugees in Pakistan and often serve as intermediaries between the government, international organisations, and the Afghan population.[30] Society for Human Rights and Prisoners' Aid (SHARP) is one of the key partners working with UNHCR and other international organisations and is part of the Refugee Rights Network of Pakistan. Among other support, one of its key contributions is providing free legal support to registered Afghan nationals in Pakistan. Other notable organisations include Human Rights Alliance, Ehsar Foundation, Strengthening Participating Organisation (SPO), Paidar Development Organisation, and Needy Poor People Foundation (NPPF), which support Afghans through programmes imparting, among others, legal assistance, training, skills development programmes, and cash-based and in-kind assistance.[31]

2.4. Emerging migration patterns among Afghans in Pakistan

The PARIM-II Background Report has already provided an overview of the trends and patterns of Afghan migration to and from Pakistan. It highlighted the reasons and different phases of migration into Pakistan and return, as well as their socioeconomic and living situation, and the factors within Pakistan influencing migration intentions.

In this section, we offer a snapshot of the latest figures and statistics on migration and provide an updated depiction of the situation, largely spurred by the Executive Order announced in September 2023 called the 'Illegal Foreigners' Repatriation Plan' for the expulsion of undocumented Afghans in Pakistan, as discussed above. This decision has affected not only the more than 600,000 newly arrived Afghans after August 2021, who were escaping the Taliban regime, but also those who have been in Pakistan for decades, including new generations born in displacement.[32] The situation is particularly dire for Afghans who were personally targeted under the new de facto Afghan regime, including

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[28] UNHCR Pakistan, "Education," accessed January 19, 2024, https://www.unhcr.org/pk/education#:~:text=UNHCR%20Pakistan%20provides%20Afghan%20refugee,education%20centres%20in%20refugee%20villages.

[29] Qaisrani, "Bridging the Gaps: Migration Management and Policy Options for Afghan Refugees in Pakistan."

[30] Jack Redden, "Feature: NGOs Connect UNHCR with Afghan Refugees in Pakistan" (UNHCR, 2003), https://www.unhcr.org/us/news/feature-ngos-connect-unhcr-afghan-refugees-pakistan.

[31] Katja M Mielke et al., "Figurations of Displacement in and beyond Pakistan: Empirical Findings and Reflections on Protracted Displacement and Translocal Connections of Afghans".

[32] Kugelman, "Why Is Pakistan Expelling 1.7 Million Afghans?"

humanitarian actors, civil society activists, lawyers, media and Afghan military personnel, making their return a direct threat to their lives at the hands of the Taliban administration.

A border consortium tracks the flows at two official borders between Pakistan and Afghanistan (namely, the Torkham border in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) and the Chaman border in Balochistan), while UNHCR collects data from three additional border points in KP and Balochistan. In 2023, a total of 557,436 Afghan nationals have returned to Afghanistan.[33] Out of these, 84,000 Afghans returned between January and September 2023, while the remaining 473,436 returned between October and December following the removal order.[34] The various quarterly and bi-weekly reports tracking this return over the last year show that up until September, return rate was highest for undocumented families, followed by those holding ACC and lastly undocumented individuals travelling without family. PoR cardholders were rarely among those returning to Afghanistan. However, according to the latest bi-weekly reports published by IOM from 1 November to 31 December 2023, there has been an increasing percentage of PoR cardholders returning, while the dominant group remains undocumented Afghans. In the latest bi-weekly report (16-31 December), about 4% of the returnees were PoR cardholders, 2% were ACC Cardholders, while 94% were undocumented Afghans. This is noteworthy as the repatriation order in principle only targets those without valid documents and permits to stay in Pakistan, and PoR cardholders are exempt from this current scheme of return. Although the 'voluntariness' of these returns is questionable in the wake of the latest crackdown, according to IOM's publications, these numbers do not include those 'forcibly removed' by the Government of Pakistan in the last quarter. Between November and December 2023, a total of 18,974 Afghans have been forcibly returned as they did not possess any valid documentation. Moreover, UNHCR reports that in 2023, 30,600 Afghan individuals have been arrested or detained which reflects a nine-times increase compared to the previous year.[35] In terms of demographics, IOM reports that in 2023 the returnees (excluding forcibly returned) were generally balanced in gender and often minors (in almost 60% of the cases). UNHCR further elaborates that of the returning households, 28% are headed by females while the remaining are male-headed households.

In terms of reasons for return, recorded push factors have significantly changed since October 2023. In the last quarter of 2023, fear of arrest is the highest cited push factor (recording as high as 97% in the first two weeks of November), followed by forced repatriation, reflecting the impact of the expulsion order. In the previous quarters up to September 2023, the most common factor driving return was inability to pay rent, inability to pay for utilities and lack of employment, reflecting economic pressures. In terms of pull factors, IOM documented that up until September 2023 availability of assistance was the main pull factor, followed by reunion with family, while from October onwards family reunion dominated as a pull factor, followed by availability of assistance.

The uncertainty and confusion created by the current political context is also reflected in the queries received at the remote Migrant Resource Centre (MRC) for Afghanistan.[36] The latest Trends Analysis

[33] IOM Pakistan, "Bi-Weekly Flow Monitoring of Afghan Refugees (16-31 December 2023)," Displacement Tracking Matrix, 2024, https://dtm.iom.int/reports/pakistan-flow-monitoring-afghan-returnees-16-31-december?close=true.

[34] IOM Pakistan, "Quarterly Flow Monitoring of Afghan Refugees (July - September 2023)," Displacement Tracking Matrix, 2023, https://dtm.iom.int/reports/pakistan-quarterly-flow-monitoring-afghan-returnees-pakistan-july-september-2023?close=true.

[35] UNHCR, "Pakistan-Afghanistan Returns Emergency Response (as of 18th January 2024)," accessed January 24, 2024, https://reporting.unhcr.org/afghanistan-pakistan-core-update-returns-emergency-response-9-6760.

[36] https://www.facebook.com/mrcafghanistan/.

for the months of October and November 2023 show that queries received on the situation of Afghans in Pakistan was the biggest concern noted by MRC.[37] As per public statement of the Government of Pakistan, the 25,000 Afghans in Pakistan awaiting resettlement to the US and other countries are not part of the recent crackdown on irregularly present Afghans in Pakistan and will not be deported to Afghanistan.[38] However, recent news reported that Pakistan is charging an exit fee to undocumented refugees who want to leave the country through humanitarian channels.[39]

Amidst the current political and media focus on the repatriation of Afghans, there is a lack of information available to track any other migration trends of Afghans out of Pakistan, if they exist. MRC Pakistan did notice an increase in queries received from Afghan nationals in Pakistan asking about eligibility for humanitarian visas. However, a reason for that could also be MRC's increased outreach towards Afghans to make them aware of the MRC's activities.[40]

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[37] ICMPD. "Migration Trends Analysis for Afghanistan (Report 3, October-November 2023)." Vienna: ICMPD, 2023, unpublished.

[38] Munir Ahmed, "Pakistan Says Nearly 25,000 Afghans Waiting for U.S. Visas Won't Be Deported as Part of Clampdown," *Associated Press*, November 8, 2023, https://www.pbs.org/newshour/politics/pakistan-says-nearly-25000-afghans-waiting-for-u-s-visas-wont-be-deported-as-part-of-clampdown.

[39] Caroline Davies, "Pakistan Charging Refugees $830 to Leave," *BBC*, November 23, 2023, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-67512576.

[40] ICMPD. "Migration Trends Analysis for Pakistan (Report 3, October-November 2023)." Vienna: ICMPD, 2023, unpublished.

3. Migration information campaigns targeting migrants in transit

3.1. Introduction

In recent years, migration campaigns have become instrumental as policy responses among many European countries, with policymakers and donors increasingly investing in them. These campaigns often employ diverse messages that highlight different aspects of the migration experience, according to the specific objective they aim to achieve and the audience they target. Whether they employ a more positive or negative message, migration campaigns have been criticised under several aspects. First, they may deprive migrants of their political agency, portraying them as passive and vulnerable subjects.[41] Besides, they assume (often wrongly)[42] that migrants do not have correct or trustworthy knowledge of migration as they purportedly rely on potentially biased or deceitful information from social networks and social media. Other scholars have highlighted the scarce or unclear impact of such campaigns, which might be not only difficult to measure but also to achieve.[43] Lastly, migration campaigns might be considered part and parcel of migration management strategies to control and regular migration movements, supplementing rather than counteracting bordering practices and enlarging the distance between 'us' (broadly conceived as Western citizens and saviours) and 'them' (as foreigners in/as danger).[44]

While being aware of the nexus between securitarian and humanitarian discourses in migration studies more generally[45] and in the analysis of information campaigns more specifically,[46] we examine the relative campaigns based on the values and messages they convey, guided by the IOM's distinction

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[41] Myria Georgiou, "Does the Subaltern Speak? Migrant Voices in Digital Europe," Popular Communication 16, no. 1 (January 2, 2018): 45–57, https://doi.org/10.1080/15405702.2017.1412440; Anke Fiedler, "From Being Aware to Going There: On the Awareness and Decision-Making of (Prospective) Migrants," Mass Communication and Society 23, no. 3 (2020): 356–77, https://doi.org/10.1080/15205436.2019.1666992.

[42] Bernd Beber and Alexandra Scacco, "The Myth of the Misinformed Migrant? Survey Insights from Nigeria's Irregular Migration Epicenter," Ruhr Economic Papers (Essen: RWI - Leibniz-Institut für Wirtschaftsforschung, 2019); Sjoerd van Bemmel, "The Perception of Risk among Unauthorized Migrants in Ghana," Journal of Risk Research 23, no. 1 (January 2019): 47–61.

[43] Jasper Tjaden, Sandra Morgenstern, and Frank Laczko, "Evaluating the Impact of Information Campaigns in the Field of Migration: A Systematic Review of the Evidence, and Practical Guidance," Central Mediterranean Route Thematic Report Series (Geneva: International Organization for Migration, 2018); Raffaella Pagogna and Patrick Sakdapolrak, "Disciplining Migration Aspirations through Migration-information Campaigns: A Systematic Review of the Literature," Geography Compass 15, no. 7 (July 2021).

[44] Pierluigi Musarò, "Aware Migrants: The Role of Information Campaigns in the Management of Migration," European Journal of Communication 34, no. 6 (December 2019): 629–40; Juliette Howard, "Beyond the Humanitarian Rhetoric of Migrant Information Campaigns," E-International Relations, 2021, https://www.e-ir.info/2021/06/14/beyond-the-humanitarian-rhetoric-of-migrant-information-campaigns/; Anissa Maâ, Julia Van Dessel, and Amandine Van Neste-Gottignies, "Information Directed Towards Migrants and the (Un)Making of Borders: An Interdisciplinary Perspective Between Countries of Origin, Transit, and Destination," Journal of Borderlands Studies 38, no. 6 (November 2, 2023): 895–900, https://doi.org/10.1080/08865655.2023.2261455.

[45] William Walters, "Foucault and Frontiers: Notes on the Birth of the Humanitarian Border," in *Governmentality: Current Issues and Future Challenges*, ed. Ulrich Bröckling, Susanne Krasmann, and Thomas Lemke (New York: Routledge, 2010), 138–64; William Walters, "Reflections on Migration and Governmentality," *Movements: Journal for Critical Migration and Border Regime Studies* 1, no. 1 (2015); Polly Pallister-Wilkins, *Humanitarian Borders: Unequal Mobility and Saving Lives* (London: Verso, 2022).

[46] Ceri Oeppen, "'Leaving Afghanistan! Are You Sure?' European Efforts to Deter Potential Migrants through Information Campaigns,'" *Human Geography* 9, no. 2 (2016): 57–68; Pierluigi Musarò, "Aware Migrants: The Role of Information Campaigns in the Management of Migration," *European Journal of Communication* 34, no. 6 (December 2019): 629–40, http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/0267323119886164.

between pro-migration and anti-migration narratives.[47] This would allow us to distinguish between campaigns employing more stringent and negative messages and others using a more right-based language, while at the same time placing them along an overarching spectrum that goes from a securitarian narrative, on the one side, to a more humanitarian narrative, on the other.

In this respect, some campaigns employ a more stringent approach, framing migration as a security issue and portraying migrants as potential threats to national security. These campaigns – which are implemented not only in countries of origin and transit but also in countries of destination – often draw on (and reproduce) stereotypes and fear-mongering tactics to depict migrants as criminals, terrorists, or carriers of diseases, contributing to the stigmatisation and demonisation of migrant communities. By framing migration through a security lens, these campaigns seek to justify restrictive immigration policies, border controls, and surveillance measures under the guise of protecting national interests. Moving alongside the spectrum, other campaigns revolve around the plight of migrants, shedding light on the challenges they face during their journey or in the countries of destination, including exploitation, discrimination, and forced displacement. By amplifying the voices of migrants and showcasing their (often difficult) experiences, these campaigns generally try to provide potential migrants in countries of origin with reliable information on the risks of irregular migration or on the legal and socio-economic situation in countries of destination, with the aim of deterring them from undertaking the journey in an irregular way.

At the other end of the spectrum, some campaigns employ a language focused on access to rights and knowledge, providing migrants with relevant information on their basic rights during the journey or in countries of destination, potential contacts in case of emergency or troubles along the way, as well as on how access to essential services and opportunities for integration. Other campaigns focus on migrants' need for better and more accurate information on regular migration channels and the possibilities to access them, thus empowering them in making more informed decisions on migration. Among the campaigns employing a positive framing we also include those aiming at providing migrants with information and concrete opportunities on how to contribute to the social and economic development of their own countries.

While it is necessary to take into consideration the critiques surrounding migration information campaigns, particularly their potential to reinforce power dynamics and perpetuate stereotypes, it is also important to acknowledge recent studies that suggest that, despite their limitations and challenges as well as their difficulty to be translated into immediate action, these campaigns still have some impact, particularly in terms of increasing awareness among migrants.[48] Moreover, the effectiveness of these campaigns seems to be contingent upon their focus. More targeted and focused campaigns are likely to be beneficial to the target audience, emphasising the need for nuanced and context-specific approaches. However, it is also important to complement such campaigns with concrete policies that facilitate regular access to European countries, reducing the risks of irregular migration and the implementation of strict border enforcement.

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[47] IOM, "Communicating on Migration," in *The Essentials of Migration Management (EMM2.0)* (International Organization for Migration, 2023), https://emm.iom.int/handbooks.

[48] Felipe Alexander Dunsch, Jasper Tjaden, and William Quiviger, "Migrants as Messengers: The Impact of Peer-to-Peer Communication on Potential Migrants in Senegal" (Geneva, 2019); Oumarou Hebie, Mawugnon F E Sessou, and Jasper Tjaden, "Irregular Migration from West Africa: Robust Evaluation of Peer-to-Peer Awareness-Raising Activities in Four Countries" (Geneva, 2023); M Bia-Zafinikamia, J Tjaden, and H Gninafon, *The Impact of Mobile Cinema Events on Potential Migrants in Guinea. Impact Evaluation Report* (Geneva: IOM, 2020).

The background report has provided a comprehensive analysis of migration information campaigns targeting Afghan migrants in Pakistan specifically, as well as Afghan migrants and migrants in transit more generally.[49] Drawing from it, the following section will look at the specific framing of these campaigns in terms of security and humanitarian messages, respectively. In doing so, it will lay the groundwork for the design of more robust migration information campaigns.

3.2.   The security narrative

Previous ICMPD research has discussed how migration information campaigns can have different objectives and target groups, thus conveying specific messages accordingly.[50] When looking at campaigns targeting Afghan migrants (either in their country of origin or in transit), an important approach, steeped in apprehension over terrorism, crime, and the perceived risks associated with irregular migration, has emerged – one that conceives migrants as potential threats to national security. In some cases, these campaigns tend to portray the country of destination in a negative light, highlighting the difficulties of socio-economic integration in order to make them less appealing for potential migrants.[51] In other cases, they specifically aim at intimidating migrants and preventing them from reaching a specific territory through harsh deterrent messages. Consequently, they align with other policy measures such as stringent border controls, heightened surveillance, and restrictive immigration policies.

The Australian government has been particularly active in implementing deterrent campaigns targeting potential irregular migrants from Afghanistan (as well as elsewhere). The *Operation Sovereign Borders*, launched in 2013 and still ongoing, has employed posters, digital media contents, YouTube advertisements,[52] videos, and even a film,[53] with the aim of 'protecting Australia's borders, combatting people smuggling in our region, and importantly, preventing people from risking their lives at sea'.[54] Among the most iconic representations of such campaign are the poster displayed in Pakistan's largest international airport, which warned potential Afghan migrants that they will not make Australia their home if they travel in an irregular way, and the 90-minute fictional film, *The Journey*, which deterred potential migrants and asylum seekers – from Afghanistan, as well as from Pakistan, Iran, and Iraq, where the film was also broadcast – from attempting to reach Australia.[55]

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[49] Ayesha Qaisrani, "Migration Insights: Understanding Onward Migration Dynamics among Afghan Nationals in Pakistan," PARIM-II Background Report (Vienna: International Centre for Migration Policy Development, 2023), https://www.icmpd.org/file/download/60522/file/D2.1-Background-report-16-08-2023-Final.pdf.

[50] Katharina Hahn-Schaur, "Awareness Raising and Information Campaigns on the Risks of Irregular Migration from Pakistan: Background Report" (Vienna: International Centre for Migration Policy Development, 2021), https://www.icmpd.org/file/download/59402/file/Background%2520Report%2520final.pdf.

[51] Falk Hartig, "Deterrence by Public Diplomacy: The Negative Dimension of International Political Communication," Journal of Communication Management 21, no. 4 (November 6, 2017): 342–54.

[52] Olivier Laughland, "Angus Campbell Warns Asylum Seekers Not to Travel to Australia by Boat," The Guardian, April 11, 2014, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/apr/11/angus-campbell-stars-in-videos-warning-asylum-seekers-not-to-travel-by-boat.

[53] Djamila Schans and Caitlin Optekamp, "Raising Awareness, Changing Behavior? Combatting Irregular Migration through Information Campaigns" (Den Haag: WODC, 2016), https://repository.wodc.nl/bitstream/handle/20.500.12832/175/Cahier_2016-11_2683_Volledige_tekst_tcm28-239610.pdf?sequence=2&isAllowed=y.

[54] Australian Government, "Operation Sovereign Borders," Department of Home Affairs, accessed February 9, 2024, https://osb.homeaffairs.gov.au/.

[55] Sarah C. Bishop, "An International Analysis of Governmental Media Campaigns to Deter Asylum Seekers," International Journal of Communication 14 (2020): 1092–1114.

Other notable deterrent campaigns targeting Afghan migrants have been implemented by the German and Norwegian governments, especially during the height of the 2015 'long summer of migration'.[56] In winter 2015, Germany started a campaign called *Rumours about Germany*, involving the installation of billboards in the main Afghan cities, the communication of stories in newspapers and local television, and the widespread dissemination of posts through social media. The campaign aimed at discouraging potential Afghan migrants to travel to Germany by showcasing the risks of irregular migration or depicting the difficult asylum procedures and control measures in Germany. For this reason, it was harshly criticised by Human Rights Watch and Afghan community organisations for its attempt to prevent people from escaping an insecure situation.[57]

In the same period, the Norwegian Ministry of Justice and Public Security launched the Facebook-based campaign *Stricter asylum regulations in Norway*, targeting young men from Afghanistan – who were second only to Syrians in terms of asylum seekers in the country – and Eritrea with the aim of deterring them from going to Norway irregularly or from applying to asylum altogether. The first post, published in English on Friday 6 November 2015, aimed at reaching asylum seekers in countries of origin and transit. It listed a series of restrictive governmental measures to stem migration to Norway, including a reduction of benefits in reception centres, an increasing focus on return, and the limitation to family reunification.[58] The initial reactions to the Facebook posts – which targeted asylum seekers but attracted instead racist and xenophobic comments from Norwegian citizens – prompted the Ministry of Justice to team up with the communication team of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in the attempt not only to moderate the page but also to expand the campaign in countries of origin and transit of potential migrants.[59] The involvement of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs helped to disseminate the campaign message through both digital and offline means (such as posters, leaflets, and newspaper articles) across the Norwegian diplomatic missions worldwide.[60]

Other countries have designed and implemented similar deterrent campaigns in the attempt to manage migration movements through the restriction of asylum procedures or the strengthening of border controls against irregular migrants. As also discussed in the background report, in 2016 the Austrian government launched a campaign to inform potential migrants from Afghanistan about the risks of the journey and the difficult social and economic conditions of reception in Austria.[61] Although framed in terms of information provision towards "economic migrants", the campaign was 'justified in avoiding a perceived loss of national sovereignty and control, thus requiring a stricter border regime'.[62]

To a certain extent, campaigns highlighting the plight of migrants during the journey and the risks and challenges of (irregular) migration can be included under this framing. This is the case of the social

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[56] Bernd Kasparek and Marc Speer, "Of Hope. Hungary and the long Summer of Migration," bordermonitoring.eu (blog), September 9, 2015, https://bordermonitoring.eu/ungarn/2015/09/of-hope-en/.

[57] Natalie Ilsley, "HRW Slams Germany for Trying to Keep Afghans Away from Europe," Newsweek, November 18, 2015, https://www.newsweek.com/refugee-crisis-afghanistan-eu-refugee-crisis-395415.

[58] Jan-Paul Brekke and Kjersti Thorbjørnsrud, "Communicating Borders. Governments Deterring Asylum Seekers through Social Media Campaigns," *Migration Studies* 8, no. 1 (2018): 43–65.

[59] Audun Beyer, Jan-Paul Brekke, and Kjersti Thorbjørnsrud, "Communicating Borders. Informing Migrants and Potential Asylum Seekers through Social Media" (Oslo: Institutt for samfunnsforskning, 2017).

[60] Bishop, "An International Analysis of Governmental Media Campaigns to Deter Asylum Seekers."

[61] Qaisrani, "Migration Insights: Understanding Onward Migration Dynamics among Afghan Nationals in Pakistan."

[62] Verena K. Brändle, "Claiming Authority Over 'Truths' and 'Facts': Information Risk Campaigns to Prevent Irregular Migration," in Europe in the Age of Post-Truth Politics: Populism, Disinformation and the Public Sphere, ed. Maximilian Conrad et al. (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2023), 151–76.

enterprise Seefar-implemented campaigns *On The Move* and *The Migrant Project*.[63] The first campaign, running from April to December 2020, aimed at informing transit migrants from Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Iraqi Kurdistan, and Pakistan about the risks of irregular migration and providing them with reliable information on asylum procedures and other legal alternatives in countries of transit and destination. Despite its alleged successes (portrayed by the organisation in a short post), the *On The Move* campaign was strongly criticised in the media for being allegedly funded by the UK government in an attempt to reduce irregular migration through the Channel and from the countries of origin[64] and its website was removed once the project ended. Even the second campaign received media attention for its supposed financial support by the Home Office; however, its website is still running, providing migrants with information on the risks of irregular migration and the difficult life for (irregular) migrants in the destination countries, often with stories of returnees who did not "make it".

Whether they employ strong, fearsome messages or they simply attempt to provide information on the risks of irregular migration and the situation in the countries of destination, such campaigns, first, tend to oversimplify the multifaceted nature of migration, neglecting the underlying socio-economic, political, and humanitarian factors that drive individuals to migrate; second, they may fuel discrimination and xenophobia in host countries – even when they are directed towards migrants in countries of origin and transit, as the *Stricter asylum regulations in Norway* has shown – thus exacerbating societal divisions rather than addressing the complexities of migration; and third, they might reproduce restrictive bordering practices and migration policies, while shifting the responsibility of the risks of the journey onto migrants themselves.[65] Importantly, research has shown that deterrent messages often fail, as they are prone to being misunderstood[66] or even mocked by migrants themselves.[67]

3.3.   The humanitarian narrative

Certain migration campaigns have adopted a more humanitarian approach, highlighting the rights and needs of migrants and showing empathy, solidarity, and respect. Rather than conceiving potential migrants as security threats, these campaigns aim to provide them with more reliable and trustworthy information on regular migration channels and the rights connected to (regular) migration. For this purpose, they employ a wide variety of messages, messengers, and channels of communication, according to the specific target group they try to reach or to the objective they wish to achieve. Exploring the dynamics and impact of migration information campaigns employing a humanitarian

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[63] https://www.themigrantproject.org/.

[64] Lizzie Dearden, "Home Office Spent Millions on 'Ineffective' Adverts to Deter Asylum Seekers with More Now Planned on Rwanda Campaign," Independent, April 23, 2022, https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/rwanda-deal-migrants-communications-home-office-b2063558.html.; see also Verena K. Brändle, "Claiming Authority Over 'Truths' and 'Facts': Information Risk Campaigns to Prevent Irregular Migration."

[65] Paul Hodge, "A Grievable Life? The Criminalisation and Securing of Asylum Seeker Bodies in the 'Violent Frames' of Australia's Operation Sovereign Borders," Geoforum 58 (2015): 122–31, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.geoforum.2014.11.006; Patrick Van Berlo, "Australia's Operation Sovereign Borders: Discourse, Power, and Policy from a Crimmigration Perspective," Refugee Survey Quarterly 34, no. 4 (December 2015): 75–104, https://doi.org/10.1093/rsq/hdv011; Ceri Oeppen, "'Leaving Afghanistan! Are You Sure?' European Efforts to Deter Potential Migrants through Information Campaigns," Human Geography 9, no. 2 (2016): 57–68.

[66] Seefar, "3E Impact. Ethical, Engaged & Effective. Running Communications on Irregular Migration from Kos to Kandahar" (SEEFAR, 2018).

[67] Charles Heller, "Perception Management - Deterring Potential Migrants through Information Campaigns," Global Media and Communication 10, no. 3 (2014): 303–18, https://doi.org/10.1177/1742766514552355.

narrative becomes essential in understanding their role in attempting to shape migrants' knowledge, attitudes, and intentions.

As highlighted in the background report,[68] few migration-related campaigns have specifically targeted Afghan nationals in Pakistan. When zooming out of Pakistan, however, numerous campaigns targeting either migrants on the move (regardless of their nationality) or Afghan nationals in general (not only in Pakistan but also in their country of origin or in transit through other countries) emerge. The main campaigns targeting Afghan migrants in transit are *InfoMigrants*,[69] which sees the participation of media outlets and press agencies from France, Germany, and Italy, and the *Diaspora Awareness Raising Campaign*, funded by the Dutch Government and implemented by the Danish Refugee Council and the Mixed Migration Centre in collaboration with diaspora organisations.[70] Although these campaigns employ different messages and operate in different countries, they all aim at raising potential and transit migrants' awareness on safe migration routes and their knowledge and rights on legal migration procedures, thus empowering them to make more informed decisions about migration.

It is worth mentioning that Afghan migrants are often one among several target groups in the design of these campaigns. Exemplary is the case of *InfoMigrants*, a broad awareness-raising initiative operating through a website and across different social media in order to provide migrants in countries of origin and transit with reliable information on migration in different languages (among which Pashto, Dari, Arabic, Bangla, English, and French). Similarly, many campaigns target both potential migrants and migrants in transit, thus making it difficult to distinguish between specific target groups. In contrast, as research has highlighted, individuals in their home country, living in camps, or in transit through other countries might have different needs, opportunities, and experiences, thus prompting the design and implementation of more target-specific campaigns.[71]

Especially after the Taliban takeover of Afghanistan in August 2021, it also became clear that the message of campaigns targeting Afghan migrants in transit countries could no longer have the same impact as before. As Brekke and Thorbjørnsrud highlighted in their analysis of the role of information in the decision-making process on migration among Afghan nationals in transit through Türkiye, the dominant messages revolve around three main (positive and negative) aspects: the potential contribution of Afghan nationals to the socio-economic development of their countries of origin; the dangers of continuing their journey to Europe; and the difficult situation in the desired countries of destination in Europe.[72] Such messages, the authors continue, are often accompanied by a general stigma and resentment against Afghan nationals, who are portrayed as social, economic, and cultural threats and are always at risk of deportation to Iran or Afghanistan, particularly after the conclusion of the return agreement between the Taliban regime and Türkiye in 2022.

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[68] Qaisrani, "Migration Insights: Understanding Onward Migration Dynamics among Afghan Nationals in Pakistan."

[69] https://www.infomigrants.net/en/

[70] See Frederic Kamta, Ravi Baghel, and Johanna Kern, "Evaluation of Awareness Raising Campaigns for (Potential) Migrants" (Centre for Evaluation and Development, 2023), https://www.government.nl/documents/reports/2023/01/19/evaluation-of-awareness-raising-campaigns-for-potential-migrants.

[71] Policy Research Institute, "Evaluation of the Telling the Real Story Project 2.0" (Geneva: UNHCR, 2021).

[72] Jan-Paul Brekke and Kjersti Thorbjørnsrud, "The Role of Narratives in Migratory Decision-Making: The Role of Narratives in Onward Migration of Afghan Nationals from Istanbul to Europe," BRIDGES Working Papers 16 (Oslo: Institute for Social Research, 2023).

However, the authors argue that these messages might be ineffective, since Afghan migrants cannot return voluntarily to their country, are often perfectly aware of the dangers of the journey, and still conceive Europe as a place that can provide stability, rights, and a future, thanks to the information received by their social contacts in the countries of destination. According to the same report, many Afghans would rather travel regularly to Europe rather than facing the mental and physical challenges of the irregular journey, and some of them managed to do so thanks to the establishment of (albeit limited) study exchange programmes before the Taliban takeover or legal (humanitarian) pathways after that. With the deteriorating socio-political situation in Afghanistan, the increasing risk of deportation from Iran and Pakistan, and the high hopes for a better future, many seem therefore more willing to try their luck, despite campaign messages discouraging them from irregular migration.[73]

3.4.   ICMPD's Migrant Resource Centres

As highlighted in the background report, ICMPD has played an active role in implementing migration information campaigns in the Silk Routes Region.[74] In the framework of the EU-funded project *Improving Migration Management in the Silk Routes Countries* (IMM) under the Budapest Process, ICMPD supported the creation of several Migrant Resource Centres (MRCs) in the Silk Route countries,[75] including two in Pakistan (Lahore and Islamabad, which both opened in 2016 under the IMM 1) and one in Afghanistan (Kabul, which started its operations in 2018 under the IMM 2 but has moved online since the Taliban takeover in August 2021). In Pakistan, the MRCs are a joint cooperation between the Government of Pakistan and ICMPD – with the MRC in Islamabad operating under the umbrella of the Ministry of Overseas Pakistanis and Human Resource Development (MOPHRD), and the one in Lahore operating under the umbrella of the Provincial Labour and Human Resource Department. A new MRC in Peshawar is likely to be established in the summer of 2024 under the EU-funded project PROTECT. The MRCs in Pakistan provide support and assistance to potential Pakistani migrants, outgoing migrants, and, more recently, Afghan nationals in Pakistan. They offer a wide array of services, including legal aid, documentation assistance, language training, and cultural orientation in the legal migration pre-departure context, tailored to individual needs and circumstances.

The MRCs in Pakistan have also implemented migration information campaigns. In the framework of the PARIM-I project, different activities for potential Pakistani migrants, Afghan nationals in Pakistan, and the general population as well as training sessions for local journalists were conducted with the help of or through the MRCs, reaching millions of people throughout the KP province. Such initiatives aimed at supporting potential and intending migrants in making informed decisions about migration, providing accurate and trustworthy information about migration to both migrants and the general public, and raising awareness on the risks of irregular migration as well as on available legal and safe pathways of migration, thus attempting to reduce irregular migration movements.

According to MRC data for 2023, the MRCs in Pakistan reached a total of 1,387,386 people through social media, 86% of whom via Facebook (see Table 1). Additionally, they reached 97,880 people through outreach events and pre-departure briefings (see Table 2). Besides, they received queries from 15,859 people, providing one-to-one counselling to 4,983 people through its social media, phone, and walk-in services (see Table 3). Employment in Europe, in the GCC countries, and elsewhere, as well as

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[73] Cf. Jan-Paul Brekke and Audun Beyer, "'Everyone Wants to Leave'. Transit Migration from Khartoum - The Role of Information and Social Media Campaigns" (Oslo: Institute for Social Research, 2019), www.samfunnsforskning.no.

[74] Qaisrani, "Migration Insights: Understanding Onward Migration Dynamics among Afghan Nationals in Pakistan."

[75] Afghanistan, Bangladesh, India, Iran, Iraq, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka.

study abroad were the most common topics, accounting for almost two thirds of the enquiries received.

Table 1: MRCs Pakistan: Number of people reached via social media

Indicator	Lahore	Islamabad
Facebook		
Total page reach	1,197,037	n.a.
Total followers	786,837	n.a.
Total engagement	116,845	n.a.
Facebook live sessions (MRC)		
Total reach	95,158	n.a.
Total engagement	3,213	n.a.
Total likes	1,785	n.a.
Total views	19,158	n.a.
Instagram		
Total page reach	n.a.	1,256
Total engagement	n.a.	321
Total followers	n.a.	2,348
YouTube		
Total video views	n.a.	5,159
Total subscribers/followers	n.a.	35
Twitter/X		
Total impressions	186,187	n.a.
Total followers	4,029	n.a.
WhatsApp Announcements		
# of people in announcements group (except Afghans)	4,162	3,653

NB: Table 1 draws upon data provided by MRCs in Pakistan which have not been published yet.

Table 2: MRCs Pakistan: Number of people reached via community and group outreach

Indicator	Lahore	Islamabad*
Number of participants in MRC-led outreach sessions		
(a) Male	6,048	2,684
(b) Female	1,195	271
Over 18 years old	6,521	2,951
Under 18 years old	722	4
Total	**7,243**	**2,955**
Number of participants in orientation sessions at vocational training centres (VTCs)		
(a) Male	2,807	5,210
(b) Female	2,866	974
Over 18 years old	5,535	6,023
Under 18 years old	136	161
Total	**5,673**	**6,184**
Number of participants in orientation sessions at universities / educational institutions		
(a) Male	2,242	1,363
(b) Female	1,556	585
Over 18 years old	2,960	1,948
Under 18 years old	838	-
Total	**3,798**	**1,948**
Number of participants in pre-departure briefings		
(a) Male	35,547	32,743

(b) Female		283	739
Over 18 years old		35,830	33,482
Under 18 years old		-	-
Total		**35,830**	**33,482**

* Data from June/July to December 2023

NB: Table 2 draws upon data provided by MRCs in Pakistan which have not been published yet.

Table 3: MRCs Pakistan: Number of people counselled

Indicator	Lahore	Islamabad*
Number of people counselled		
Walk-in	278	92
Hotline/landline/MRC mobile phone	555	265
Facebook	460	137
WhatsApp	1,155	755
Email	236	22
Telegram	0	0
Instagram	0	0
Post-session counselling (in-person)	530	360
Other channels	0	138
Total	**3,214**	**1,769**
Other types of engagement		
Number of clients contacting the hotline	6,480	-
Number of people listening to pre-recorded messages over hotline	4,451	-
Number of people recording messages	659	-
Number of people who received SMS on hotline	-	-
Number of people who reached out via WhatsApp	2,200	743
Number of people who reached out via Facebook	1,326	-
Total	**15,116**	**743**

* Data from August to December 2023

NB: Table 3 draws upon data provided by MRCs in Pakistan which have not been published yet.

Despite, or perhaps because of the tense situation in both Pakistan and Afghanistan, the MRC Afghanistan – operating online since November 2021 – has performed rather well. According to the MRC data, more than 10 million Afghan nationals were reached by MRC social media posts and online activities in 2023, particularly through the Facebook page and the Facebook live sessions (see Table 4). In the same reporting period, 16,505 people reached out to MRC for counselling services (see Table 5), registering 18,823 queries regarding general advice on migration (13% of queries), work and migration to Europe, and migration abroad for residence and long-term stay (9% of queries in each case).

