

Migration Insights: Understanding onward migration dynamics among Afghan nationals in Pakistan

PARIM-II Background Report

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Contents

Executive Summary	1
1. Introduction	3
2. Contextual overview	7
2.1. Introduction	7
2.2. Contextualising migration history between Afghanistan and Pakistan	7
2.3. Socioeconomic characteristics of Afghans in Pakistan	9
2.3.1. Legal status of stay in Pakistan	9
2.3.2. Geographic, demographic and socioeconomic situation of Afghans in Pakistan	10
3. Drivers and patterns of onward migration of Afghans from Pakistan	20
3.1. Introduction	20
3.2. Reasons for onward migration in forced migration contexts	20
3.3. Drivers of onward migration of Afghans from Pakistan	22
3.3.1. Macro or structural factors	23
3.3.2. Meso or intermediary factors	24
3.3.3. Micro or personal factors	27
3.4. Destination choices of Afghan migrants	29
4. Information campaigns targeting migrants in third countries	33
4.1. Introduction	33
4.2. MRC Pakistan outreach and experience	33
4.3. Overview of other awareness raising campaigns in Pakistan aimed at Afghans	36
4.4. Global overview: Migration information campaigns aimed at displaced populations in third countries	41
4.4.1. Migration information campaigns targeting migrants en route	41
4.4.2. Migration information campaigns aimed at Afghans	45
4.6. Information needs of Afghan migrants along the route	53
4.7. Ethical considerations	54
5. Role of returnees in information provision (with focus on Pakistani returnees)	57
5.1. Introduction	57
5.2. Profile of Pakistani returnees	57
5.3. Are returnees effective messengers in information campaigns?	58
6. Conclusion	63
Bibliography	66

Executive Summary

This Background Report serves as a reference document to inform the different research streams, as well as the design of a migration information campaign in Pakistan, as part of the project “*Awareness Raising and Information Campaigns on the Risks of Irregular Migration in Pakistan – II (PARIM-II)*.” Building up on the experience and research findings of PARIM-I, PARIM-II extends the activities of PARIM-I and seeks to provide Afghan nationals in Pakistan with a balanced set of information regarding legal migration opportunities, protection services they are eligible for, and challenges of irregular migration, to help them make an informed migration decision, taking into account the legal and protection options available to them.

Against this background, this Background Reports aims to address the following three main themes:

- i. Understanding the migration dynamics of Afghans in Pakistan
- ii. Taking stock of the available knowledge and experience of designing migration information campaigns aimed at migrants en route for onward migration (with Afghans migrants in focus)
- iii. Discussing the role of returnees in information provision to potential migrants

Understanding the migration dynamics of Afghans in Pakistan

At present, Pakistan hosts close to 3 million Afghan nationals, living across a spectrum of legal statuses. About 1.38 million are registered as refugees with the UNCHR, 840,000 hold an Afghan Citizens Card, and 775,000 live unregistered and irregularly. Additionally, about 600,000 new Afghans arrived in Pakistan following the shift in ruling powers in Afghanistan in August 2021, however there is limited information available on their legal status, whereabouts, and socioeconomic situation while in Pakistan.

Migration decisions are based on individual choices, aspirations and preferences on the one hand, and on the other hand are subject to broader structural and intermediary factors that remain out of individual control. In other words, a range of macro, meso and micro factors interact to motivate or compel Afghans in Pakistan to consider migration.

Some of the main macro factors influencing onward migration decisions of Afghans in Pakistan include: shrinking legal protection space in Pakistan, limited humanitarian support available, lack of a pathway to citizenship, limited validity of legal status, lack of a right to work for recent Afghan arrivals on visit visa, and a general situation of economic, environmental and political instability in Pakistan. Meso factors relevant in this context include increasingly hostile policy narrative and treatment of Afghan nationals by law enforcement authorities, increased repatriation rate from Pakistan, slow resettlement processes to other destinations, eroding social cohesion between Afghan migrants and host communities, as well as lack of information on available safe migration pathways. Finally, micro factors relate to their age, gender, family situation, education, ethnicity, occupation, and intangible elements such as emotions, feelings and risk perceptions. The report situates this discussion in the broader scholarly debate on onward migration, especially in the context of those displaced by conflict and migrating irregularly.

Migration information campaigns aimed at migrants in third countries

To learn from previous experiences and lessons, this report maps migration information campaigns aimed at targeting migrants en route, especially those displaced in countries along the route to Europe. An overview of such campaigns highlights that such campaigns are largely concentrated towards specific transit hubs along the irregular migration routes leading to Europe, including in countries in the Horn of Africa, Mediterranean and towards the South Eastern European countries, including

Türkiye, and the Western Balkan countries. A heavy majority of the campaigns included in this mapping focus on deterrence messaging, discouraging migrants to continue their journeys. Campaigns focusing on Türkiye and the Western Balkans almost always target Afghan migrants along the route as well. There are limited migration information campaigns implemented in Pakistan aimed at Afghan nationals, however to draw on experience of relevant stakeholders, this report maps other (non-migration) campaigns that target Afghan nationals in Pakistan to understand their outreach mechanisms.

The report is cognizant of the ethical responsibility that is associated with migration information campaigns in general, and especially those targeted at displaced populations in other countries. It aims to highlight the complexities and considerations that are required to design a campaign that is well-aware of its own responsibility and positionality in the field of migration governance. Among other ethical considerations, the report emphasizes that campaign messages should adopt a human rights centered, “do no harm” policy in all its activities.

Role of returnees in information provision to potential migrants

Building on the research need identified by PARIM-I, this report also provides an overview of the role of (Pakistani) returnees in information provision to potential (Pakistani) migrants. PARIM-I research experience showed that a majority of potential migrants rely on returnees for migration-related information. The report draws on available literature that highlights why and under what conditions information from returnees is trusted, and whether returnees can be effective as messengers in migration information campaigns. The report also discusses ethical considerations for involving returnees in campaigns for specific messaging, and suggests that returnees can be involved not only as messengers, but also as in the design phase of campaigns

1. Introduction

This background report offers a contextual understanding on the current situation and onward migration aspirations of Afghan migrants in Pakistan, particularly those with Europe as a potential destination. Along with that, the report also gives an overview on the role of migration information campaigns targeted towards migrants from conflict countries, displaced in other countries, with aspirations to move towards other destinations through irregular means. The report is part of the project *Awareness Raising and Information Campaigns on the Risks of Irregular Migration in Pakistan – II (PARIM-II)*. PARIM-II builds on the findings and experiences of its predecessor project (titled PARIM-I) that focused on developing a balanced migration information campaign targeted towards potential irregular migrants in Pakistan.

A critical review of literature and evidence-base on migration information campaigns has been discussed at length in PARIM-I publications.¹ In PARIM-I research findings, ICMPD critically engages with the available literature on migration information campaigns, their effectiveness, and their shortcomings to draw lessons for a more responsible and ethically-sound information campaign aimed at potential migrants. It also delves into an in-depth discussion on campaign design, including choice of target group, channels, messengers, and messages.² PARIM-I research was conducted in 2021 based on an individual level survey among 1200 potential migrants in selected districts in Punjab, Pakistan, and qualitative interviews with relevant local stakeholders, and diaspora organisations in the EU.

Cognizant of the limitations of effectively evaluating the impact of migration information campaigns, this report includes lessons learned from the PARIM-I experience, and zooms in on the specific case of migrants in third countries and their decision-making for onward migration. This dimension of identifying the information gaps and needs, motivations and decision-making processes of a vulnerable group of people already displaced from their countries of origin for onward migration, adds an additional layer of complexity for responsibly designing and implementing migration information campaigns.

The case of Afghans migrants in Pakistan is very specific, owing to the forty-year long history and the size of the Afghan population in Pakistan. Approximately 3 million Afghans live in Pakistan on a spectrum of legal statuses, and estimates suggest that about 600,000 new Afghans came to Pakistan as a consequence of the Taliban takeover in 2021.³ However, geopolitical situations, domestic political landscape, security circumstances, and economic pressures in Pakistan over this time have tapered the overall welcoming climate, and have further narrowed opportunities for new Afghans for legal stay and work in Pakistan.

While movement of people (and goods) across the porous borders of the neighbouring countries is centuries old, in recent history, the large-scale forced movements from Afghanistan to Pakistan are a result of protracted conflict and civil unrest in the former. Military takeovers and withdrawals of the

¹ Katharina Hahn-Schaur, *Awareness Raising and Information Campaigns on the Risks of Irregular Migration from Pakistan: Background Report* (Vienna: ICMPD, 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).

² Qaisrani, Hahn-Schaur, and Hendow, "Irregular Migration Dynamics from Pakistan and the Role of Information Campaigns: PARIM Final Report"; Hahn-Schaur, *Awareness Raising and Information Campaigns on the Risks of Irregular Migration from Pakistan: Background Report*; Ayesha Qaisrani and Jelena Jokic, "Engaging Diasporas in Information Campaigns on Migration" (Vienna, 2021).

³ UNHCR, "Overview of Pakistan Operation," 2023, <https://data.unhcr.org/en/country/pak>.

then-USSR and the United States in the 1970s, 1989, 2001 and most recently in 2021 have led to forced eviction of millions cumulatively, the biggest proportion of which sought refuge in Pakistan.

In addition, the past two years, since the enforced takeover of the Afghan administration by the Taliban, existing socioeconomic predicaments in Afghanistan have aggravated, with lingering effects of an economic crisis resulting from a combination of the COVID-19 pandemic, climate-related and natural disasters, the international sanctions imposed on the country after the Taliban takeover, initial disruption in international aid flows, and the blockade of Afghan Central Bank assets by the US – all of which culminated to heightened poverty, unemployment, malnutrition, disruption in health and education etc. The threat of persecution and reprisals by the Taliban have created widespread fear and a fragile security environment in the country, pushing many to leave Afghanistan in search of safety. Moreover, the gender-based segregation and exclusion of women from the public space, and specifically from education and the labour market, has increasingly become an important factor at play in migration decisions of Afghans recently.⁴ The de facto Taliban administration in Afghanistan have created a “gender apartheid” by imposing systematic restrictions on human rights of women and girls, including on their freedom of movement, attire and behaviour, access to education, work, health and justice.⁵ While there is not adequate data to support the argument yet, such limitations on women are increasingly creating added push factors for women to emigrate through any means possible.⁶

While the circumstances create dire push factors for many, opportunities for legal migration are restricted due to the lack of passports among the majority, as well as general difficulties in acquiring visas for those who do have valid passports. According to the Passport Index 2023, Afghanistan has the lowest ranking passport in terms of freedom of movement and visa on arrival.⁷ Many Afghans escaping the tyrannical Taliban rule immediately entered neighbouring countries to seek protection – some through legal channels, while many reached through irregular means. Due to its geographic proximity, Pakistan became one of the main receivers of Afghans fleeing the new fragile security and socioeconomic situation in Afghanistan, adding to the 3 million already residing in the country. However, not all of the new arrivals planned on staying for long in Pakistan, owing to the limited protection options available to new arrivals, scarce opportunities for long-term settlement in the country and general socioeconomic situation of the Afghans already residing in the country.