Table 4: MRC Afghanistan: Number of people reached via social media

Indicator	2022	2023
Facebook		
Total page reach	32,939,494	10,584,799
Total followers	125,284	168,203
Total engagement	3,012,283	1,065,787
Facebook live sessions (MRC)		
Total reach	752,732	502,291
Total engagement	83,140	30,699
Total likes	35,184	13,451
Total views	160,648	122,287
Instagram		
Total page reach	76,249	53,360
Total engagement	8,037	13,513
Total followers	4,953	3,542
YouTube		
Total video views	n.a.	9,655
Total subscribers/followers	562	900
Twitter/X		
Total impressions	n.a.	48,569
Total followers	106	167
WhatsApp Announcements		
# of people in announcements group (except Afghans)	n.a.	48,845

NB: Table 4 draws upon data provided by MRC Afghanistan which have not been published yet.

Table 5: MRC Afghanistan: Number of people counselled

Indicator	2022	2023
Number of people counselled		
Hotline/landline/MRC mobile phone	n.a.	n.a.
Facebook	5,715	1,182
WhatsApp	23,366	14,622
Email	504	415
Telegram	n.a.	286
Other channels	0	138
Total	**29,585**	**16,505**

NB: Table 5 draws upon data provided by MRC Afghanistan which have not been published yet.

As discussed in the Background Report, the MRC activities have been evaluated to assess their impact.[76] In his comparative quasi-experimental study of six different MRCs across four different countries,[77] Dennison reported that the exposure of potential Pakistani migrants to the MRC activities in Pakistan reduced potential migrants self-reported likelihood to migrate irregularly (from 11.5% to 4.1%), slightly increased the likelihood to migrate (from 71.1% to 80.8%), and significantly increased migrants' awareness of safe options (from 51.7% to 90.2%), as well as their awareness on relevant government entities responsible to provide information and/or support (from 51.4% to 87.6%). Similar results were also reported regarding the exposure to the activities of MRC Afghanistan, in which

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[76] Qaisrani, "Migration Insights: Understanding Onward Migration Dynamics among Afghan Nationals in Pakistan."

[77] The six MRCs are located in Baghdad (Iraq), Cumilla and Dhaka (Bangladesh), Islamabad and Lahore (Pakistan), and Kabul (Afghanistan).

potential migrants also reported a reduced likelihood to migrate irregularly (from 39.3% to 10.3%), slightly increased likelihood to migrate (from 90.9% to 96.3%), and a generally increased awareness of safe options (from 38.9% to 62.3%), as well as of government entities (from 24.3% to 34.7%).[78]

Another study evaluated the specific impact of the activities of the two MRCs in Pakistan (in particular community outreach sessions and counselling sessions) on the knowledge, attitudes, and intentions (KAI) of participants.[79] The study reported a significant increase in knowledge of key migration topics both post-session and one year later (about 30%), a general decrease in considering migration after attending MRC activities (but also a decrease in risk perception related to migration), and a decline in the respondents' intentions to migrate in the following two years. Both studies cannot generalise the results to all potential migrants in Pakistan, or even to the overall impact of MRC outreach campaigns; however, they are helpful in providing further nuance to and knowledge on the potential effectiveness of such campaigns.

While the activities of the MRC can sensitise and empower potential migrants to make informed decisions about migration, thus having a potential impact on reducing irregular migration towards European and other destination countries, the current situation of instability and precariousness for Afghan nationals in Pakistan demands careful considerations. For this reason, the design and implementation of targeted migration information campaigns should take into consideration specific ethical concerns, as well as the general political and socio-economic developments in both countries. This approach ensures that the best interests of potential migrants are always prioritised.

3.5.   Ethical and practical considerations for the campaign development

Considering the difficult situation for Afghan nationals in Pakistan – affected by the governmental crackdown on irregular migration and unable to return to their country for humanitarian and security reasons – the development of migration information campaign requires particular attention to ethical and practical concerns. Drawing from relevant literature, the Background Report has provided an initial guidance to design campaigns targeting migrants in third countries, taking into consideration ethical and practical issues.[80] The current report expands on previous work by highlighting specific ethical challenges and elaborating on potential solutions to overcome them.

- **Understanding the context**: As cliché as it might sound, it is fundamental for campaign implementers to understand and know the context in which they operate. This is particularly crucial in Pakistan, where, as we have discussed throughout this report, the social and political situation for undocumented migrants is volatile and subject to constant change after the governmental decision to deport undocumented foreign nationals from the country. Although a significant proportion of our sample has already engaged with the MRCs, campaign developers should also consider that MRCs are embedded in national structures, which might add to distrust towards official institutions.
- **Identify the target group**: As we discuss in Chapter 5, we highlight some characteristics for the target group of 'potential Afghan migrants in Pakistan'; however, it is important to consider that such group is not necessarily homogenous in terms of gender, ethnicity, or even

[78] James Dennison, "Impact Assessment of the Migrant Resource Centres in the Silk Routes Region" (Vienna: ICMPD, 2022), https://www.budapestprocess.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/ICMPD_MRC_impact_assessment_2022.pdf.

[79] Mujtaba Zaidi, "The Influence of Information Campaigns and Outreach on the Knowledge, Attitudes and Intentions (KAIs) of Migrants in Pakistan" (Vienna: ICMPD, 2023).

[80] Ayesha Qaisrani, "Migration Insights: Understanding Onward Migration Dynamics among Afghan Nationals in Pakistan," PARIM-II Background Report, 2023, https://www.icmpd.org/file/download/60522/file/D2.1-Background-report-16-08-2023-Final.pdf.

permanence in the country. Therefore, while campaign developers should have a general target group in mind when designing and implementing the campaign, they should also consider the physiological differences within that group, in order to tailor the campaign message accordingly. As the Seefar guidelines for the implementation of campaign point out, '[t]here is rarely a homogenous ethnic audience within a source country, so your campaign approach (i.e. your channels and messages) needs to be sensitive to this'.[81] While our analysis will provide an overall profile of the target group, we will also discuss such differences and their potential impact for the design of the campaign.

- **Listening to the target population**: Beside the general differences within the target group, campaign developers should consider the more specific differences between individuals in terms of needs, ambitions, and aspirations. No matter how homogeneous we think our target group is, every person has different needs that need to be understood and taken into account for the design and development of campaigns. Our research will provide a glimpse on respondents' intentions and desires, but continuous dialogue and engagement with the target group remain essential throughout the campaign development to achieve a stronger impact.

- **Shaping the right message**: Most literature recommends that campaigns employ messages that balance between negative and positive information, raising awareness on the risks of irregular migration while correctly informing on migrants' rights along the route or in the countries of destination. Considering the difficult situation of Afghan nationals in Pakistan, however, balancing between different messages might not be enough, when their rights in the country of displacement are restricted, the options available to migrate elsewhere are limited, and the return to their country of origin is often unconceivable. In this respect, we believe that it is important that the staff is trained both in dealing with particularly vulnerable people and that the information provided focuses on practical and feasible alternatives and actual available options for potential migrants.

- **Applying the 'do no harm' principle**: As highlighted in the Background Report, campaigns should always keep the 'do no harm' principle at their core, not only by engaging with migrants but also by providing them with useful and tailored information and giving voice to their needs and aspirations.[82] Needless to say, campaign messages must avoid discriminatory or dehumanising language and respect social and cultural diversity; yet, they should also actively take into consideration the unintended negative consequences or the potential misuse of the information provided.[83] As the OHCHR suggests, for example, campaigns should not perpetuate distinctions between people falling into different legal categories but similarly experiencing the effects of the campaign, nor should they give the impression that some people are more "deserving" than others in terms of rights or service provision, even if that happens in an unconscious or inadvertent way.[84] In other words, campaigns should put migrants at the centre, providing them with reliable and trustworthy information on migration options and rights, tailored on their needs and aspirations.

- **Choosing the right partners**: Campaign developers should foster extensive collaboration with local stakeholders for the implementation of the campaign, in particular with community or religious leaders. The engagement of these figures, well-known and respected among their community, might help build the trust of the target population, thus ensuring a more impactful

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[81] Seefar, "3E Impact. Ethical, Engaged & Effective. Running Communications on Irregular Migration from Kos to Kandahar," 2018.

[82] Ayesha Qaisrani, "Migration Insights: Understanding Onward Migration Dynamics among Afghan Nationals in Pakistan".

[83] UNICEF, "Social and Behaviour Change at UNICEF," 2023, available at https://www.sbcguidance.org/sites/default/files/2023-04/UNICEF SBC Programme Guidance All Tools.pdf.

[84] OHCHR, "Stand Up 4 Migrants - Informal Summary" (Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, 2023), https://www.ohchr.org/en/get-involved/campaigns/stand-up-for-migrants.

outcome of the campaign. In some cases, campaign developers can also join forces with specific local institutions or NGOs, provided that they are trusted among the community.

- **Selecting the right channels**: There are multiple ways to reach the target population, with social media and traditional means of communication usually preferred for their ability to reach a wider segment of the population. While these channels might certainly be helpful to disseminate messages on a large scale, they might be ineffective in reaching the specific target population and inefficient in terms of costs and final impact. For this reason, it is important to 'think local',[85] employing participatory and accessible channels – such as community events, cultural performances, or social activities – that envisage the active participation of the target group and promote social interaction and solidarity within the community.

- **Knowing power and limits**: Finally, it is important for campaign developers to understand the power relations at play in the implementation of information campaigns. Whether they be governmental institutions, local authorities, or NGOs, campaign implementers are never neutral actors, but always embedded in a system of social relation and interconnections with the target group as well as with a myriad of other actors. It is important also to acknowledge that framing the choice of messengers, messages, and channels might have different and sometimes unintended consequences for the target group, ending up reproducing bordering practices and doing more harm than good to the intended target population. Understanding the power and limits of the campaign implementers might help not only achieve a stronger and more sustainable impact of the campaign, but also empower potential migrants in making more informed decisions on migration.

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[85] Ibid.

4. Research design

4.1. Methodology

The research component of the PARIM-II project entails four distinct research strands that inform this final report and offer actionable lessons for the design of the PARIM-II campaign. These research strands – employing a combination of quantitative and qualitative research methods – include background research, a survey, stakeholder mapping and key informant interviews, and validation meetings. The combined analysis of these strands allows us not only to identify the different micro, meso, and macro level elements influencing migration decisions among Afghan nationals in Pakistan, but also to capture their information needs and desires. This allows us to frame campaign messages accordingly, pinpoint influential messengers to disseminate these messages more efficiently, and explore the most common channels to reach migrants, thus enhancing the quality and impact of the campaign. The four research strands are presented and discussed in more detail below:

Background research:[86] As a starting point, a detailed literature review was conducted to form the foundation of the preparatory research phase. Building on the conceptual underpinnings already established and discussed in PARIM-I research outputs, the PARIM-II background report aimed at addressing three main aspects: i) presenting a contextual overview of Afghan nationals in Pakistan, including their migration histories from Afghanistan to Pakistan and their socioeconomic conditions within Pakistan; ii) delineating the drivers and patterns of onward migration of Afghans from Pakistan, highlighting the main micro, meso, and macro factors, as identified through existing literature, that may contribute to onward migration decisions; and iii) understanding the relevance of migration information campaigns targeting migrants in third countries, such as the case of Afghans in Pakistan, and discussing the design and impact of such campaigns. In addition, an overview of existing and previously concluded campaigns targeted at Afghan nationals in Pakistan was also presented to identify the main themes addressed and draw lessons for the design of future campaigns.

Survey: The survey served as the empirical basis for the research phase. It aimed at identifying the information needs and gaps among potential (irregular) migrants within the Afghan population living in Pakistan, including their migration intentions, risk awareness and confidence levels, preparation levels, key influencers, and preferred communication channels for effective dissemination of migration-related information.

The administration of the survey (as well as the stakeholder mapping and key informant interviews) was sub-contracted to a reputable local research organisation called the Institute of Social Policy Sciences (I-SAPS), which has extensive experience in conducting research on Afghan nationals in Pakistan. I-SAPS also supported the research phase in PARIM-I project, and hence was closely familiar with the aims and objectives of the project. Since PARIM-II was built on demand identified through the activities of PARIM-I campaign, study districts were pre-selected during the proposal phase. These included five districts in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, in particular Abbottabad, Haripur, Mansehra, Mardan, and Peshawar. As will be discussed in methodological challenges, survey could not be conducted in Abbottabad, and hence the focus was on the remaining four districts (see Figure 1). A total of 1004 potential onward migrants were interviewed, with an equal distribution of 251 participants in each of the districts.

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[86] Ayesha Qaisrani, "Migration Insights: Understanding Onward Migration Dynamics among Afghan Nationals in Pakistan," PARIM-II Background Report (Vienna: International Centre for Migration Policy Development, 2023), https://www.icmpd.org/file/download/60522/file/D2.1-Background-report-16-08-2023-Final.pdf.

Figure 1: Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Province – Districts of Interest
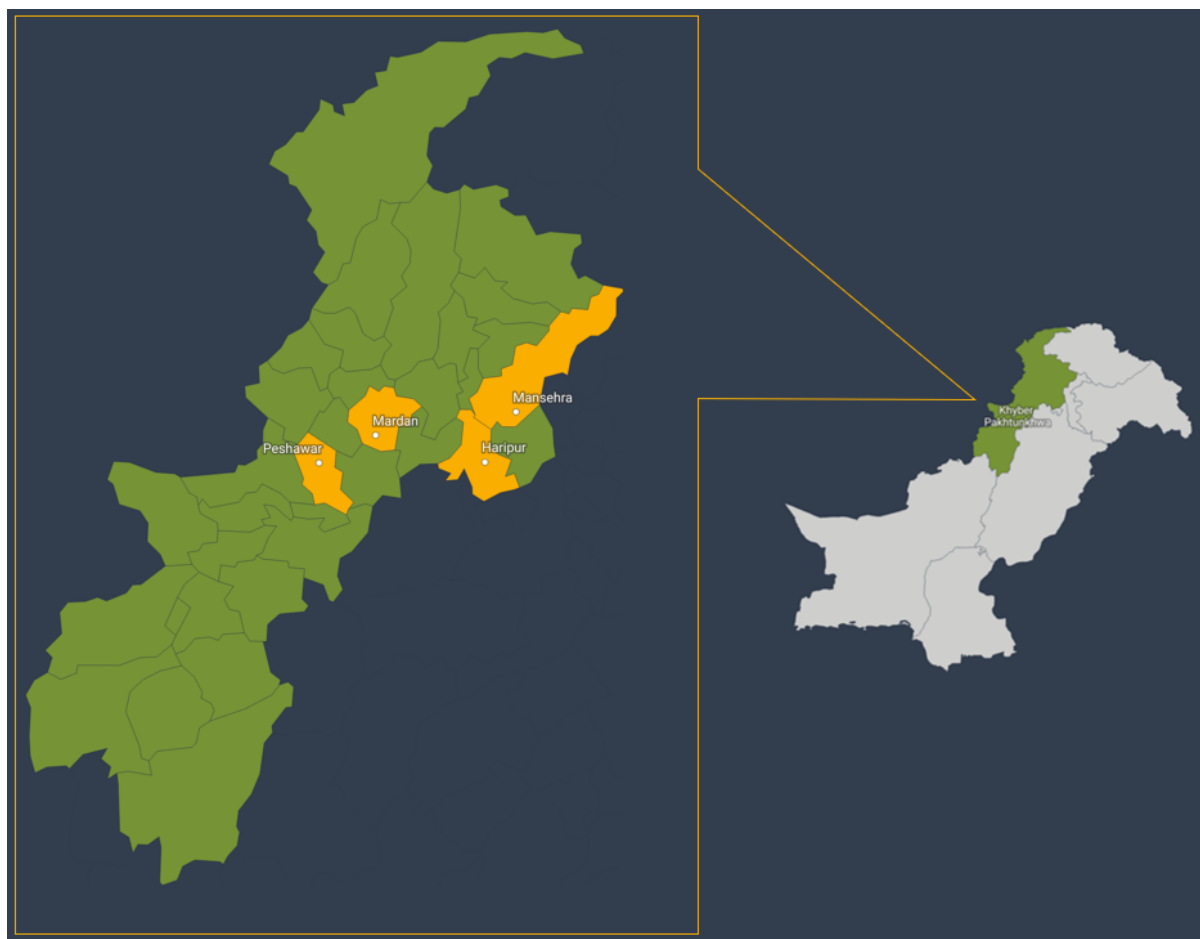
In studying migration intentions, particularly among those planning to migrate irregularly, the sample construction posed a significant challenge. Traditional probability sampling methods could not be used in our case due to several factors. Firstly, the population of 'potential Afghan migrants in Pakistan' lacks a clear definition, making identification particularly difficult. Secondly, the legal status of this population is often ambiguous, rendering individuals less accessible or willing to participate in surveys, especially under the ongoing crackdown on irregular migrants in Pakistan. This reluctance to cooperate is exacerbated by the marginalised status of the Afghan community in Pakistan. To address these challenges, we removed the identification criteria for potential migrants (which we used in PARIM-I), employing instead the 'Chain Referral Sampling' technique, a non-probability sampling method that relies on existing study subjects to recruit future participants through snowball approach from within their networks.

To facilitate the identification and engagement of survey respondents, a comprehensive multi-stage sampling methodology was implemented. Initially, the research team delineated population clusters within each of the selected districts, based on specific geographical and demographic factors and with a focus on areas with a significant Afghan migrant population, such as refugee camps. Subsequently, the research team engaged with relevant community networks within each cluster, organising meetings with community elders and local stakeholders to explain the study objectives, establish meaningful connections, and build trust and support mechanisms for implementation of the survey. The following stage entailed the identification and approach of an initial cohort of 10 potential

migrants in each district, as identified by community members based on their willingness to migrate onwards. At the end of the first interviews, the ten respondents were asked to refer at least four other potential migrants among their contacts who could be willing to participate in the survey. If some respondents were not able to identify four other potential migrants for the interview, this was compensated by other respondents who identified more than four potential migrants, still ensuring the attainment of the requisite sample size in each district. Similarly, the second cohort of 40 new respondents was asked to refer four new potential migrants, and the iterative referral process continued across subsequent cohorts until achieving the desired sample size of 1,004 respondents, thereby ensuring a broader representation within the Afghan migrant community.

This approach proved invaluable in the absence of a clearly defined initial sample, facilitating access to individuals who may have otherwise been unreachable or less likely to engage in the survey.[87] Consequently, this sampling technique not only broadened the reach to individuals otherwise inaccessible but also ensured a diverse sample from various social circles and backgrounds, eventually validating the profile of Afghan migrants as identified by other studies. With regards to gender distribution, efforts were made to ensure that at least 10% of the sample in each district was composed of female participants. Equal selection of samples from each district helped ensure sufficient representation of each district in the final analysis.

It is worth mentioning, however, that the final sample thus designed did not allow to reach a wide proportion of newly arrived Afghans. The overwhelming majority of our sample is indeed composed of Afghan nationals who have been living in Pakistan for more than 5 years or, in some cases, even born in the country (89% of cases). Only 4% of the sample includes Afghans that have arrived in Pakistan since the Taliban takeover of 2021. This is also reflected in the legal status of the population surveyed for this research, which includes a great majority of people holding a PoR or ACC (77%), while about 21% are either undocumented or on a temporary visa.

The survey questionnaire was designed by ICMPD, with active inputs from I-SAPS to inform on local sensitivities, on-ground situation and to adapt the questionnaire accordingly. To ensure inclusivity of all relevant individuals and facilitate the administration of the survey in the field, the questionnaire was then translated in Pashtu, Dari, and Urdu. While finalising the questionnaire, the survey company recruited the enumerators to be employed in the field, ensuring that they had sufficient knowledge of the local context (the field staff were selected from the same districts where they conducted the survey) and strong connections with the local community. After the recruitment process, the enumerators were provided with a one-day training in Islamabad not only on the sampling process and survey tool but also on ethical research practices and a do-no-harm approach, taking into account the sensitivities involved in dealing with a vulnerable population segment. Upon successful completion of training, the field staff was deployed to undertake data collection through face-to-face interviews in all four districts. The translated questionnaire was first pilot tested with 10 respondents in the districts of Haripur and Mardan and then administered more broadly in the span of four weeks between November and December 2023. The survey was conducted through the Computer Assisted Personal Interviews (CAPI) by using mobile phones and tablet PCs.

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[87] Mahin Naderifar, Hamideh Goli, and Fereshteh Ghaljaie, "Snowball Sampling: A Purposeful Method of Sampling in Qualitative Research," *Strides in Development of Medical Education* 14, no. 3 (2017), https://doi.org/10.5812/sdme.67670; Kim Leighton et al., "Using Social Media and Snowball Sampling as an Alternative Recruitment Strategy for Research," *Clinical Simulation in Nursing* 55, no. 6 (2021): 37–42, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ecns.2021.03.006.

Due to the nature of the data, it is extremely challenging to uncover the causal mechanisms driving the onward migration of Afghan nationals living in Pakistan. Consequently, and aligning with the objectives of the research, a series of descriptive statistics were conducted to elucidate characteristics within the sample, particularly focusing on individuals expressing clear intentions of migration within the next two years, with a specific emphasis on those planning irregular migration. The analysis primarily used Microsoft Excel software, particularly Pivot Tables.

The analytical approach involved multiple cross-tabulations and visual elements spanning diverse dimensions, including demographics, drivers of migration, social and support networks, preparation levels for migration, risk perception and confidence levels, pre-migration knowledge acquisition, preference for channels disseminating migration-related information, sources of migration information, engagement with MRCs, and the perceived usefulness derived from such interactions.

Stakeholder mapping and interviews: In addition to the survey findings, a detailed mapping was conducted to identify pertinent stakeholders involved with Afghan nationals in Pakistan, including those who could potentially serve as campaign outreach partners. In total, the mapping identified 92 stakeholders across the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, spanning the districts of Mardan, Peshawar, Haripur, Mansehra, and Abbottabad. The stakeholders represent a wide spectrum of actors at the district, provincial, and national levels, hailing from a diverse array of public and private institutions, including governmental bodies, international organisations, NGOs, travel agencies, and specialised consultants. Twelve key stakeholders were approached in November 2023 for in-depth interviews aimed at understanding the scope of their work and drawing their insights on drivers of migration for Afghan nationals in Pakistan. The distribution of stakeholders is equal across the same four districts of the survey, which were again selected based on their relevance to the overall aim of the study and on the potential presence of Afghan nationals. The stakeholders interviewed, mostly comprising CSOs at the district level, are actively engaged in providing support to Afghan nationals residing in Pakistan, offering a range of services such as humanitarian aid, educational assistance, legal guidance, and employment opportunities. Fieldwork was outsourced to I-SAPS (discussed below). The qualitative information obtained through these interviews proved invaluable in contextualizing and validating the findings of the survey.

Validation Meetings: Two Validation Meetings with Consortium Partners and National Stakeholders were conducted on 6 and 8 March 2024, respectively. The purpose of the Validation Meetings was to gather further insights from partners and relevant stakeholders and to attain their feedback on the preliminary findings of this report. The first Validation Meeting with Consortium Partners took place on 6 March 2024, online. All consortium partners attended the Validation Meeting, namely, the European Commission Department of Migration and Home Affairs (DG HOME), the Ministry of Interior of Austria, the Ministry of Interior of Bulgaria, the Finnish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the German Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (BAMF), the Greek Ministry of Migration and Asylum, and ICMPD, represented by the Regional Coordination Office for the Silk Routes and the Research Unit.

The second Validation Meeting with Pakistani Stakeholders was held online on 8 March 2024. The meeting saw the participation of Pakistani counterparts active in the area of migration and related service provision, both from the civil society and at the governmental level, including the Bureau of Emigration and Overseas Employment (BEOE), the MOPHRD, the Anti Human Smuggling Unit of the Federal Investigation Agency (FIA-AHS), the Overseas Pakistanis Foundation (OPF), the Youth Employability Network (YEN), the MRCs in Lahore, Islamabad, and Peshawar, the Technical Education and Vocational Training Authority of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP TEVTA), the Women Empowerment,

Literacy and Development Organization (WELDO), the Sustainable Development Policy Institute (SDPI), and The Centrum Media (TCM).

The meeting was facilitated by the PARIM-II Project Manager and two ICMPD Researchers who led the implementation of specific research-related deliverables. Subsequent discussions delved into the specificity of the findings, with particular interest in how potential and intending migrants use social media to obtain information on migration. In general, the Consortium Partners and the national stakeholders endorsed the findings presented, expressing their satisfaction with the development of the research project.

4.2. Ethical considerations

This project delves into the circumstances of Afghan migrants residing in Pakistan, especially those contemplating further migration via irregular channels. Given the complex background surrounding this demographic, it is imperative to carefully consider the ethical dimensions of the study. In this respect, particular attention was dedicated to the selection of the field staff and the recruitment of research participants.

In the first case, field staff was selected among the local community to ensure their familiarity with the local context, establish trust with the research participants, and mitigate potential risks or power imbalances between researchers and participants. As previously mentioned, due to the particular situation of engaging with vulnerable groups, the field staff was trained also on ethical research practices and a do-no-harm approach, to ensure compliance with ethical research guidelines, treat participants with particular care and sensitivity, and respect their dignity and well-being.

In the second case, we were aware that many individuals find themselves in legally or personally uncertain situations, with some experiencing protection concerns due to the difficulty in accessing asylum procedures in Pakistan. This underscores the critical importance of confidentiality in developing the research project. To address this concern, the survey questionnaire did not gather any information that could have allowed to trace participants back, such as their name and specific address. Besides, informed consent was sought among all participants to the survey, after presenting a clear introductory statement that outlined how participants' data would be handled, the purpose of its use, and their rights. This statement emphasised participants' freedom to choose not to participate in the interview or to decline to answer any question at their discretion. Considering the particularly vulnerable situation of Afghan migrants in Pakistan, further attention was paid to the use of careful and respectful language in the survey, ensuring clarity and sensitivity to the precarious circumstances of the interviewees.

4.3. Challenges and limitations

Conducting a study focusing on Afghan nationals residing in Pakistan presents numerous ethical and methodological challenges, especially considering the complex political landscapes of both Afghanistan and Pakistan. The Pakistani government's crackdown on irregular migration – following the executive order decision to expel all irregular migrants from the country from November 2023 – had a particular impact on the Afghan community, including Afghans without papers as well as those who had expired documents, creating a sense of panic amongst the community. The changing political scenario affected our research activities conducted in that same period, as people were hesitant to speak to anyone and reluctant to provide their personal information, especially on highly sensitive matters such as their irregular migration intentions. To overcome this issue, in coordination with the survey company we decided to revise the target group, focusing not only on newly arrived Afghans,

who could have been more affected by the changing policies due to their precarious legal status, but more broadly on Afghan nationals in Pakistan, including those with PoR cards.

Identifying potential irregular migrants within the Afghan community in Pakistan poses another significant challenge. This difficulty arises not only from the hesitancy of individuals to divulge their irregular migration intentions but also from inherent challenges in finding these individuals, many of whom operate outside official records. Although the sampling method used in this study aids in identifying a portion of these individuals, its efficacy may be limited. The method primarily relies on networks, which may be more effective in reaching settled individuals rather than newly arrived migrants. Consequently, the vast majority of our respondents consists of individuals either born in Pakistan from Afghan origins or living in the country for more than five years. This aspect warrants careful consideration, given the potential impact on the study's findings, the broader understanding of migration dynamics in the region, and its implications on information campaigns. The overwhelming presence of long-term Afghan residents in our survey might indeed overlook newcomers' specific needs for information and support while overrepresenting the opinions of individuals that, although still living in camps and potentially affected by the new dispositions, might have different needs and ambitions.

Given the employment of a non-representative sample, it is also important to note that our findings cannot be generalised to the entire Afghan population (both in general and specifically in Pakistan). Since the sample should have responded to specific characteristics (Afghan individuals in Pakistan with intentions to migrate), we necessarily operated with a smaller sub-sample of the population, with different characteristics across the districts. Although this might allow us to offer a greater diversification of the sample, the change in its composition may result in a parallel diversification of the findings, with some characteristics in specific districts more represented than in others. Considering also the more restrictive political scenario, the sample can also present issues of social desirability bias, i.e., the tendency of survey respondents to answer questions according to socially acceptable standards, under-representing bad behaviours or over-representing good ones.[88]

Other characteristics of the sample might prompt reflection on the methodological challenges of our research project. One example is constituted by the number of people who reportedly had contacted the MRC (about 37% of the whole sample) and those who had suggested that the MRC could represent a valid source of information on migration (only 1%). According to a private conversation with the manager of the company responsible for the survey, there could be a number of reasons for anomaly in responses, but none can be said with certainty. Some may include the following.

- General vs Specific Personal Information: In the first question, the discussion was about general sources of information, while the respondents may contact the MRC for more personalised information, thus not reporting it in the first question.
- Different pre-migration stages: Individuals may initially rely on some sources information (social media or family and friends) to form their preferences or opinions about migration and turn to MRCs for specific information or assistance only at a later stage. In fact, among those with contacted the MRCs, 94% were reportedly ready to migrate in the next two years, while this proportion was 66% among those that had not come in contact with the MRCs. Similarly, the proportion of those who had taken some steps for migration was significantly higher among this segment as compared to those who had not contacted the MRCs.

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[88] William Lawrence Neuman, Social Research Methods: Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches (London: Pearson, 2009).

- Triggered Memory: As the question on the source of information on migration that respondents had used was asked in an open-ended manner, the MRC might not necessarily come to their mind, while a direct question on MRC might have triggered a higher number of acknowledgements and related more directly to a personal experience.
- Social Desirability Bias: As explained above, some respondents might tend to provide what is believed to be the correct answer rather than an honest one. A closer analysis shows that those who contacted the MRCs reportedly were more confidence about their level of awareness pertaining to migration and perhaps wanted to convey such awareness.

For all these reasons, the findings of our research cannot be generalised.

Another challenge arises from the geographical scope of the fieldwork. Originally, the survey was supposed to be administered in 5 districts in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, with 200 respondents in each district. However, due to the absence of an Afghan camp and to the difficulties in accessing the target population, the district of Abbottabad was excluded from the survey. The overall sample size was nevertheless kept as per the research design, with 251 respondents from each of the remaining four districts.

5. Migrant profile and drivers of migration

5.1. Background

For designing an effective migration information campaign, it is crucial to understand the target group that the campaign aims to reach. Understanding the target audience entails getting familiar not just with their general characteristics in terms of demographics, but also their access to services, information, and resources, as well as their broader situational context and surroundings that intersect with their characteristics to shape their life decisions and experiences. As was done for PARIM-I, deeper knowledge of the target audience contributes to designing a tailored campaign that speaks to the needs of the target population in terms of their migration intentions, information gaps, specific demographic and geographic groups, and preferences of channels and messengers of campaign content.[89]

In this section, in our analysis of the qualitative and quantitative data collected in the study, we continue to build on the conceptual framework put forth by Black et al., as was done in the PARIM-I research outputs.[90] The framework is particularly helpful not only to delineate the intersecting micro, meso, and macro factors that drive migration but also to understand how such factors influence the migration processes, decisions, and outcomes, thus providing a comprehensive and multi-dimensional perspective on migration and offering a useful analytical tool to grasp the complexities of migration. The following discussion will help us understand the general framework in which Afghan migrants in Pakistan consider onward migration decisions, given the set of circumstances they experience at a personal, community and structural level. This chapter also draws on the PARIM-II Background Report that summarised relevant literature on onward migration in general, but also specific migration trends among Afghan nationals towards Europe.

5.2. Micro drivers: Characteristics of target audience

Unlike the PARIM-I survey where we adopted a criteria-based approach for sample selection including factors such as age, education, income level and intention to migrate, we opted for a more lenient approach for identifying the sample for PARIM-II, as discussed in Chapter 4. The sample was selected based primarily on identification of Afghans with migration intentions by community members. This means that there is more variability in the personal characteristics of this sample across indicators of age, location, education, ethnic background, marital status, income group, and profession across the districts. It is interesting to note the intersection of these characteristics with migration intentions, factors influencing these intentions, awareness on migration, as well as degree of planning and preparation for migration across the sample and specifically for the districts under study. Such an analysis allows a deeper understanding of the sample, offering more detailed identification of information needs of the target audience.

Overall, the sample (n=1004) shows the following characteristics of the target group: **a typical potential Afghan migrant residing in Pakistan, particularly KP, tends to be a male of Pashtun ethnicity (90%), under the age of 35 years (60% fall between 18-35), married (75%), with educational attainment between primary and secondary level (5-10 years of formal education), and no technical**

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[89] Seefar and ECORYS, "Study on Best Practices in Irregular Migration Awareness-Raising Campaigns" (Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2021).

[90] Richard Black et al., "The Effect of Environmental Change on Human Migration," *Global Environmental Change* 21 (2011): S3–11, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.gloenvcha.2011.10.001; Ayesha Qaisrani, Katharina Hahn-Schaur, and Maegan Hendow, "Irregular Migration Dynamics from Pakistan and the Role of Information Campaigns: PARIM Final Report" (Vienna: International Centre for Migration Policy Development (ICMPD), 2021).

or vocational training (67%). He is likely to be self-employed (44%) earning less than PKR 50,000 (approx. EUR 165) per month, living with about 5-10 household members (63%). Due to some methodological limitations discussed in Chapter 4, some characteristics were pre-defined or were derived because of the nature of the sample. For instance, most lived in refugee campsites (46%), were registered refugees or holding a proof of registration (75%), and had been living in Pakistan for more than 5 years (61%). Moreover, the fact that the survey was conducted in KP also influences the ethnic makeup of the sample. As noted in interviews conducted with relevant stakeholders and confirmed in our survey sample (see Figure 2), ethnic Afghan groups that speak Dari or Farsi may have a higher tendency to migrate from Pakistan (SH08_Mansehra; SH11_Haripur). This is largely because of the fear of persecution if deported back to Afghanistan and also discrimination faced within Pakistan because of belonging to an ethnic minority group.

Figure 2: Intention to migrate irregularly according to ethnic background
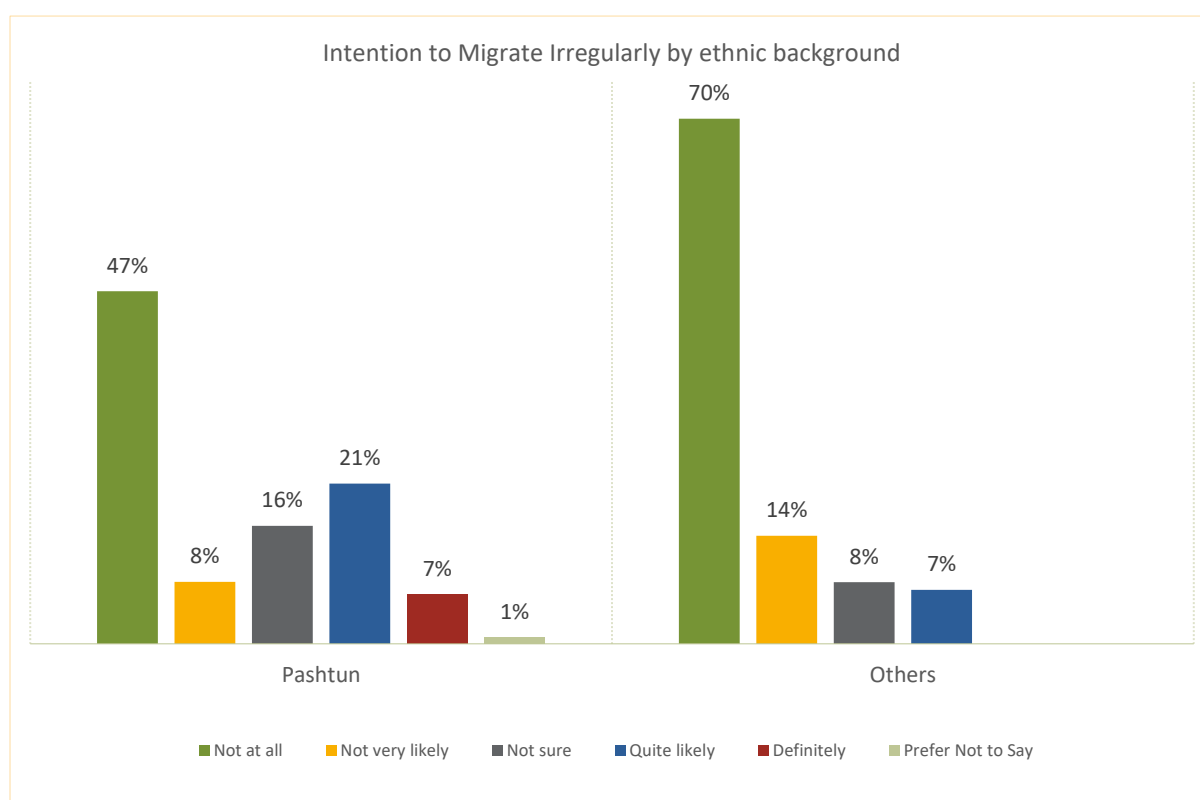
NOTE: The percentages are calculated per ethnic group. There are 907 individuals in the Pashtun sample, compared to 97 in the ethnic category 'Others' (of whom 46 Tajiks, 5 Uzbeki, and 4 Hazaras).

While the profile of those who expressed an intention to migrate irregularly (n=412) largely mirrored that described above, they were more likely to be in the age group of 18-25 years (38%), with up to secondary level education (37%) and slightly more likely to be daily wagers (40%) (as compared to self-employed). The other parameters show similar results as the overall sample.

This profile is broadly similar to a typical profile of an Afghan migrant, as found in other literature. IOM surveys conducted in 2016[91] and 2021[92] among the potential and actual Afghan migrant communities, respectively, generally confirm these characteristics. A similar survey by Mixed Migration Centre on Afghans in Türkiye also corroborates the profile that our survey shows, however, the age range of the profile found in the MMC report suggests a slightly younger demographic (18-30 years).[93] The profile determined from our survey matches the profile of Afghan callers who reach out to MRC Pakistan with queries related to migration, further validating our findings.[94]

While the sample was purposefully selected among those who were known to have some degree of intention to migrate, as identified by the community network, we asked two additional questions in the survey that not only allowed us to understand the **self-reported migration intentions**, but also served as checks on the validity of the sample selection. The first check asked the likelihood to which the respondent would consider migrating to another country in the next two years. About 93% of the sample declared some level of intention to migrate from Pakistan, with 27% stating 'very likely', 49% 'likely' to migrate – i.e., 76% showing a strong intention to migrate - while 17% were 'unsure' reflecting a weaker intention or indecision (see Figure 3). The high percentage of respondents declaring some level of intention to migrate shows that our overall sample is a good representative of Afghans with migration intentions from Pakistan. However, intentions to migrate were subject to some variance across the districts, with fewer respondents from Peshawar sharing an intent to migrate in the next two years as compared to other districts.

[91] IOM Pakistan, "Comprehensive Profile of Afghan Potential Migrants in Pakistan 2016," Comprehensive Migration Flows Survey (CFMS), 2016, https://dtm.iom.int/reports/cmfs-profile-afghan-potential-migrants-2016. . Conducted among 294 Afghans in Pakistan, the survey found that 76% of the sample was aged between 18-34 years, 41% had between primary and secondary level of education, about 90% lived in Pakistan for more than 5 years. The survey suggested that potential Afghan migrants were unmarried, but the sample size was quite small to make generalisable conclusions.
[92] IOM, "Afghanistan - Survey on Drivers of Migration - Round 2 (November 2020 - March 2021)" (Displacement Tracking Matrix, 2021), https://dtm.iom.int/reports/afghanistan-survey-drivers-migration-round-2-november-2020-march-2021.
[93] MMC. "Afghans En Route to Turkey: Access to Critical Information" (Copenhagen: Mixed Migration Centre, 2022), https://mixedmigration.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/230_-Afghans_en_route_to_Turkey.pdf.
[94] Migrant Resource Centre Pakistan, "Awareness Raising and Information Campaigns on the Risks of Irregular Migration in Pakistan (PARIM) - Monthly Reports" (ICMPD, 2022).

Figure 3: Likelihood of Migration in the next 2 years

How likely are you to migrate to another country in the next two years? (n=1004)

	Haripur	Mansehra	Mardan	Peshawar	Total
Not at all	3%	3%	0.4%	3%	2%
Not Likely	2%	1%	2%	12%	4%
Unsure	9%	8%	14%	35%	17%
Likely	78%	30%	53%	35%	49%
Very Likely	8%	57%	30%	14%	27%

Legend: ■ Very Likely ■ Likely ■ Unsure ■ Not Likely ■ Not at all
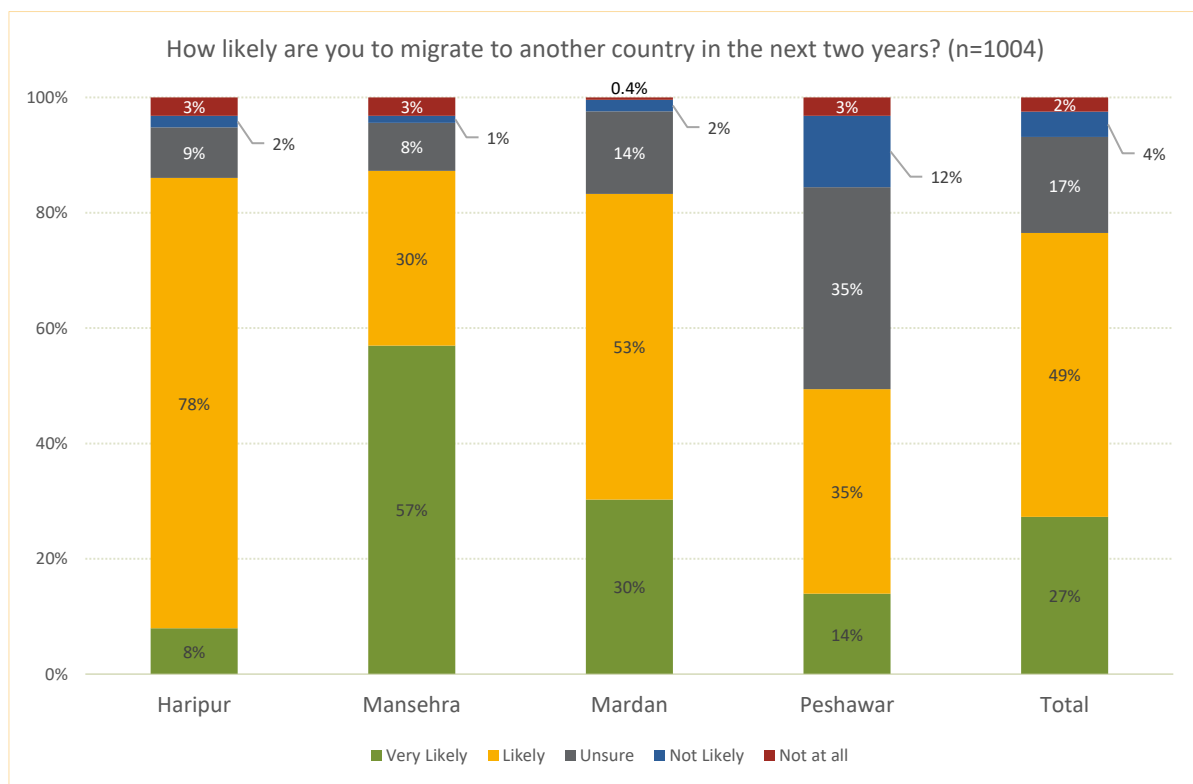
The second relevant question relates to their **intentions of migrating *irregularly*** (see Figure 4). Since this question is particularly sensitive to ask, especially with the current political climate in Pakistan and the crackdown on undocumented Afghans, we are aware that the responses we received may be affected. We also acknowledge that this indicator is likely to be highly subjective to social desirability bias, where respondents may feel the pressure to respond in a way that would be viewed as agreeable or favourable, in this case declaring their non-intention to irregularly migrate.[95] In order to mitigate this outcome and make respondents more comfortable in sharing their opinions, the survey questionnaire included also a question aiming to get participants to respond about the general migration trends of other people, providing therefore information on the overall Afghan population in Pakistan.

When asked the more personal and specific question, out of the total sample (n=1004), 58% answered that they do not consider irregular migration (i.e., travelling without papers to their preferred destination): 49% expressed 'not at all' and 9% mentioned 'not very likely', see Figure 3). In comparison, about 41% expressed an intention to irregularly migrate to varying degrees - i.e., 6% mentioned 'definitely' considering this option, 20% said 'quite likely', and 15% reported 'unsure'. While responses for 'definitely' and 'quite likely' reflect a strong intention to migrate irregularly, we also treat 'unsure' as those who may consider irregular migration but had weak intentions at the time of the interview (or given the other biases noted previously). When discussing respondents with an intention to migrate irregularly, we club together responses for those who reported 'definitely', 'quite likely', and 'unsure', unless stated otherwise. Hence, this indicator is interpreted cautiously in the report and should always be understood with reference to its smaller sample size (n=412). Often, we also zoom

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[95] Roger Tourangeau and Yang Yan, "Sensitive Questions in Surveys," *Psychological Bulletin* 133, no. 5 (2007): 859–83.

into those with more concrete or stronger intentions to migrate irregularly, referring to those who responded 'definitely' and 'quite likely' to this question (n=233).

Figure 4: Likelihood of irregular migration

How likely is it for you to travel irregularly (without papers)? (n=1004)
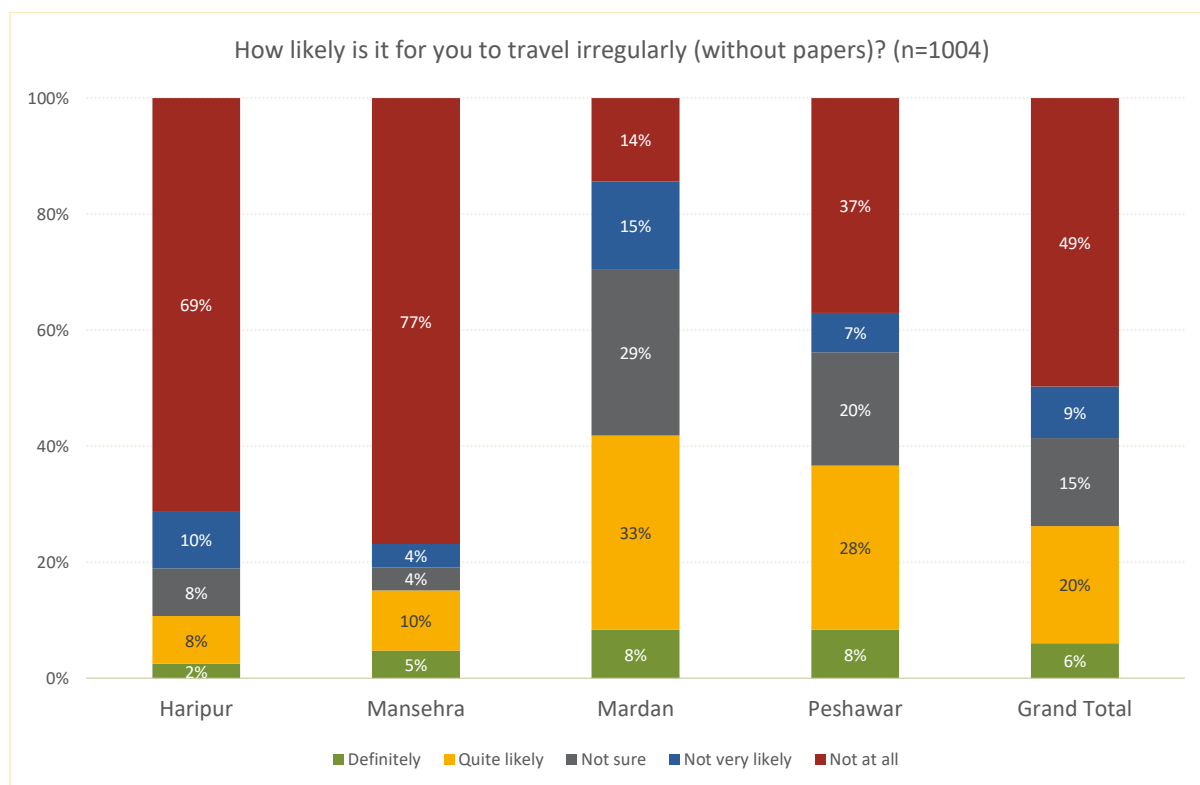
Interestingly, in contrast to the findings of PARIM-I where we found that migrating irregularly was very common amongst the Pakistani youth in the study districts (100% sample believed that there was a trend among youth in their area to migrate to Europe), implying a culture of (irregular) migration in the region, the same trend is not observed for the case of Afghans in Pakistan. While 48% of the sample believed it to be a common practice,[96] 35% of the sample believed that it is 'not at all' common for Afghans in Pakistan to travel onwards without papers, and another 16% believed it was rare. Hence it should be noted that, in fact, irregular migration among Afghans in Pakistan may not be as common of a phenomenon as it is for Pakistanis in certain migration hotspots of the country in central Punjab. Secondly, our sample largely comprised of Afghans who had been living in Pakistan for longer term. Perhaps, the trend of migrating onwards is more common among the newly arrived migrants, which unfortunately our sample captured in a very limited way. The relatively lower trend of irregular onward migration among Afghans might reflect the relatively lower trend of irregular migration from the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province in general (as compared to Punjab) – although it is noted that trends of both regular labour migration and irregular migration from KP have been on the rise for the last decade.[97]

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[96] 10% reported "common", 32% believe it to be "very common" and 6% say Afghans "almost always" migrate without papers.
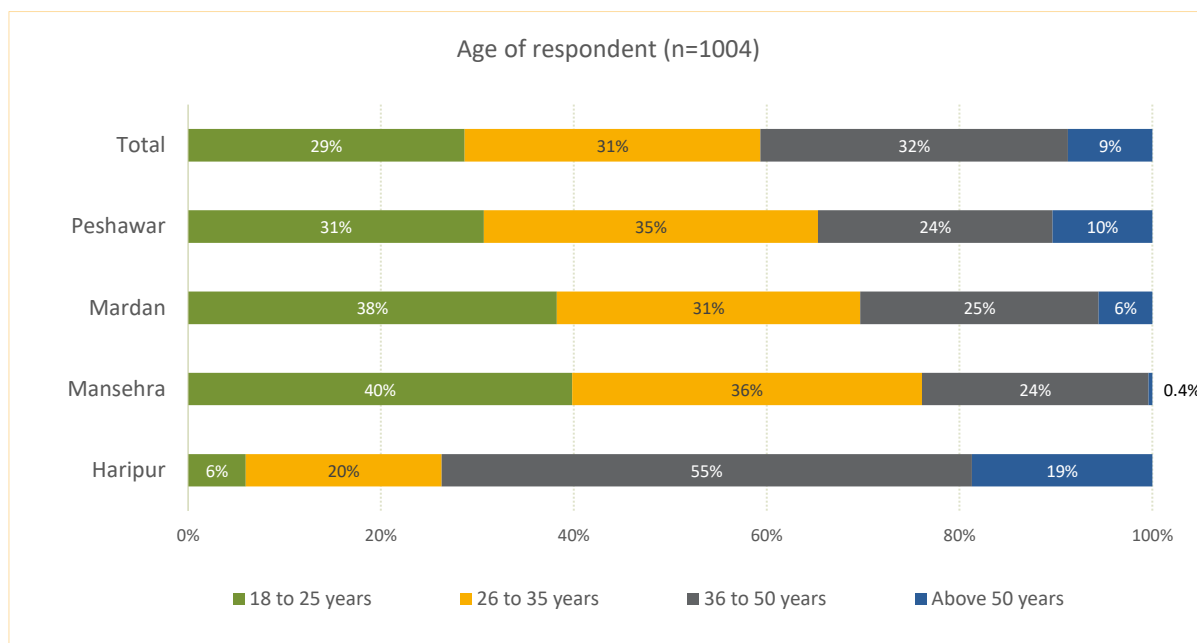
[97] Bureau of Emigration and Overseas Employment (BEOE), "Number of Pakistani Workers Registered for Employment Abroad (1981-2024), Province Wise," 2024, https://beoe.gov.pk/files/statistics/2024/province.pdf; UNODC, "Smuggling of Migrants from Pakistan: Reasons, Routes, and Risks," 2016, https://doi.org/10.1542/peds.2014-136s1.

A closer observation of the above-mentioned demographic and socioeconomic indicators reveals interesting variations. In terms of **districts** and **locality**, majority of respondents from Haripur lived in rural areas (46%), while this percentage was much smaller for the other districts, in Mansehra the majority lived in urban areas (52%), in Mardan almost two thirds of the respondents (65%) were from those living in refugee camps, and in Peshawar the percentage of those living in camps (49%) was not much higher than those living in urban areas (44%). Overall, sample distribution across the districts was constant (n=251) but, zooming in on those with a reported intention to migrate in the next two years, we observe that Peshawar had a slightly less percentage of those with the intention to migrate in the next two years (84%) as compared to the other districts (above 95% for other districts). Specifically, intentions to migrate irregularly were noted to be highest from Mardan (70%), followed by Peshawar (56%), Mansehra (19%), and Haripur (18%). This highlights a contradiction in responses by respondents in Peshawar – some respondents who expressed no intention to migrate within the next two years expressed an intention to migrate irregularly when asked directly. This may imply that although there was a less reported interest to migrate within the next two years from Peshawar, but those with the intention to migrate may be more likely to consider irregular migration from the district. Another interesting deviation is that the intention to migrate irregularly was reported higher from rural areas (20%) as compared to those from urban areas (16%, while the majority were from refugee campsites (64%)).

In terms of **age,** while 60% of the sample fall under the age of 35 years, further classification into age range reveals that the sample was almost equally represented for the age ranges of 18-25 years (29%), 26-35 years (31%), and 36 – 50 years (32%). The high percentage of those in the age range of 36-50 years is particularly insightful as it shows a deviation from the traditional profile of potential Afghan migrants who are often much younger.[98] A closer analysis shows that the high representation of this older age category in the sample primarily hails from Haripur (see Figure 5). In Haripur, the majority sample was in the age range of 36-50 years (55%), and even a strikingly high number above the age of 50 (19%) as compared to other districts, where the majority was in the age range of 18-25 years, followed by 26-35 years. This also corresponds to our district-level finding on migration intention which shows that tendency of irregular migration intention is lowest in Haripur, and perhaps the age factor plays a role in this lower percentage. Results for age distribution followed the same trend for those who expressed an intention to migrate within the next two years.

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[98] MMC, "Afghans En Route to Turkey: Access to Critical Information"; IOM, "Afghanistan - Survey on Drivers of Migration - Round 2 (November 2020 - March 2021)."

Figure 5: Age group distribution per district

Age of respondent (n=1004)

District	18 to 25 years	26 to 35 years	36 to 50 years	Above 50 years
Total	29%	31%	32%	9%
Peshawar	31%	35%	24%	10%
Mardan	38%	31%	25%	6%
Mansehra	40%	36%	24%	0.4%
Haripur	6%	20%	55%	19%

For all age groups, preference for migration to Europe was seen to be dominant in terms of desired destination. However, it was interesting to note that those in the age range of 18-25 years were least likely to mention GCC countries, Iran, or other destinations. This is probably related to the characteristics of our sample: considering that the overwhelming majority of respondent are Pashtun, they might find the GCC countries or Iran less attractive, due to a relatively small 'culture of migration' among Afghan nationals towards the former[99] and different ethnic, religious, and linguistic culture in comparison with the latter.[100] Particularly those with an expressed intent to migrate irregularly tend to be younger 18-25 years (38%), and the likelihood of irregular migration intention is observed to decline over older age groups compared to this range. Data also shows that younger respondents (18-25 years) are more likely to consider irregular migration due to pressure of friends or family, as compared to other age groups, and are more likely to have started preparing for migration (e.g. by contacting friends and family abroad, learning new skills, contacting an agent, acquiring migration related information,

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[99] GCC countries are common among Pakistani migrants, who can go there through legal labour migration routes, but not for Afghan nationals. According to the Afghan Analyst, there are indeed between 360,000 to 380,000 Afghans in the GCC countries, the great majority of whom are labour migrants living mostly in Saudi Arabi and the United Arab Emirates. Source: Sabawoon Samim, "Sending Money Home: The Impact of Remittances on Workers, Families and Villages," Afghanistan Analysis Network (blog), January 25, 2024, https://www.afghanistan-analysts.org/en/reports/migration/sending-money-home-the-impact-of-remittances-on-workers-families-and-villages/#:~:text=Within%20the%20Gulf%2C%20the%20destinations,2015%20(see%20footnote%20201).

[100] Iran hosts mostly Farsi (and Turkic speaking) Afghans due to 1) geographical position of Farsi and Uzbek speaking natives in the north and the west of Afghanistan (Herat province) and 2) common languages and religion (particularly in case of Hazara Shias). On the other hand, Pakistan has historically hosted Pashtun Afghans, who populate the Afghanistan's eastern and southern provinces and who share language and culture with Pakistani nationals. However, in the last decade, when the Iranian government increased the deportation of Afghans for political reasons, and when Pakistan still granted Afghan nationals visa, then Afghans from different ethnicities migrated to Pakistan. Source: Shoaib Rahim, "Pakistan and Iran Are Afghanistan's Neighbours, but Their Treatment of Afghans Is Shameful," The Globe and Mail, November 10, 2023, https://www.theglobeandmail.com/opinion/article-pakistan-and-iran-are-afghanistans-neighbours-but-their-treatment-of/.

and collecting documents) as compared to other age groups (however these differences in preparation levels are not too significant across different age groups).

Understanding the role of **gender** in migration intentions also reveals some interesting dynamics. The sample included a fixed proportion of 10% female representation in the overall sample (n=103) and in each of the districts. An astounding 94% of the women interviewed shared an intention to migrate, with the highest percentage from Haripur and Mansehra. About 40% of women also shared an intent to migrate irregularly (25% answered 'quite likely' and 15% answered 'unsure', but none mentioned 'definitely'). This is a rather insightful finding as generally profiles of potential or current Afghan migrants largely focus on men (owing to the dominant trend). A consistent proportion of women with migration intentions was observed across the districts (reflecting the sample design), although more women from Mardan reported irregular migration intentions, and just one woman from Mansehra (with a weak/indecisive intention: 'unsure'). While the sample is quite small, it reveals that majority of women respondents with migration intentions were in the age category of 36-50 years (43%), and compared to the overall sample, they tend to have no formal education. They were not active in the labour market and declared themselves as unemployed (65%). When asked about their awareness of migration options, most replied being 'somewhat' aware, highlighting the scope for more focus of the PARIM-II campaign on this group. While Europe was still the most popular destination for these women with an intention to migrate, instead of the UK and Canada (as in the overall sample), the second most desired destination was the GCC countries. Their preparation levels for migration are also observed to be relatively low. About half of those with a migration intention have taken no preparatory steps for migration, while those who reported taking some preparatory action reflect very rudimentary steps such as contacting people abroad and getting more information about migration options.

These findings are aptly contextualised with secondary sources which highlight the plea of Afghan women in Pakistan (and Iran), where continuously declining protection space push them to consider irregular migration, making them vulnerable to additional risks such as sexual assault, human trafficking, and torture.[101] While we were not able to reach many newly arrived Afghans in Pakistan (post-August 2021) through our survey, qualitative findings from a Samuel Hall study highlight that the risk of women attempting irregular migration through unsafe channels is particularly high as the Government of Pakistan cracks down on those who were allowed in post-August 2021 for "transit".[102] This highlights the importance of reaching out to Afghan women separately through the PARIM-II campaign in order to ensure that they have access not only to appropriate information about their migration options to help them make informed decisions, but also to specific contact information in case of emergency during their journey.

In terms of **marital status**, unlike the PARIM-I findings and other relevant reports highlighting the profile of potential migrants,[103] a significant majority of our sample was married (75%), including among women who expressed an intention to migrate. The trend was consistent across the districts, and also for those who shared an intent to migrate within the next two years, as well as those with an

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[101] Asia Displacement Solutions Platform, "Forced to Migrate: Afghan Women Waiting for Protection in Iran and Pakistan," Briefing Note (Samuel Hall, 2023), https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5cfe2c8927234e0001688343/t/6582d871fc9cd55ef84ac482/170307 3913763/Briefing+Note+1+-+Forced+to+migrate+-+Afghan+women+waiting+for+protection+in+Iran+and+Pakistan.pdf.
[102] Ibid.
[103] IOM Pakistan, "Comprehensive Profile of Afghan Potential Migrants in Pakistan 2016"; MMC, "Afghans En Route to Turkey: Access to Critical Information."

intent to migrate irregularly. **Ethnically**, the sample overwhelmingly comprised Pashtun respondents (90%) (also because of the choice of locations). The distribution was similar across the districts. The presence of Tajik group was also found in Peshawar and Haripur. In terms of migration intentions, both in the next two years and irregularly, Pashtun ethnic groups dominated the sample, as reflected for the overall sample.
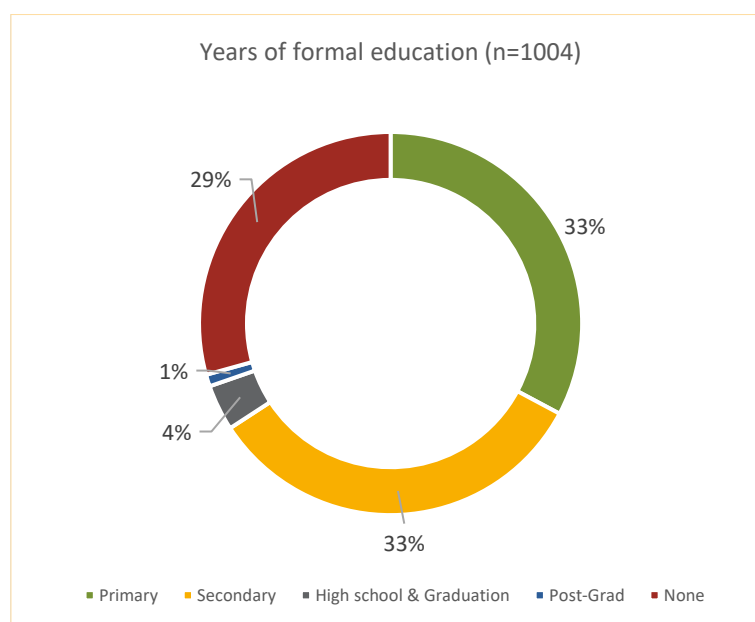
In terms of **education,** the distribution between those who had completed primary education (up to 5 years of formal education) and those who had attained up to secondary level education (up to 10 years of formal education) was equal (33%) across the districts (see also Figure 5). As highlighted in chapter 2, it is also important to remember access to education for Afghan nationals in Pakistan has always been difficult, with international organisations and CSOs attempting to bridge this gap by providing basic formal education in refugee camps. As one stakeholder highlighted, the lack of formal education among Afghan nationals in Pakistan and, in some cases, the language differences between the different groups exacerbate their difficulties and pose a substantial hurdle in acquiring pertinent information for international migration (SH06_Mardan). Peshawar had the highest percentage of sample with no formal education (49%), whereas Haripur had the lowest percentage of uneducated respondents (10%). Contextualising this information in terms of broader education indicators shows Haripur has the highest percentage of population in that has ever attended school (71% compared to 62% in Mansehra, 58% in Mardan, and 61% in Peshawar.[104]

Trends in educational attainment were consistent when analysed specifically for those with an intention to migrate within the next two years: 34% had up to secondary level education, 33% had up to primary level, while 28% were uneducated. However, when focusing specifically on those with an intention to migrate irregularly, the percentage of those with up to secondary level education goes up slightly (37%), while it is equivalent for those with primary level education and no education (29% for both). These are consistent with evidence found in other studies that have focused on Afghans on the move.[105] Moreover, majority of women with intentions to migrate irregularly had no education. Findings show no discernible difference in choice of destination based on education levels. However, a closer look indicates that those with no formal education are more likely to report 'not at all' and 'not much' when asked how informed they are on migration process, as compared to those who have some level of educational attainment. They are also more likely to report 'not sure' when asked about the migration channels they perceive themselves to be eligible for. Conversely, those with graduate level education are more likely to choose 'students/work visa' as their eligible channel for migration over 'humanitarian channel', which was the most popular choice among lower educational levels.

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[104] PBS, "Pakistan Labour Force Survey 2020-21" (Islamabad: Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, 2021), https://www.pbs.gov.pk/sites/default/files/labour_force/publications/lfs2020_21/LFS_2020-21_Report.pdf.
[105] MMC, "Afghans En Route to Turkey: Routes, Protection Risks, and Access to Assistance" (Mixed Migration Centre, 2021), https://mixedmigration.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/198_4Mi_Snapshot_Afghans_en_route_to_Turkey_updated.pdf.pdf; MMC, "Access to Information and Decision-Making among Refugees and Migrants in Türkiye" (MMC Asia and the Pacific 4Mi Snapshot, 2023), https://mixedmigration.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/290_Refugees_migrants_Turkiye.pdf.; IOM, "Afghanistan - Survey on Drivers of Migration - Round 2 (November 2020 - March 2021)."

Figure 6: Years of formal education

Years of formal education (n=1004)

33%

29%

1%

4%

33%

■ Primary ■ Secondary ■ High school & Graduation ■ Post-Grad ■ None

An overwhelming majority of the sample had no formal **technical or vocational training** (68%), distantly followed by those who had more than 3 years of technical training (14%). Across the districts, Haripur was a bit of an anomaly as it had a lower percentage of those with no technical training (as compared to other districts), while a higher percentage of those with short trainings (less than 1 year; as well as 1-3 years). The same pattern was observed for those with intentions to migrate within the next two years, and those with irregular migration plans.

Regarding **employment status**, the sample shows that 44% are self-employed, often running small businesses, 34% are daily wagers, engaged in manual labour, while 12% are unemployed. Slight variations were observed for the districts: in Haripur and Mansehra the majority was self-employed (70%[106] and 41%, respectively), while in Mardan and Peshawar daily wagers comprised the biggest groups (42% and 41% respectively), followed by self-employed. Employment status of those with an intention to migrate in the next two years mirrors that of the overall sample, however, particularly for those with an intention to migrate irregularly, the share of daily wagers (40%) is higher than those who are self-employed (37%). These findings are aligned with the characteristics of potential Pakistani migrants as found in PARIM-I. In their study, Mielke et al. show that the prevalent form of employment among Afghans in Pakistan was self-employment and daily labouring, although more than half of their sample was unemployed.[107] They also highlight the added vulnerability of Afghan daily wagers in Pakistan as their daily wage rate given to Afghans in the informal market is often much less than that a Pakistani labour receives. Students comprised less than 5% of the sample, which may also indicate towards the hurdles Afghan youth experiences in Pakistan in accessing schooling after secondary level.

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[106] This relatively high number probably reflects the older age of respondents in Haripur.
[107] Katja M Mielke et al., "Figurations of Displacement in and beyond Pakistan: Empirical Findings and Reflections on Protracted Displacement and Translocal Connections of Afghans".

Figure 7: Current employment status per district

Current Employment Status (n=1004)

District	Unemployed	Self Employed	Daily Wager	Short-term contract	Long-term contract	Student
Haripur	5%	70%	18%	1%	6%	
Mansehra	12%	41%	36%	2%	5%	4%
Mardan	18%	30%	42%	1%	3%	5%
Peshawar	14%	35%	41%	3%	4%	4%
Total	12%	44%	34%	2%	4%	3%
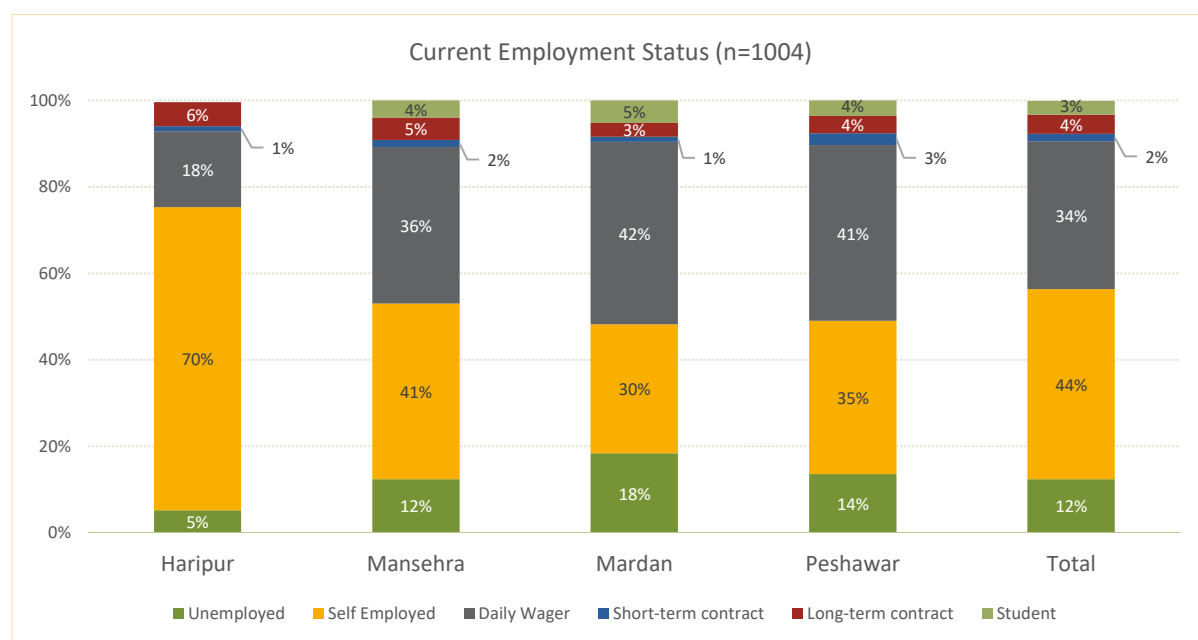
Despite the relatively lower percentage of unemployed individuals in the sample, our data indicates that the monthly earnings of those with work is not very satisfactory either. Majority (70%) of the sample earned an **income level** below PKR 50,000 (EUR 165) per month, 15% responded having no income, and 13% earned between PKR 50,000-100,000 (EUR 165-330) per month, while income levels beyond this range were less than 3% of the sample. Mardan had the highest percentage of respondents with no income, while Haripur had the least. Trends stayed consistent when looked specifically for income levels of those who had declared an interest to migrate, with the majority (69%) earning below PKR 50,000 (EUR 165) per month. Similarly, for those with an intent to migrate irregularly, majority earned less than PKR 50,000 (EUR 165)/month, however, the percentage of those with an income of PKR 50,000-100,000 (EUR 165-330)/month was slightly higher than those with no income. This makes sense as irregular migration requires resources, often more than what is required for regular migration channels, and hence those with an income may be more likely to consider it than those with no income.

Based on **duration of stay in Pakistan**, the majority had been in Pakistan for more than 5 years (61%), followed by those second-generation Afghans born in Pakistan (28%). The same trend was observed for those who expressed an intention to migrate within the next two years, and those with an irregular migration intent. The percentage of those born in Pakistan was highest in Mansehra (58%) and Mardan (52%), whereas this percentage was minimal for those from Haripur[108] and Peshawar. However, it is also worth noticing that, according to some stakeholders, despite their longer presence in the country, the situation for Afghan nationals in Pakistan remains difficult due to economic challenges, lack of educational institutions, basic infrastructure deficiencies, and the constant fear of forced deportation, while for newly arrived migrants the situation seems relatively better, thanks to economic and practical support of the World Bank and human rights organisations aimed at providing basic necessities to refugees (SH03_Peshawar; SH04_Mardan).

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[108] Once again, this could be related to the relatively older age of respondents from this district.

Considering the sensitivity of the topic and the political circumstances in Pakistan, most of our sample comprised Afghans with registered **legal status** (PoR and ACC cardholders, 76%), and 20% were on temporary visas. About 2% expressed that they held a Pakistani citizenship, 2% did not know their legal status, while 1% stated that they were undocumented. These trends were similar when checked for those with an intention to migrate within the next two years, as well as those with an intention to migrate irregularly. Most of the respondents live in Pakistan with their **family members**, and 63% of them have a household size of 5-10 members. The same pattern is observed across the districts, as well as for those who have migration intentions (within two years; and irregularly).