Simultaneously, extremely slow progress on resettlement applications, shortage of humanitarian visa opportunities, limited legal migration options for Afghans due to increased scrutiny, and a general lack of information on the available opportunities have led to an increased desperation among Afghans in Afghanistan to attempt migrating through irregular channels to reach desired destinations.⁸ This has increased their exposure to risks of exploitation, abuse and trafficking along the way, raising global

⁴ UNHCR, “Regional Refugee Response Plan for Afghanistan Situation 2023,” 2023, <https://reporting.unhcr.org/afghanistan-situation-regional-refugee-response-plan-2023>.

⁵ UN OHCHR, “Experts: Taliban Treatment of Women May Be ‘Gender Apartheid,’” July 11, 2023, [https://www.ohchr.org/en/stories/2023/07/experts-taliban-treatment-women-may-be-gender-apartheid#:~:text=The Taliban in Afghanistan have,amount to %22gender apartheid.%22](https://www.ohchr.org/en/stories/2023/07/experts-taliban-treatment-women-may-be-gender-apartheid#:~:text=The%20Taliban%20in%20Afghanistan%20have,amount%20to%20gender%20apartheid.%22).

⁶ UN WOMEN, “Out of Jobs, into Poverty - the Impact of the Ban on Afghan Women Working in NGOs,” 2023, <https://www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2023-01/Gender-alert-3-Out-of-jobs-into-poverty-Afghanistan-en.pdf>.

⁷ Passport Index, “Global Passport Power Rank 2023,” 2023, <https://www.passportindex.org/byRank.php>.

⁸ Mixed Migration Centre, “The Changing Dynamics of Afghan Migration after August 2021,” 2023, https://mixedmigration.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/266_Changing-Dynamics-Afghan-Migration.pdf.

alarm and concern over the safety of those who migrate through irregular channels.⁹ There has been an uptick in reports of detention, torture and abuse of Afghans in neighbouring Pakistan and Iran, but also increased incidence of kidnapping, trafficking, exploitation, violence, and pushbacks among Afghan migrants along their journey.¹⁰ There is also a reported increase in pushbacks of Afghan migrants, especially along the Türkiye-Iran border.¹¹ According to Human Rights Watch, just in the first four months of 2022, Türkiye deported 44,768 Afghans.¹²

In light of this, PARIM-II seeks to provide Afghan nationals in Pakistan with a balanced set of information regarding legal migration opportunities, protection services they are eligible for, and challenges of irregular migration, to help them make an informed migration decision, taking into account the legal and protection options available to them. The project will focus on five districts in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, namely: Abbottabad, Haripur, Mansehra, Mardan, and Peshawar. Responding to the needs of the project, this report provides contextual background of Afghans in Pakistan, especially those that arrived after August 2021 with an insight into their migration dynamics, as evident in available literature. It also highlights the information gaps and needs of Afghans, especially those with plans to migrate onwards from Pakistan.

It also analyses lessons learned from existing migration information campaigns targeted at displaced populations in third countries, and adopts a human rights perspective to draw insights for developing an information campaign for Afghans in Pakistan. This report also taps on the experiences of the Migrant Resource Centres, operational in both Pakistan (with two physical locations), and Afghanistan (virtually since November 2021). Since the fall of Kabul, there has been an increased level of coordination between the MRCs of Pakistan and Afghanistan with the objective of providing customised information to Afghan clients regarding their migration queries. Moreover, building up on the findings of PARIM-I, the report also provides a brief overview of the role of returnees as influencers in migration information campaigns in Pakistan.

The report is organised as follows:

After this introduction (Chapter 1), Chapter 2 provides a historical and contemporary overview of Afghan movements to Pakistan and contextualises the trends in terms of the socioeconomic conditions that Afghans in Pakistan experience. Chapter 3 offers a discussion on drivers and patterns of onward migration in forced migration contexts, and zooms in on the case of drivers of onward migration for Afghans from Pakistan. It categorises the main drivers into macro, meso and micro levels to understand the systemic, intermediary and personal level factors that may shape migration decisions. It also highlights some of the major destination choices of Afghan migrants, based on recent data. Chapter 4 presents an overview of migration information campaigns in four different streams: first the chapter discusses the experiences based on MRCs Pakistan and MRC Afghanistan, followed by an overview of general awareness raising campaigns that have targeted Afghans in Pakistan. The chapter then

⁹ Human Rights Watch, “End Violence and Serious Human Rights Violations Against Afghan Refugees,” 2022, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2022/06/20/end-violence-and-serious-human-rights-violations-against-afghan-refugees>.

¹⁰ Gallup, “Taliban Returns, Majority of Afghans Seek an Exit,” World Poll, 2021, <https://ga.gallup.com/Article.aspx>; Abubakar Siddique, “New Videos Put Spotlight On Mistreatment Of Afghan Refugees In Iran,” *Gandhara*, April 8, 2022, <https://gandhara.rferl.org/a/videos-show-mistreatment-afghan-refugees-iran/31793242.html>.

¹¹ Amnesty International, “‘They Don’t Treat Us like Humans’: Unlawful Returns of Afghans from Turkey and Iran” (London, 2022), <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/ASA11/5897/2022/en/>.

¹² Human Rights Watch, “‘No One Asked Me Why I Left Afghanistan’ Pushbacks and Deportations of Afghans from Turkey,” 2022, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2022/11/18/turkey-pushes-afghans-back-iran-border>.

presents the key features of migration information campaigns aimed at migrants en route, followed by a global overview of migration information campaigns that target Afghan potential and in-transit migrants. The chapter also raises some ethical concerns regarding designing and implementing migration information campaigns aimed at population groups forcibly displaced in other countries due to conflict. In Chapter 5, this background report presents a broad discussion on the role of returnees in information provision for migration decision-making, and whether they can be effective as messengers in migration information campaigns.

2. Contextual overview

2.1. Introduction

This section sets the stage by presenting the contextual overview of migration dynamics of Afghan nationals between Afghanistan and Pakistan. It provides a short historical overview, followed by a synopsis of contemporary movements. It then discusses in detail the socioeconomic situation of Afghan nationals residing in Pakistan, and also provides the general socioeconomic conditions of the five districts in Pakistan that are part of the project.

2.2. Contextualising migration history between Afghanistan and Pakistan

Afghanistan has a long history of domestic and cross-border migration, with a strong culture of migration resulting from its central location in the Silk Road trade. Re-definitions of nation-state boundaries and borders created as a result of independence in the region from the British cut through ethnic tribes, leading to regular movements across the neighbouring borders for social and livelihood-related reasons.¹³ The border between Pakistan and Afghanistan has been largely porous and disputed, allowing cross-border movement through both sides of the border. However, there is an ongoing initiative to fence it from the Pakistani side based on security concerns.¹⁴ Movement across this border, from both sides, is a common phenomenon, for work, family reasons, trade etc. Many Afghans usually travel to Pakistan to also access education and health services.¹⁵

While patterns of cross-border movement of people between what is now Pakistan and Afghanistan have historical roots, the focus of the current discussion is on the Afghan population that has arrived in Pakistan in recent decades due to the long-standing geopolitical turbulences and political unrest in Afghanistan. Since the 1970s, Afghanistan has been a subject to a series of conflicts, inflicted by both local insurgents including the Taliban, as well as international powers, which has led to large-scale forced migration of Afghans, many of whom sought refuge in neighbouring Pakistan and Iran.

While initially welcoming of Afghan refugees due to long-standing historical ties, since the turn of the 21st century, Pakistan has adopted a more closed-door policy, and has offered restricted access to refugee status to new arrivals.¹⁶ Pakistan is not a signatory to the 1951 Refugee Convention, nor its 1967 Protocols. Until 1999, this meant that Afghans displaced by conflict were given refugee status on a prima-facie basis. Afterwards, they were allowed to enter the country but did not receive a refugee status. There are no pathways for permanent settlement of Afghan refugees in Pakistan. The policy response has always approached Afghan refugees presence in the country as temporary, prioritising policy options for return and repatriation.

In 2005, a census was conducted for the Afghan population in Pakistan, and registered Afghans received Proof of Registration (POR) cards, allowing them a legal identity in Pakistan and access to

¹³ Mathew Willner-Reid, "Afghanistan: Displacement Challenges in a Country on the Move," 2017, <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/afghanistan-displacement-challenges-country-move>.

¹⁴ Amina Khan, "Pak-Afghan Border: A Case Study of Border Management," 2017, http://issi.org.pk/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/2-SS_Amina_Khan_No-3_2017.pdf.

¹⁵ Léo Torrétton, "Undocumented Migrants Face Danger, Violations on Journey between Afghanistan and Pakistan," IOM, 2023, <https://roasiapacific.iom.int/stories/undocumented-migrants-face-danger-violations-journey-between-afghanistan-and-pakistan>.

¹⁶ Katja M Mielke et al., "Figurations of Displacement in and beyond Pakistan: Empirical Findings and Reflections on Protracted Displacement and Translocal Connections of Afghans" (Bonn, 2021), <https://trafig.eu/output/working-papers/figurations-of-displacement-in-and-beyond-pakistan>; Ayesha Qaisrani, "Bridging the Gaps: Migration Management and Policy Options for Afghan Refugees in Pakistan," 2021, <https://library.fes.de/pdf-files/bueros/pakistan/18612.pdf>.

certain limited social services.¹⁷ The PoR cards had a limited validity period, and those Afghans not registered in the census were declared as “illegal” foreigners according to Pakistan’s Foreigners Act of 1946 and its Protocol of 1967. It is to be noted that at the time of writing this report, the validity of PoR cards had expired on June 30, 2023, and the Government of Pakistan had not extended the validity yet.¹⁸ Moreover, subsequent Afghans arriving in Pakistan have not received refugee protection as that accorded to PoR cardholders, and very limited number of applications were processed for Refugee Status Determination.¹⁹ It can be concluded that in absence of a legal governance framework for the protection of refugees, policy responses adopted by Pakistan on matters related to Afghan nationals appear to be rather ad hoc.²⁰

As the Taliban took over Afghanistan in August 2021, Pakistan initially announced that it would not take any Afghans on humanitarian grounds and barred entry of those crossing the border without a valid visa.²¹ With closure of almost all diplomatic missions, and refusal of entry into Pakistan for those fleeing without a Pakistani visa, many had no choice but to opt for irregular channels to enter Pakistan to access consular services for other countries. Smugglers raised their fees and people were forced to pay double the amount it took them to be cross the Pak-Afghan border a year before (\$140-193 in 2021 from \$90 in 2020) at the border area of Spin-Boldak.²² In addition, there were also reports of high bribes being exchanged and extortion of Afghan desperate to leave the country.²³

By October 2021, there were some improvements in the situation. Pakistan introduced e-visa service for Afghans applying for Pakistani visas, waived visa fees and opened a pedestrian border crossing point, allowing more legal migration to take place.²⁴ However, border crossings over official checkpoints continued to be inconsistent well into 2022 due to volatile political relations between the two countries.²⁵

Estimates of Afghans fleeing to Pakistan after the Taliban takeover range from an official statement of 250,000 to realistic estimates of 600,000 individuals.²⁶ Those that managed to enter on valid visas

¹⁷ Ministry of States and Frontier Regions and UNHCR, “Census of Afghans in Pakistan,” 2005, <https://reliefweb.int/report/afghanistan/census-afghans-pakistan>.

¹⁸ Muska Safi and Amadullah Archiwal, “Afghan Refugees in Pakistan Worry as Their Refugee Cards Expire,” *Voice of America*, July 27, 2023, <https://www.voanews.com/a/afghan-refugees-in-pakistan-worry-as-their-refugee-cards-expire/7199312.html>.

¹⁹ Muhammad Zubair, Muhammad Aqeel Khan, and Muzamil Shah, “Analysis of Pakistan’s Policy Towards Afghan Refugees: A Legal Perspective,” *Global Political Review* IV, no. III (2019): 28–38, [https://doi.org/10.31703/gpr.2019\(iv-iii\).04](https://doi.org/10.31703/gpr.2019(iv-iii).04).

²⁰ Qaisrani, “Bridging the Gaps: Migration Management and Policy Options for Afghan Refugees in Pakistan.”

²¹ Shah Meer Baloch and Hannah Ellis-Petersen, “‘Unprecedented’ Numbers Crossing from Afghanistan to Pakistan,” *The Guardian*, August 27, 2021, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/aug/27/unprecedented-numbers-crossing-afghanistan-pakistan#:~:text=Every day%2C tens of thousands,minorities such as Hazara Shias>.

²² Al Arabia News, “Afghan Smugglers Hike Prices, Expand Networks after Taliban Takeover,” February 14, 2022, <https://english.alarabiya.net/News/world/2022/02/14/Afghan-smugglers-hike-prices-expand-networks-after-Taliban-takeover>.

²³ Baloch and Ellis-Petersen, “‘Unprecedented’ Numbers Crossing from Afghanistan to Pakistan.”

²⁴ Mixed Migration Centre, “The Changing Dynamics of Afghan Migration after August 2021.”

²⁵ European Union Agency for Asylum (EUAA), “Pakistan Situation of Afghan Refugees: Country of Origin Information Report,” 2022, https://coi.euaa.europa.eu/administration/easo/PLib/2022_05_EUAA_COI_Report_Pakistan_Situation_of_Afghan_refugees.pdf.

²⁶ Devon Cone and Sabiha Khan, “‘They Left Us without Any Support’ Afghans in Pakistan Waiting for Solutions,” n.d., https://d3jwam0i5codb7.cloudfront.net/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/Pakistan_July2023_R-1.pdf.

were given amnesty until December 2022.²⁷ However, for many the short-term visas have expired and they have been living in an irregular situation.²⁸

Population movement statistics as collected by IOM show that in 2021, the months between July and October experienced a decline in movement (although the rate of flow from Afghanistan to Pakistan remained higher than the reverse trend).²⁹ The slowdown in official movement could be because of the entry restrictions into Pakistan without a valid visa, and the worsening security situation in Afghanistan discouraging return of Afghans. The trend picked up November onwards, when Pakistan allowed e-visa application to Afghans entering Pakistan.

2.3. Socioeconomic characteristics of Afghans in Pakistan

2.3.1. Legal status of stay in Pakistan

At its highest point, there were about 5 million Afghan nationals in Pakistan. In 2005, a comprehensive census was conducted of the Afghan population in Pakistan which estimated that more than 3 million Afghans lived in Pakistan at that time.³⁰ With subsequent waves of return, repatriation, and more migration, the current estimate is also approximately of 3 million Afghans living in Pakistan.³¹ The UNHCR also estimates that between 2002-2022, about 4.3 million Afghans have been facilitated for voluntary repatriation, with 6,039 Afghans repatriated from Pakistan just in 2022.³² The high volume of “voluntary” return has come under critique as accounts of use of force and violence have been widely reported in the past.³³

Afghan population in Pakistan can be divided into the following legal categories:

- **Proof of Registration Cardholders:** those who arrived before 1999 and were given prima-facie refugee status under UNHCR. Children of PoR cardholders also receive PoR cards. These PoR cards have limited validity and the Government of Pakistan has conducted a series of renewal drives for their validity, the latest one concluding in 2022 and updating the PoR cards to smart cards containing biometric information. Official reports state that 1.4 million Afghans received updated PoR cards in the latest drive.³⁴ The latest extension of PoR cardholders is up until 30th June, 2023.
- **Afghan Citizens Cardholders:** In 2018, the Government of Pakistan gave Afghan Citizens Cards to those Afghan nationals who were undocumented but not eligible for Proof of Registration

²⁷ Zofeen Ebrahim, “Afghan Refugees Fear Return as Pakistan Cracks Down on Migrants,” *Inter Press Service*, February 1, 2023, https://www.ipsnews.net/2023/02/afghan-refugees-fear-return-as-pakistan-crackdown-on-migrants/?utm_source=rss&utm_medium=rss&utm_campaign=afghan-refugees-fear-return-as-pakistan-crackdown-on-migrants.

²⁸ Cone and Khan, “‘They Left Us without Any Support’ Afghans in Pakistan Waiting for Solutions.”

²⁹ IOM, “Movemnets in and out of Afghanistan (March 2021 - February 2022),” 2022, <https://www.iom.int/sites/g/files/tmzbdl486/files/documents/afg-movements-in-and-out-19-mar-25-mar-2022.pdf>.

³⁰ Ministry of States and Frontier Regions and UNHCR, “Census of Afghans in Pakistan.”

³¹ UNHCR, “Operational Data Portal: Country View Pakistan,” 2022, <https://data.unhcr.org/en/country/pak>.

³² UNHCR, “Pakistan: Voluntary Repatriation of Afghan Refugees (1 January to 31 March 2023),” 2023, <https://reliefweb.int/report/pakistan/pakistan-voluntary-repatriation-afghan-refugees-1-january-31-march-2023>.

³³ Human Rights Watch, “Pakistan Coercion, UN Complicity: The Mass Forced Return of Afghan Refugees,” February 13, 2017, <https://www.hrw.org/report/2017/02/13/pakistan-coercion-un-complicity/mass-forced-return-afghan-refugees>.

³⁴ UNHCR, “Pakistan Concludes ‘Drive’ to Issue Smartcards to Registered Afghan Refugees,” January 4, 2022, <https://www.unhcr.org/pk/13723-pakistan-concludes-drive-to-issue-smartcards-to-registered-afghan-refugees.html>.

Cards. About 879,198 Afghans received the Afghan Citizens Cards.³⁵ The ACC offers protection for non-refoulement up until an initial validity period of six months, allowing those registered to apply for an Afghan passport and then applying for a Pakistani visa to continue staying in the country. The Afghan Citizens Card does not provide access to any social or legal services.

- Afghan nationals on valid visa: These include Afghans nationals residing in Pakistan on a valid visa, including work, education, business or family visa.
- Undocumented Afghans in Pakistan: There are many Afghan nationals currently in Pakistan who remain unregistered and undocumented, either because of lack of eligibility or fear of deportation in case of registering themselves with the authorities.³⁶ Undocumented in this sense means lack of a valid visa or legal status within Pakistan. this group may have other identification document such as an Afghan passport or *tazkera* (Afghan ID card).³⁷

Continuous cross-border movements of Afghan migrants, as well as refugees and returnees, across the Pakistan-Afghanistan border has blurred the distinctions between different legal statuses, leading to confusion over matters related to protection and durable solutions.³⁸

2.3.2. Geographic, demographic and socioeconomic situation of Afghans in Pakistan

Geographic and demographic distribution: The majority of registered Afghans (52.5%) reside in the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, followed by those in Balochistan (24.2%), Punjab (14.3%), Sindh (5.5%), Islamabad (3.1%), and Azad Jammu and Kashmir (0.3%). UNHCR maintains 54 recognised refugee villages (RVs) in the country; however, about 70 percent of registered Afghans reside urban areas. In these villages, UNHCR in collaboration with the Government of Pakistan and NGOs is providing basic community-based services like primary school education, basic health care, water and sanitation. About 69% of the Afghan registered Afghan refugees reside in urban or peri-urban areas, while the remaining 31% reside in “refugee villages” largely located in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan provinces.³⁹

Table 1: Afghan refugees in Pakistan, by province

Province	Number of registered Afghan refugees
Khyber Pakhtunkhwa	691,239
Balochistan	318,914
Punjab	188,579
Sindh	72,745
Islamabad	40,463
Azad Jammu and Kashmir	4,317

Source: UNHCR (2022)⁴⁰

As aid started diminishing to refugee villages, resulting in cuts in food assistance, Afghans in Pakistan had no choice but to start looking for income opportunities in peri-urban and urban areas. Many

³⁵ Mielke et al., “Figurations of Displacement in and beyond Pakistan: Empirical Findings and Reflections on Protracted Displacement and Translocal Connections of Afghans.”

³⁶ Qaisrani, “Bridging the Gaps: Migration Management and Policy Options for Afghan Refugees in Pakistan.”

³⁷ European Union Agency for Asylum (EUAA), “Pakistan Situation of Afghan Refugees: Country of Origin Information Report.”