We also tried to gauge the **migration aspirations of the broader Afghan community** in Pakistan based on the respondents' perspectives. Responses show that 47% of the respondents believe that Afghans would prefer to stay in Pakistan, another 43% perceive that they would prefer to migrate onwards, while only 10% shared that Afghans would want to return to Afghanistan. Of those with the opinion that Afghans would prefer to migrate onwards, countries in Europe (Germany and France) were noted to be the main destinations. This is aligned with the respondents' own preference of desired destinations. It should be noted that these responses on migration plans of Afghans may be influenced by the ongoing political situation in the country as well as by most of respondents' long history in the country. Hence, the perception by almost half of the respondents that Afghans would prefer to stay in Pakistan, and the low preference for return may indicate the dissatisfaction with the current executive order, forcing Afghans to return. This theme was also highlighted by one of the stakeholders interviewed for this research:

Generally, Afghan migrants, if allowed to stay in Pakistan, show a preference to remain rather than migrate to other countries. However, if faced with forced deportation, they may consider irregular migration to various destinations, including Iran, India, or Afghanistan, albeit with reluctance to return to their homeland.

(SH02_Peshawar)

Table 6: Overall sample profile

Profile of overall sample (n=1004)	Deviations from sample for those with intention to migrate within two years (n=937)	Deviations from sample for those with intention to migrate irregularly (n=412)	District-wise characteristics
District: Equal district-wise sample distribution by design (25%)	Migration intention reported comparatively lower in Peshawar (84%); highest in Mardan (97%)	Higher tendency for irregular migration in Mardan (70%); Lowest in Haripur (11%)	
Locality: 46% live in refugee campsites, 32% in urban settings, and 22% in rural areas	Similar trend as overall sample	64% campsites; 20% rural; 16% urban	In Haripur, more respondents were from rural areas; Mardan had the highest respondents from campsites

Age: 29% fall in 18-25 years; 31% in 26-35 years range; 32% in 36-50 years; and 9% over the age of 50	Similar trend as overall sample	Higher proportion of 18-25 years old	Haripur has higher proportion of older respondents (35-50 years) – and the lowest reported intention to migrate irregularly
Gender: 90% male; 10% female (as per survey design)	94% women shared an intention to migrate	40% shared an intention to migrate irregularly	More women from Mardan reported irregular migration intentions
Marital status: 75% are married; 23% are unmarried; <1% each divorced/ widowed/polygamous marriage	Similar trend as overall sample	Similar trend as overall sample	Proportion of unmarried respondents was highest in Mardan and lowest in Haripur
Ethnic background: 90% Pashtun, 4% Tajik, 5% others	Similar trend as overall sample	Similar trend as overall sample	Tajik groups in Peshawar and Haripur, and 'others' in Mansehra
Education: 33% primary level education; 33% secondary level; and 29% no education. <5% with higher than secondary level education	Similar trend as overall sample	Higher percentage of those with secondary level education (37%	Peshawar had the highest percentage with no formal education (49%); Haripur had the lowest (10%)
Technical/vocational training: 67% no technical education; 14% 3+ years; 11% 1-3 years of technical education	Similar trend as overall sample	Similar trends as overall sample	Haripur had more respondents with technical and vocational training
Employment Status: 44% self-employed; 34% daily wager; 12% unemployed	Similar trend as overall sample	40% daily wagers; 37% self-employed	Higher proportion of self employed in Haripur and Mansehra; Higher proportion of daily wagers in Mardan and Peshawar
Personal income: 70% < PKR 50k (~ EUR 165); 15% no income; 13% PKR 50-100k (~ EUR 165-330)	Similar trend as overall sample	67% less than PKR 50k; 16% b/w PKR 50-100k; 14% no income	'No income' repeated most in Mardan; least in Haripur
Length of stay in Pakistan: 61% +5 years; 28% born in Pakistan; 7% 3-5 years. 4% arrived <3 years ago	Similar trend as overall sample	Similar trends as overall sample	Mansehra had highest percentage of those born in Pakistan

Legal status: 76% registered (PoR and ACC holders); 20% on temporary visa status; 2% Pakistani citizens; 2% did not know their status; 0.7% undocumented	Similar trend as overall sample	76% registered; 18% on temporary status; 4% Pakistani national	More registered population in Haripur; more people in Peshawar do not know their status
Household size: 99% live with family – 63% have 5-10 household members	Similar trend as overall sample	Similar trend as overall sample	Respondents with >10 HH members more in Mardan, Mansehra and Peshawar

5.3. Meso drivers: Obstacles and facilitators in migration of Afghan nationals
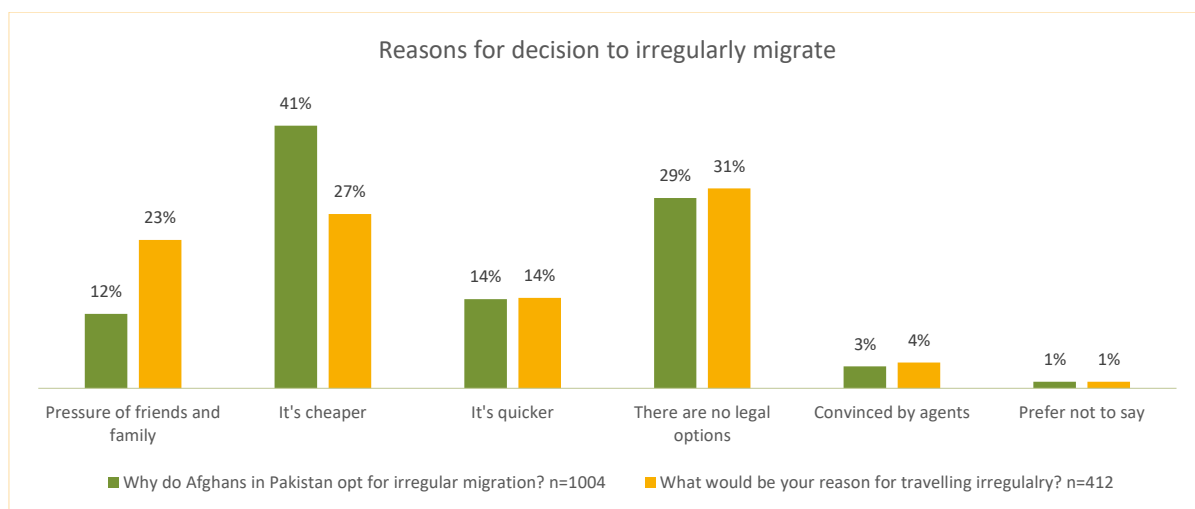
For meso drivers, we consider the intermediary factors, i.e., facilitating or inhibiting factors that contribute to the decision to migrate irregularly. Besides analysing the drivers of migration, we consider the practical aspects that play a role in the choice or decision between migrating regularly and irregularly. Respondents were asked two related questions: one asking the main reason for Afghans in general to choose irregular path, while the second was a direct question, asking the reasons for their choice to migrate irregularly (travel without papers). The comparison of the two reveal interesting dynamics between personal reasons and the general factors experienced by Afghan nationals in Pakistan, highlighting some of the prevalent meso factors at play behind the decision. For the broader community, the **perceived lower cost** of irregular migration appears to be the dominating force behind the decision (see Figure 8). Ranked by 41% of the sample, the main factor pushing most Afghans with migration intentions to consider irregular pathways is the idea that it is much cheaper than pursuing legal means. While the percentage of cost as a factor in the personal decision (27%) is much lower than the overall sample (41%), it is still the second highest reason according to the responses of those who shared an intention to migrate irregularly, signifying its relevance. The perception that irregular migration may cost less than regular channels also holds true for other population groups, as was found for potential Pakistani migrants in PARIM-I.

In our sample, particularly among those with monthly income less than PKR 50,000 (EUR 165), the affordability (or lower cost) was the topmost factor for considering irregular migration, while for all other income levels, the lack of legal options was the top-rated response. Cost consideration was the main reason for irregular migration intentions among those in the older age category (35 years+), those with primary level education and those without any education (among those with intentions to migrate irregularly). Majority of those having stronger intentions to migrate irregularly (those who responded 'definitely' and 'quite likely') perceived the estimated cost of irregular migration to be more than PKR 3 million (approx. EUR 10,000). This is in line with recent UNODC data, which estimate that the smuggling fees from Pakistan Western European countries are almost USD 12,000 (about EUR 11,000).[109] Across the districts, there were variations in terms of reasons for considering irregular migration. Cost of migration was a considerable factor in Haripur (59%) and Peshawar (44%). Interestingly, as noted earlier, intentions to migrate irregularly were the lowest in Haripur, which might

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[109] UNODC, "Study on Illicit Financial Flows Associated with Smuggling of Migrants and Trafficking in Persons from GLO.ACT Partner Countries to Europe" (Vienna, 2023).

be related not only to the relative older age of respondents but also to the costs of migration, pushing those who cannot afford regular migration channels to consider irregular means.

Figure 8: Reasons for irregular migration

Reasons for decision to irregularly migrate

- Why do Afghans in Pakistan opt for irregular migration? n=1004
- What would be your reason for travelling irregulalry? n=412

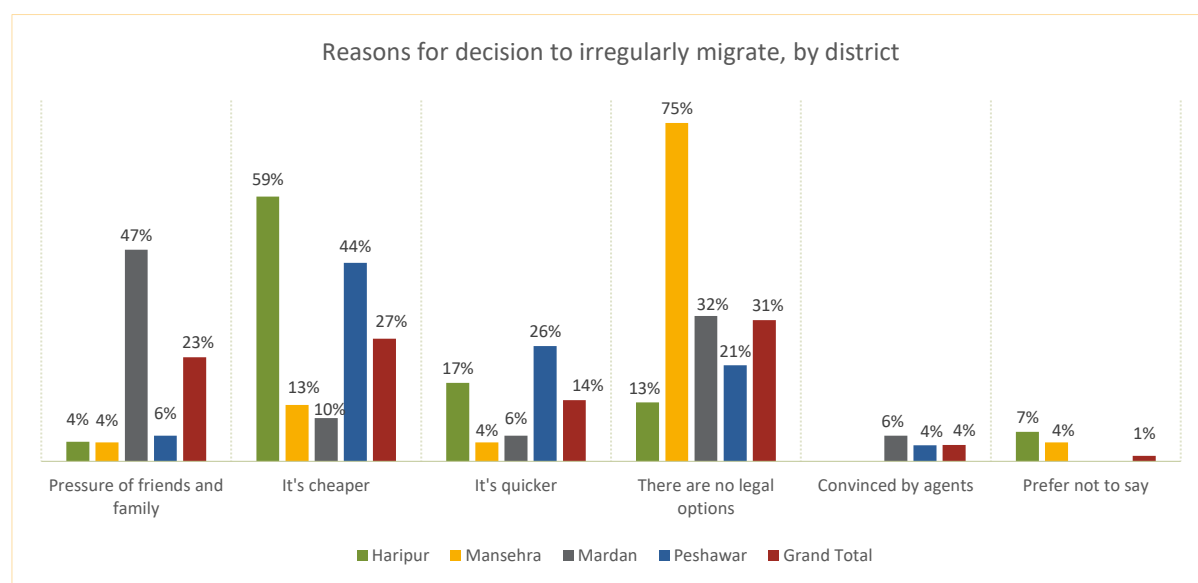|	Pressure of friends and family	It's cheaper	It's quicker	There are no legal options	Convinced by agents	Prefer not to say
Green	12%	41%	14%	29%	3%	1%
Yellow	23%	27%	14%	31%	4%	1%

Moreover, another meso factor that warrants discussion is the speed of the process. Irregular migration is considered **quicker** than regular modes of migration, highlighting the frustration with the long bureaucratic procedures often experienced through regular channels (see Figure 9). Indeed, as discussed in the PARIM-II background report and other literature, Afghans face excruciatingly long delays in the processing of their applications in the few legal channels for which they are eligible (e.g., resettlement applications or Special Immigrant Visas).[110] About 14% of the sample believes that the main reason for considering irregular migration among Afghans in Pakistan is because it allows for a quicker journey towards the desired destination. This emerged as the third highest response (after 'it's cheaper' and 'no legal option'). In their own personal intention to migrate irregularly, the quickness of irregular migration journey ranked instead as the fourth most common factor (14%) for considering this mode of migration. While certainly this figure does not seem high, it provides relevant information when looking at specific demographic characteristics. The relatively quickness of irregular migration was indeed particularly noted in Peshawar (and the least in Haripur), among those with no education, or among those with temporary visa status in Pakistan. There was not much difference in age groups for this factor, although – quite interestingly – older age groups seemed slightly more likely to consider this as a reason for irregular migration. The perceived lower costs and faster procedures of irregular migration are also highlighted by some stakeholders. As one of them put it:

The preferred destinations for migration include Europe, America, Canada, and Australia. While the majority opt for legal means of migration, there is a notable consideration of irregular options. The key reasons for choosing irregular migration stem from its perceived economic and timely advantages, offering a quicker and more cost-effective alternative.

SH07_Mansehra

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[110] MMC, "The Changing Dynamics of Afghan Migration after August 2021" (Copenhagen: Mixed Migration Centre, 2023), https://mixedmigration.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/266_Changing-Dynamics-Afghan-Migration.pdf; for the US, processing Special Immigrant Visas might take from 600 to almost 1,000 days, with difference due to the urgency of some cases, see https://immigrationforum.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/Factsheet-SIV-Processfinal.pdf.

Figure 9: Reasons for irregular migration by district

Reasons for decision to irregularly migrate, by district

[Bar chart showing percentages by category and district]

Pressure of friends and family: Haripur 4%, Mansehra 4%, Mardan 47%, Peshawar 6%, Grand Total 23%
It's cheaper: Haripur 59%, Mansehra 13%, Mardan 10%, Peshawar 44%, Grand Total 27%
It's quicker: Haripur 17%, Mansehra 4%, Mardan 6%, Peshawar 26%, Grand Total 14%
There are no legal options: Haripur 13%, Mansehra 75%, Mardan 32%, Peshawar 21%, Grand Total 31%
Convinced by agents: Mardan 6%, Peshawar 4%, Grand Total 4%
Prefer not to say: Haripur 7%, Mansehra 4%, Grand Total 1%

Haripur Mansehra Mardan Peshawar Grand Total

Note: Percentages computed by district. In each district were consider individuals with intentions to migrate irregularly that answered to the question 'What would be your reason for your choice to TWP?'. The samples are: Haripur – 46; Mansehra – 48; Mardan – 177; Peshawar – 141; Grande Total – 412.

Consistent with the results of PARIM-I and other literature on the topic, **social networks** continue to emerge as strong facilitators for migration decisions in terms of providing encouragement, information, and even financial support.[111] Analysing the findings across these dimensions, we are able to identify whether social networks at home or abroad play a more dominant role. When asked about the influence of social contacts on migration decisions, 49% collectively reported that they have been **encouraged** to consider migration by friends and family, especially those networks in Pakistan. There were some differences observed in the roles played by friends and family in Pakistan, and those abroad, in migration decision-making and planning. Amongst all respondents, 18% were encouraged to migrate by friends and family in Afghanistan and Pakistan, 16% by friends and family abroad, and 15% by other relatives. Particularly focusing on those who declared an intention to migrate irregularly, 25% reported being encouraged by relatives, 24% by friends and family abroad, while 21% by friends and family in Afghanistan

Another interesting angle emerging from our findings is that the 'encouragement' from friends and family for the migration decision could also manifest itself in the form of **'family pressure'.** The survey shows that about 3% of those with a stronger intention to migrate in the next two years (respondents with 'very likely' and 'likely' responses) reported being under family pressure to consider further migrating from Pakistan. Albeit insignificant in the overall sample, this factor is particularly noted in Mardan. This was highlighted as a push factor for considering migration by 9% of those with strong intentions to migrate irregularly (n=233). Specifically for irregular migration, 12% respondents believed that pressure from friends and family is the reason why Afghans in Pakistan generally consider migrating irregularly, and 23% cited this as the reason for them to consider irregular migration. This was again particularly noted in Mardan, where the intentions to migrate irregularly were the strongest. This finding is further strengthened from a series of direct questions asking the nature of influence of

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[111] Jørgen Carling, "How Does Migration Arise?," in *Ideas to Inform International Cooperation on Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration*, ed. M. McAuliffe and M. Klein Solomon (Geneva: IOM, 2017), 19–26; IOM Pakistan, "Comprehensive Profile of Afghan Potential Migrants in Pakistan 2016."

friends and family in Pakistan, Afghanistan, and abroad on the decision to migrate irregularly. About 18% of respondents with intentions to migrate irregularly stated their family pushed for it, 16% mentioned their friends pushed for it, and 24% stated that their friends and family abroad pushed for the decision to migrate irregularly. Of course, this finding should not be taken out of context, as the overall sentiment drawn from responses to these series of questions was that while social contacts (friends and family in Pakistan, Afghanistan, and abroad) might support the decision to migrate irregularly, they nevertheless would not recommend it. Besides, there were also strong cases of friends and family resisting the decision to migrate irregularly. About 19% of potential irregular migrants mentioned their family resisted their idea of migrating irregularly, 13% reported their friends resisted this idea, and 15% mentioned their social contacts abroad showed resistance to this decision.

When looking at the role of social networks as a **source of migration-related information**, we noticed that 24% of the sample reported friends and family abroad as the main source of information, second only to social media (62%, whose role will be discussed in a separate section). This perception was most pronounced in Mardan but least in Haripur. Friends and family in Pakistan and Afghanistan were not ranked as high (9%) for acquiring information before migrating. These findings resonate with conclusions drawn by an IOM survey conducted among potential Afghan migrants in Pakistan, who also found that friends and family abroad were the major source of information for migration to Europe.[112] In our survey, especially among those with irregular migration intentions, friends and family abroad were mentioned by 38% (second only to social media with 56%), as compared to 22% who considered friends and family in Pakistan as information sources on migration. This difference shows that while friends and family in Pakistan may have an important role in motivating or even pushing for migration decisions, friends and family abroad are considered more appropriate sources of relevant information, based on their experience and expertise on the subject. About 79% of the sample reported having friends and family abroad, who they can easily get in touch with and are in regularly in contact with. This trend was consistent when checked for those with migration intentions in the next two years, and those with irregular migration intentions. Having social contacts in the desired country of destination emerged as the second most popular factor for considering that destination (9%).[113]

Besides their influence over the migration considerations and their role as a source of information, social networks also play a dominant role as a source of **financial support** to facilitate the migration process. The role of friends and family in Pakistan was found to be prominent in terms of providing loans for covering the cost of migration among those with strong intentions to migrate within the next two years (40%), as well as among those with irregular migration intentions (43%).[114] Among those with stronger irregular migration intentions, reliance on financial assistance from friends and family (32%) was higher than on personal savings (12%), whereas those with concrete migration intentions within the next two years reported relying slightly more on personal savings (22%) than on family support (20%). This highlights two aspects: potential migrants' reliance on informal loans is heavier than other sources of financing (e.g. bank loans or microfinance from NGOs); and secondly, those with

[112] IOM Pakistan, "Comprehensive Profile of Afghan Potential Migrants in Pakistan 2016." The survey, however, did not take into consideration the role of social media as source of information.
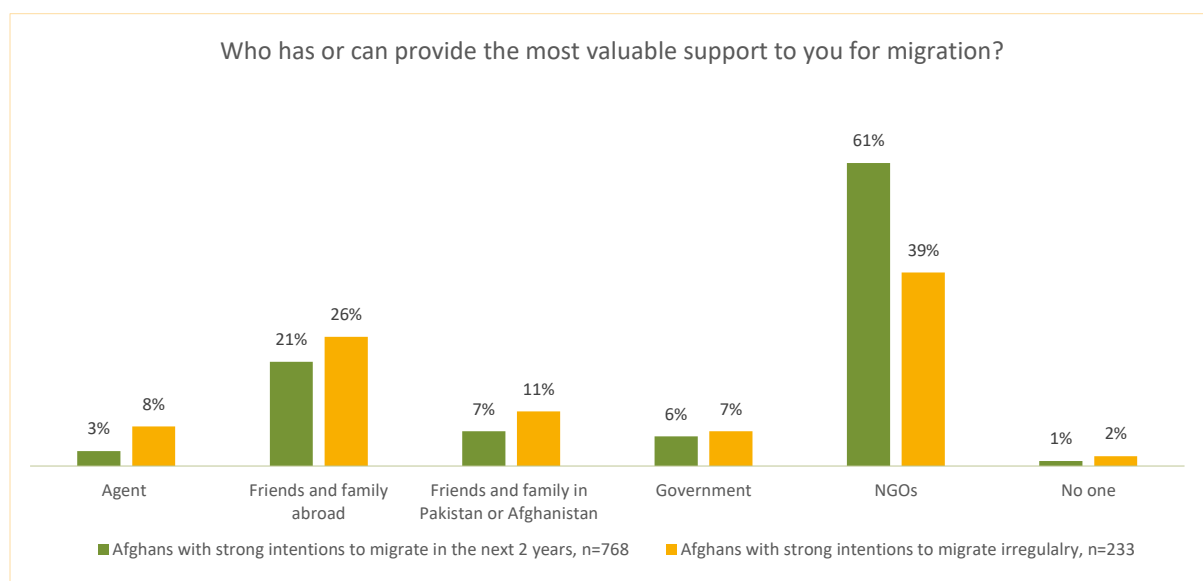[113] Although the difference between the most commonly chosen response, "economic factors" (62%) and having "social contacts" is significant. Please also note that this question was only asked to those who expressed "very likely" and "likely" to migrate within the next two years (n=768).
[114] Considering that this was a multiple option question, respondents may have (or plan to) collect finances for migration through multiple means.

irregular migration intentions may not be in a financial position to cover the costs of the trip without family support. This is supported by existing literature in the field.[115]

An insightful finding from this survey is that **institutional entities** (including government and non-governmental agencies) are found to play a much more active role in migration considerations of Afghan nationals in Pakistan than was found for potentially Pakistani migrants.[116] Although their role as sources of information for migration was still negligible (1% each for government and NGOs), it was much more pronounced as sources of support in migration preparation. Among those with more concrete intentions to migrate within the next two years, the majority (a striking 61%) considered **NGOs** as the source of most valuable support for migration, and this was consistent in all districts. Across the districts, this response was most pronounced in Haripur, followed by Mansehra, Mardan and Peshawar. As for those with concrete irregular migration intentions (who responded 'definitely' and 'very likely', n=233), 39% reported NGOs as important sources of (financial or legal) support for migration preparation. Among this group, this response was most pronounced in Mardan.

Figure 10: Support sources for migration

Who has or can provide the most valuable support to you for migration?

- Afghans with strong intentions to migrate in the next 2 years, n=768
- Afghans with strong intentions to migrate irregulalry, n=233

| Category	Green	Yellow
Agent	3%	8%
Friends and family abroad	21%	26%
Friends and family in Pakistan or Afghanistan	7%	11%
Government	6%	7%
NGOs	61%	39%
No one	1%	2%

Receiving support from the **government** was also notable. About 6% of those with strong migration intentions in the next two years, as well as irregularly, considered that government would provide them support, and interestingly this was much more pronounced in Peshawar as compared to other districts. One explanation for this high reliance on (or perhaps expectation from) NGOs and the government for preparatory support could be that the majority of our sample is based in refugee campsites, where institutional actors (such as the UNHCR, NGOs and the Pakistani government) are the most active in offering services and resources to Afghan nationals. Hence, there might be an expectation that the support provided by these actors would facilitate their migration intentions. However, when asked if they have contacted these entities for migration information, the majority responded in a negative way (see chapter 6 for more information).

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[115] ILO, "The Cost of Migration: What Low-Skilled Migrant Workers from Pakistan Pay to Work in Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates" (Geneva: International Labour Organization, 2016).

[116] Qaisrani, Hahn-Schaur, and Hendow, "Irregular Migration Dynamics from Pakistan and the Role of Information Campaigns: PARIM Final Report," 2021.

Surprisingly, a higher trust level on government institutions is also observed when considering getting help along the journey. When asked who irregular migrants should consider contacting in case of experiencing challenges along the migration journey, 52% of the overall sample responded 'embassy' in the country they are in, while the second most common response was 'local police' (23%). The choice of embassy as the main contact point was most pronounced in Haripur, and least in Mardan, whereas the opinion that the local police would help was most prevalent in Mansehra. Even if focusing on those with intentions to migrate irregularly, contacting the embassy was the most common response, mentioned by 45% of this sub-group, in addition to contacting 'local NGOs' (29%), local community (27%), international organisations (21%), local police (21%), agents (11%), and friends and family (<1%). While these responses reflect a higher expectation of support from government institutions, it also highlights a striking information gap especially concerning potential Afghan migrants, that can be filled by the PARIM-II campaign. Since the Taliban takeover of Afghanistan in August 2021, only a handful of countries have diplomatic representations of the new Taliban government.

Figure 11: Contact in case of problems during the migration journey
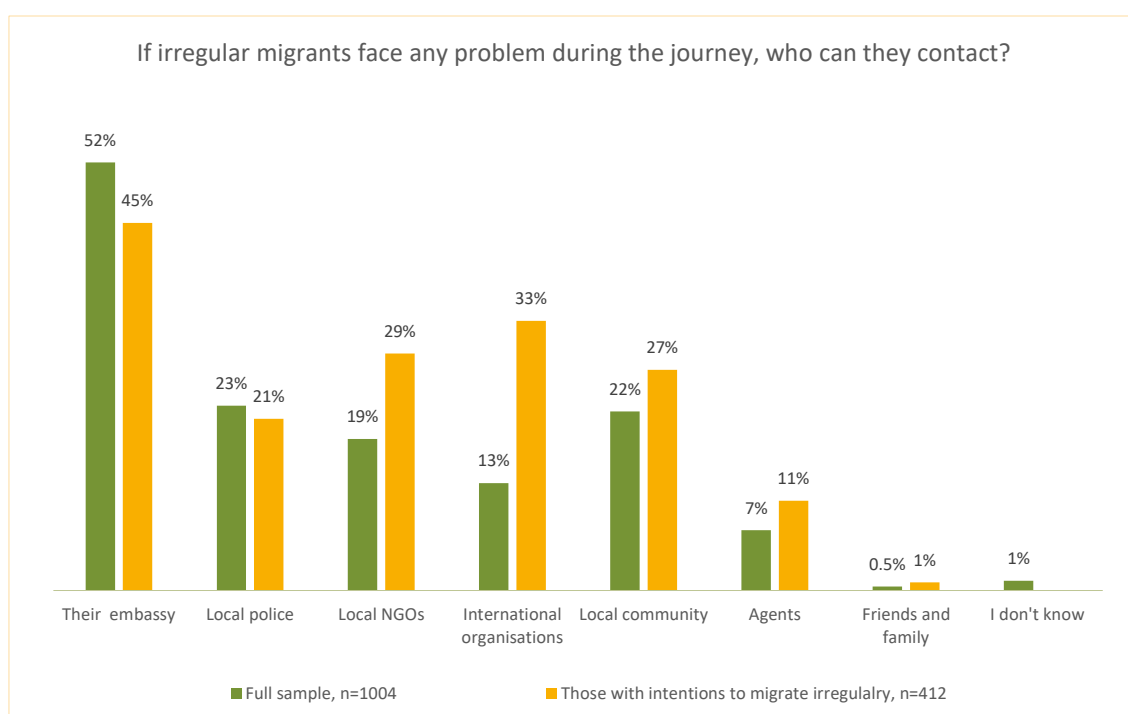
While still notable, the role of **migration agents**[117] in migration decision-making and planning of Afghan nationals was slightly less pronounced for this sample as compared to PARIM-I respondents (among potential Pakistani migrants). In PARIM-I findings, agents appeared as the third most commonly reported source of support for migration preparations, and the selection of agents was considered an important preparatory step, as well as a challenge, the trend was slightly low amongst the Afghan

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[117] In the Pakistani context, smugglers are usually referred to as "agents" among the migrant community. Registered agents might help migrants with documents and practices for regular migration, while unregistered ones – often in rural areas – might be involved in illicit smuggling activities. However, the distinction between the two is not always clear, as the same agent can support migrants in their regular and irregular journeys. In our survey, there is no distinction between registered or unregistered agents.

sample.[118] One potential explanation could be related to the fact that agents might help arrange legal migration journey for Pakistani migrants to the GCC, but this might not be the case for Afghan migrants, who have usually other destinations. Another explanation might be related to the nature of our sample, since potential Afghan migrants in Pakistan, already in a precarious social and economic situation, might be more reticent to openly talk about agents facilitating their migration journey than potential Paksitani migrants.

In any case, among those with irregular migration intentions, 21% reported agents as the main source of migration information (ranked fourth after social media, friends and family abroad, and TV news), and 4% reported they were convinced into considering irregular migration by agents. With regard to the role of agents as source of support, 8% of those with more concrete intentions to migrate irregularly mentioned agents, in comparison to 3% of those with concrete intention to migrate within the next two years. However, district level results show that, among potential migrants with strong intentions to migrate irregularly, agents' support was only mentioned in Peshawar and Mansehra but not in Haripur and Mardan.

Interestingly, The Afghan migrant community encounters three fundamental challenges: restricted connections overseas, financial constraints, and dependency on migration agents. A substantial number of Afghans confront the absence of relatives or friends in foreign countries, depriving them of potential support from that quarter. Additionally, a significant majority of Afghan individuals grapple with the financial burden associated with covering migration expenses, and this challenge is compounded by difficulties in finding a reliable migration agent. Unfortunately, many migrants face issues with agents who, despite receiving payment, neglect to furnish essential information and guidance, leaving individuals stranded and uninformed about the intricacies of the migration process.

Among those with more concrete intentions to migrate within the next two years, about 9% had contacted agents for migration preparations, and only 1% had paid an agent. In PARIM-I, finding a trustworthy agent was the top challenge considered in migration preparation (reported by 59%) for those considering migration, whereas within the current sample, only 9% of those with concrete migration intentions within the next two years reported 'finding a reliable agent' as a challenge, and 14% of those with concrete irregular migration intentions reported this as a challenge in migration preparations. Moreover, only about 7% of the overall sample (predominantly hailing from Peshawar) responded that irregular migrants should contact their agents in case of any trouble along the way. This relatively lower reliance on agents for information and support, and lower involvement in the preparation phase is also at odds with earlier findings on potential Afghan migrants in Pakistan, where the role of 'migration facilitator' emerged to be quite strong in preparations.[119] As explained before, the sensitive political situation under which this survey was conducted might have affected some answers, with some respondents fearful of expressing their interaction with or reliance on agents to avoid further complications. However, this assumption is not backed by evidence from the field or more recent literature.

[118] Ayesha Qaisrani, Katharina Hahn-Schaur, and Maegan Hendow, "Irregular Migration Dynamics from Pakistan and the Role of Information Campaigns: PARIM Final Report" (Vienna: International Centre for Migration Policy Development (ICMPD), 2021).
[119] IOM Pakistan, "Comprehensive Profile of Afghan Potential Migrants in Pakistan 2016."

Table 7: Meso drivers of irregular migration

Meso driver of irregular migration	Qualification of results for those with irregular migration intentions	District level results	Other characteristics
(Perceived) lower cost	Strong facilitating factor reported by 27%	Main reason in Haripur and Peshawar	Top reason for those with income < PKR 50,000, (EUR 165) and primary or no education
Irregular migration considered quicker	Facilitating factor reported by 14%	Most pronounced in Peshawar, least in Haripur	Ranked higher by those with no education
Social network in Pakistan	Strong facilitating factor as source of 'encouragement', and financial support (through loans and cost coverage); Also, strong role of 'family pressure'	Strong role of social network in Pakistan in terms of encouragement and family pressure in Mardan.	Social contacts in Pakistan also played a role as 'resistors' against irregular migration
Social network abroad	Strong facilitating factor as source of relevant information	Most reported in Mardan and least in Haripur	Presence of social network considered in the choice of desired destination
NGOs	Very prominent role as source of support for irregular migration, reported by 34% of those with strong irregular migration intentions	Most reported in Mardan; least in Peshawar	Could be because of high reliance of Afghan nationals living in campsites on international organisations and NGOs for access to services
Government agencies	Reported as source of support for migration preparation by 6% of potential irregular migrants	Most pronounced in Peshawar, least in Haripur	Higher than expected trust on government entities, even for support during the journey if encountered a challenge
Agents	Less prominent role than expected: As a source of information: 12% As a source of support for migration preparation: 8% As a challenge in migration preparations: 14%	Agent's role as providers of valuable support mentioned in Peshawar and Mansehra, but not in Haripur and Mardan	Younger respondents with irregular migration intentions more likely to have contacted an agent in preparation of migration

Returnees	Not as strong of a role as noticed in PARIM-I findings. 22% with irregular migration intentions mentioned their role as source of support in preparation	Reported higher from Mardan, lowest from Haripur	Some influence of returnees may already be captured in 'friends and family' in Pakistan

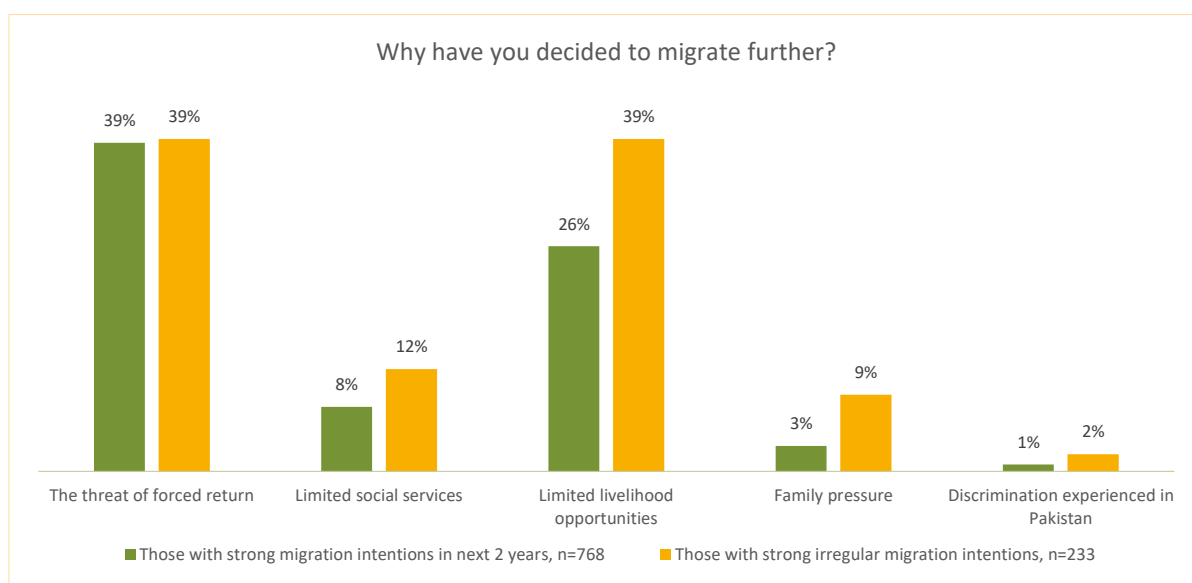## 5.4. Macro drivers: Structural factors driving Afghan migration from Pakistan

Macro-level drivers of migration refer to broad and overarching factors at the national or international level that significantly influence migration patterns and trends. These drivers are often structural and systemic in nature, impacting large populations and shaping migration flows over extended periods. Survey findings and analysis of the current developments surrounding Afghan nationals in Pakistan highlight an interplay of socio-political and economic factors that act as macro level drivers of migration. In the past year (2023), Pakistan has witnessed some of the most volatile political and economic circumstances that have not only affected Pakistani nationals, but have had disproportionate effects on migrants, especially for Afghans, and others living with precarious legal statuses.[120] Moreover, a heightened security concern in the country has led the Pakistani government to introduce stringent measures against irregular migrants in the country, which disproportionately affects Afghan nationals as the largest foreign population in Pakistan.[121] While in the PARIM-II Background Report, we considered these policy developments under meso factors, a drastic change in the government's approach towards Afghans, led by security concerns and the geopolitical and foreign affairs priorities, convinced us to reconsider the framing and approach it more from the lens of a structural driver. Below, we discuss the effects of these structural factors, as have emerged from the survey findings, and the background research that fed into this research.

Within the PARIM-II survey, a number of drivers have emerged that fall under this category. While security concerns were the main driver of migration out of Afghanistan for the majority of our sample (86%), the **'threat of forced return'** to Afghanistan is the main reason for onward migration from Pakistan. This was reported by 39% of those with a strong intention to migrate within the next two years (n=768), as well as for those with a strong intention to migrate irregularly (n=233). This factor was the most cited reason in Haripur and Mansehra, and second most mentioned reason in Peshawar and Mardan (after limited economic/livelihood opportunities). Based on socioeconomic characteristics, we observe that the fear of forced return is the primary reason among the age group of 26-35 years, with no formal educational attainment, and falling within income bracket of PKR 50-100,000 (about EUR 165-330).

[120] N.A., "Pakistan Inflation Hits Record for Second Consecutive Month," Al Jazeera, June 2, 2023, https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/6/2/pakistan-inflation-hits-record-for-second-consecutive-month; Qaisrani, "Migration Insights: Understanding Onward Migration Dynamics among Afghan Nationals in Pakistan," 2023.
[121] UNHCR, "UNHCR Concerned at Adverse Effects of Pakistan Orders for Undocumented Foreigners to Leave," November 21, 2023, https://www.unhcr.org/us/news/briefing-notes/unhcr-concerned-adverse-effects-pakistan-orders-undocumented-foreigners-leave.

Figure 12: Reason of further migration

Why have you decided to migrate further?

Reason	Those with strong migration intentions in next 2 years, n=768	Those with strong irregular migration intentions, n=233
The threat of forced return	39%	39%
Limited social services	8%	12%
Limited livelihood opportunities	26%	39%
Family pressure	3%	9%
Discrimination experienced in Pakistan	1%	2%

The threat of forced return is a particularly important driver to consider because of the political situation in Pakistan in relation to Afghan nationals in Pakistan when the survey was administered. As discussed in Chapter 2, the executive decision to repatriate all foreigners without a registered legal status in Pakistan directly impacted a significant proportion of Afghan families living in Pakistan. The situation was aptly described by a stakeholder interviewed in Haripur:

The fear of forced deportation back to Afghanistan is a major driver for opting for onward migration from Pakistan. Most Afghan migrants prefer regular means of migration, but a significant number also resort to irregular means due to the perceived complexity and time-consuming nature of legal channels. The trends post-August 2021 shows a rise in migration patterns, driven by strict deportation policies and escalating inflation rates, contributing to an increased urgency among Afghan migrants to seek opportunities in other countries.

(SH09_Haripur, paraphrased)

While the official decision was only directed at those without a proper legal registration in Pakistan, in practice, media and civil society reports show that there were instances of PoR cardholders being deported, raising much uncertainty and fear among the entire Afghan community in Pakistan.[122] Moreover, initial announcements by the government also declared that in the next phases of this repatriation drive, holders of PoR cards and ACC would also be targeted, hence pushing those with legal status towards vulnerability and uncertainty about their stay in Pakistan.[123] This is validated in our findings, where we observe that among those with a registered status (PoR card/ACC holders), the threat of forced return was the top most cited reason for considering onward migration, cited by 34% of those with a concrete intention to migrate irregularly. Afghans who had lived in Pakistan for more

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[122] HRW, "Pakistan: Widespread Abuses Force Afghans to Leave" (New York: Human Rights Watch, November 28, 2023), https://www.hrw.org/news/2023/11/28/pakistan-widespread-abuses-force-afghans-leave; see also discussion in chapter 2.4.

[123] UNHCR-RBAP, "Emergency Update No.5: Pakistan-Afghanistan Returns Response" (UNHCR Regional Bureau for Asia and Pacific, December 7, 2023).

than 5 years were more likely to mention this reason compared to those who were born in Pakistan, although it was a major concern for both these groups.

Related to the political scenario, another noteworthy finding from the survey is the **lack of legal options** for migration, which was cited as the predominant reason for respondents to consider irregular migration. This was reported by 31% of those with irregular migration intentions and was the main factor in Mansehra. This option was rated highest particularly among younger age groups (rated highest among age groups of 18-25 and 26-35 years), with no education, and income levels below PKR 100,000 (EUR 330) per month. Indeed, as noted in a recent report by the International Rescue Committee, while the resettlement needs of Afghans in the region have nearly tripled between 2022 and 2023, the speed of implementation has been very slow, and commitments of new safe schemes offered by Europe have shown limited materialisation, if any.[124] In our sample, the lack of legal pathways was particularly emphasised as a reason for irregular migration considerations by those with a registered migration status in Pakistan (PoR card/ACC holders), as well as those on a temporary visa. Considering only those with intentions to migrate to European countries (excluding the UK), 28% reported 'no legal options' as the prime reason for considering irregular migration, ranking second after 'it's cheaper' (30%). This reason is noteworthy to consider, as the lack of legal options for Afghans also means that within our sample, those who have expressed an intention to migrate within the next two years, but have not declared an intention to migrate irregularly, may face difficulties in actualising their plans through regular channels, which could lead to further consideration of irregular means. Media reports show that many of those who faced expulsion following the executive deportation order of October 2023 were already registered with the UNHCR or the respective embassy for resettlement to other countries; therefore, slow progress due to bureaucratic delays has pushed those eligible for resettlement further into precarity.[125] Many of those waiting for resettlement or seeking legal avenues to migrate had escaped the Taliban rule due to threat to life and personal security. When faced with the situation of forced return to the same country where their life is at risk, some may be desperately pushed to consider irregular migration as a way out.[126] Qualitative interviews conducted with relevant stakeholders working with Afghan community in Pakistan corroborate this finding, showing how lack of legal travel documentation may be a reason for Afghan youth in Pakistan to opt for irregular channels for onward migration. As one of them put it:

The lack of a place to stay in Afghanistan and the perceived need to start life anew if they return are driving factors behind their inclination for onward migration. European countries are identified as the preferred destinations for Afghan youth residing in Pakistan. Given the absence of legal documents, passports, or ID cards, it is anticipated that this migration will predominantly occur through irregular means. The major reasons for choosing irregular migration stem from the lack of legal documents, as these individuals are reluctant to return to Afghanistan to obtain the necessary paperwork.

(SH06_Mardan, paraphrased)

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[124] IRC, "Two Years on: Afghans Still Lack Pathways to Safety in the EU" (New York: International Rescue Committee, 2023), https://www.rescue.org/sites/default/files/2023-05/P%26A2305_Safe pathways for Afghans_Report Final_web.pdf.

[125] Sarah Zaman, "Resettling Afghans Facing Expulsion from Pakistan Poses Challenge for UNHCR," *Voice of America*, November 4, 2023, https://www.voanews.com/a/resettling-afghans-facing-expulsion-from-pakistan-pose-challenge-for-unhcr-/7341362.html.

[126] IRC, "Two Years on: Afghans Still Lack Pathways to Safety in the EU."

Similar to the findings of PARIM-I, **economic drivers** are predominantly prevalent in relation to irregular migration, both as push and pull factors. Survey findings show that among those with concrete intentions to migrate irregularly, limited economic/livelihood opportunities were the prime reason for considering onward migration (cited by 39%). Especially in Mardan and Peshawar, this emerged as the top cited reason. The younger respondents (18-25 years old) were most likely to consider this as the main reason for moving from Pakistan towards other countries. Furthermore, those with income levels below PKR 50,000 (EUR 165) and no income were most likely to mention lack of economic/livelihood opportunities as the main driver for considering onward migration. In terms of educational level, except for those without any formal education, this was the most reported reason for considering irregular migration for all educational attainment levels.

With regard to the respondents' concerns in leaving their country, about 9% of the sample, regardless of their migration status, reported that poverty was the main driver for them to migrate from Afghanistan to Pakistan. For those whose temporary status is reliant on finding a job, this may be particularly worrisome considering the deep economic crisis that the country as a whole is going through. In their analysis on Afghan community in Pakistan, Mielke et al. corroborate that Afghans in Pakistan, especially the lower-income groups, live in a socioeconomic limbo and precarity doing menial jobs for earning a living due to restrictions in accessing the formal job market.[127] The issue of discrimination experienced by Afghans in the Pakistani job market was also highlighted in interviews with stakeholders (SH09_Haripur).

As noted above, there is a slight difference in the main reason for migration based on the type of migration intentions, with those having irregular migration intentions citing economic reasons (limited economic/livelihood opportunities) as well as the threat of forced return as the main driver of considering onward migration, while those with migration intentions within the next two years citing the threat of forced return as the predominant factor. This difference highlights an important aspect – **while the fear of forced return is still prevalent among both types of intending migrants, the added economic pressures prevalent in the society may make any legal avenues unachievable, hence pushing intending migrants to consider irregular means**. Another interesting and relevant finding is that for the few respondents who shared not having an intention to migrate further from Pakistan (n=69), lack of financial resources was one of the main reasons, mentioned by 24% of this sub-group (second to 'satisfaction of living in Pakistan'). This highlights that while this group may aspire to migrate, lack of financial resources reduces their capabilities of acting upon those aspirations, as found in other studies.[128]

Similarly, economic reasons do not just dominate as the main driving forces from Pakistan, but also emerged as the top factors contributing to decisions related to the destination. Perceptions about economic ease in the countries of destination emerged among the reasons for choosing a particular destination. Economic factors were rated highest as the main attraction, reported by 62% of those with more concrete migration intentions in the next two years (n=768), and was the top response across all the districts, as well as across all destination choices. Demographically, older respondents, with primary level or less education, and lower income status (below PKR 50,000, or EUR 165) are more likely to mention economic factors as the main reason for prioritising a destination. Among those with

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[127] Mielke et al., "Figurations of Displacement in and beyond Pakistan: Empirical Findings and Reflections on Protracted Displacement and Translocal Connections of Afghans," 2021.

[128] Jørgen Carling and Kerilyn Schewel, "Revisiting Aspiration and Ability in International Migration," *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 44, no. 6 (2017): 945–63, https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183X.2017.1384146.

European countries as the main destination choice, 65% reported economic reasons as the main reason for the choice. Similarly, for those with strong intentions to migrate irregularly (n=233), economic factors were rated to be the highest (49%) as the main reason for prioritising a particular destination.

Figure 13: Reason of destination country choice
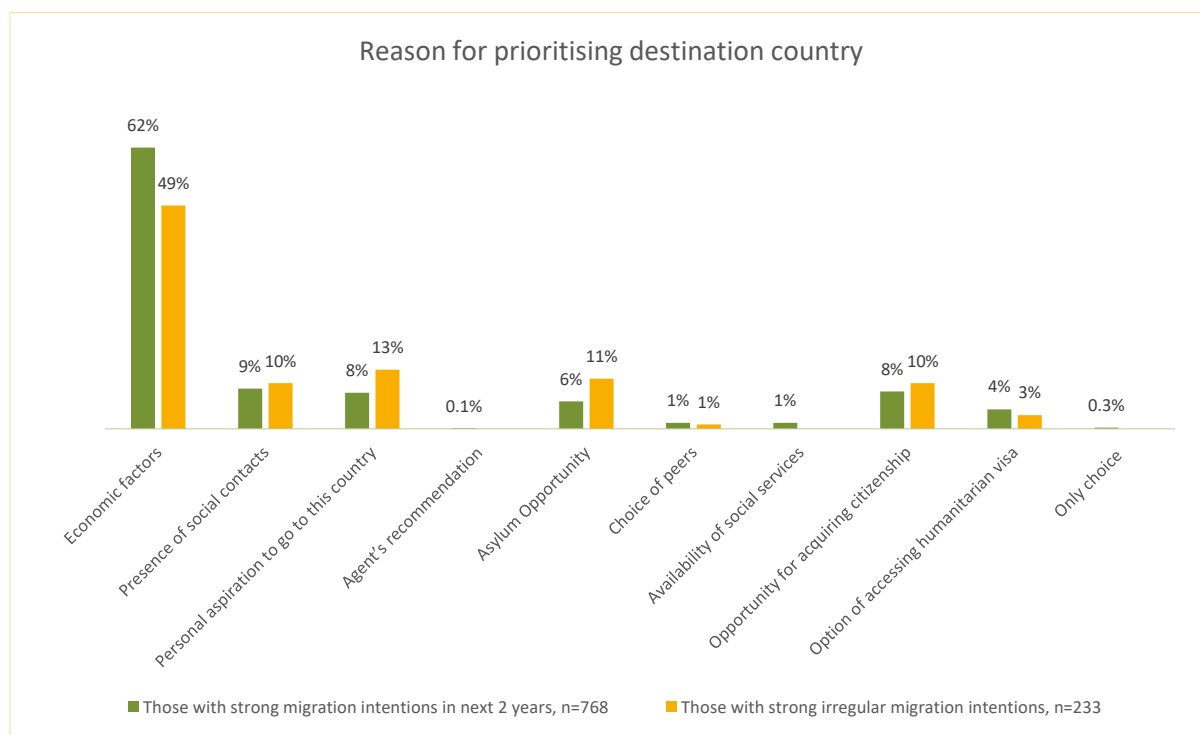
Along the same lines, when specifically asked about their perception of how easily they would find employment in the desired destination, the majority (49%) of those with strong migration intentions in the next two years responded 'easy' and 38% responded 'very easy' – reflecting that, in total, about 87% were optimistic about economic prospects at the destination. Only 4% considered that finding employment would be difficult (2% responded 'hard' and another 2% 'very hard'). Trends for those with strong irregular migration intentions were consistent, with 85% collectively reporting that finding employment would be 'easy' or 'very easy'.

Table 8: Structural factors

Structural factors	Qualification of results for those with irregular migration intentions	District level results	Other characteristics
Threat of forced return	Main reason for migration intention in next 2 years (39%) Most common reason for those with strong irregular migration intention (39%) (along with limited economic opportunities)	Most cited reason in Haripur and Mansehra	Predominant driver for those in age group 26-35 years, with no formal education

Lack of legal migration options	Reported by 31% of those with irregular migration intentions	Predominant factor reported in Mansehra	More pronounced for younger respondents (18-35 years), with no education, income levels below PKR 100,000 (EUR 330)
Economic drivers – in Pakistan and country of destination	Lack of livelihood opportunities one of the main drivers for those with strong irregular migration plans (39%); 49% reported economic factors as main pull factors to preferred destination	Lack of livelihood opportunities main reason highlighted in Mardan and Peshawar	Most reported by 18-25 years old, income levels below PKR 50,000 (EUR 165) as strong push factor; As a pull factor, reported more by older respondents, with primary education or less, and income less than PKR 50,000 (EUR 165)
Access to social services	Reported as a driver by 12% of those strongly intending to migrate irregularly	Particularly reported in Peshawar and Mardan	Respondents older than 26 years and earning less than PKR 50,000 (EUR 165) more likely to report limited access to social services as a problem
Safety and security	Not reported as a driver of migration from Pakistan, but the most powerful driver from Afghanistan	Respondents in Peshawar were less likely to report this as the main reason of migrating from Afghanistan (but still the top reason)	Respondents perceive very safe and secure conditions at destination

Finally, although **limited access to social services** in Pakistan did not emerge as a strong driver of migration from the country (reported by 8% of those strongly intending to migrate in the next two years, and 12% of those strongly intending to migrate by irregular means) as compared to other factors, it is still notable to be considered as a compounding structural factor behind migration intentions. Among those with strong irregular migration intentions, this reason was reported more by those over the age of 26 years with income below PKR 50,000 (approx. EUR 165) and was more

pronounced particularly in Peshawar and Mardan. Examining the factors behind the choice of a particular destination, access to social services was a weak consideration (reported by 1% of those strongly intending to migrate within the next two years, and negligible for those with irregular migration intentions). Juxtaposing this with the responses on their perception of how access to services would be in the countries of destination, it is apparent that potential migrants believe access to services to be easy across all destination countries. More specifically, when asked about their perception on ease of access to suitable housing and healthcare in the place of destination, about 87% do not consider it a problem (approximately 44% mark it as easy; 43% perceive it to be very easy), and a similar trend was noted for those with strong irregular migration intentions.

While not specifically a driver of onward migration from Pakistan, lack of safety and/or threat to life was mentioned as the main factor for migrating from Afghanistan to Pakistan (reported by 87% of the full sample, with particular incidence in Mardan, Haripur, and Mansehra). This is important to consider as onward migration intentions are heavily influenced by the conditions of the country of origin, as was concluded in the PARIM-II Background Report,[129] and the demographic characteristics of our sample. Within Pakistan, threat to safety can be interpreted in terms of the risk of forced return they experience, which may push them back to insecure and unsafe conditions in Afghanistan. Besides the unsafe conditions in the countries of origin and transit, expectations of a safe and secure environment in the country of destination may also be a factor attracting some to consider migrating to those places. Results from our survey demonstrate that an overwhelming majority (96%) of those with strong intentions to migrate within the next two years, and 89% of those with strong irregular migration intentions believe that safety and security conditions would be easy to avail once they are in the place of destination.

5.5. Knowledge and risk awareness on migration

In PARIM-I research outputs, we established the relevance of a potential migrants' prior risk awareness and confidence levels with their inclination to receive new information (through awareness campaigns) and alter their decisions and behaviours. Prior research shows that if a potential migrant perceives that they know all about the risks associated with irregular migration, and is confident about overcoming those, they may not be very receptive to campaign messaging. As discussed by Morgenstern in detail, potential migrants may be more receptive to campaigns if they provide information that is new, is relevant to their particular needs, or addresses misinformation.[130]

Our survey allows us to understand, to a certain degree, the general risk awareness and knowledge of migration options by potential Afghan migrants. This would help design a campaign that fills the knowledge gaps and addresses misconceptions. However, the survey responses are to be interpreted with caution, as they may not actually reflect the detail of knowledge about the risk but only a superficial awareness of certain risks, without an understanding of how potential migrants might be affected personally by it. We found through interviews with Pakistani returnees in a separate PARIM-II research output that while the interviewed returnees were generally aware of some risks of an
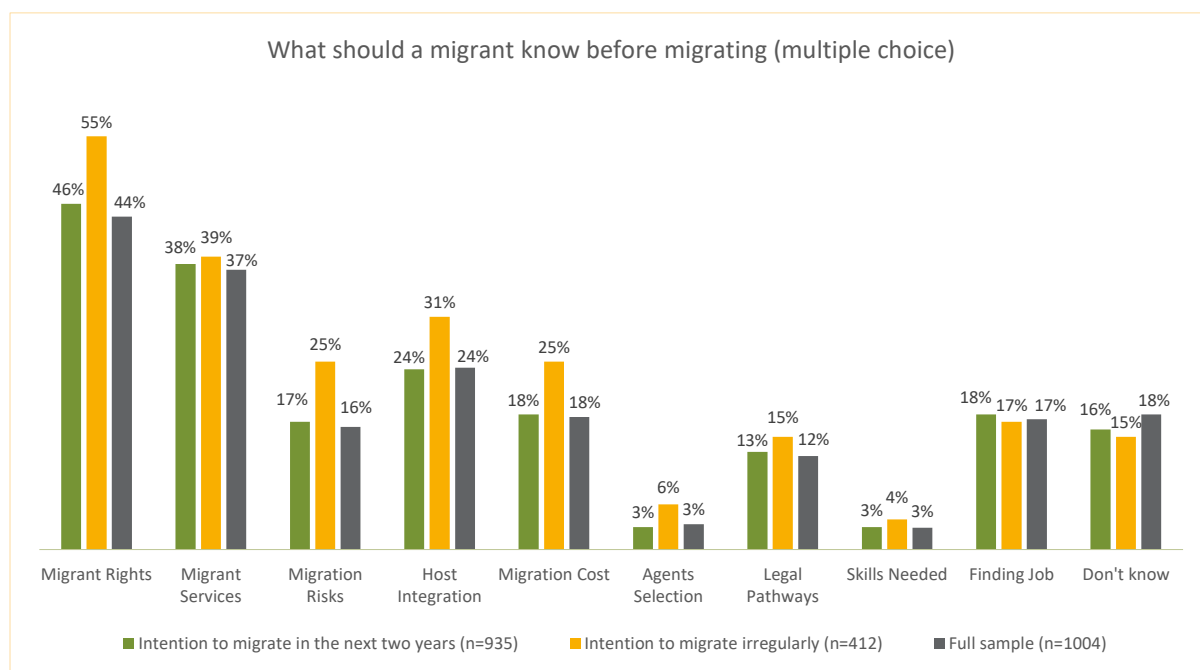
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[129] Khalid Koser and Katie Kuschminder, "Understanding Irregular Migrants' Decision Making Factors in Transit" (Belconnen: Department of Immigration and Border Protection, 2016), https://www.homeaffairs.gov.au/research-and-stats/files/occasional-paper-21.pdf; Qaisrani, "Migration Insights: Understanding Onward Migration Dynamics among Afghan Nationals in Pakistan," 2023.

[130] Sandra Morgenstern, "Political Information & Migration" (PhD Thesis, University of Konstanz, 2020).

irregular journey, they had not known more detail about the likelihood of those risks to be experienced personally.[131]

When asked what a migrant should know before migrating, the top three responses from the overall sample (n=1004) included knowledge about migrants' rights (44%), awareness about the services offered for migrants (37%), and information about opportunities for integrating in the destination countries (24%). About 18% of the sample reported not knowing what a potential migrant should know before migrating, and this rate was higher for those with lesser education. Matters such as knowing the cost of migration (18%), finding a job at the destination (17%), knowing about migration risks (16%), legal pathways of migration (12%) were rated relatively lower. This shows that the respondents consider it more important to know about the conditions at the destination (their rights, available services, and integration opportunities) as compared to aspects that would prepare them for the journey (such as costs and risks). Peshawar had the highest number of people who responded they do not know what a migrant should know before migrating, and Mardan had the least. Further analysis shows that those with no formal level of education are more likely to respond not knowing what information a migrant should have before migrating. Figure 14 below shows the responses of the full sample with those that had intentions of migrating within the next two years (n=935) and those with irregular migration intentions (n=412). While generally the trend of responses is more or less similar, we notice that respondents with irregular migration intentions are more likely to have a comparatively higher percentage on all options, but slightly less likely to respond they 'don't know' what a migrant should know about migration. This may indicate a relatively higher awareness on collecting relevant information before migrating among those with irregular intentions.
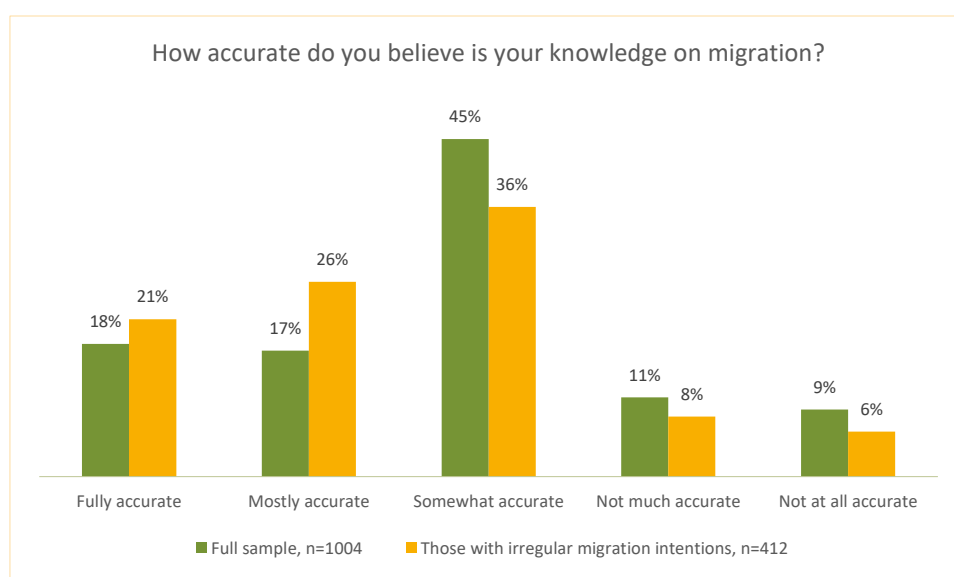
Figure 14: Migrant knowledge before migration

What should a migrant know before migrating (multiple choice)

Intention to migrate in the next two years (n=935) ■ Intention to migrate irregularly (n=412) ■ Full sample (n=1004)

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[131] Ayesha Qaisrani and Marco Mogiani, "Voices of Return: Leveraging the Influence of Returnees in Migration Information Campaigns," PARIM-II Returnee Report (Vienna: International Centre for Migration Policy Development, 2024), unpublished.

Responses on questions aimed at assessing their knowledge levels on migration show that the majority of the respondents were sceptical about their extent of knowledge on the topic. When specifically asked about how informed they consider themselves on migration options and migrant rights, 'somewhat' was the most popular response (44% for migration options, and 43% for migrant rights), and only 17% reported they were 'fully' aware (in both questions). The same trend was noticed when they were specifically asked about their knowledge levels on migration options to their preferred destination (43% responded adequately). Similarly, for assessing their confidence level on migration information, respondents were asked to rate the degree to which they believe their knowledge on migration is accurate (see Figure 15). The majority (45%) responded being 'somewhat' accurate on relevant knowledge, about 18% responded having 'fully' accurate knowledge, and 17% reported being 'mostly' accurate. Only 9% of the sample mentioned that their knowledge on migration is 'not at all' accurate, while 11% said 'not much'. A considerably higher percentage of respondents from Peshawar reported 'not at all' on all three questions designed to assess the knowledge and confidence level of respondents on that knowledge.

Figure 15: Self-report of migration knowledge accuracy

How accurate do you believe is your knowledge on migration?

	Fully accurate	Mostly accurate	Somewhat accurate	Not much accurate	Not at all accurate
Full sample, n=1004	18%	17%	45%	11%	9%
Those with irregular migration intentions, n=412	21%	26%	36%	8%	6%

Further analysis shows that the confidence in the level of information on migration and migrant rights, knowledge levels on migration for preferred destination, and self-perceived accuracy of their knowledge on migration options increase with higher education. Respondents with no education are more likely to report being less informed about migration options and migrant rights, less knowledgeable on their preferred destination, and less confident in their self-perceived knowledge on migration. Based on age, younger respondents are more likely to depict confidence in all these indicators. Filtering for those who reported having 'definite' plans for irregular migration, results showed even higher levels of reported knowledge and belief that it is accurate (see Figure 16). The majority responded being 'mostly' and 'fully' accurate in their knowledge of migration. About 50% of those with 'definite' plans for irregular migration reported being 'fully' aware about migrant rights, as well as on migration process for preferred destination. This reflects a higher degree of confidence among those with very concrete decisions to migrate irregularly. Further narrowing down on the sample with irregular migration intentions specifically to Europe (n=143), the majority responded being 'mostly' accurate in their knowledge on migration. In other words, respondents tend to show

higher confidence in their own knowledge of migration when they are younger, relatively more educated, and more keen to migrate irregularly.

Figure 16: Self-report of migration knowledge accuracy among respondents with 'definite' irregular migration intentions
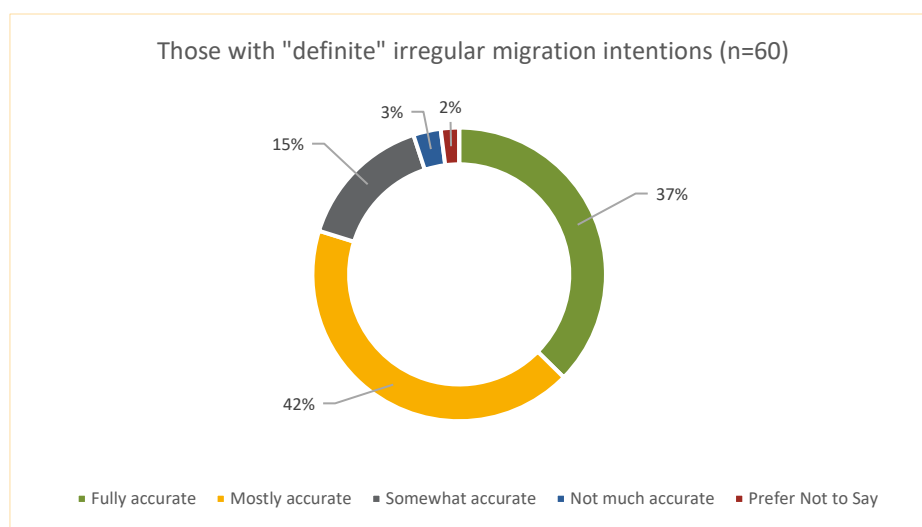

Regarding their general and specific knowledge on migration issues, the survey also inquired about their awareness on possible legal options that Afghan nationals in general and they personally could be eligible for. The majority of respondents (45%) believed humanitarian visas to be the appropriate legal migration channel for Afghans, with particularly high response rates in Haripur for this option. The second highest rated option was work/student visa (33%), which received higher responses in Mansehra as compared to other districts. Resettlement visa ranked as the third most reported option (18%), with high response rates from Peshawar. This trend was matched when specifically asked which legal migration options they consider themselves to be eligible for, with humanitarian pathway ranking the highest (47%), followed by work/student visa (31%), and resettlement visa (16%).

Specifically, in relation to risk awareness on irregular migration, respondents were asked to list down three major risks that people travelling without proper documents experience. The top three responses included hunger and thirst (reported by 48% of the sample), life or health risk (reported by 47%), and mistreatment by border authorities (reported by 45%). Responses of those who declared an intention to migrate mirrored that of the complete sample. However, there were marked variations across the districts in terms of how different risks are perceived across the sample. For instance, in Haripur, the highest reported risk in migrating irregularly was kidnapping, in Mansehra and Peshawar it was risks to health or life, while in Mardan, it was mistreatment by border authorities. Kidnapping was ranked quite low in Peshawar, as compared to other districts, and in Haripur, deportation was not perceived a major risk, in contrast to other districts. Surprisingly, mistreatment by migration agents did not feature as a major risk as reported by respondents (Figure 17 below). Comparing these results to the risk awareness of potential Pakistani migrants from PARIM-I shows somewhat similar understanding – violence, witnessing death (life threat), and lack of food (hunger) made the top of the list as risks that potential Pakistani migrants expected to experience personally on their journey.[132] However, it must be noted that in our case the surveyed population has already experienced migration,

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[132] Qaisrani, Hahn-Schaur, and Hendow, "Irregular Migration Dynamics from Pakistan and the Role of Information Campaigns: PARIM Final Report," 2021.

therefore their reporting might reflect the actual experiences that they or their families have had when migrating to Pakistan, while potential Pakistani migrants might have only a general feeling.

Figure 17: Major risks of irregular migration

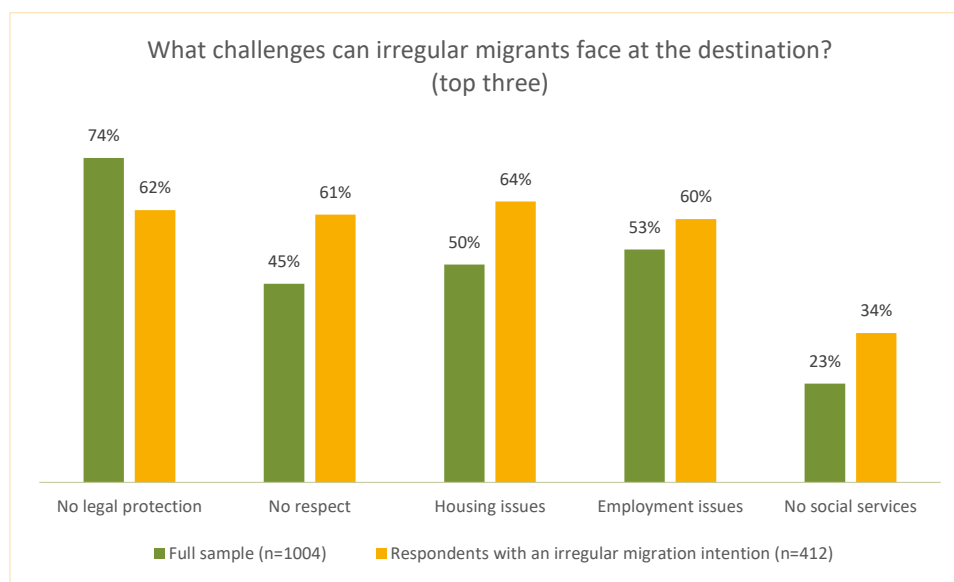What are the three major risks that undocumented migrants experience? (n=1004)
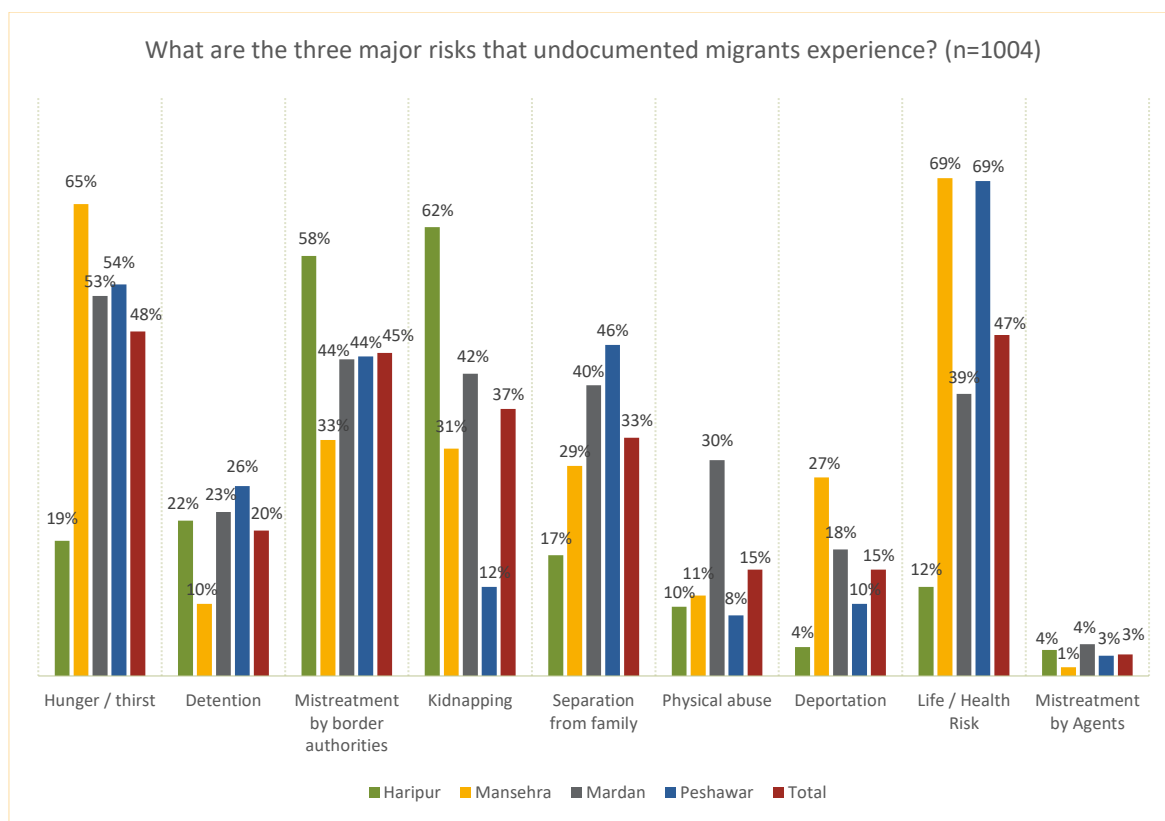
For assessing their knowledge on support systems and services in place for migrants, we asked who irregular migrants should contact if faced with any trouble along the way. Majority of the respondents (54%) stated that they should contact their own embassy (as discussed earlier in section 5.3), followed by those who believe local police would be the relevant entity (23%) to reach out to, and the local community should be able to support (22%). There were some variations noticed across the districts. Contacting the embassy was rated high in all districts except for Mardan, where the top response was contacting the local community. Similarly, contacting the local police was reported significantly higher in Mansehra as compared to other districts. While reliance on agents was overall ranked low (7%), it was significantly higher in Peshawar (29%), whereas in all other districts it was zero or negligible. This is rather insightful, as it shows that for the majority of the respondents, agents are not considered to be reliable sources of support in case of challenges experienced on the journey.

Similarly, assessing their awareness on potential risks encountered on reaching the destination as an irregular migrant (see Figure 18), the survey shows that majority of the sample considers it would be challenging to acquire legal protection for an irregular migrant (74%), followed by employment issues (53%), and issues in finding accommodation (50%). Other issues such as 'having no respect' (45%) and no social services such as education and health were also ranked considerably high (23%). Comparing these responses with those who mentioned having an intention to migrate irregularly, there are some variations. While all post-arrival challenges were rated quite high, it is noted that potential irregular

migrants consider housing issues the most challenging for an irregular migrant (64%),[133] followed by finding no legal protection (62%), having no respect (61%), employment issues (60%), and no access to social services (34%). While this variation does not portray a significant difference in awareness about risks, it reflects the difference in perception about what the biggest challenges would be. Moreover, it appears rather counter-intuitive that even though they perceive that challenges encountered after arrival would be high, they still consider it worthwhile to migrate irregularly.