³⁸ Daniel A Kronenfeld, “Afghan Refugees in Pakistan: Not All Refugees, Not Always in Pakistan, Not Necessarily Afghan?,” *Journal of Refugee Studies* 21, no. 1 (2008): 43–63, <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1093/jrs/fem048>.

³⁹ UNHCR, “Operational Data Portal: Country View Pakistan.”

⁴⁰ UNHCR.

moved out of the refugee villages to the cities. While there are socioeconomically well-off Afghan nationals living in urban centres of Pakistan, the majority of Afghans live in vulnerable situations, often in informal settlements, with restrictions in access to basic services and amenities. In a (year) survey, the employment rates of Afghans residing in refugee villages was less than those living in urban settlements.⁴¹

In terms of demographic distributions, UNHCR reports that Afghan population in Pakistan comprises 53% male and 47% female. Age-wise, 46% fall in the working age category, 38% are children (ages 5-17), 12% are infants (0-4 years), and 4% are above the age of 60. About 8.7% of the registered Afghans in Pakistan have specific needs.⁴²

Reasons for migration to Pakistan: As discussed above, the political, security, environmental and socioeconomic fragility in Afghanistan over the past forty years have resulted in heightened vulnerability of the Afghan people. In particular, aside from the uncertainties caused by the change in government, migration drivers include escalation of violence in recent years, fear of persecution as well as various forms of gender based violence against women, and exploitation of children; food scarcity and malnutrition; and the increasing frequency of environmental crises such as frequent and severe floods, avalanches and winter storms.⁴³ In 2023 alone, it is estimated that about 28.3 million Afghans are experiencing dire humanitarian assistance needs.⁴⁴ Dire push factors, such as the ones mentioned above, lead to configurations of forced and voluntary migration from Afghanistan. Majority of the population movements take place within the region, especially across neighbouring countries.

As found by the TRAFIG survey conducted in 2020-2021 among 299 registered Afghans in Pakistan, an overwhelming majority (92%) cited insecurity, war and violence as their reason for migration from Afghanistan, followed by 50% who cited economic reasons, 11% who reported military service, 7% who reported land conflict, and political persecution each, 2% who cited educational reasons, and 1% cited family reasons. Besides these push factors, reasons for choosing Pakistan were reported to be improved economic conditions (62%), geographical proximity (40%), relatively better security situation (35%), family reunification (14%), familiar culture and language (12%), and personal history of living in Pakistan (4%).⁴⁵

There is a dearth of comprehensive data on the socioeconomic situation of Afghans in Pakistan. Since the 2005 census, there has not been an attempt of conducting a representative survey of all Afghans in Pakistan, regardless of their legal status. Hence, analyses on the socioeconomic situations of Afghans in Pakistan is based on sub-sets of the Afghan population, often focusing only on individuals registered with the UNHCR. Not much information is known about the condition of unregistered Afghan nationals in Pakistan. Nevertheless, such surveys contribute immensely to understanding their background and identifying potential priority policy areas.

Employment and livelihoods: There are a number of policy-related and practical hindrances in Afghan nationals' access to basic life amenities in Pakistan. The most basic of these is the right to work. PoR,

⁴¹ Mielke et al., "Figurations of Displacement in and beyond Pakistan: Empirical Findings and Reflections on Protracted Displacement and Translocal Connections of Afghans."

⁴² UNHCR, "Overview of Refugee and Asylum-Seekers Population as of June 30, 2023," 2023, <https://data.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/101904>.

⁴³ ICMPD, "Migration Outlook Silk Routes 2022 South and West Asia" (Vienna, 2022).

⁴⁴ UN OCHA, "Afghanistan Humanitarian Needs Overview 2023," 2023, <https://reliefweb.int/report/afghanistan/afghanistan-humanitarian-needs-overview-2023-january-2023>.

⁴⁵ Mielke et al., "Figurations of Displacement in and beyond Pakistan: Empirical Findings and Reflections on Protracted Displacement and Translocal Connections of Afghans."

in essence, does not grant the right to work or employment in Pakistan. However, an ad hoc and unwritten agreement exists to allow Afghan nationals to work in the informal sector. Under the 2017 Repatriation and Management Policy for Afghan Refugees, a flexible visa regime provides terms for PoR card holders to apply for a visa inside Pakistan, including for work purposes. By law, Afghans in Pakistan cannot own businesses and cannot be engaged in public sector employment.⁴⁶

Considering that the majority of Afghan population in Pakistan falls in the working age group (18-59 years),⁴⁷ lack of access to meaningful employment in Pakistan contributes strongly to the barriers experienced by Afghans for upward socioeconomic mobility and integration into the Pakistan society. Moreover, the short-term and limited validity of PoR cards, arbitrary extensions, and delays in enforcement of extensions further introduce hurdles in ensuring long-term and full-time employment of Afghan nationals in Pakistan.

While technically Afghans are not eligible for Pakistani nationality, there are cases of Afghans acquiring national identity cards through clandestine means, and passing off as Pakistanis. This way, they are able to by-pass numerous administrative and bureaucratic hurdles that otherwise restrict their access to services and formal labour market.⁴⁸

Recent arrivals, especially those that arrived after August 2021 in principle, do not have the right to work in Pakistan, unless they already had valid work permits. As this is quite rare, many find themselves in a state of helplessness as they wait for resettlement or processing of their Refugee Status Determination, without having any means to support themselves and their families. Even the more qualified ones find themselves unemployable due to lack of Pakistani identity cards.⁴⁹

The TRAFIG survey found that those in the peri-urban areas had higher access to employment or work as compared to those in rural and urban areas. In the same vein, those that lived in refugee villages had lower likelihood of employment compared to those living privately. Labour force participation of men (72%) was noted to be considerably higher than that women (20%). In addition, younger population (ages 20-29) was found to be economically more active as compared to older working age population (ages 50-59). Those with secondary and higher levels of education were also found to have higher rates of employment.⁵⁰

Income generation activities and employment sectors of Afghan nationals depend on their skills and qualifications as well as social networks within Pakistan, in addition to their legal status. Low-skilled Afghans largely earn their livelihoods from daily labour or working as small-scale vendors or shopkeepers. Collecting scrap, working in construction and transport industry, waiting tables in restaurants, tailoring and working as security guards are also common employment activities. Women tend to be engaged in home-based income generation activities such as tailoring and embroidering.⁵¹

⁴⁶ UNHCR, "Regional Refugee Response Plan for Afghanistan Situation," 2023, <https://globalcompactrefugees.org/media/regional-refugee-response-plan-2023-afghanistan-situation>.

⁴⁷ UNHCR, "Operational Data Portal: Country View Pakistan."

⁴⁸ Mielke et al., "Figurations of Displacement in and beyond Pakistan: Empirical Findings and Reflections on Protracted Displacement and Translocal Connections of Afghans."

⁴⁹ Ebrahim, "Afghan Refugees Fear Return as Pakistan Cracks Down on Migrants."

⁵⁰ Mielke et al., "Figurations of Displacement in and beyond Pakistan: Empirical Findings and Reflections on Protracted Displacement and Translocal Connections of Afghans."

⁵¹ CODE, "Afghan Refugees in Pakistan: The Road Ahead," 2019, <https://codepak.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/Afghan-Refugees-The-Road-Ahead.pdf>; ILO and UNHCR, "Market Systems Analysis for Afghan Refugees in Pakistan," 2018, https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/--ed_emp/documents/genericdocument/wcms_636574.pdf; European Union Agency for Asylum (EUAA), "Pakistan Situation of Afghan Refugees: Country of Origin Information Report."

There are some minor geographical differences as well, as found by a 2018 Market Systems Analysis conducted by ILO and UNHCR which shows that in Balochistan, the main sectors that Afghans are involved in are construction, tomato farming and rearing small ruminants and livestock; while in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, dairy sector also engages a considerable proportion of Afghan labour.⁵²

Those with some level of education (up to intermediate/high school level) were found to be engaged as teachers (at religious and formal private schools), trainers in the developmental sector/NGOs, mechanics, and mobile phone repairers. A few Afghans are doing economically better and have even managed to set-up trade and business set-ups especially in the carpet industry, dry fruits and fabrics trade, and even scrap collection.⁵³

The ILO and UNHCR assessment finds that both Afghans in Pakistan, as well as the host community perceived Afghans to be more efficient in low-skill and labour intensive activities, where their demand is also higher.⁵⁴ Such perceptions, together with the insecure legal status of Afghans in Pakistan, may explain why there is limited upward socioeconomic mobility over generations, and successive generations often find themselves engaged in the same work fields as their parents. Those who managed to acquire Pakistani citizenship had better access to formal employment sector.⁵⁵

Healthcare access: In terms of health, Afghan nationals have access to public health services. However, the poor state of the public health sector due to very limited health budget makes it extremely difficult for Pakistanis and Afghans alike to receive quality healthcare. Hence, those that can afford it, prefer to access private healthcare. Healthcare provision is not necessarily dependent on the legal status of Afghan nationals, however, as it is common for undocumented Afghans to borrow PoR cards or ACCs of their relatives or friends in case they need to show documentation in hospitals.⁵⁶

Access to education: Afghan children's access to education in Pakistan needs to be understood in the context of the national educational system in the country. With limited budget allocated to the education sector, Pakistan has the second-highest population of out-of-school children with an estimated 22.8 million school-age children not in schools.⁵⁷

In principle, children of PoR cardholders have access to free primary education, delivered in refugee villages and organised by UNHCR. More recently, efforts by national and international NGOs as well as UNHCR to increase access to free secondary education to Afghan children have also been underway. However, according to the UNHCR website, only 57,000 children receive this free education,⁵⁸ and an estimated 80% of school-aged Afghan children remains out of school.⁵⁹

Another issue related to educational access is that Afghan children in refugee schools receive primary and secondary education as per the Afghan National Curriculum. This curriculum is neither aligned

⁵² UNHCR and ILO, "Market Systems Analysis of Afghan Refugees in Pakistan," 2018, https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_emp/documents/genericdocument/wcms_636574.pdf.

⁵³ Mielke et al., "Figurations of Displacement in and beyond Pakistan: Empirical Findings and Reflections on Protracted Displacement and Translocal Connections of Afghans."

⁵⁴ UNHCR and ILO, "Market Systems Analysis of Afghan Refugees in Pakistan."

⁵⁵ Mielke et al., "Figurations of Displacement in and beyond Pakistan: Empirical Findings and Reflections on Protracted Displacement and Translocal Connections of Afghans."