Figure 18: Challenges of irregular migration faced in destination countries

What challenges can irregular migrants face at the destination? (top three)

|	No legal protection	No respect	Housing issues	Employment issues	No social services
Full sample (n=1004)	74%	45%	50%	53%	23%
Respondents with an irregular migration intention (n=412)	62%	61%	64%	60%	34%

5.6.   Migration preparation levels

We understand that migration decision-making is not a linear process, and a multitude of factors and triggers shape the ultimate decision to migrate (or not). There is, of course, always the limitation of intention-behaviour gap, i.e., even if an individual may express an intention to migrate, they may not always end up migrating – especially if that intention is weak or respondents are unsure about it. This may happen due to change in any of the micro, meso, or macro drivers discussed above or other triggers that may alter the circumstances. Nevertheless, our survey offers us a glimpse into the preparation level of the sample, not only providing insight into their awareness on what needs to be done before migrating, but also reflecting their preferences of different practical steps taken before migration, which may indicate their intentions for regular or irregular migration.

The survey results show that more than half (54%) of those who expressed an intention to migrate within the next two years have taken no preparatory steps for migration (see Figure 19). A possible explanation might be related to the fact that some respondents might start preparing to migrate just before the actual start of the journey – leading, in turn, to potentially consider irregular migration, which is perceived as quicker. Those who admitted to having taken some preparatory steps had done the very basics, such as contacting social connections abroad (23%), collecting information (18%), and learning skills in preparation of going abroad (12%). More concrete steps were reported less, e.g., 9% reported they had applied for a visa, 9% mentioned they had contacted agents, and 6% mentioned they had gathered necessary documentation. Contacting the embassy, having paid an agent, or getting

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[133] This could reflect the recent governmental order according to which landlords have to report on undocumented Afghan nationals.

a ticket scored even lower. Variations across the districts show that more respondents in Mardan reported having taken some preparatory steps as compared to other districts, and reports of having applied for a visa were also the highest in Mardan. Responses on having contacted an agent were relatively higher in both Peshawar and Mardan. It is interesting to notice that, among those who planned to migrate irregularly, the percentage of those who have already taken preparatory steps is much higher (76%); however, the steps taken are rather similar.

Figure 19: Preparatory Steps taken towards further migration
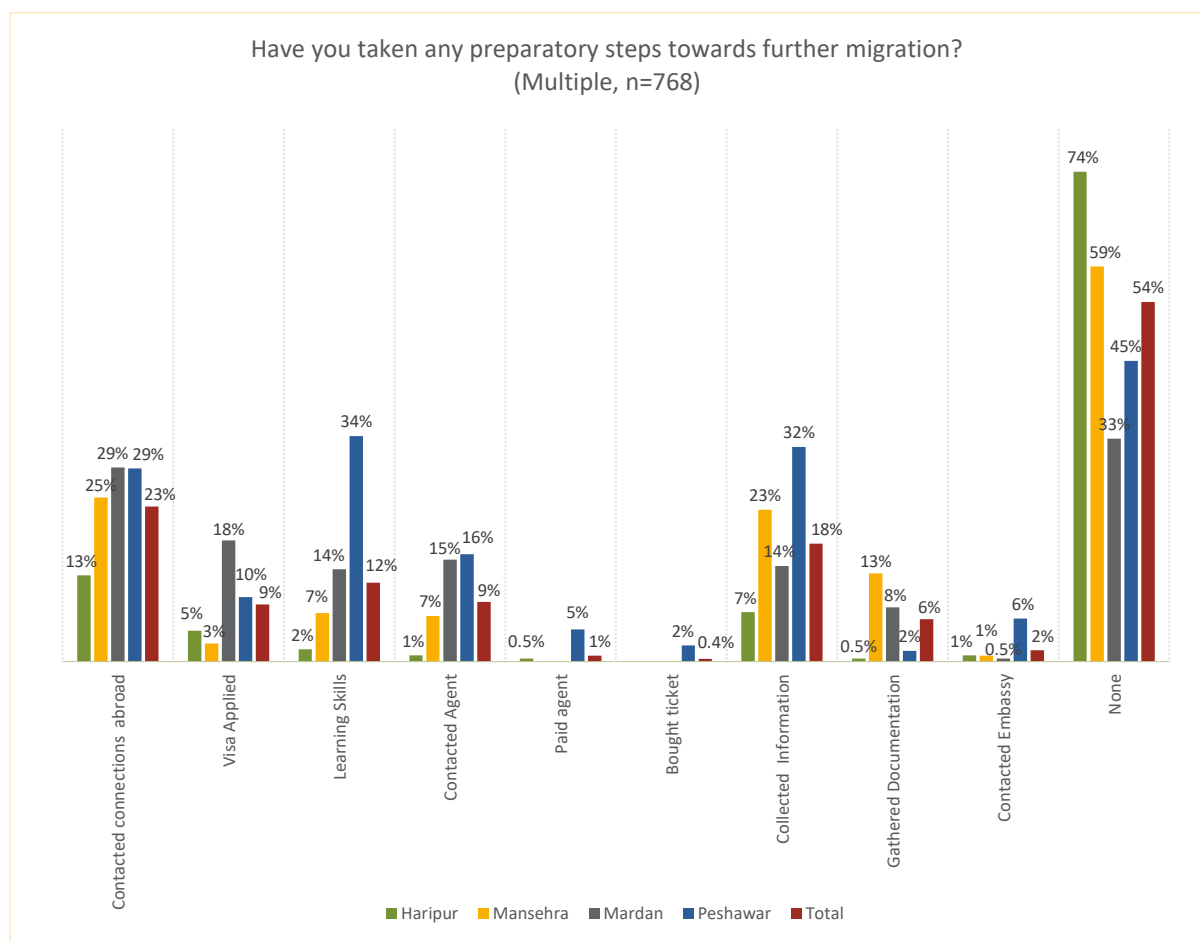
When asked about the extent to which they feel prepared to travel to their preferred destination, of those with strong migration intentions in the next two years, an equal percentage responded being 'somewhat' prepared (36%) and being 'fully' prepared (35%). Respondents in Mansehra had higher levels of confidence on their migration preparations (60% reported being 'fully' prepared), while of those reporting 'somewhat' most were from Haripur (see Figure 20). Despite high reports of being 'fully' prepared, 37% of those with migration intentions in the next two years claimed to have no travel documents. In fact, 33% of those with irregular migration intentions reported having no documents in preparation for their travel, and 43% of those who reported being 'fully' aware of migration options to preferred country had no travel documents. The lack of travel documents was particularly noticeable in Mansehra. Only 4% mentioned having a visa, reported highest from Peshawar, and lowest from Mansehra and Mardan. Even 6% of those with irregular migration intentions also reported having a visa, although it is not clear from the survey whether the visa acquired is for the preferred destination or a country to transit through. When asked what else they would require actualising their migration
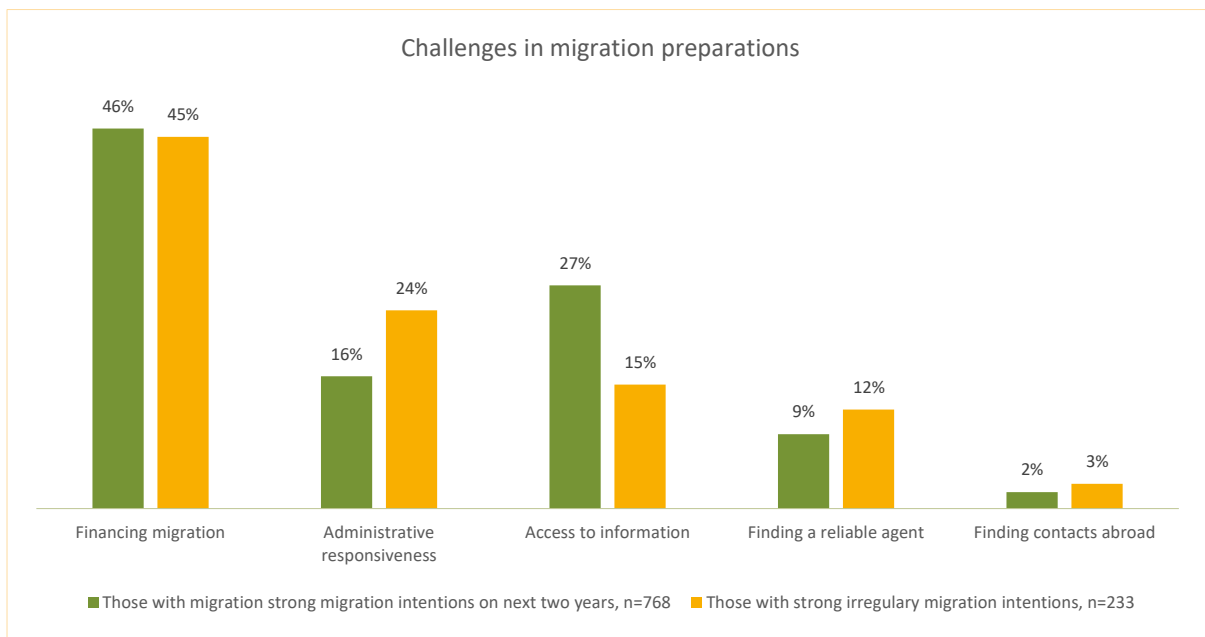
plans, the top three responses were passport (36%), finances (34%), and visa (21%). Requiring a passport was rated the highest in Haripur (73%), while it was quite low in Peshawar (11%) in comparison. Requiring a visa was reported the highest in Mansehra (37%) and lowest in Haripur.

Figure 20: Preparation feeling towards migration to preferred destination
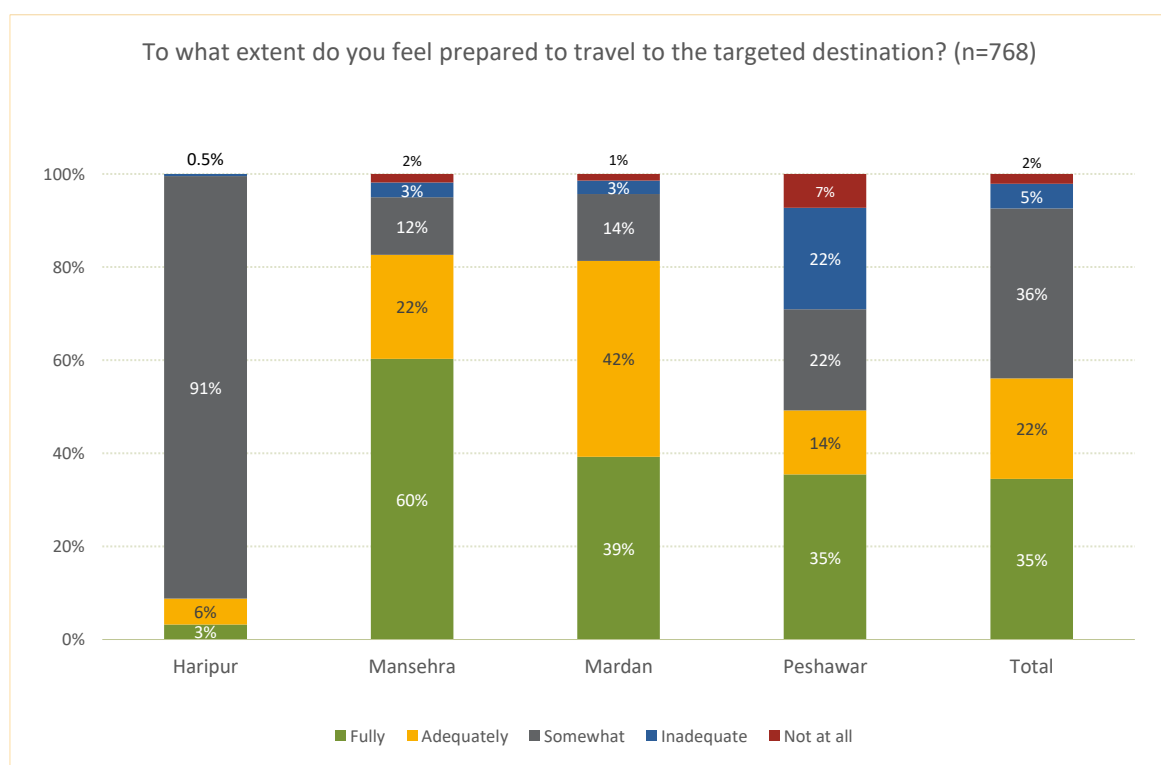
In terms of the biggest challenges that potential migrants are facing in preparing for migration (see Figure 21), financing has come up as the most significant issue, reported almost equally by 46% of those with migration intentions in the next two years and 45% of those with strong irregular migration intentions. The issue of financing migration is experienced as the most important challenge across all districts except Haripur, which ranked access to information as the highest one. For those intending to migrate in the next two years, the next biggest challenges were access to relevant information (27%) and administrative responsiveness (16%). For those with strong irregular migration intentions, the ranking of subsequent challenges differed: the second most important challenge was administrative responsiveness (24%), followed by finding a reliable agent (14%). The challenge of finding a reliable agent was particularly noticeable in Mardan, from where intentions of irregular migration are noted to be the highest.

Figure 21: Challenges in migration preparations

Challenges in migration preparations

- Financing migration: 46%, 45%
- Administrative responsiveness: 16%, 24%
- Access to information: 27%, 15%
- Finding a reliable agent: 9%, 12%
- Finding contacts abroad: 2%, 3%

■ Those with migration strong migration intentions on next two years, n=768   ■ Those with strong irregular migration intentions, n=233

6. Messaging, messengers and channels: Lessons for PARIM-II campaign

6.1. Background

Drawing from previous research in the framework of PARIM-I as well as from both scholarly literature and PARIM-II's empirical research, this chapter aims at honing the strategies and mechanisms for the effective dissemination of migration-related information. It will do so through a comprehensive analysis of potential migrants' information needs and gaps as well as through a parallel examination of the nuances of messaging, the diversity of messengers, and the effectiveness of channels employed in the design and implementation of migration information campaigns.

In particular, as also emerged from the literature, this chapter reiterates the need to design migration information campaigns according to the diverse needs, concerns, and aspirations of potential migrants. It also looks at the role of different messengers – from governmental agencies to grassroots organisations, community leaders, and migrants themselves – in delivering credible and relevant information to target audiences. Finally, it will examine the diverse channels that could be employed to reach potential Afghan migrants in Pakistan, including digital platforms, traditional media, and community-based initiatives, shedding light on their respective strengths, limitations, and potential impact on migrant decision-making processes.

This chapter eventually provides valuable insights for policymakers, practitioners, and other researchers in this field, informing more effective and responsive approaches to information dissemination with regard to Afghans in Pakistan considering secondary movement.

6.2. Messaging and framing

As discussed before, migration information campaigns can employ either positive or negative messages to shape potential migrants' attitude towards the migration journey, according to the specific objective they aim to achieve. Campaigns that employ a negative framing tend for example to focus just on the risks related to irregular migration or to discourage migrants from entering a certain territory by emphasising the lack of asylum opportunities. On the other hand, if they have the interests of migrants at their heart, migration information campaigns employing a positive message can provide migrants with accurate and trustworthy information on the availability of support services and resources in their countries, as well as on opportunities to travel through regular channels to other destinations.

In their analysis of Afghan migrants in transit through Türkiye and elsewhere, Brekke and Thorbjørnsrud outline how the campaigns targeting them focus mostly on three main messages: the possibility to return to their country, the dangers of migration routes, and the difficult life in the European countries. However, the authors also highlight how these messages are either ignored (considering the situation in the country of origin), already well-known, or in contrast with the situation described by family and friends abroad, respectively, and therefore disregarded.[134] For this reason, campaign messages cannot be framed only in a negative way, but should be balanced with messages of resilience, empowerment, and access to support networks.

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[134] Jan-Paul Brekke and Kjersti Thorbjørnsrud, "The Role of Narratives in Migratory Decision-Making: The Role of Narratives in Onward Migration of Afghan Nationals from Istanbul to Europe"; see also Ceri Oeppen, "'Leaving Afghanistan! Are You Sure?' European Efforts to Deter Potential Migrants through Information Campaigns".

Even our findings seem to suggest that potential migrants are not very interested in knowing more about the dangers of irregular migration (16%) or the costs of the journey (18%); rather, they would like to gather more information about the conditions of reception in the countries of destination, either in terms of rights (44%), services available (37%), or integration measures (24%). When considering age groups (see Figure 22), different age cohorts seem to show slightly varying degrees of concern regarding specific aspects of migration. For instance, younger individuals between 18 and 35 years old express a heightened interest in understanding migrant rights and – although in much lower numbers – getting to know more about legal migration pathways, possibly reflecting a desire for autonomy and awareness of legal protections. On the other hand, individuals older than 36 seem to demonstrate a greater emphasis on accessing migrant services, indicating a need for practical support and resources for their migration experience. This discrepancy in priorities underscores the importance of tailoring migration information campaigns to cater to the diverse needs and concerns of different age demographics.

Figure 22: Knowledge before migration by age group

What should a migrant know before migration?
(Multiple choice, n=1004)
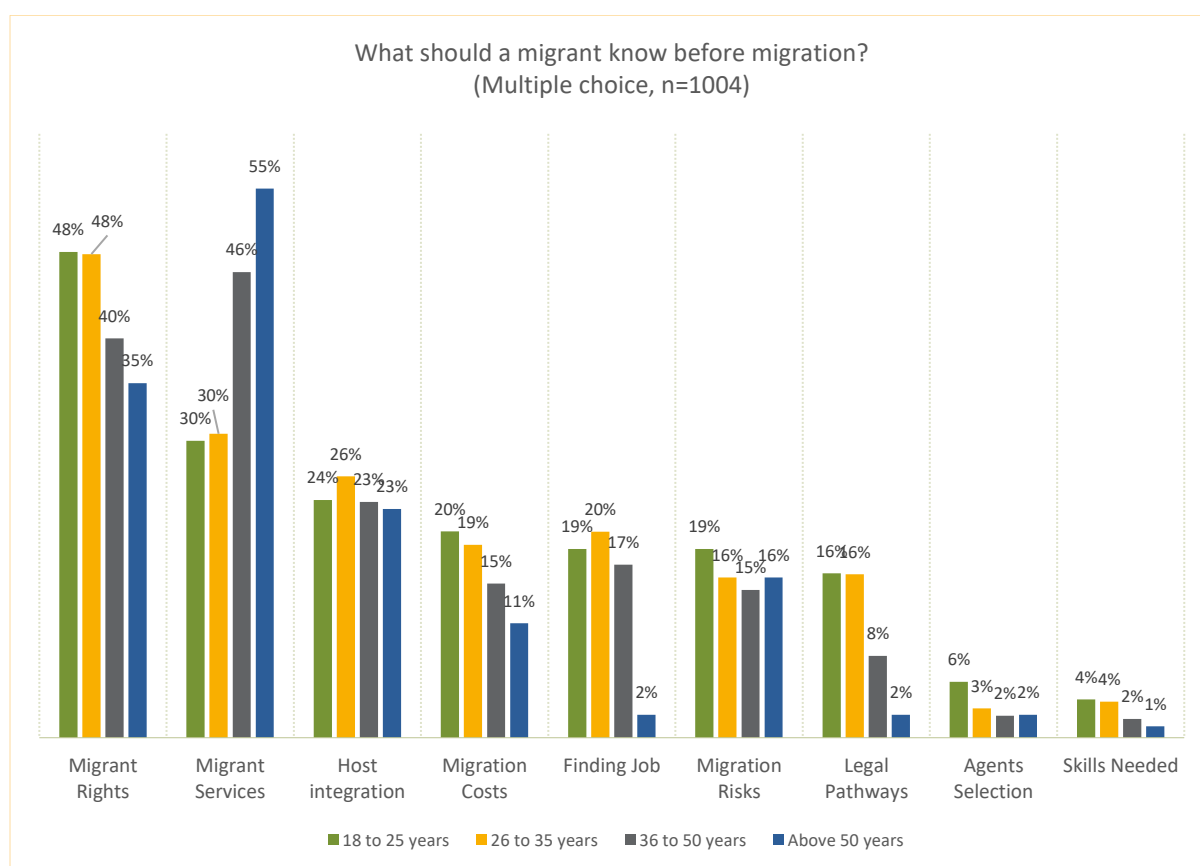
Even the overwhelming majority of stakeholders interviewed explicitly highlight the importance of obtaining information on documentation and legal pathways – rather than migration policies more generally – when preparing for the migration journey. In line with the potential migrants' responses, several stakeholders also seem to consider the importance of providing information on financial means and resources for the journey and on social and economic opportunities in countries of destination, while only one stakeholder mention the necessity to provide information on the drawbacks of irregular migration or on the selection of the agent. As one stakeholder summarised: 'The relevant information that Afghan nationals in Pakistan might need includes details on migration

policies of other countries, available employment opportunities, and required documentation and guidance on the overall migration process' (SH11_Haripur).

The survey data reveals intriguing patterns also when examining responses across different districts (see Figure 23). For instance, in Mardan almost one third of respondents seem to show a particularly high concern for migration risks and costs in comparison to respondents in other districts, and districts like Haripur and Mardan exhibit a greater emphasis on accessing migrant services and migrant rights, respectively. These regional variations may be influenced by factors such as socio-economic conditions, existing support infrastructure, and historical migration trends, highlighting the importance of context-specific approaches in designing migration information campaigns.

Figure 23: Knowledge before migration by district
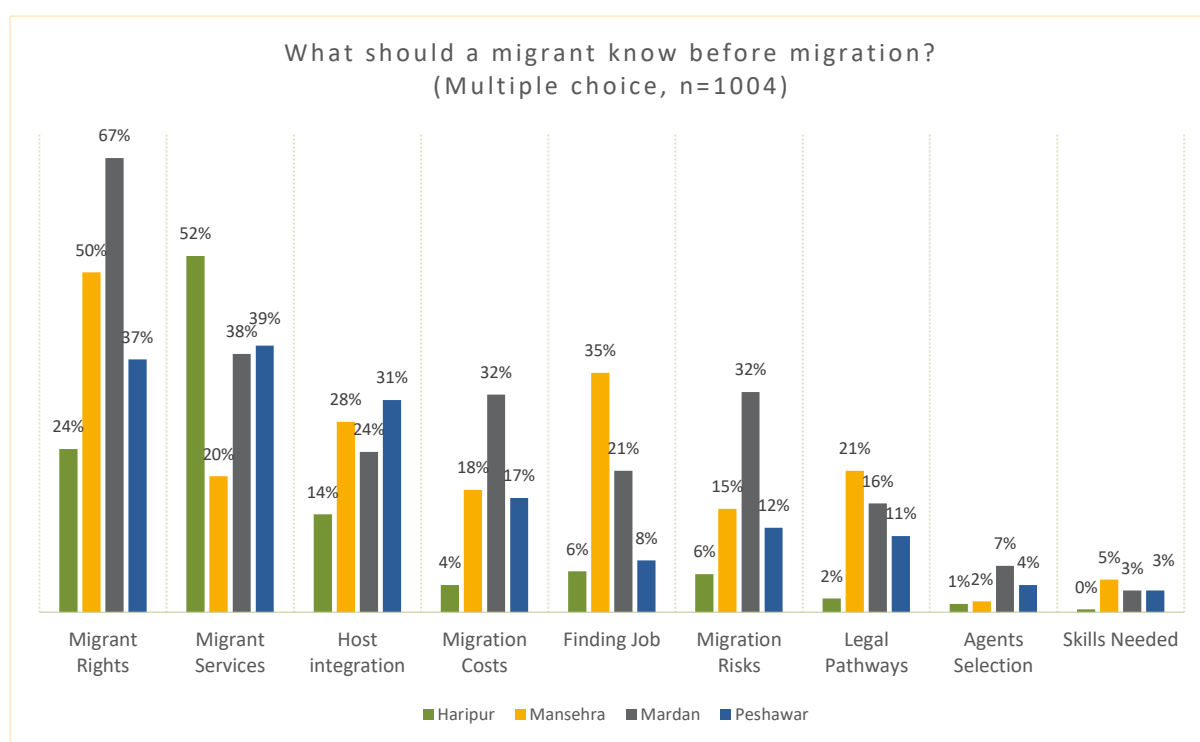
Interestingly, but not completely unexpectedly, the request for information on migration in preparation for the journey seems to vary as to whether potential migrants are planning to migrate in the following two years or if they are likely or very likely to migrate irregularly. In the first instance, the overwhelming majority of potential migrants that report being likely or very likely to migrate in the next two years seems to be more interested in information regarding jobs and relevant skills, legal pathways, and migrant rights. Conversely, among those who are likely or very likely to migrate irregularly, there is a higher proportion of request for information on agent selection as well as on costs and risks related to migration. Although the variation in numbers is too small to draw significant conclusions, it seems nevertheless important to capture the different needs for information among different target groups, in order to design tailored and more efficient information campaigns.

The need for specific information on migration emerges not only from general questions on information needs but also from more personal questions on challenges faced during the preparation for the journey, eligibility of migration options, and costs and risks of (irregular) migration. While these questions have been already analysed in the previous chapter to outline the profile of the potential Afghan migrant from Pakistan, in this section we will explore more in depth whether the answers

provided by Afghans indicate a potential need for information that could be then reflected in the message of the information campaign.

As discussed in chapter 5, the financing of the migration journey constitutes one of the biggest challenges for almost half of migrants with strong intentions to migrate or more likely to migrate irregularly. Moreover, 41% of all potential migrants interviewed and more than a quarter of those who would be willing to travel irregularly would choose irregular migration because it is perceived as cheaper than regular one. For this reason, migration information campaigns can focus on the financial aspect of (irregular) migration, particularly in the districts of Haripur and Peshawar, where the perception of the lower costs of irregular migration is particularly high among those willing to travel without papers (59% and 44% of respondents in those districts, respectively) and the need for information on the financial costs of the migration journey among the whole sample is lower than in other districts.

As emerged from the survey, another challenge for Afghans is the perceived lack of legal pathways, reported by 29% of all respondents and 31% among those with strong intentions to travel without papers, with particularly high incidence in Mansehra (75% of respondents in that district). The perceived lack of legal pathways may prompt potential Afghan migrants to consider irregular migration, which is considered quicker by 14% of respondents (both in general and with intentions to migrate irregularly). Despite the perceived lack of legal pathways, 45% of overall respondents believe to be eligible for humanitarian visas (especially in Haripur, where this percentage goes up to 84%), while 31% of respondents (58% in Mansehra) believe they could qualify for student or work visas (see Figure 24). On the other hand, only 12% of respondents would need more information on legal pathways, potentially indicating an already existing general knowledge on the topic. While a better and more targeted provision of information on legal pathways can be influential, in particular related to practical issues such as specific contact information or eligibility requirements, we also believe in the importance of effectively creating legal migration pathways for Afghan nationals in Pakistan, both for humanitarian and work or study reasons.

Figure 24: Perceived personal eligibility for migration options by district

Perceived personal eligibility of migration options (% per district)
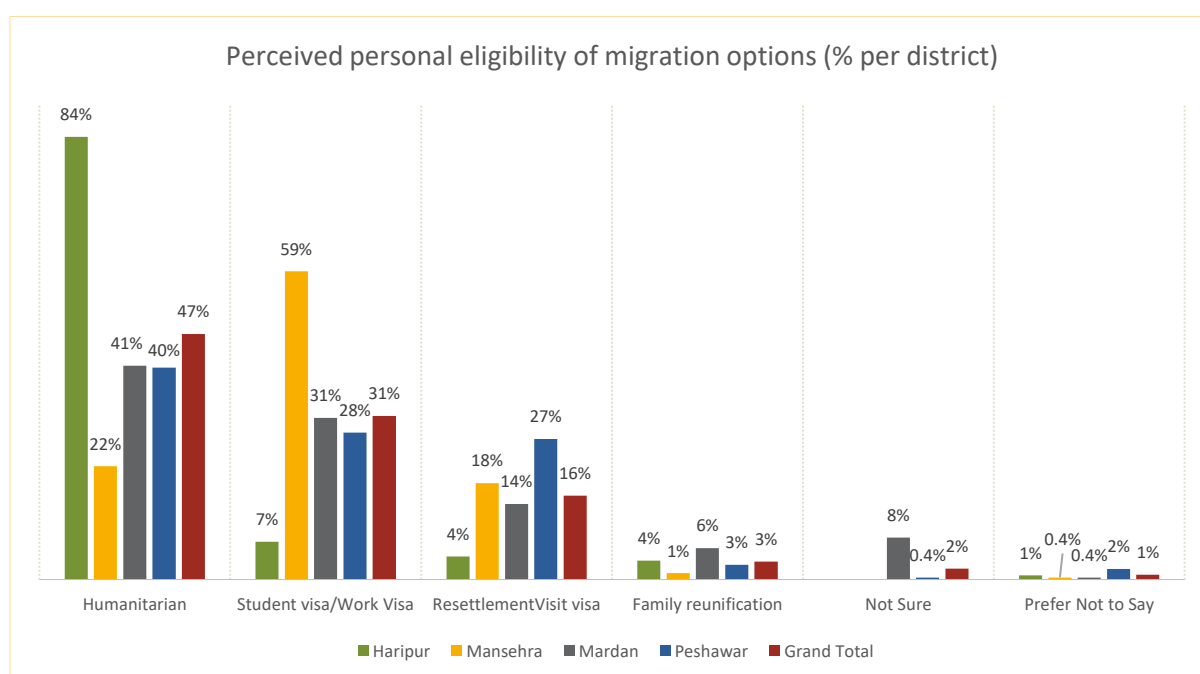
Another aspect that the migration information campaign can focus on is the risks of irregular migration. As seen in the previous chapter, almost half of respondents are generally aware of the main risks related to irregular migration, in particular hunger and thirst (48%), life or health risks (47%), and mistreatment by border authorities (45%). However, significant variations across districts were also noted, with very few respondents in Haripur, for example, worried about mistreatment by agents (2% of people in that district), deportation (4%), or physical abuse (10%). In this case, while it is important to address the lack of specific knowledge on the risks of irregular migration across different districts, it should also be noticed that information campaigns should carefully balance negative and positive messages, in order to highlight the risks of irregular migration, provide concrete information and support in case of danger during the journey, and underline the opportunities of regular migration.

One last aspect is related to the potential institutions that migrants can contact during the journey. As emerged from the survey, the majority of respondents (52%) stated that irregular migrants can contact their own embassy in case of emergency during the journey, followed by the local police (23%) and the local community (22%). Interestingly, those with strong intentions to travel without papers think that irregular migrants can get in touch not only with their embassy (45%), but also with international organisations (33%) or local NGOs (29%). When comparing these data with those on potential migrants' general and personal sources of information, some contradictions seem to emerge: While potential migrants do not rely on governmental institutions or NGOs for the provision of information on migration, trusting instead less reliable sources such as social and personal networks, they nevertheless trust such institutions and organisations in case of problems during the journey. It is here, we believe, that governments and international organisations should work better and more efficiently to provide concrete support to migrants in distress as well as balanced information on migration.

In conclusion, the data seem to highlight the complex interplay of factors influencing potential migrants' decision-making processes as well as the variegated need for information that potential migrants might have before preparing for the journey. Effective migration information campaigns should therefore consider not only demographic characteristics but also regional dynamics to ensure that messaging and support services are relevant, accessible, and impactful. By addressing the diverse needs and concerns of potential migrants across different age groups and districts as well as according to the specific their needs and ambitions, such campaigns can empower individuals with the knowledge and resources needed to make informed decisions about their migration journey while safeguarding their rights and well-being.

## 6.3.   Channels of communication

When it comes to migration intentions, preparation, and planning, access to relevant information and the accuracy thereof are key. As highlighted in the literature,[135] information plays a pivotal role in shaping migration decisions, influencing migrants' perceptions, choices, and experiences. The availability of reliable information can empower migrants to make informed decisions, navigate migration processes more effectively, and mitigate risks associated with irregular migration.

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[135] Caitlin Optekamp, "Migration Information Campaigns. A Qualitative Study on the Role That Migration Information Campaigns Play in the Migrant Decision-Making Process through the Lens of Practitioners in the Field of Migration" (Universiteit Utrecht, 2016); Jan-Paul Brekke and Audun Beyer, "'Everyone Wants to Leave'. Transit Migration from Khartoum-The Role of Information and Social Media Campaigns" (Oslo, 2019), www.samfunnsforskning.no.

Therefore, understanding the sources of information as well as their reliability among potential migrants is essential for enhancing the effectiveness of migration governance and support services.

Figure 25 offers insights into the diverse sources from which migrants can obtain information on migration, segmented by age groups. While traditional sources such as governmental institutions, NGOs, and TV and radio broadcastings are represented, it is probably unsurprising that migrants increasingly rely on digital platforms, social media, and personal acquaintances for information – in particular, but not only, the younger ones. When asked generally about where a migrant can get information on migration, social media represented by far the most important source, selected by 64% of respondents, followed by friends and family abroad (24%) and TV news (16%). When delving into the age groups, while TV news might be the third most important source of information on migration for respondents older than 26 years old, for the younger ones TV news dropped to the fifth position, after social media, friends and family abroad, returnees, and agents. The analysis of the source of information that potential migrants might use when intending or preparing to migrate underscores not only the growing importance of social media and online channels in shaping migrants' knowledge and perceptions but also, as we have seen before, the reliance on potentially unreliable sources of information, such as informal networks.

Figure 25: Sources of migration information
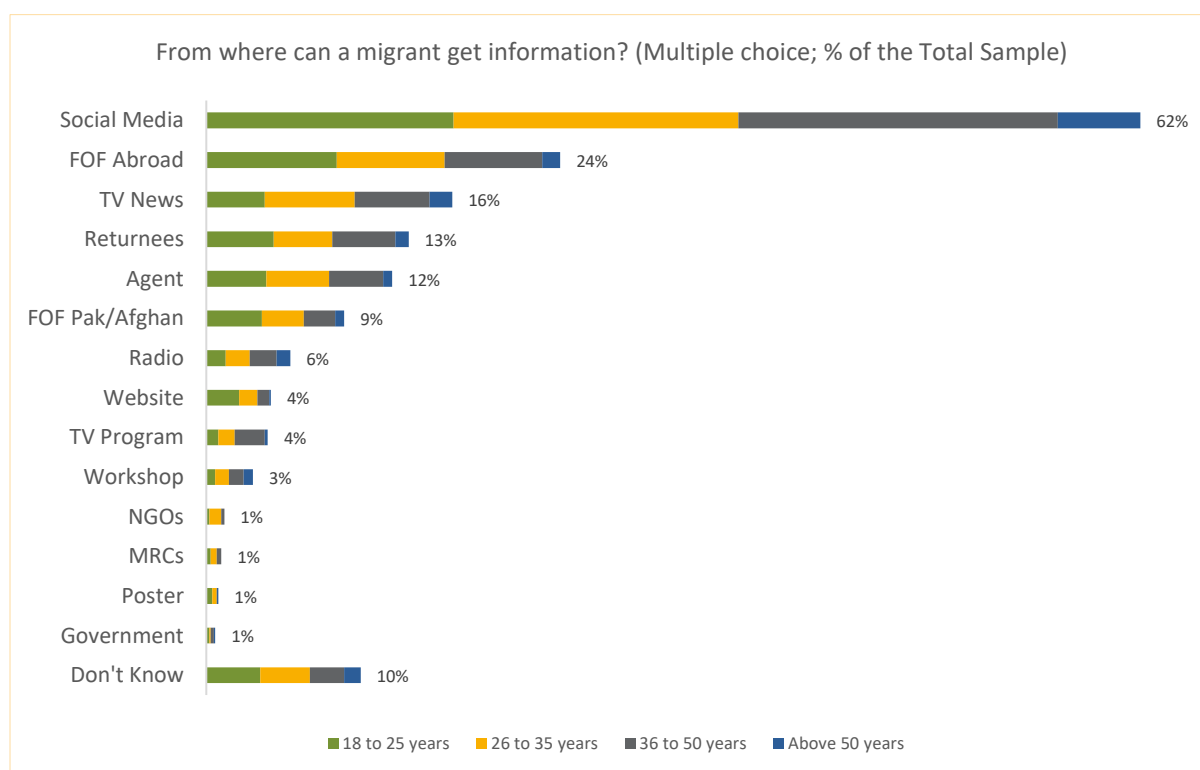
When asked whether they had personally used any such source of information on migration, only 36% of respondents answered positively. Interestingly, about three quarters of respondents in both Haripur and Peshawar have never used any sources of information on migration, while 49% of respondents in Mardan and 57% in Mansehra have done so (see Figure 26). Even when looking more in depth at the specific source of information used, a tendency to use social media and social networks (including friends, family members, and agents) emerges. All this might suggest the need not only for

a more capillary distribution of information across different districts but also for the provision of more accurate and trustworthy information itself.