⁵⁶ Mielke et al.

⁵⁷ UNICEF, "Education," UNICEF Pakistan, 2022, <https://www.unicef.org/pakistan/education>.

⁵⁸ UNHCR, "Education," UNHCR Pakistan, 2022, <https://www.unhcr.org/pk/education>.

⁵⁹ Imtiaz Ayub and Shaista Attaullah, "Barriers to Access Education for Afghan Refugees in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan," 2022, <https://adsp.ngo/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/Barrier-to-Education-for-Afghan-Refugees-Long-Report.pdf>.

with nor recognised by the education boards in Pakistan, leading to restrictions in access to higher education.⁶⁰ This is further complicated as education is a provincial jurisdiction in Pakistan, rather than being decided at the national level. Hence, in every province, Afghan children face varying barriers in accessing high school and higher education. Additionally, Afghan children experience barriers in accessing education due to lack of documents that schools require for enrolment such as birth certificates and national ID cards of parents.

A recent development in this area took place in 2022, when Pakistan finalised a USD 63 million package for professional training for Afghan nationals, including 3,000 scholarships, free training with stipends for 5,000 Afghan nationals, free training for 150 Afghan teachers, 100 nursing diploma scholarships, and the establishment of an AIOU (Allama Iqbal Open University) regional campus in Kabul to improve the education sector and skill development.⁶¹

Child labour is another major issue among Afghan nationals in Pakistan. A UNHCR study conducted in November 2022 found that poverty and limited access to sufficient livelihood opportunities and hindrances in right to work have forced many Afghan households to put their children in labour. Child labour among Afghan nationals was reported to be high in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Baluchistan provinces. Common types included agricultural labour, garbage collection and scrap picking, working in market stalls, or small restaurants and auto-mechanic shops.⁶²

Residence and accommodation: In Pakistan, foreigners do not have the right to purchase and own property. Hence the majority of Afghans living outside of the refugee villages live either in squatter settlements on government land or in rented accommodation. In certain regions, such as Punjab, renting properties has also become extremely cumbersome for Afghans due to a recent legislation that requires landlords to register tenants with local police.⁶³ This is a problem not only for those Afghans that want to avoid interaction with law enforcement agencies due to systemic discrimination and profiling of Afghans in relation to crime and insecurity, but also for landlords who prefer to not rent to Afghans in anticipation of any issues.

There is limited data on where the newly arrived Afghans are residing in Pakistan. Inferences drawn on news and media updates show that temporary refugee camps in Islamabad have been housing newly arrived Afghans for the past two years.⁶⁴

Freedom of movement within Pakistan: While PoR cardholders are given the right of freedom of movement, mobility of Afghans, especially those without documents is often quite restricted as they are subjected to regular apprehensions and scrutiny.⁶⁵ Especially cumbersome for them is crossing provincial borders as they experience extra security checks, and even harassment, detention and abuse.⁶⁶

⁶⁰ European Union Agency for Asylum (EUAA), "Pakistan Situation of Afghan Refugees: Country of Origin Information Report."

⁶¹ ICMPD, "Migration Outlook Silk Routes 2022 South and West Asia."

⁶² UNHCR, "Participatory Assessment Report - Pakistan," 2022, <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/101325>.

⁶³ Qaisrani, "Bridging the Gaps: Migration Management and Policy Options for Afghan Refugees in Pakistan."

⁶⁴ InfoMigrants, "Afghan Refugees Arrive in Italy via Humanitarian Corridor," July 7, 2023, <https://www.infomigrants.net/en/post/50513/afghan-refugees-arrive-in-italy-via-humanitarian-corridor>.

⁶⁵ European Union Agency for Asylum (EUAA), "Pakistan Situation of Afghan Refugees: Country of Origin Information Report."

⁶⁶ Mielke et al., "Figurations of Displacement in and beyond Pakistan: Empirical Findings and Reflections on Protracted Displacement and Translocal Connections of Afghans."

Shrinking legal protection space: While the Government of Pakistan has hosted more than 3 million Afghan refugees for over four decades now, the protection space offered to Afghans in Pakistan has been closing, with very limited opportunities for Afghans to settle in the country for a longer-term. There is a gaping legal vacuum in Pakistan regarding refugee protection as Pakistan has neither signed the 1951 Refugee Convention nor its 1967 Protocols, and it does not have any national legislation that governs refugee protection in the country. This means that Pakistan in general does not allow the right of seeking asylum in its territory. While prima-facie refugee status was permitted for Afghan refugees arriving before 1999, the Government of Pakistan has not allowed the UNHCR to offer any documentation, including asylum-seeking certificates or Refugee Status Determination for newly arrived Afghans since the fall of Kabul 2021.⁶⁷ Lack of any protection services offered in Pakistan, and limited humanitarian assistance available to those Afghans without any documents acts as a strong driver for many to attempt onward migration.

Limited resources and restricted humanitarian support: Besides the shrinking space for legal protection, there is a huge dearth of resources available to support Afghans in Pakistan. Despite the commitment of the international community to support neighbouring countries in providing assistance to newly arrived Afghans, the needs far exceed the resources available in the areas of registration, financial support, health, education, shelter, water, food, and livelihoods etc.⁶⁸ Available infrastructure in Pakistan is stretched and under extreme stress to provide special services for newly arrived Afghans in the country. International attention has also diverted to other geopolitical matters requiring urgent action including the invasion of Ukraine by Russia, earthquake in Türkiye, civil war in Sudan etc.

Lack of a pathway to citizenship: Afghan nationals residing in Pakistan on a special status (PoR or ACC cardholders) are not offered a pathway to citizenship, despite some of them having resided in Pakistan for more than 40 years or being born in Pakistan. While constitutionally offers birth-right citizenship (jus soli), this right is not extended to Afghans on a “special status” i.e. PoR cardholders and their offspring.⁶⁹ Legislation around citizenship by marriage has gendered elements which allows a foreign woman to acquire Pakistani citizenship by marrying a Pakistani man, but a foreign man is not eligible for Pakistani citizenship even by marriage.⁷⁰ While women who acquire Pakistani citizenship by marriage gain access to a wide range of previously-restricted services, it has been reported that they are also subjected to blocked ID cards when the Government of Pakistan intensifies efforts to repatriate Afghans.⁷¹ This means that those Afghans living in Pakistan for all or majority of their lives have no choice but to live in a state of legal limbo in Pakistan.⁷²

Limited validity of legal status: Those on special statuses such as PoR cardholders or Afghan Citizens Cardholders are frequently impacted by the short-term validity of their legal documents and delays in extensions. This limits their access to and availability of basic life services such as health, education, employment etc., and also affects their eligibility for renting accommodation, opening bank accounts,

⁶⁷ Cone and Khan, “‘They Left Us without Any Support’ Afghans in Pakistan Waiting for Solutions.”

⁶⁸ UNHCR, “Regional Refugee Response Plan for Afghanistan Situation 2023.”

⁶⁹ Amir Wasim, “Opposition Attacks PM’s Statement on Citizenship for Children of Refugees,” *Dawn*, 2018, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1434933>.

⁷⁰ Government of Pakistan, “The Pakistan Citizenship Act 1951,” 1951, <https://pakistancode.gov.pk/pdf/files/administratora2b6f3407a109a491d47d649f6ff0c01.pdf>.

⁷¹ European Union Agency for Asylum (EUAA), “Pakistan Situation of Afghan Refugees: Country of Origin Information Report.”

⁷² Qaisrani, “Bridging the Gaps: Migration Management and Policy Options for Afghan Refugees in Pakistan.”

acquiring a driving license or owing a sim card.⁷³ Legally, only those with PoR cards are eligible for opening a bank account and owning a sim, and these policy updates also took place as recent as in 2018 after about 40 years of hosting Afghan refugees in the country.⁷⁴ Without such rights, economic integration and progress for a population that has been living in a state of protracted displacement is severely constricted, structurally inhibiting prospects of a decent life, and giving root to considerations of other opportunities, such as onward migration.

Box 1: Local socioeconomic context and migration dynamics in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa

As mentioned, PARIM-II will focus on five districts in the province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa in Pakistan (Abbottabad, Haripur, Mansehra, Mardan and Peshawar). Khyber Pakhtunkhwa is host to the biggest Afghan refugee population in Pakistan.

A brief overview of the socioeconomic indicators of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and select districts may elucidate the existing setting under which migration dynamics are shaped.⁷⁵ Formerly named as North West Frontier Province (NWFP), Khyber Pakhtunkhwa was renamed in 2010. By land area it is the smallest province in Pakistan, compared to the other three (Balochistan, Punjab and Sindh), and population-wise, it is the third largest. The province is divided into eight administrative divisions that are further divided into districts. In 2018, another administrative restructuring merged the former Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA)– seven tribal districts that border Afghanistan with a collective population of about 5 million⁷⁶ – with Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

According to the latest population census of 2017⁷⁷, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa has a population of 30.5 million, with 18.8% of the population living in urban areas. Majority of the population is of Pashtun ethnicity, especially along the border of Afghanistan, with prominent presence of Hindkowan in the Hazara valley, including in Abbottabad, Haripur and Mansehra.

In terms of economy, agriculture, forestry and mining are dominant sectors with high contribution to Pakistan's GDP. 78% of the country's marble production takes place in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. In general, the province has a young population with 43.4% of the population under the age of 15 years, and 20% between the ages of 15 to 24 years. The literacy rates and educational levels in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa are less than the national average. The provincial literacy rate is 54% compared to 59% of the national average, and majority of adult population with some educational attainment have only primary level education. At the provincial level, about 95% of households have own a mobile or smart phone, and 33% have access to internet.

Abbottabad: Home to a population of 1.3 million, Abbottabad has experienced a population growth of 51% in the last two decades. The district has a population density of 677, with 22% of the district urban in nature.⁷⁸ It is considered a relatively well-developed district in the province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa,

⁷³ Mielke et al., "Figurations of Displacement in and beyond Pakistan: Empirical Findings and Reflections on Protracted Displacement and Translocal Connections of Afghans."

⁷⁴ Mixed Migration Centre, "The Changing Dynamics of Afghan Migration after August 2021."

⁷⁵ Government of Pakistan, "Provincial Census Report: Khyber Pakhtunkhwa," 2017, https://www.pbs.gov.pk/sites/default/files/population/census_reports/pcr_kp.pdf.

⁷⁶ Government of Pakistan, "Population Census of Pakistan," 2017.