Figure 26: Used migration information by age and district

Have you ever used any of these for migration information yourself? n=1004
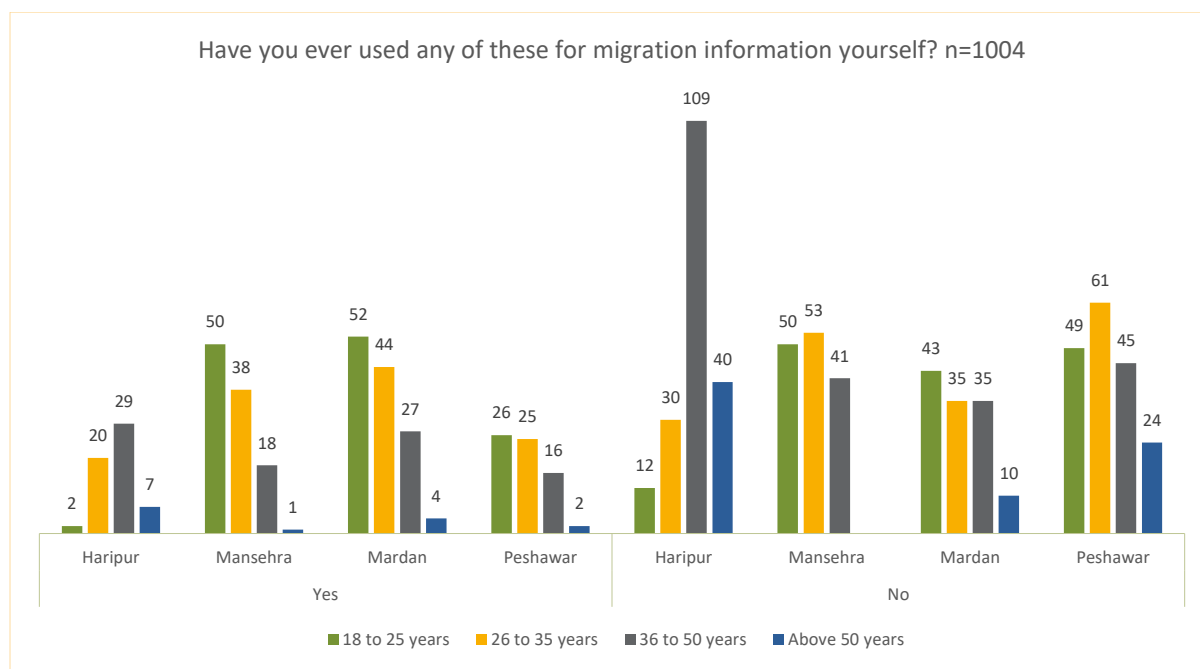
Among the 361 respondents who have personally used sources of information, more than a third of them – in particular among the younger segments – has used social media, sometimes in combination with other sources, while another 16% has sought information either in websites or through television news (see Figure 27). Respondents in Mardan and Mansehra seem to have been particularly active in seeking information about migration, in 50% and 42% of the cases, respectively (see Figure 28), probably signalling a higher predilection towards migration from these districts – which seems to be also reflected in the potential aspirations to migrate either in the next two years (Mansehra) or irregularly (Mardan). However, their sources of information change: while respondents in Mardan have mostly sought information in social media or among family members and friends abroad, respondents in Mansehra have done so predominantly among family members and friends in Afghanistan and Pakistan as well as via websites. With regard to age, our findings suggest that younger respondents are more likely to search for information via social media – although, as we will show below, they seem more reluctant than other groups to receive information through them – and through websites.

Figure 27: Used sources of information by age
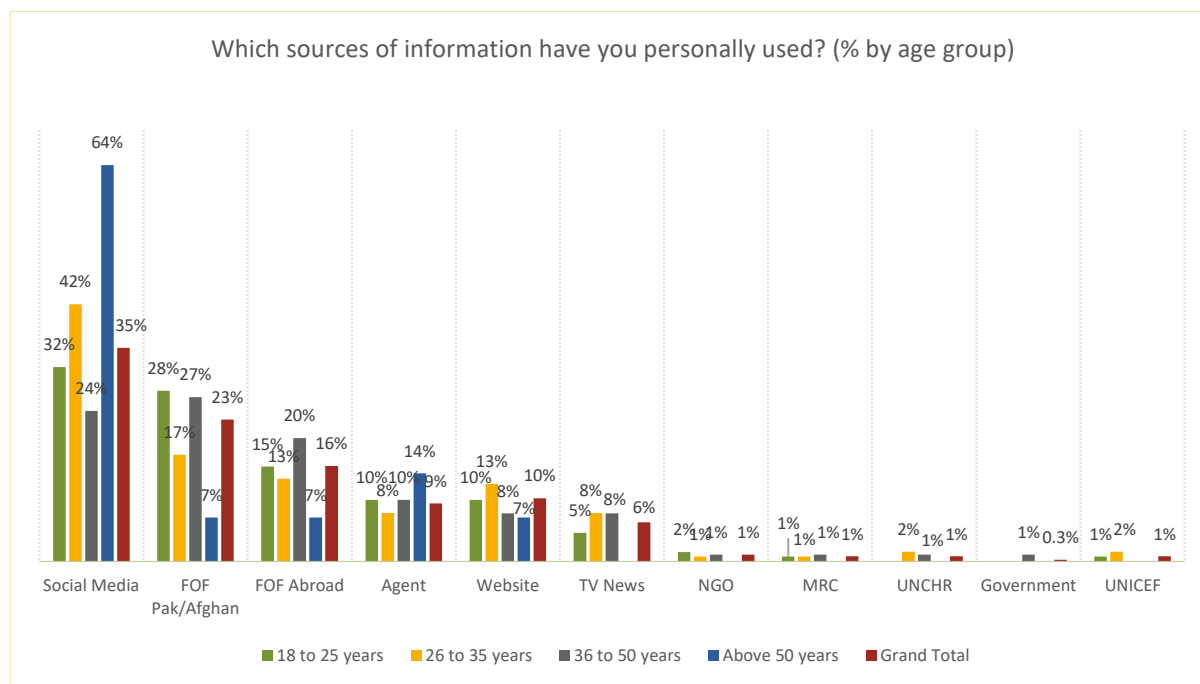
Which sources of information have you personally used? (% by age group)

Note: In each age group were considered those who have selected at least one source of information. The samples are: 18 to 25 years – 130; 26 to 35 years – 127; 36 to 50 years – 90; Above 50 years – 14; Total Sample – 361.

Figure 28: Used sources of information by district
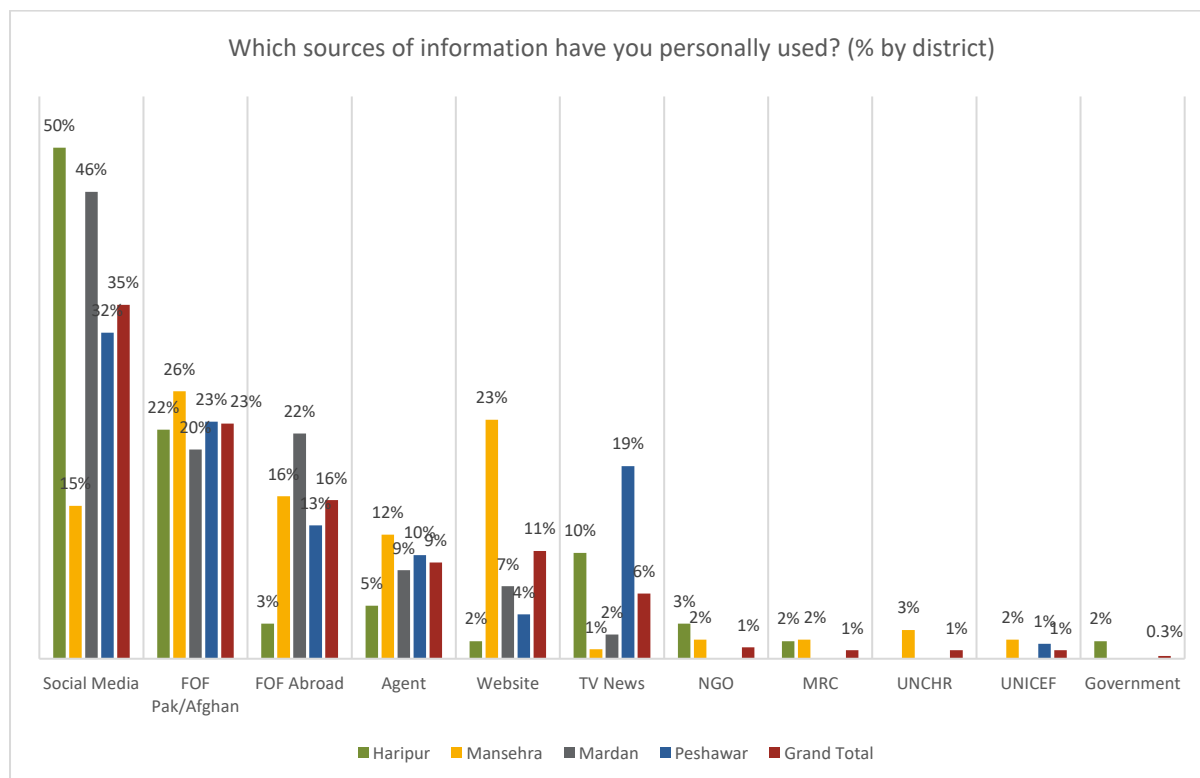
Which sources of information have you personally used? (% by district)

Note: In each district were considered those who have selected at least one source of information. The samples are: Haripur – 58; Manshera – 107; Mardan – 127; Peshawar – 69; Total Sample – 361.
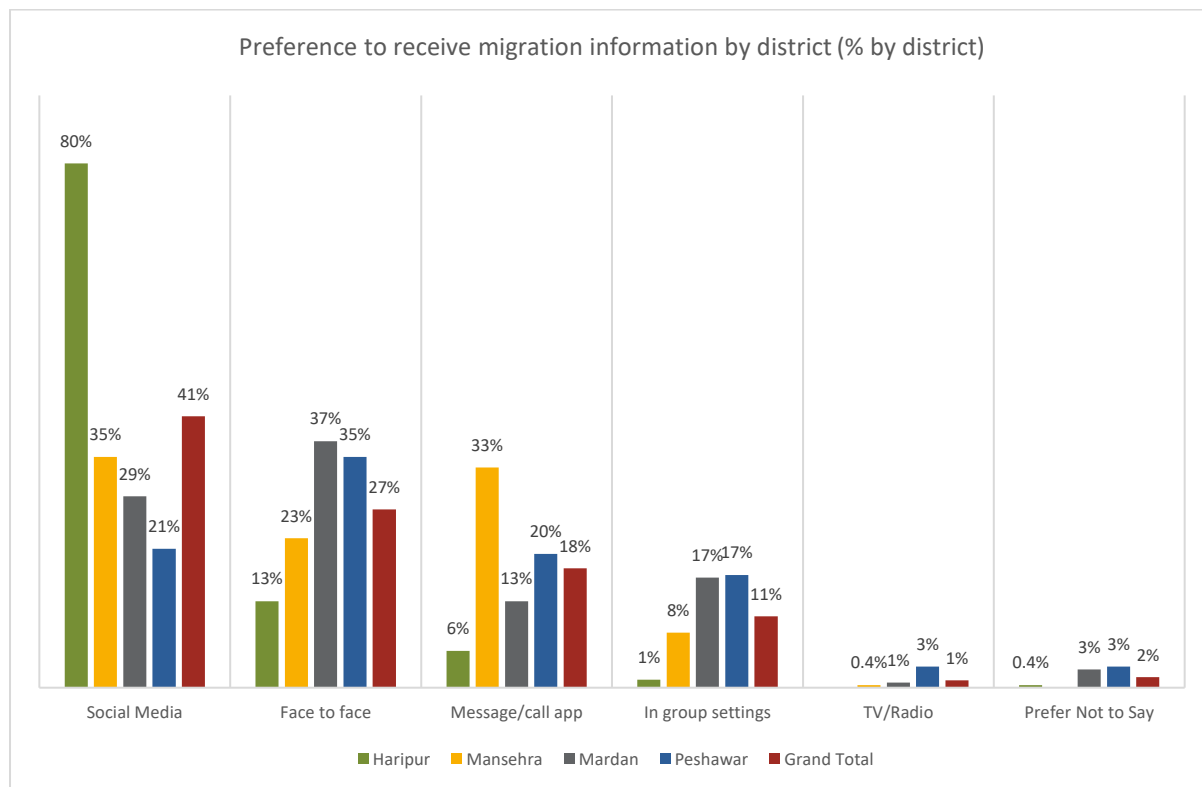
As some authors highlighted,[136] migration information campaigns might be often perceived as tools to discourage migration in general and reproduce bordering practices, rather than promoting regular alternatives to irregular migration. This might explain the fact that those among our sample who plan to migrate irregularly do not look for information through such channels, but rather via social media and social networks. For this reason, the design of a successful campaign should take into consideration a comprehensive range of messages capable of targeting different people with different needs and aspirations, with the aim of not only reducing irregular migration but also promoting regular and valid alternatives to it. This is certainly not an easy task, especially considering the difficult legal and socio-political situation for Afghan nationals in Pakistan, and certainly one that requires efforts and collaboration across different levels, also at the policy level.

The use of social media in acquiring information on migration is not surprising, especially considering that 79% of respondents own a smartphone and another 4% share one. Conversely, the remaining 17% of respondents either own or share a dial phone (15%) or do not have any (2%). Interestingly, the data shows some slight variations in terms of type of phone access across different districts, which might affect the preferences of respondents in choosing the best way to receive information. In Peshawar, for example, the use of smartphones seems to be quite lower in comparison to the other three districts, which, in turn, increases the chances to prefer offline ways to receive information on migration, such as face-to-face meetings or group events. This, however, does not mean that respondents in the other districts necessarily prefer to receive information exclusively via social media. Only in Haripur the overwhelming majority of respondents (200 people, corresponding to about 80% of respondents from that district and almost half among those who selected this choice) would prefer to receive information by social media (see Figure 29).

In the other districts, besides social media, which is still relatively well considered among respondents in Mansehra and Mardan, also face-to-face meetings, phone calls and messages, and group events seem to be popular choices, with slight geographical and demographical variations (see Figures 29 and 30). Face-to-face meetings and group activities are preferred in Mardan and Peshawar, while respondents in Mansehra seem to have a relative predilection to receive information via phone calls and messages. Quite interestingly, younger respondents between 18 and 35 years of age seem to prefer face-to-face meetings – although social media remain a valid alternative. In comparison to the latter group, respondents older than 35 seem to prefer to receive migration information either via social media (41% of those selecting this choice are between 36 and 50 years of age) or through group activities.

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[136] Jørgen Carling and María Hernández-Carretero, "Protecting Europe and Protecting Migrants? Strategies for Managing Unauthorised Migration from Africa," *British Journal of Politics and International Relations* 13, no. 1 (2011): 42–58; Charles Heller, "Perception Management. Deterring Potential Migrants through Information Campaigns," *Global Media and Communication* 10, no. 3 (2014): 303–18; Oeppen, "'Leaving Afghanistan! Are You Sure?'"

Figure 29: Preference to receive migration information by district

Preference to receive migration information by district (% by district)

	Haripur	Mansehra	Mardan	Peshawar	Grand Total
Social Media	80%	35%	29%	21%	41%
Face to face	13%	23%	37%	35%	27%
Message/call app	6%	33%	13%	20%	18%
In group settings	1%	8%	17%	17%	11%
TV/Radio	0.4%	1%	1%	3%	1%
Prefer Not to Say	0.4%		3%	3%	2%

Note: In each district were considered the 251 individuals. The Grande Total concerns the full sample of 1004 people.

Figure 30: Preference to receive migration information by age

Preference to receive migration information by age (% by age group)

|	18 to 25 years	26 to 35 years	36 to 50 years	Above 50 years	Grand Total
Social Media	28%	37%	53%	57%	41%
Face to face	34%	29%	19%	25%	27%
Message/call app	25%	20%	13%	5%	18%
In group settings	9%	11%	12%	11%	11%
TV/Radio	1%	2%	1%		1%
Prefer Not to Say	2%	1%	1%	2%	2%
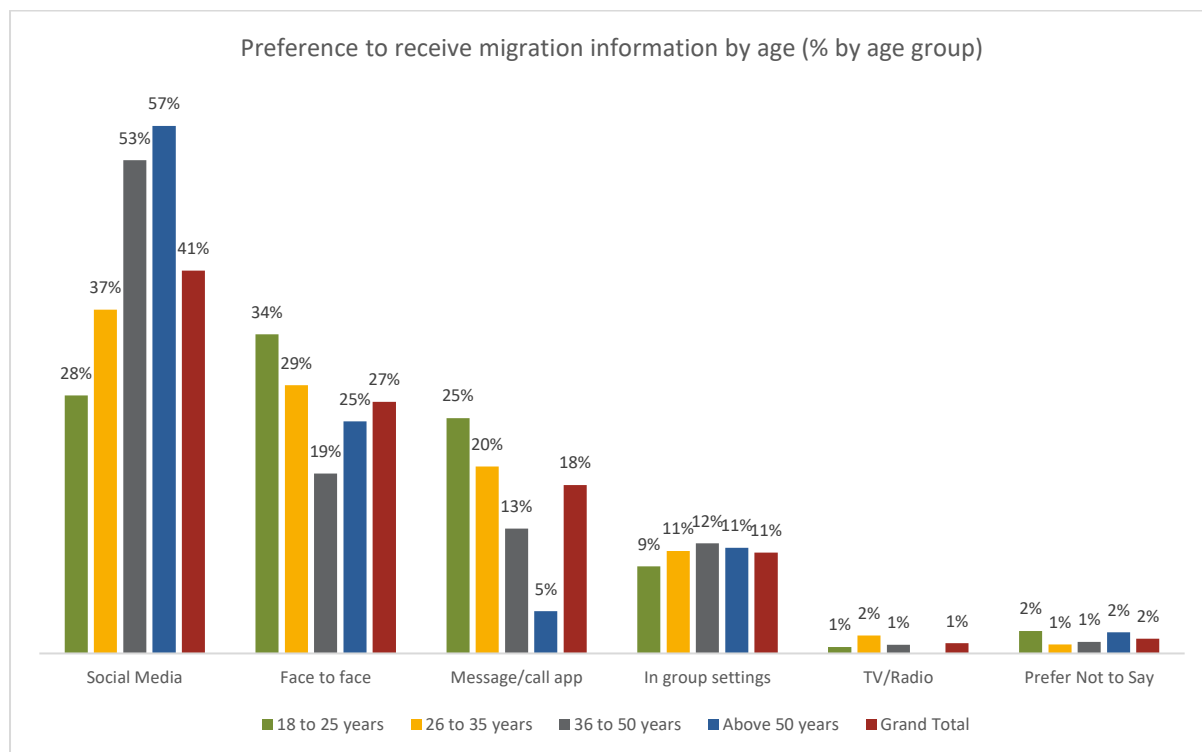
Note: In each age group were considered all individuals. The samples are: 18 to 25 years – 288; 26 to 35 years – 308; 36 to 50 years – 320; Above 50 years – 88; Total Sample – 1004.

It is not surprising that the overwhelming majority of stakeholders interviewed also consider social media as an important channel of communication to distribute relevant information on migration. Similarly, many stakeholders also mentioned the importance of community events in disseminating migration information, while others would prefer face-to-face meetings and workshops as a more direct way to engage with potential migrants. As one stakeholder put it, 'The most effective approach involves face-to-face meetings. Additionally, the use of social media, newspapers, television, educational events, and community meetings as alternative means of communication can also be explored' (SH07_Mansehra). It is probably a bit more surprising that several stakeholders included traditional means of communication such as radio (in Peshawar and Mardan) and TV (in the other two districts of Mansehra and Haripur) among the most efficient ways to disseminate migration information, due to their widespread accessibility and reach among potential migrants. Although even several potential migrants seem to rely on television news for the provision of information on migration (about 16% of the sample), the use of television campaigns needs nevertheless to be evaluated carefully, due to its high costs and difficulty in providing targeted messages.

Although very few migrants seem to personally rely on institutional sources to acquire more information on migration, our findings also show that 37% of our respondents have actually engaged with the MRC, either through in-person activities and visits or via social media. In terms of contact methods with MRCs (see Figure 31), visits emerge as a popular choice, particularly among respondents aged 36 to 50 years. This preference for face-to-face interaction underscores the importance not only of establishing accessible and welcoming centres but also of building positive and enduring relationships with potential migrants. The data also reveals the growing role of digital communication channels, such as social media and WhatsApp, in accessing migrant support services, particularly among younger age groups (18 to 35 years) in the district of Mardan. This highlights the importance of leveraging digital platforms to reach potential migrants, particularly those who may prefer online communication channels. Despite the prominence of digital channels, traditional communication methods like phone calls still play a significant role in contacting MRCs, with relatively even distribution across age groups and districts.

Figure 31: Way of contact with MRCs
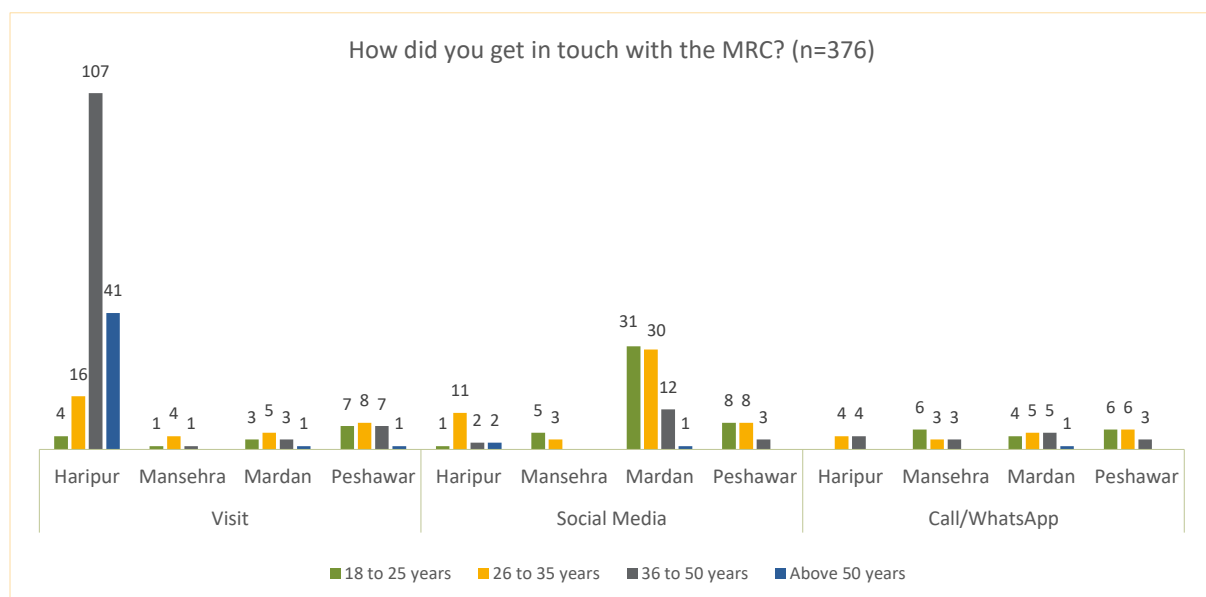
Moreover, the data also highlight some district-level variations in contact patterns, with districts like Mardan exhibiting higher frequencies of contact via social media, while Haripur shows a relatively higher prevalence of in-person visits, probably due to the geographical proximity with the MRC in Islamabad. Understanding these regional dynamics might be crucial for tailoring outreach strategies and allocating resources effectively to ensure equitable access to migrant support services across different geographical areas. By understanding the preferences and behaviours of potential migrants across different age groups and districts, MRCs can enhance their outreach strategies to better meet the needs of potential migrants, thus tailoring migration information campaigns accordingly.

In conclusion, the findings from both the survey data and stakeholder interviews highlight the critical role of information access and dissemination in shaping migration intentions, preparation, and planning among potential Afghan migrants in Pakistan. The use of social media and digital platforms as primary sources of migration-related information seems particularly widespread across different age groups and districts, with some slight variations. However, reliance on agents and informal networks – generally conceived as potentially unreliable sources of information – persists, thus highlighting the need for concerted efforts to enhance the accuracy and reliability of information channels. Furthermore, the geographical and demographic variations in information-seeking behaviours underscore the importance of tailored and targeted information campaigns that consider the preferences and needs of potential migrants across different districts and age groups. While social media remains a dominant channel, face-to-face meetings, community events, and traditional media also play significant roles in information dissemination, particularly in districts where smartphone ownership might be lower.

These results emphasise the importance of adopting a multifaceted approach to migration information campaigns, which should not only aim at reducing irregular migration but also promoting regular and valid alternatives through the provision of accurate and reliable information. Collaboration between governmental institutions, NGOs, and community-based organisations is essential in designing and implementing effective communication strategies as well as in addressing the complex and dynamic migration challenges in the region.

6.4. Credible messengers

As emerged in PARIM-I research,[137] the credibility of the messenger is paramount in the design and implementation of migration information campaigns. The content being the same, the employment of government officials, celebrities, returnees and others in the delivery of the message might have a different impact among the audience: As a general rule, the closer the (emotional) connection between the messenger and the audience, the higher the impact of the campaign might be.[138] For this reason, it is important to choose the messengers carefully, paying attention not only to their role and charisma but also to their relationship with potential migrants.

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[137] Katharina Hahn-Schaur, "Awareness Raising and Information Campaigns on the Risks of Irregular Migration from Pakistan: Background Report" (Vienna, 2021); Ayesha Qaisrani, Katharina Hahn-Schaur, and Maegan Hendow, "Irregular Migration Dynamics from Pakistan and the Role of Information Campaigns: PARIM Final Report" (Vienna, 2021).

[138] James Dennison, "Emotions: Functions and Significance for Attitudes, Behaviour, and Communication," *Migration Studies* 12, no. 1 (2024): 1–20, https://doi.org/10.1093/migration/mnad018; Jasper Tjaden and Felipe Alexander Dunsch, "The Effect of Peer-to-Peer Risk Information on Potential Migrants – Evidence from a Randomized Controlled Trial in Senegal," *World Development* 145 (2021), https://doi.org/10.1016/j.worlddev.2021.105488.

In line with recent research,[139] also the respondents in our sample rely more on social networks and closer contacts in Afghanistan, Pakistan, or abroad than on governmental institutions and NGOs. When asked generally about the main sources of information at migrants' disposal, family members and friends abroad (23%) represent the most popular choice as potential messengers, followed by agents (12%) and family members and friends in Afghanistan and Pakistan (9%). Returnees also represent a source of information that migrants in general can draw from in 13% of cases; however, they do not seem to constitute a source that migrants themselves would personally choose. In fact, when asked which source of information potential migrants have personally used, none of the respondents indicated that they have contacted or got in touch with returnees. This might be related to three issues: first, as highlighted above, returnees might fall under the category of family and friends, preventing us from seeing their involvement as messengers; second, Afghan nationals who migrate from Pakistan might return (voluntarily or not) to Afghanistan; third, some returnees might be perceived as failed migrants and therefore not consulted during migration plans.

While potentially unreliable sources of information such as agents and informal networks remain quite popular, more official institutions constitute a valid and reliable source of information only for a handful of respondents – even when they are generally inquired about the potential sources that a migrant can employ. Although respondents seem to be highly reliant on institutional sources for migration support and also help along the journey if faced with any challenge (see chapter 5), the scarce reliance on governmental institutions (selected by only 6 potential migrants), MRCs (10), and NGOs (12) as credible sources of information might reflect lower trust levels in these institutions, constituting an issue that such agencies should work on not only to improve their reach and credibility but also to design and implement tailored and more efficient information campaigns.

The responses of potential Afghan migrants stand in stark contrast when compared with those of stakeholders: While for potential migrants, NGOs and community and religious leaders do not seem to represent an important source of information (in fact, the latter are never mentioned in their replies), several stakeholders have indicated different types of community leaders (from imams and religious leaders in general to camp managers and sardars) as credible messengers for the implementation of the campaign. Similarly, other stakeholders have also expressed their trust in NGOs and community-based organisations as valid messengers; however, only 1.1% of potential migrants seem to perceive these actors as sources of information on migration. As one stakeholder highlighted: 'Effective means of providing information on migration include community events and engagement with mosque imams and religious leaders, who can easily disseminate this information to the people, as well as NGOs and community-based organisations, which can represent credible messenger for Afghan nationals in Pakistan' (SH03_Peshawar). Although community and religious leaders as well as NGOs and community-based organisations might not be necessarily perceived as unreliable or untrustworthy, these data might suggest the need to engage with them in an open, responsible, and sustainable way, in order to increase their reach and credibility among potential migrants.

Even when looking at the specific sources of information that potential migrants have personally used (see Figure 32), the situation does not seem to change. First of all, it is interesting to notice that only 36% of respondents has actually used one or more of the sources of information indicated in the previous question. Within this group, 38% of respondents across all ages and districts has personally contacted friends and family members in Afghanistan and Pakistan (23%) or abroad (15%) to receive

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[139] IOM Iraq-DTM, "Migration Flows from Iraq to Europe: Reasons Behind Migration" (Baghdad, 2016); IRFAD, "Needs Assessment Study on Migration Information in Iraq" (Baghdad, 2021).

information about migration. Institutional sources such as NGOs, MRCs, or the government are only selected by very few people across different ages, and their low usage is not so statistically significant to draw specific suggestions. The issue of trust in specific sources of information has been long analysed in the literature: Potential migrants tend to rely more on family and friends than on governmental institutions and NGOs, whose messages are often perceived as biased.[140] However, this issue can also represent an incentive for such institutions to explore ways to expand their reach, increase their credibility, and provide more reliable and trustworthy information.

Figure 32: Used sources of information
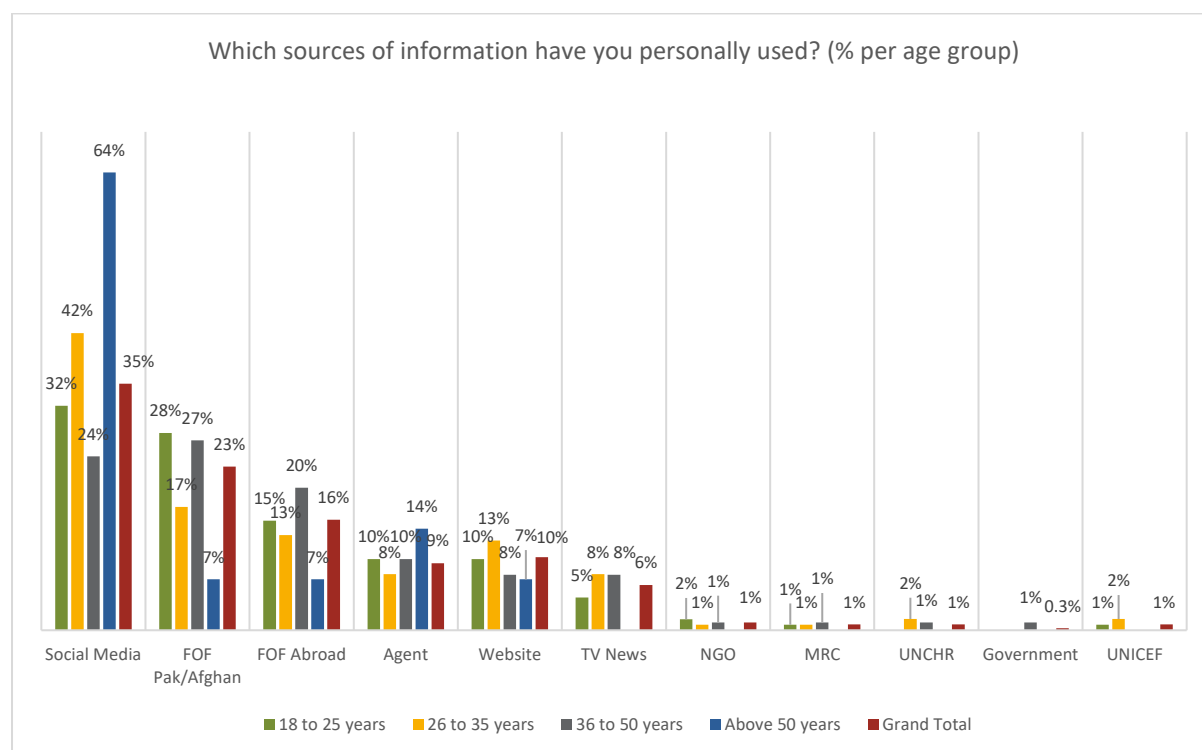
Note: In each age group were considered those who have selected at least one source of information. The samples are: 18 to 25 years – 130; 26 to 35 years – 127; 36 to 50 years – 90; Above 50 years – 14; Total Sample – 361.

Although the numbers of respondents that sought for information via institutional sources is very low, an interesting pattern seems to be visible. Official institutions and organisations such as the government, the MRCs, or NGOs do not appear to constitute sources of information among those migrants who are likely or definitely willing to migrate irregularly; however, they seem to be consulted by migrants who are likely or very likely to migrate in the next two years (see Figures 33 and 34) especially in Haripur and Mansehra. Given the low numbers, these findings should be taken with a pinch of salt; however, they might mean that governmental and non-governmental institutions are seen as important sources of information when potential migrants actively look for legal migration pathways rather than plan for irregular journeys.

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[140] Ida M S Vammen et al., "Does Information Save Migrants' Lives? Knowledge and Needs of West African Migrants En Route to Europe" (Copenhagen, 2021).