⁷⁷ Information not adjusted for the Newly Merged Districts of FATA to Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

⁷⁸ Government of Pakistan, "Population Census of Pakistan."

with major economic sectors being hospitality and tourism, education, and mining and mineral development.⁷⁹

The Labour Force Survey of 2020-21 shows that Abbottabad district has a working age population of 1 million, with more than 80% in the rural areas. Services sector has the highest employment concentration, especially in the urban areas, following by industry sector and agriculture. Majority of the women are employed in the agriculture sector (57% of economically active women). The district has an unemployment rate of 7.7%, with female unemployment (8.4%) compared to male (7.5%). About 76% of the economically active population in the district is engaged in the informal sector.⁸⁰

According to a national scale survey of 2020, Abbottabad has the highest percentage of ever attended school population in the province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (77%), and has the lowest population of out of school children in the province (7%).⁸¹ In other areas as well, Abbottabad tends to score high on provincial level indicators. For instance, mobile phone ownership (53%) and usage of internet (92.7%), proxies for integration of telecommunication and digital media, are also highest in Abbottabad in the province.

Haripur:⁸² Haripur hosts a population of 1 million people. The mainstay of Haripur district is the agriculture and horticulture sector, along with the mining sector. The Labour Force Survey 2020-21 shows that 76% of the population in Haripur is in the working age, and the district employment to population ratio is 36%. Services sector employs 36% of the labour force, followed by agriculture (34.8%) and industry (29%). Unemployment is quite high in the district at 10.6%, with female unemployment even higher 14.2% compared to male unemployment (9.4%). About 70% of the districts' labour force is engaged in informal work.

Haripur's proportion of population that has ever attended school is 71%, and 62% population has achieved primary level or higher education. About 13% of school aged children (5-16 years) are out of school in the district. About 95% households in Haripur own a mobile/smart phone and 44% have access to internet.

Mansehra: Mansehra has a population of 1.5 million. The main economic sector in Mansehra is agriculture sector, specifically fruit production, dairy and livestock sector, and route logistics to facilitate China Pakistan Economic Corridor. Mansehra's tourism industry is also thriving.⁸³ The employment to population ratio in the district is 42%, with majority of the population engaged in agriculture sector (44%), followed by services (33.4%) and industry (23%). Female employment is highest in the agriculture sector at 79%). Unemployment rate is lower than in Haripur at 7.3%. The

⁷⁹ Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Economic Zones Development and Management Company KPEZDMC, "District Abbottabad," 2020, <https://kpezdmc.org.pk/about-us>.

⁸⁰ Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, "Pakistan Labour Force Survey 2020-21," 2021, https://www.pbs.gov.pk/sites/default/files/labour_force/publications/lfs2020_21/LFS_2020-21_Report.pdf.

⁸¹ Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, "Pakistan Social and Living Standard Measurement Survey District Level 2019-20," 2020, https://www.pbs.gov.pk/sites/default/files//pslm/publications/pslm_district_2019-20/PSLM_2019_20_District_Level.pdf.

⁸² Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, "Pakistan Labour Force Survey 2020-21."

⁸³ Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Economic Zones Development and Management Company KPEZDMC, "District Wise Economic Profile: Khyber Pakhtunkhwa," 2020, https://kpezdmc-my.sharepoint.com/personal/webmaster_kpezdmc_org_pk/_layouts/15/onedrive.aspx?id=%252Fpersonal%252Fwebmaster_kpezdmc_org_pk%252FDocuments%252Fwebsite%252FDownloads%252FDistrict-wise Economic Profiles.pdf&parent=%252Fpersonal%252Fwebmaster_.

district also has high rates of underemployment (7%). About 80% of the population is engaged in informal work, with majority (40%) engaged in self-employment.

Mansehra's proportion of population that has ever attended school is 62% and 51% population has achieved primary level or higher education. About 21% of school aged children are out of school in the district. About 97% households in Mansehra own a mobile/smart phone and 37% have access to internet.

Mardan: Mardan is home 2.3 million people. Its main economic sectors are agriculture, horticulture, and manufacturing (including sugar, textiles, beverages, cigarettes, edible oil, and soap/shampoo industries). With a labour force of 827,000, Mardan's employment to population ratio is 41%. Majority of the population is engaged in the agriculture sector (42%), followed by services sector (37.3%) and industries sector (21%). Female employment (65%) is higher in the agriculture sector than male (34%). As high as 74% of the labour force is engaged in the informal sector, especially in the urban areas. Majority of the labour force is engaged in self-employment (43%), followed by those employed by others (31%). Unemployment rate is high at 10.5% with 3% of the labour force being underemployed.

Mardan's proportion of population that has ever attended school is 58% and 46% population has achieved primary level or higher education. About 20% of school aged children are out of school in the district. About 96% households in Mardan own a mobile/smart phone and 38% have access to internet.

Peshawar: Peshawar is the capital of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, and hosts a population of 4.2 million. The main economic sectors in Peshawar include agriculture, horticulture, manufacturing, services and pharmaceutical industries.

With a labour force of 1.5 million, Peshawar has an employment to population ratio of 44%. Majority of the labour force is engaged in the services sector (49%), followed by industries (26.2%) and agriculture (25%). Female employment is highest in the agriculture sector (54%). 70% of the labour force is involved in informal sector, with majority working as employees (44%). Unemployment in Peshawar is at 8% with 2.2% of the labour force underemployed.

Peshawar's proportion of population that has ever attended school is 61% and 50% population has achieved primary level or higher education. About 25% of school aged children are out of school in the district. About 95% households in Peshawar own a mobile/smart phone and 50% have access to internet.

Local migration dynamics from Khyber Pakhtunkhwa

While the top districts of origin for international migration of Pakistani nationals, including irregular migration, are located in Punjab province in Pakistan as covered in PARIM-I, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa ranks second in terms of rate of emigration from Pakistan, and has an increasing emigration trend.⁸⁴ Between 1981-2023 (June), 26% of all registered emigrants originate from Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (compared to 52% from Punjab).⁸⁵

⁸⁴ BEOE, "Labour Migration Report 2020," 2020, <https://beoe.gov.pk/files/statistics/yearly-reports/2020/2020-full.pdf>.

⁸⁵ BEOE, "Statement Showing the Number of Pakistanis Registered for Employment Abroad during the Period 1981-2023 (June)," Statistics and Data, 2023, <https://beoe.gov.pk/files/statistics/2023/district.pdf>.

Table 2 Number of emigrants from select districts in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa

District	Number of emigrants			
	2021	2022	2023 (as of June)	Total (1981-2023 June)
Abbottabad	3,802	9,583	4,559	153,817
Hariupur	2,477	6,326	3,163	97,481
Mansehra	3,158	9,504	4,237	142,163
Mardan	6,968	20,937	9,312	272,256
Peshawar	5,279	16,078	8,140	246,974
Pakistan	288,280	832,339	395,166	12,248,426

Source: BEOE 2023⁸⁶

Majority of the emigration from Khyber Pakhtunkhwa is by men, and the share of women in international migration is very low. As of 2020, the share of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa in total female emigration of Pakistan was only 3%.⁸⁷

Unemployment rate in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa is the highest in the country (8.8%) compared to other provinces.⁸⁸ Considering that poor economic conditions and high unemployment often tend to be the main driver of migration from Pakistan, many people from the province are compelled to seek economic opportunities abroad in the absence of domestic safety nets.⁸⁹ A heavy majority of these migrants go through legal routes, largely towards the Gulf countries.^{90,91}

Besides migration through regular channels, there is a more visible trend of opting for irregular routes to reach Europe by individuals from Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. A 2021 study by the Crisis Response and Policy Centre indicates that most of the Pakistani arrivals in the Western Balkan countries are Pashtuns who report security concerns and financial issues as main drivers for migrating.⁹² In fact, the report notes that many of those migrating from Khyber Pakhtunkhwa were actually internally displaced due to military operations and border skirmishes before initiating the journey, highlighting driving forces beyond the economic factors.

⁸⁶ BEOE.

⁸⁷ BEOE, "Labour Migration Report 2020."

⁸⁸ Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, "Pakistan Labour Force Survey 2020-21."

⁸⁹ IOM, "Pakistan: Survey on Drivers of Migration - Migrants in Europe during Covid-19," 2021.

⁹⁰ Bureau of Emigration and Overseas Employment, "Annual Analysis of Manpower Export 2019," 2019.

⁹¹ Muhammad Rafiq, Muhammad Saeed, and Muhammad Israr, "A Qualitative Study of the Factors Driving the Temporary Migration of Workers from the Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan to Saudi Arabia," *Journal of Humanities, Social And Management Sciences (JHSMS)* 3, no. 1 (2022): 2788–4791, <https://www.ideapublishers.org/index.php/jhsms/article/view/701/283>.

⁹² Saman Ali Vještica and Maja Dragojević, "Game People: Irregular Migration and Risks," 2021, <https://data.unhcr.org/en/documents/download/89058>.

3. Drivers and patterns of onward migration of Afghans from Pakistan

3.1. Introduction

This section delves deeper into the dynamics of onward migration, especially focusing on population groups displaced by conflict. It examines the factors that contribute to onward migration decision-making, and identifies the parameters that distinguish these factors from decision-making factors of potential migrants in countries of origin. Furthermore, this chapter also puts forth the main macro, meso, and micro drivers of migration for Afghan nationals living in Pakistan.

3.2. Reasons for onward migration in forced migration contexts

While there is a plethora of literature exploring aspirations and drivers of migration in general, onward migration especially in the context of forced migration has received limited attention in the past.⁹³ Aspirations or needs for onward migration in forced migration scenarios require close attention to the factors at play in countries of temporary stay, or “transit countries”. The notion of “transit countries” itself is contested in migration literature especially because of its contextualisation within the European migration debate, with references to transit countries usually directed at the EU neighbouring countries, and the transit zones in Saharan Africa and the Middle East.⁹⁴ This section makes references to “transit country” in a broad sense to discuss onward migration decisions, rather than problematizing it conceptually. Moreover, it refers to “transit” countries for the specific case of those who wish to migrate onwards, and is cognizant of the fact that many migrants may in fact be settled in more permanent situations in the same countries, and there may be other migration dynamics at play.

Existing evidence suggests that decisions of onward (irregular) migration depend on a variety of factors in the country of origin, transit and destination. In the broadest terms, onward migration is a function of individual and personal factors, including family situation, financial resources at disposal, living standards in the country of current residence, abuse and discrimination experienced there, as well as time and financial investment made already to reach the intended destination (e.g. though an earlier failed attempt or payment to a smuggler).⁹⁵ Brekke and Beyer also refer to “path dependency” in decisions of onward migration, i.e. when migrants feel the need to keep moving and continue their journeys since they are already on the path.⁹⁶

Focusing on Afghan migrants in Greece and Türkiye, Kuschminder notes that time since arriving in the transit country also plays a role, with shorter duration of stay more likely to imply onward migration. The study finds that migrants that had been in the country for less than three years more likely to migrate onwards.⁹⁷ In addition perceptions of better living conditions in the intended destination,

⁹³ Jørgen Carling, *Measuring Migration Aspirations and Related Concepts*, 2019, www.mignex.org/d023; Hein de Haas, “The Internal Dynamics of Migration Processes: A Theoretical Inquiry,” *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 36 (2010): 1587–1617; Mathias Czaika, Jakub Bijak, and Toby Prike, “Migration Decision-Making and Its Key Dimensions,” no. 870299 (2021).

⁹⁴ Frank Düvell and Ferruccio Pasotre, “Transit, Migration and Politics Trends and Constructions on the Fringes of Europe,” 2015, https://www.compas.ox.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/ER-2008-Transit_Migration_Trends_Fringes_IMISCOE.pdf.

⁹⁵ Khalid Koser and Katie Kuschminder, “Understanding Irregular Migrants’ Decision Making Factors in Transit,” 2016, <https://www.homeaffairs.gov.au/research-and-stats/files/occasional-paper-21.pdf>.

⁹⁶ Jan-Paul Brekke and Audun Beyer, “Everyone Wants to Leave” *Transit Migration from Khartoum-The Role of Information and Social Media Campaigns*, 2019, www.samfunnsforskning.no.

⁹⁷ Katie Kuschminder, “Afghan Refugee Journeys: Onwards Migration Decision Making in Greece and Turkey,” *Journal of Refugee Studies* 31, no. 4 (2018): 566–87, <https://cadmus.eui.eu/handle/1814/50844>.

perception of security situation, existence of social networks, ease of asylum process, as well quality of social welfare play an important role as pull factors.⁹⁸

Moreover, intangible and subjective factors such as personality traits but also emotions and feelings play an important role. Kuschminder notes that for Afghan migrants in Türkiye and Greece, “hope” is one of the main driving forces behind onward migration decisions, while Scalettaris et al. find that the “fear” of societal shame and “guilt” of not fulfilling obligations to other family members also contribute to decisions on continued journeys.⁹⁹

Furthermore, Kiriscioglu and Ustubici examined the way migrants perceive and navigate risk in the context of forced migration. In doing so, they identified three main types of aspirations among Syrian and Afghan migrants in Türkiye: i) to move onwards at any cost; ii) to move onwards only with documents; and iii) to stay put in the country of presence and not move. Their findings showed that the differences in risk perceptions of the migrants, among other things, determine why certain migrants prefer to migrate onwards across the Türkiye-EU border despite prevailing risks on their journeys, and these differences in risk perceptions are very subjective depending on the migrants’ individual and personal circumstances.¹⁰⁰

For instance, those who were willing to migrate onwards at any cost perceived the risk of staying in the current location more intense than moving on. These were often those individuals who struggled to live a decent life in the country of transit, and did not merely associate risk with the dangers en route, but with the struggles of living an unfulfilled life in dire circumstances. For this group, losing “time” staying in the country, waiting for legal options to migrate (e.g. resettlement) were a bigger risk. Most individuals in this group were unmarried men, with intentions of migrating alone. On the other hand, the study also found that individuals who wished to migrate onward with valid and legal documents perceived the risk of failure along the way, and the likelihood of starting life from scratch if intercepted on migrating irregularly, as a higher price than staying put in their existing circumstances. These individuals mostly included heads of households, who were responsible for taking decisions for their families. Hence, their risk perception also took into account the repercussions of putting their families in danger on the route. In addition, a third group of individuals that preferred to stay in Türkiye rather than migrate onward included those who perceived risk in terms of clash of cultures and religious identity, and preferred to stay in an environment that resonated with their cultural and religious values, despite the everyday hardships faced.

Kiriscioglu and Ustubici’s findings reveal important insights into how individuals exercise their agency and construct migration aspirations depending on their personal risk perceptions. Furthermore, it can be inferred that since most of the study respondents had reached Türkiye without documents in the context of forced migration, they had first-hand knowledge and experience of the risks and dangers of traveling without documents, so their risk perception was also shaped by their actual experiences, rather than abstract knowledge on a potential risky situation. Therefore, aspirations and decisions on

⁹⁸ Frank Düvell, “Transit Migration in the European Migration Spaces: Politics, Determinants and Dynamics,” in *Transit Migration in Europe*, ed. Frank Düvell, (Amsterdam University Press, 2014), 209–36.

⁹⁹ Kuschminder, “Afghan Refugee Journeys: Onwards Migration Decision Making in Greece and Turkey”; Giulia Scalettaris, Alessandro Monsutti, and Antonio Donini, “Young Afghans at the Doorsteps of Europe: The Difficult Art of Being a Successful Migrant,” *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 47, no. 3 (2019): 519–35, <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/1369183X.2019.1618250?journalCode=cjms20>.

¹⁰⁰ Eda Kiriscioglu and Aysen Ustubici, “‘At Least, at the Border, I Am Killing Myself by My Own Will’: Migration Aspirations and Risk Perceptions among Syrian and Afghan Communities,” *Journal of Immigrant and Refugee Studies*, 2023, <https://doi.org/10.1080/15562948.2023.2198485>.

onward migration also depend on their previous experience and their perception of whether another attempt is “worth it” or not, based on their personal and family circumstances.

That said, most of the research focusing on onward migration decision-making of Afghans concentrate on Türkiye and Greece, with limited attention to other countries that may have been part of the fragmented journey towards Europe.¹⁰¹ There are very few studies that delve deeper into the dynamics at play in neighbouring countries of Afghanistan, especially Iran and Pakistan. In the following subsection, the main factors that may contribute to onward migration decisions of Afghans from Pakistan are discussed.

3.3. Drivers of onward migration of Afghans from Pakistan

Currently, there are limited studies that empirically capture the drivers of migration for Afghan nationals living in Pakistan. Migration is a social process and depends on the interaction of different factors that shape or influence the decision to migrate or stay. However, for Afghans the space to make migration decisions based on their choices, aspirations and preferences is subject to the broader structural and intermediary factors that remain out of their control.¹⁰² In other words, a range of macro, meso and micro factors interact to motivate or compel Afghans in Pakistan to consider migration.

A 2021 survey by Mielke et al. highlights the multi-layered drivers of migration for Afghans in Pakistan, especially towards Europe.¹⁰³ Somewhat surprisingly, their survey shows that the vast majority of their sample (82%) preferred to stay in Pakistan rather than consider migration. However, the research was conducted before the full extent of consequences of the Taliban takeover in Afghanistan evolved. It seems likely that migration aspirations have changed since then.

The factors discussed below are based on data from Afghans residing in Pakistan for a longer time. Yet, similar factors may also influence migration decisions of those fleeing from Afghanistan since 2021. Recently migrated Afghans are in a difficult position. They are unable to start and build a new life in Pakistan owing to the lack of any longer-term protection facilities offered to them; they cannot go back to Afghanistan considering the threat of persecution at the hands of the new Taliban regime and the deteriorating human rights situation in the country, especially pertaining to women and girls; and they have limited international support in accessing legal migration pathways to other destinations.¹⁰⁴

This leaves many of them with little choice but to attempt dangerous migration journeys from Pakistan through irregular channels in pursuit of safety and security, and a chance to access basic human rights. A 2021 study conducted by MMC among 436 newly arrived Afghans (post August 2021) in Türkiye shows that for 37% respondents, Pakistan was the main transit country in their migration journey (compared to Iran for 84% of the respondents).¹⁰⁵ Before the Taliban takeover, the percentage of Afghans starting their irregular migration journey towards Türkiye from Pakistan was quite low, as found by a survey by Buz et al. in 2020 who report that among Afghans in Türkiye, only 19.4%

¹⁰¹ Kuschminder, “Afghan Refugee Journeys: Onwards Migration Decision Making in Greece and Turkey.”

¹⁰² Sema Buz et al., “Destination Unknown Afghans on the Move in Turkey,” 2020, https://mixedmigration.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/115_destination_unknown_research_report.pdf.

¹⁰³ Mielke et al., “Figurations of Displacement in and beyond Pakistan: Empirical Findings and Reflections on Protracted Displacement and Translocal Connections of Afghans.”

¹⁰⁴ International Rescue Committee, “Two Years on: Afghans Still Lack Pathways to Safety in the EU,” 2023, https://www.rescue.org/sites/default/files/2023-05/P%26A2305_Safe_pathways_for_Afghans_Report_Final_web.pdf.

¹⁰⁵ Mixed Migration Centre, “Afghans En Route to Turkey: Routes, Protection Risks, and Access to Assistance,” 2021, https://mixedmigration.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/198_4Mi_Snapshot_Afghans_en_route_to_Turkey_updated.pdf.pdf.

mentioned moving first from Afghanistan to Pakistan, and then to Iran and Türkiye.¹⁰⁶ This indicates that while Pakistan hosts a bulk of Afghan refugees for decades, for most Afghan migrants, Pakistan is not the preferred transit country for their journey towards the West, rather their journey usually takes them from Afghanistan straight to Iran, and then onwards. However, it can be drawn that the desperate situation created after August 2021 led more people to attempt irregular migration also through Pakistan.

Some broad factors that contribute to migration decision-making, specifically for the case of Afghans are discussed in the sections below.