Figure 33: Used sources of information by likelihood of migration in the next 2 years
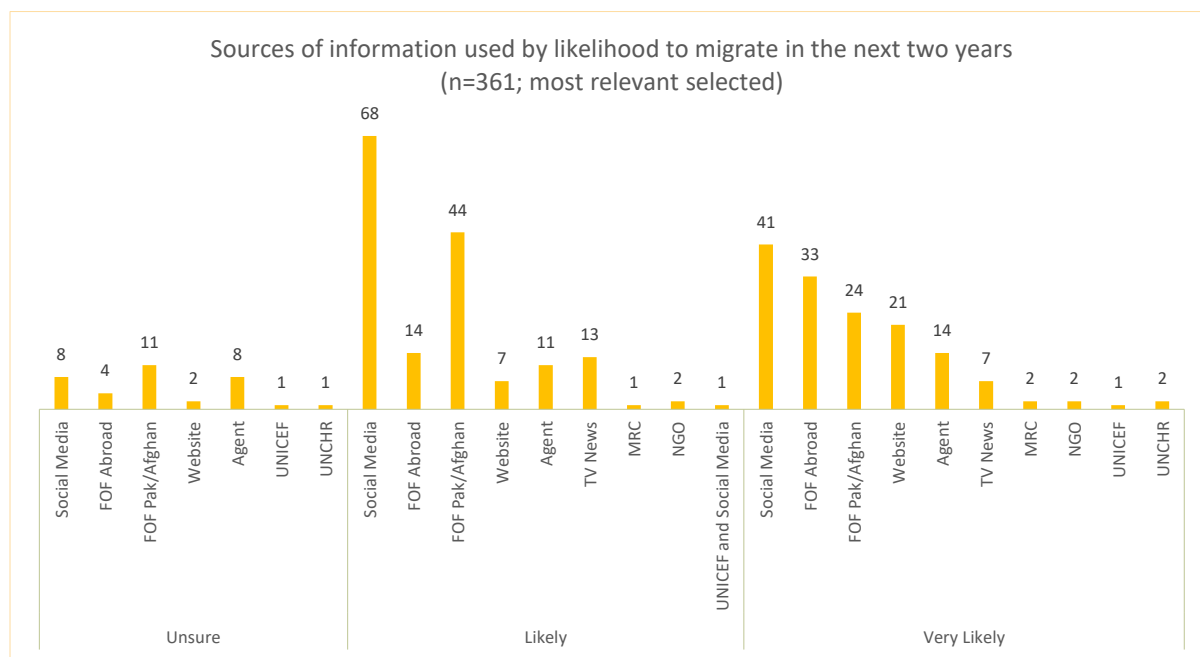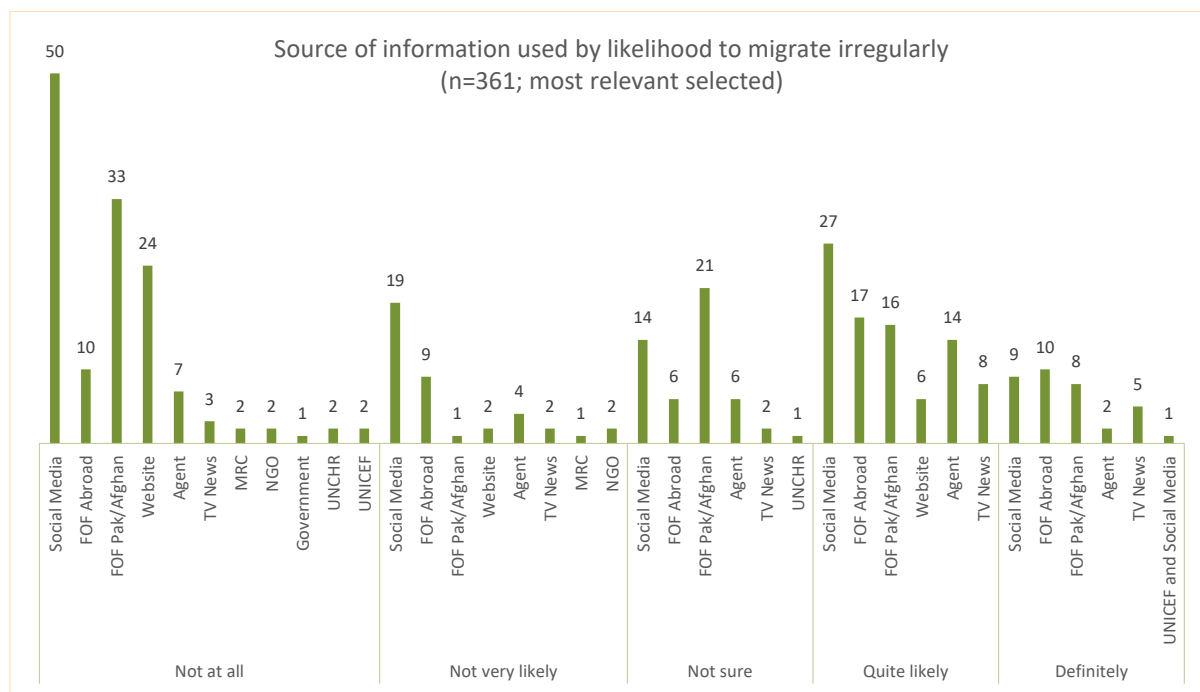

Sources of information used by likelihood to migrate in the next two years
(n=361; most relevant selected)

Figure 34: Used sources of information by likelihood of irregular migration

Source of information used by likelihood to migrate irregularly
(n=361; most relevant selected)

The survey also allows us to explore more in depth the role of MRCs and their credibility as source of information. Our findings show that 37% of respondents have already contacted the MRCs in Pakistan, and 84% of them found their services either useful or very useful (see Figure 35). MRC services seem to be more popular among respondents older than 36 years old: 197 out of 408 respondents belonging in this age group (48%) have used such services, finding them useful or very useful in 89% of the cases. On the other hand, among the 596 respondents aged 18 to 35 years, only 179 have used MRC services (30% of the age group), finding them useful or very useful in 78% of the cases. However, a significant

proportion of our sample (62%) has never contacted MRCs and only 1% of them has indicated MRCs as potential sources of information. This suggests either the presence of potential barriers in accessing them or a lack of awareness regarding available migrant support services, thus highlighting the need for enhanced outreach efforts to reach these individuals (in particular younger people) and ensure they are aware of the assistance and services available to them.

Figure 35: Usefulness of MRC support by age
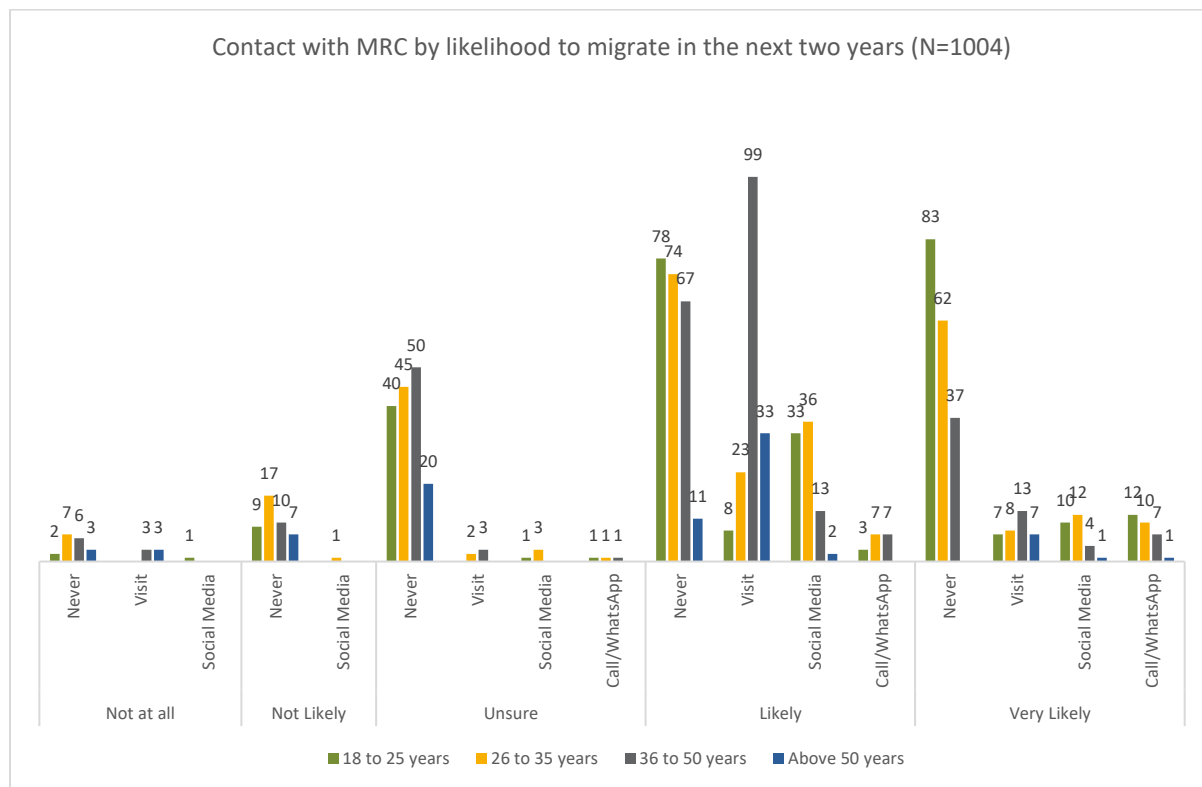

Usefulness of MRC support by age
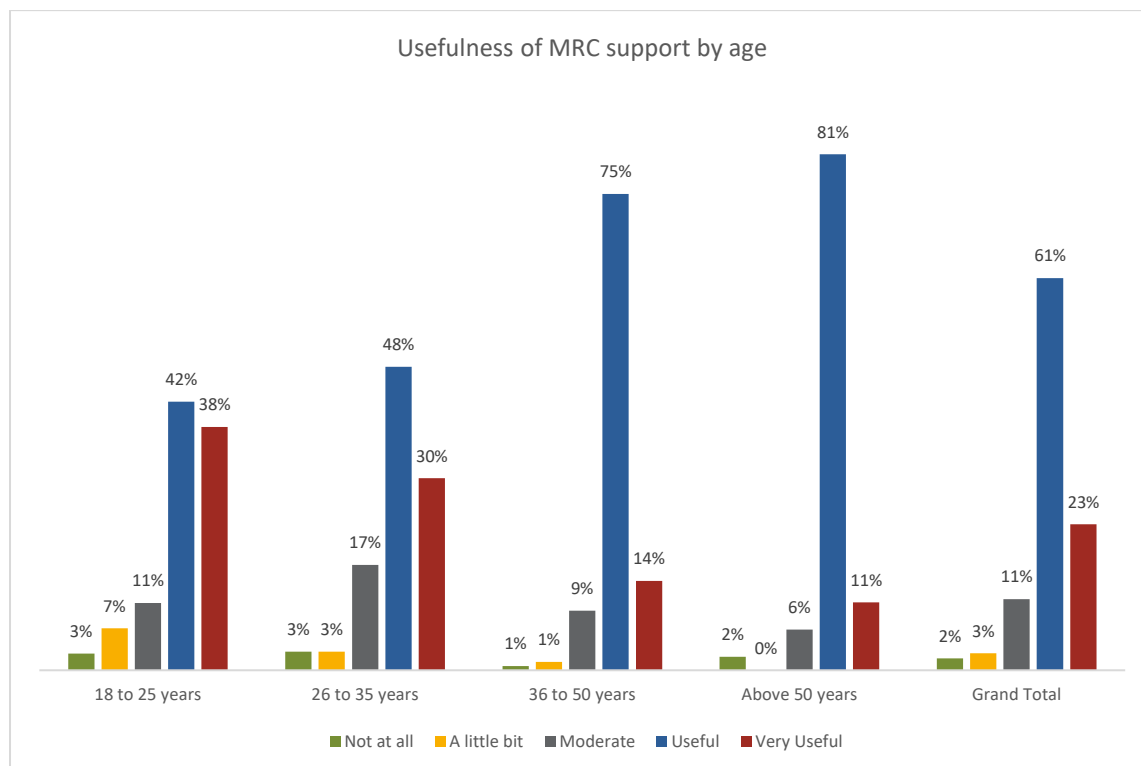
Note: In each age group were considered those who answered to the usefulness of the support received by MRCs. The samples are: 18 to 25 years – 76; 26 to 35 years – 103; 36 to 50 years – 150; Above 50 years – 47; Total Sample – 376.
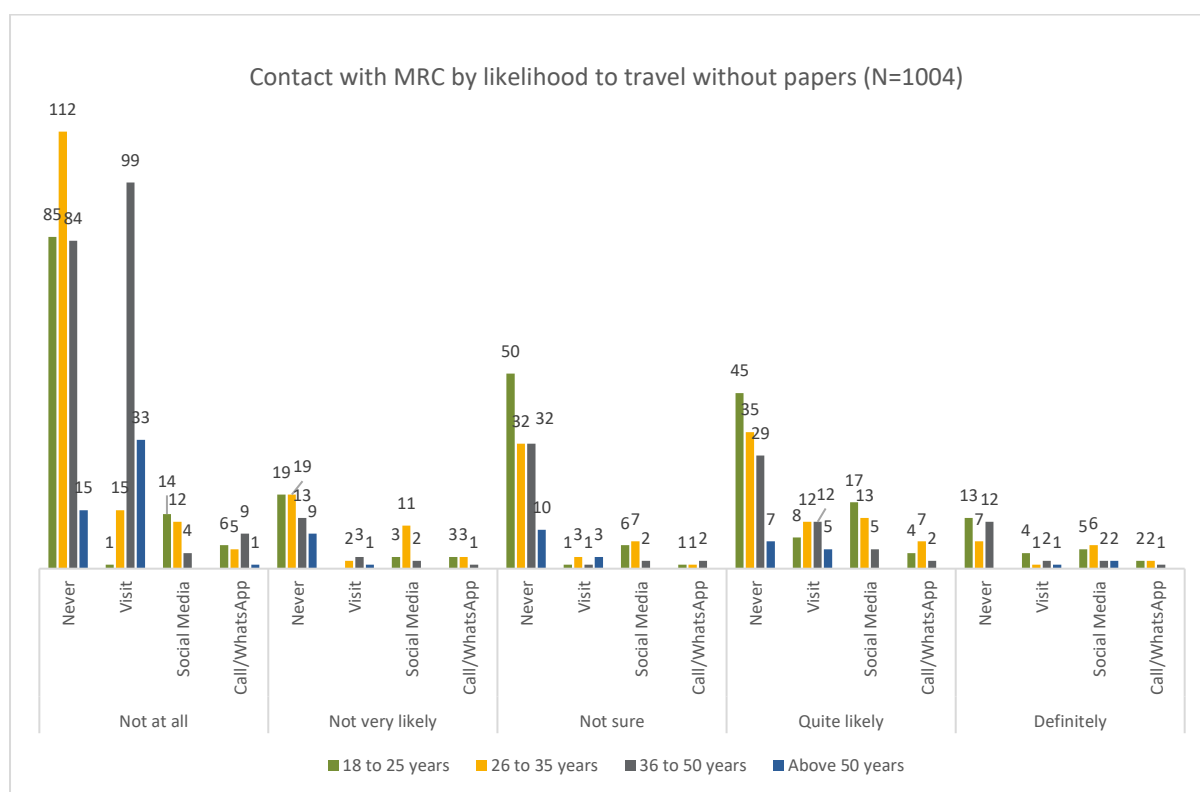
When looking at the respondents that contacted the MRC according to their likelihood to migrate in the next two years, it emerges that the MRC represents an important source of information when people are planning to migrate (see Figure 36). 35% of individuals who report being likely or very likely to migrate demonstrate higher levels of engagement with MRCs – in particular through in-person visits or social media – compared to those who are unsure or less likely to migrate in the near future. This suggests a potential correlation between migration intentions and the employment of migrant support services, highlighting the importance of targeted outreach efforts to reach and assist individuals at different stages of their migration decision-making process. On the other hand, many respondents – especially among the youngest segments of our sample (297 respondents) – have never contacted the MRC even when they expressed their intention to migrate in the next two years. The low outreach towards young potential migrants, who are more likely to report irregular migration intentions, gives us factual information on the gaps that MRCs face, prompting them to consider ways to reach out to this specific group more efficiently.

Figure 36: Contact with MRCs by likelihood of migration in the next 2 years

Contact with MRC by likelihood to migrate in the next two years (N=1004)

Legend: ■ 18 to 25 years ■ 26 to 35 years ■ 36 to 50 years ■ Above 50 years

Similar results emerge when looking at the MRC engagement among those who expressed their intention to migrate irregularly (or are unsure about it, see Figure 37). Two thirds of them have indeed never contacted the MRCs, thus suggesting that there is still much room of improvement, not only in terms of outreach but also of effectiveness of its activities and campaigns.

Figure 37: Contact with MRCs by likelihood of irregular migration

Contact with MRC by likelihood to travel without papers (N=1004)

■ 18 to 25 years ■ 26 to 35 years ■ 36 to 50 years ■ Above 50 years

When looking at the respondents' perceived level of satisfaction regarding their engagement with MRCs, the overwhelming majority (84%) of the 376 respondents that contacted the MRC reported that their services and activities have been useful or very useful. However, some respondents seem to find them only a little bit useful or not useful at all, in particular when intending to migrate in the next two years through regular (see Figure 38) or irregular means (see Figure 39). Although the numbers are too low to draw some relevant conclusions, this might nevertheless prompt to provide better and more tailored services that responds to the varied needs of potential migrants.

Figure 38: Usefulness of MRCs contact by likelihood of migration in the next 2 years
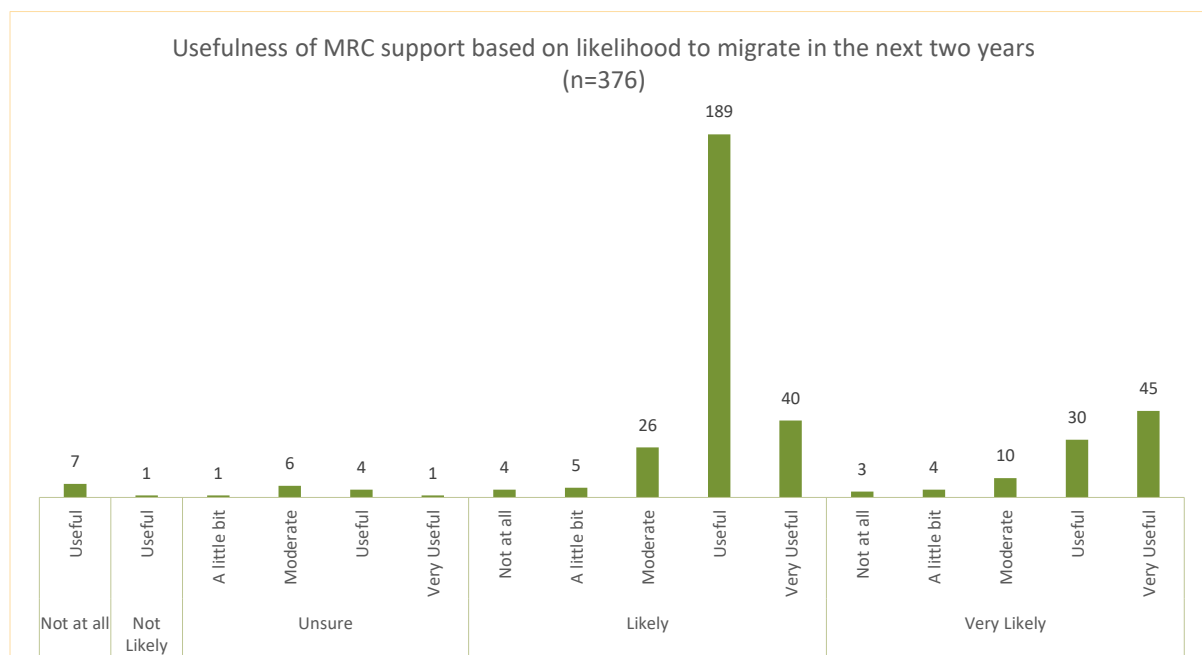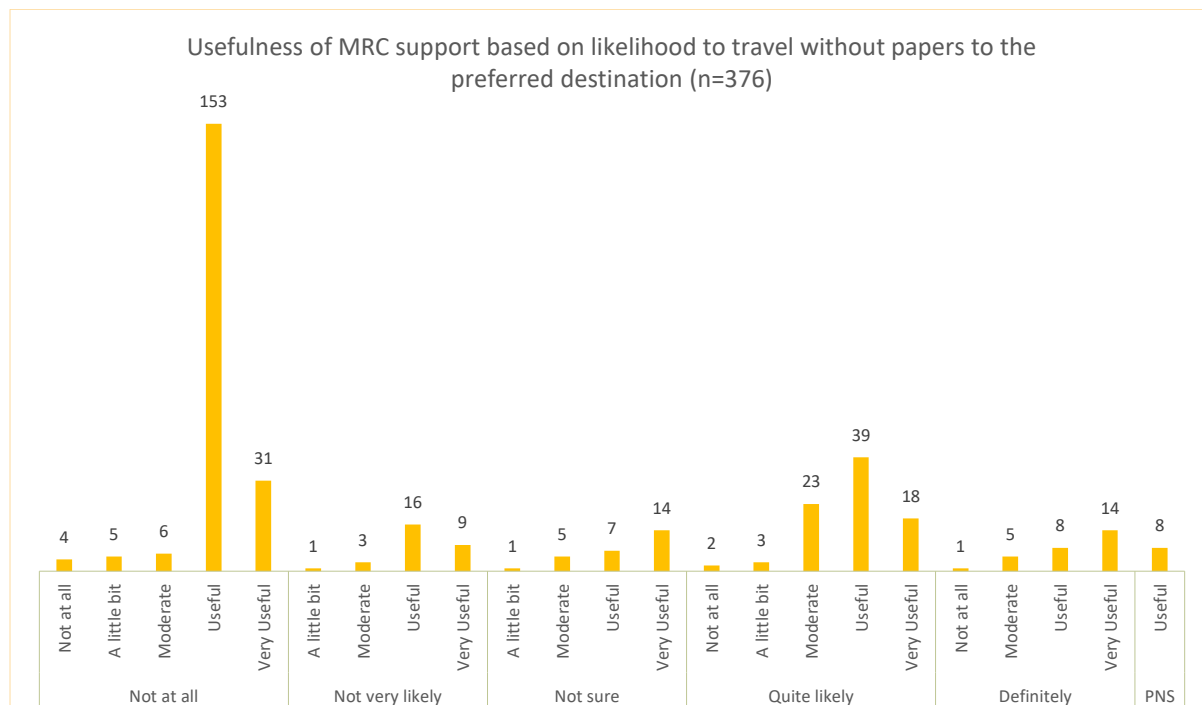
Usefulness of MRC support based on likelihood to migrate in the next two years
(n=376)

Figure 39: Usefulness of MRCs by likelihood of illegal migration

Usefulness of MRC support based on likelihood to travel without papers to the
preferred destination (n=376)

Overall, the data seem to highlight the important role of MRCs and their perception as credible and reliable sources of information among potential migrants. However, our findings also show the need to expand their reach and provide tailored support mechanisms to address the diverse needs and concerns of potential migrants.

7. Summary of findings and recommendations for the PARIM-II campaign

This section summarises the main findings from the research phase of PARIM-II project, with the objective to provide detailed information for the design of the migration information campaign. The purpose is to define the target group across the different districts, as well as across demographic characteristics in order to tailor the campaign according to the needs of the population groups. Before proceeding, however, it is important to remember that the situation for Afghan nationals in Pakistan has been precarious for decades and has now reached a new apex with the recent governmental crackdown on irregular presence in the country. This situation has provoked serious protection concerns, prompting many Afghans to leave the country often in an irregular way, due to the lack of establish humanitarian corridors for outward migration. In this respect, Afghan nationals have been experiencing a situation of protracted displacement in a country where their options of permanent settlement are non-existent, the legal migration pathways to other countries are restricted, and the idea of return to their country is unconceivable due to the human rights and security issues under the Taliban rule.[141] For this reason, the development and implementation of migration information campaign should also take into consideration the ethical challenges of dealing with a particularly vulnerable population.

Personal characteristics

- The profile of a potential Afghan migrant from Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan broadly matches the characteristics of Afghans traveling to Europe in terms of age, gender, and education as depicted in available literature, but there are slight variations in terms of marital status, and nature of employment. When selecting the target audience for the PARIM-II campaign, the following personal characteristics could be kept in mind:
  - A typical potential Afghan migrant residing in Pakistan, particularly KP, tends to be a male of Pashtun ethnicity (90%), under the age of 35 years (60% fall between 18-35), married (75%), with educational attainment between primary and secondary (5-10 years of formal education), and no technical or vocational training (67%). He is likely to be self-employed (44%) earning less than PKR 50,000 (approx. EUR 165) per month, living with about 5-10 household members (63%). Due to the survey design, majority of the sample held legal registration in Pakistan (as PoR cardholders or ACC holders) and lived in campsites.
  - Specifically, those with irregular migration intentions are likely to be younger (18-25 years old), have up to secondary level education, and daily wagers, instead of self-employed. On all other parameters, they mirrored the profile of the overall sample.
- While intentions to migrate from Pakistan in the next two years were noted to be quite high among the sample (93%), their tendency to migrate irregularly (41%) was found to be lower than what we found for potential Pakistani migrants in PARIM-I (63%). In fact, about half of the sample believed that migrating onwards from Pakistan was not a very common trend among Afghans living in Pakistan. Intentions to migrate in the next two years were the highest in Mansehra, where 57% of the sample expressed a 'very likely' chance to migrate, and the lowest in Peshawar.

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[141] Ayesha Qaisrani, "Migration Insights: Understanding Onward Migration Dynamics among Afghan Nationals in Pakistan," PARIM-II Background Report, 2023, https://www.icmpd.org/file/download/60522/file/D2.1-Background-report-16-08-2023-Final.pdf.

- When asked specifically about the intention to migrate irregularly, 26% of the sample expressed a strong intention to migrate irregularly (responding 'definitely' and 'very likely'), whereas another 15% was 'not sure'. District wise findings varied with respondents from Mardan indicating the highest likelihood with irregular migration intentions, and those from Haripur reporting the lowest levels.
- Although the sample for women respondents was quite small, the intention to migrate within the next two years among that small sample was high (94%). The tendency of women to express an intention to migrate irregularly was also noted to be higher in Mardan, as compared to other districts, although there were no females who responded 'definitely' to an intention to migrate irregularly. In contrast to the typical male profile, female potential migrants tend to have no formal education, are between the ages of 26-35 years, and are not active in the labour market.

Drivers of migration

- The threat of forced return and limited livelihood opportunities in Pakistan were noted to be the main push factors from Pakistan for those considering irregular migration. The threat of forced return was reported more by respondents in the age group of 26-35 years, with no formal education, and belonging to lower middle-income groups (earning PKR 50-100,000 per month, or about EUR 165-330), whereas those reporting economic push factors (such as limited livelihood opportunities) tended to be from the younger age group (18-25 years old), belonging to lower income groups (earning less than PKR 50,000, or about EUR 165, per month or having no income), but with some level of formal education.
- For the majority of the sample, Europe (particularly Germany and France) was noted to be the most preferred destination, followed by UK and Canada. For female respondents, after Europe, the second most preferred destination was the GCC countries. Economic opportunities in countries of destination were the main reason for the choice of destination.
- The most pronounced reason for leaning towards irregular migration intentions is the lack of legal options available to Afghan nationals in Pakistan among our sample, followed by the perceived lower cost of irregular migration. In Mardan, where the tendency to migrate irregularly was noted to be the highest, pressure by friends and family was significant in motivating irregular migration intentions.

Role of social networks and other actors

- Social networks are observed to play a prominent role in migration decisions of Afghan nationals in Pakistan – both friends and family in Pakistan/Afghanistan and abroad. While friends and family in Pakistan were more likely to 'encourage' or even 'pressure' potential migrants to consider migration, social network abroad was seen to be more influential in providing migration relevant information. In terms of financial support, friends and family in Pakistan had a more significant role to play – either by providing loans or by direct contributions.
- A contrasting finding compared to other literature is that potential Afghan migrants in Pakistan consider institutional actors (particularly NGOs, but also governmental institutions) to be valuable sources of support in their migration planning. In fact, reliance on NGOs was noted to be even higher than friends and family when asked who could provide them with the most valuable support for migration preparation. Surprisingly, governmental institutions, especially

embassies and local police, were trusted to help irregular migrants along the journey in case of any challenge faced.

- The role of agents was prominent as a source of migration information, but it was not as pronounced as found in the case of potential Pakistani migrants (PARIM-I findings).

- The role of returnees as sources of migration information, and for providing support for migration preparation was not too pronounced compared to other sources (such as social media, friends and family).It must be noted, however, that potential Afghan migrants might not necessarily be in close contact with Afghan returnees in their everyday life, as the latter might not necessarily be returned to Pakistan.

Knowledge on migration and risk awareness

- Responses on questions aimed at assessing respondents' knowledge levels on migration shows that the majority were sceptical. This is a useful finding for the campaign, as those who are less aware and less confidence on their knowledge on migration are more likely to be receptive to campaign messaging.

- With higher education, the confidence in the level of information on migration and migrant rights, knowledge levels on migration for preferred destination, and accuracy of their knowledge on migration options increases.

- Those with 'definite' intentions and those who report 'most likely' when asked about intentions to migrate irregularly are found to be more confident about their knowledge levels on migration. They are also more likely to be aware of various topics that individuals should have information on before migrating. This means that campaign messaging may be slightly effective on them but those who responded 'not sure' on intentions to migrate irregularly may be more receptive owing to their lower levels of information on the relevant topics.

- The top three anticipated risks that respondents foresee irregular migrants facing during their journey are: i) hunger and thirst; ii) life or health risk; and iii) mistreatment by border authorities.
  - These perceptions varied across districts: in Haripur, the highest reported risk in migrating irregularly was kidnapping, in Mansehra and Peshawar it was risks to health or life, while in Mardan, it was mistreatment by border authorities.

- With regard to challenges anticipated to be experienced at the destination, acquiring legal protection for irregular migrants, employment issues and finding accommodation were rated to be the biggest issues. Those with irregular migration intentions considered finding accommodation a bigger issue than others.
  - Providing updated information on legal protection opportunities in countries of destination, as well as the challenges and opportunities in terms of finding employment and accommodation could be part of the campaign messaging.

Migration preparation levels

- More than half (54%) of those who expressed an intention to migrate within the next two years have taken no preparatory steps for migration.
  - This is an opportunity for the campaign to share accurate and balanced information on what kind of preparation is necessary to migrate through the available regular channels for Afghan migrants.

- Those who reported taking some preparatory steps had taken only basic steps such as contacting social connections abroad, collecting information, and learning skills.

- District-wise comparisons show that preparation levels were reported higher from Mardan – the district from where irregular migration intentions were also noted to be the highest among the survey districts. The proportion of respondents reporting taking no preparation steps taken was highest in Haripur – the district from where irregular migration intentions were the lowest.
- About 83% of those who had reported Europe as a preferred destination had no travel documents at the time of the survey.
   - The information campaign could provide targeted information on the type of travel documents required and the procedures and costs to acquire them to save potential migrants from misinformation spread by unverified sources.
- In terms of challenges in migration preparation, migration financing, access to relevant information, and issues with administrative responsiveness were rated as the biggest challenges.
   - As highlighted in PARIM-I findings, the PARIM-II campaign could provide targeted information on the actual cost of migration through regular channels to debunk the myth of irregular migration being cheaper. Moreover, with the findings of this survey, as well as other information needs as highlighted by target group during campaign intervention, the campaign should provide custom-fit information to relevant groups. The campaign should also be used as an opportunity to understand the lags and issues faced by target audience in administrative processes and communicate them to the respective authorities. An information mechanism could be developed which updates applicants about their application status with a definite response date mentioned.

Message Framing

As emerged in previous research,[142] the most effective migration information campaigns tend not only to balance positive and negative messaging strategies but also to provide information according to the specific needs of migrants themselves. In this respect, only 16% of our respondents expressed interest in knowing about the dangers of irregular migration, while 44% were concerned about migrant rights and 37% sought information on available services in destination countries. However, some differences might emerge when we look at specific categories of migrants.

- Age differences: Different age groups prioritise distinct aspects of migration information. 41% of younger individuals (18-35 years old) are more interested in understanding migrant rights and legal pathways, while 24% of respondents older than 36 prioritise access to migrant services.
- Regional variations: Information-seeking behaviours may vary across different regions, according to the different socio-economic conditions and historical migration trends. For example, in Mardan, nearly one-third of respondents showed heightened concern for migration risks and costs compared to other districts.
- Temporal intentions: Potential migrants planning to migrate in the next two years prioritise information on jobs, skills, and legal pathways. In contrast, those likely to migrate irregularly are more concerned about agent selection and migration costs and risks.
- Risk awareness: While almost half of respondents were generally aware of the main risks related to irregular migration, awareness levels varied across districts. For example, in Haripur,

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[142] Seefar, "3E Impact. Ethical, Engaged & Effective. Running Communications on Irregular Migration from Kos to Kandahar," 2018; Seefar and ECORYS, "Study on Best Practices in Irregular Migration Awareness Campaigns" (Publications Office of the European Union, 2021).

few respondents were concerned about mistreatment by agents (2%) or deportation (4%), highlighting the need for targeted risk communication.

- Institutional trust: Despite limited reliance on governmental institutions and NGOs for migration information, potential migrants trust these entities for assistance during the journey. In our sample, 52% of respondents stated that irregular migrants could contact their embassy in case of emergency, highlighting institutional trust.

Effective migration information campaigns should consider demographic characteristics and regional dynamics to provide relevant, accessible, and impactful messaging and support services. By addressing the diverse needs and concerns of potential migrants, such campaigns can empower individuals with the knowledge and resources needed to make informed decisions about their migration journey while safeguarding their rights and well-being.

Importance of credible messengers

The credibility of messengers plays a crucial role in migration information campaigns. Research suggests that the emotional connection between the messenger and the audience significantly impacts the campaign's effectiveness. However, as also emerged from our research, migrants often tend to rely on informal social networks (which, however, might not always provide correct or trustworthy information) than on official sources (which are perceived as biased). This might suggest caution in the choice of messengers as well as the need for a closer connection with the targeted population in order to increase the credibility of official institutions on the ground.

- Preference for informal networks over official institutions: Respondents in the sample rely more on social networks and closer contacts in Afghanistan, Pakistan, or abroad than on governmental institutions and NGOs for migration information. Family members and friends abroad (23%) are the most popular potential messengers, followed by agents (12%) and family members and friends in Afghanistan and Pakistan (9%). Conversely, the respondents trust in governmental institutions and NGOs as credible sources of information is limited. Stakeholders, on the other hand, perceive community and religious leaders, NGOs, and community-based organisations as credible messengers.
- Usage of information sources: Only 36% of respondents have personally used migration information sources, with almost half contacting friends and family members in Afghanistan and Pakistan (23%) or abroad (15%). Institutional sources such as NGOs, MRCs, or the government are rarely selected by respondents, reflecting lower trust levels in these institutions.
- Role of MRCs: MRCs are perceived as important sources of accurate and reliable information on migration risks, socio-economic conditions in destination countries, and legal migration alternatives. 37% of respondents have contacted MRCs in Pakistan, and the engagement with MRCs often correlates with migration intentions, suggesting a potential link between accessing MRC services and migration decision-making.
- Satisfaction with MRC engagement: While the majority of respondents that have used MRC services (84%) have found them useful or very useful, some expressed limited satisfaction, especially among those intending to migrate in the next two years.
- Overall role of MRCs: While MRC services seem appreciated, there is a need to enhance outreach efforts and provide tailored support mechanisms to effectively address the diverse needs and concerns of potential migrants.

Right channels of communication

Information plays a crucial role in shaping migration decisions, influencing perceptions, choices, and experiences of potential migrants. Access to reliable information empowers migrants to make informed decisions, navigate migration processes effectively, and mitigate risks associated with irregular migration. Understanding the sources of information and their reliability among potential migrants is vital for enhancing migration governance and support services.

- Usage of information sources: Only 36% of respondents personally used migration information sources, with significant variations across districts. Social media and personal networks, including friends, family members, and agents, are the primary sources used, particularly among those planning to migrate irregularly. This highlights the need for wider distribution of information across districts and the importance of providing accurate and trustworthy information.
- Sources of information: From our findings, potential migrants, especially among younger segments, significantly rely on social media to acquire information on migration, although traditional sources of information such as governmental institutions, NGOs, and TV and radio broadcasts are also popular. The districts of Mardan and Mansehra showed higher activity in seeking migration information, reflecting potential aspirations to migrate in these areas.
- Role of smartphones and communication preferences: The widespread ownership of smartphones (79% of respondents) influences communication preferences, with social media being a preferred channel. Face-to-face meetings and group events are also favoured, particularly in districts with lower smartphone usage.
- Stakeholder perspectives: Stakeholders recognise the importance of social media, community events, and traditional media in disseminating migration information. Even traditional means of communication like radio and TV were highlighted as valid sources of information, although caution should be used, especially considering their limitations in targeted messaging and higher costs.

The findings underscore the critical role of information access and dissemination in shaping migration intentions among potential Afghan migrants in Pakistan. Social media and digital platforms are primary sources of migration-related information, but traditional communication methods also play significant roles, particularly in districts with lower smartphone ownership. However, it is paramount to account for variations in information-seeking behaviours across districts and age groups, in order to provide tailored outreach strategies. Understanding regional dynamics helps in allocating resources effectively to ensure equitable access to migrant support services. Tailored and targeted information campaigns are essential for addressing the diverse needs of potential migrants across different districts and age groups, promoting regular migration alternatives, and mitigating the risks associated with irregular migration. Collaboration between governmental institutions, NGOs, and community-based organisations is vital for designing and implementing effective communication strategies and addressing the complex migration challenges in the region.

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