3.3.1. Macro or structural factors

Macro factors constitute those that are largely independent from the individual. These relate to broader structural landscape as well as the general domestic economic, political and security environment of the country that may influence migration decisions.¹⁰⁷ In section 2.3.2, the main structural factors that shape Afghan migrants' experience in Pakistan have been discussed at length. These include **restrictions to the formal labour market, shrinking space for legal protection, limited validity of legal status, declining humanitarian support, lack of a pathway to citizenship, difficulties in accessing affordable accommodation, obstacles in achieving higher education, poor healthcare etc.** All these factors contribute to circumstances that may motivate some Afghan migrants to consider onward migration

In addition, **the overall economic and development context in Pakistan** that affects both the local population as well as Afghan nationals. Soaring inflation, sluggish economic performance and volatile political situation in Pakistan have influenced Afghan migration decisions, including return to Afghanistan in the last two years. In the first quarter of 2023, some 1,255 Afghans (293 households) returned voluntarily from Pakistan to Afghanistan, with 73% citing socioeconomic challenges/inflation as the main reason for the decision.¹⁰⁸ This is the time when inflation in Pakistan reached as high as 38% in April 2023, its highest in 48 years.¹⁰⁹

Particularly in 2022 and leading into 2023, the culmination of different macro factors including the no-confidence vote against the government, mega floods in the summer, the depreciating value of the Pakistani rupee and the fast depleting Pakistani foreign reserves has created a dire situation for locals and migrants alike. In the mega floods of Pakistan in 2022, 41 of the districts that were severely affected host about 800,000 Afghan nationals.¹¹⁰ Those that are already living on the margins of the society, including undocumented Afghan citizens, are particularly facing the brunt. It is estimated that Afghans in Pakistan constitute 70% of the 11 million most vulnerable population in Pakistan in 2021.¹¹¹ Even those with PoR status are increasingly considering voluntary repatriation to Afghanistan experiencing difficulties in paying rent and accessing utilities.¹¹²

¹⁰⁶ Buz et al., "Destination Unknown Afghans on the Move in Turkey."

¹⁰⁷ Francesco Castelli, "Drivers of Migration: Why Do People Move?," *Journal of Travel Medicine* 25, no. 1 (2018), <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1093/jtm/tay040>.

¹⁰⁸ UNHCR, "Pakistan: Voluntary Repatriation of Afghan Refugees (1 January to 31 March 2023)."

¹⁰⁹ Al Jazeera, "Pakistan Inflation Hits Record for Second Consecutive Month," June 2, 2023, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/6/2/pakistan-inflation-hits-record-for-second-consecutive-month>.

¹¹⁰ UNHCR, "Regional Refugee Response Plan for Afghanistan Situation 2023."

¹¹¹ UN OCHA, "Pakistan Humanitarian Response Plan 2021," 2021, <https://reliefweb.int/report/pakistan/pakistan-humanitarian-re-sponse-plan-2021-april-2021>.

¹¹² European Union Agency for Asylum (EUAA), "Pakistan Situation of Afghan Refugees: Country of Origin Information Report."

3.3.2. Meso or intermediary factors

Castelli defines meso factors as those elements that are closely tied to the individual but not completely under the individual's control.¹¹³ These are the factors that may facilitate or hamper the decision to migrate. These include developments in the policy sphere that may motivate or discourage migration decisions of Afghans in Pakistan, the general discourse and policy narrative on Afghan migrants in Pakistan, social networks, and availability of information sources etc.

Policy narrative and treatment of Afghan nationals: The overall political and developmental narrative in Pakistan also contributes to the negative profiling of Afghans in Pakistan, especially evident since 2014. Since the Peshawar school attack in 2014 and the speculated involvement of some Afghan miscreants, the image of Afghans in Pakistan as a security concern has risen, and their racial profiling has intensified. Increasingly, political statements portray Afghans as a burden on Pakistani resources. Many Afghans have been forced to sell their assets and return to Afghanistan due to increasingly hostile policy discourse. This narrative negates and ignores any positive contributions of Afghan population to Pakistan, and presents them as a liability to take care of. Heightened policy hostility towards Afghan nationals is often observed in the form of random arrests, destruction of settlements, confiscation of documents, demand for bribes etc.¹¹⁴

Increase in rate of returns from Pakistan: The UNHCR suspended forced returns of Afghans since the shift in powers in August 2021. However, the rate of forced returns and deportations enforced by the Government of Pakistan actually increased in the past two years. In 2021, 437 Afghans were returned to Afghanistan from Pakistan.¹¹⁵

Arbitrary detention of Afghan nationals in Pakistan has become increasingly common in a politicised and securitised policy environment. In a new wave of heightened surveillance and crackdown on undocumented Afghans in Pakistan, Pakistan detained 1500 Afghan nationals who did not have proper documentation in November 2022.¹¹⁶ Detainees also included women and children.¹¹⁷ On their release, they were immediately deported to Afghanistan.¹¹⁸

Limited and slow resettlement options and humanitarian admissions: Between 2003 and 2021, about 9000 Afghans were resettled from Pakistan to other countries. In the period of 2016-2019, resettlement processing dwindled to almost zero. Resettlement processing for Afghan nationals has been excruciatingly slow, with high rejection rates. The TRAFIG survey shows that 94% of the sample had never applied or been advised to apply for resettlement to another country, and of 6% of who did apply for resettlement, 50% were waiting for a decision, 33% had received rejection, and the remaining were unaware of their status.¹¹⁹

In light of the recent situation in Afghanistan, resettlement needs have increased, however there is a widening gap in terms of number of commitments, applications processed and people resettled. Out of the 600,000 newly arrived Afghans in Pakistan, only 20,000 have referrals for resettlement in the US

¹¹³ Castelli, "Drivers of Migration: Why Do People Move?"

¹¹⁴ Human Rights Watch, "'What Are You Doing Here?' Police Abuses against Afghans in Pakistan," 2015, https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/report_pdf/pakistan1115_4up.pdf.

¹¹⁵ UNHCR, "Situation Reports 2018-2021," 2021, <https://reporting.unhcr.org/situation-reports-2018-2021?sitcode=310>.

¹¹⁶ Mixed Migration Centre, "The Changing Dynamics of Afghan Migration after August 2021."

¹¹⁷ Ebrahim, "Afghan Refugees Fear Return as Pakistan Cracks Down on Migrants."

¹¹⁸ International Rescue Committee, "Two Years on: Afghans Still Lack Pathways to Safety in the EU."

¹¹⁹ Mielke et al., "Figurations of Displacement in and beyond Pakistan: Empirical Findings and Reflections on Protracted Displacement and Translocal Connections of Afghans."

Refugees Admissions Programme, and the process is at a standstill due to some administrative and bureaucratic disagreements between the governments of Pakistan and the US.¹²⁰

From the European side, less than 5000 Afghan refugees have been resettled in the EU member states since 2010.¹²¹ Between 2021 and 2022, EU member states pledged to accept 36,000 Afghans based on humanitarian grounds and 1,100 through the resettlement pathway.¹²² The quota for humanitarian admissions was further increased by the EU states in 2022, pledging to admit another 13,000 Afghans in 2023.

Despite these pledges and commitments to increase pathways for resettlement, family reunification and other protection avenues targeted at the Afghan population, data shows slow progress. A recent report by the International Rescue Committee (IRC) shows that in 2022, only 19 Afghans were resettled globally from Pakistan (and 153 from Iran), which is a negligible proportion of the 270,000 Afghans in need of resettlement from Pakistan and Iran.¹²³ Existing needs require for the EU to resettle at least 42,500 Afghans within the next five years, as estimated by the IRC. ¹²⁴ About 41,500 Afghans were admitted to the EU through ad hoc emergency evacuations in August 2021. The IRC states that, “practical or bureaucratic hurdles – including narrow eligibility criteria, strict evidentiary requirements, and low processing capacity – are limiting the scale, pace, and progress of EU efforts to bring Afghans to safety.”¹²⁵ More recently, in March 2023, Germany temporarily halted work on processing admission applications from Afghan nationals owing to alleged attempts to take undue advantage of the system, further slowing down the process.¹²⁶ ICMPD’s Silk Routes Migration Outlook 2022 notes that insufficient protection services and limited legal means for settlement would likely contribute to irregular movements as Afghans seek protection.¹²⁷

Social cohesion: Due to familial, ethnic, religious and linguistic ties, many Afghans have strong social networks within specific areas in Pakistan that help them navigate life in an environment where Afghans are legally barred from many simple activities such as acquiring a driver’s licence, owning any property or business and sometimes even renting property.¹²⁸ While sentiments of hospitality, sympathy, and comradeship among Pakistanis for Afghans was high in the initial phases of Afghan displacement to Pakistan, the intensity of those sentiments is gradually fading over time and there is a rise of negative perceptions among common Pakistanis for Afghan nationals in Pakistan.¹²⁹

The protracted nature of Afghan displacement in Pakistan intersects with the prevalent economic, social, political and security-related situation in Pakistan, as well as the political narrative on Afghans

¹²⁰ Cone and Khan, “‘They Left Us without Any Support’ Afghans in Pakistan Waiting for Solutions.”

¹²¹ International Rescue Committee, “Two Years on: Afghans Still Lack Pathways to Safety in the EU.”

¹²² International Rescue Committee.

¹²³ International Rescue Committee.

¹²⁴ Lisa O’Carroll, “EU Accused of ‘Staggering Neglect’ after Just 271 Afghans Resettled across Bloc,” *The Guardian*, May 31, 2023, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/may/31/eu-accused-of-staggering-neglect-after-just-271-afghans-resettled-across-bloc>.

¹²⁵ International Rescue Committee, “Two Years on: Afghans Still Lack Pathways to Safety in the EU.”

¹²⁶ InfoMigrants, “Germany Announces Temporary Halt for Afghan Admissions,” March 30, 2023, <https://www.infomigrants.net/en/post/47862/germany-announces-temporary-halt-for-afghan-admissions>.

¹²⁷ ICMPD, “Migration Outlook Silk Routes 2022 South and West Asia.”

¹²⁸ Asif Javed et al., “Socio-Economic Inclusion of Afghan Refugees in Pakistan” (Islamabad, 2020), https://sdpi.org/socio-economic-inclusion-of-afghan-refugees-in-pakistan/publication_detail.

¹²⁹ European Union Agency for Asylum (EUAA), “Pakistan Situation of Afghan Refugees: Country of Origin Information Report.”

in Pakistan, diminishing the local community's appetite for hosting and co-existence.¹³⁰ Such sentiments are translated into the everyday lives of Afghans in the form of discrimination, vilification and negative profiling, leading to hostility towards the Afghans by the local population. While social cohesion among the Afghans in Pakistan and the local population has seen a considerable degree of erosion, these sentiments do not drive out many Afghans who have been settled in Pakistan for many years, unless enforced through a policy move (e.g. forced return).¹³¹

Lack of information on available safe migration pathways: Lack of information among newly arrived Afghans can be categorised into two types: information about available resources in Pakistan for them, and information on onward migration options available to them. For those who arrived from Afghanistan recently and do not have strong social networks in Pakistan, there is a general lack of information available about the next steps in terms of where to get help, where to live, and how to provide for themselves. In terms of eligibility, most services are targeted only towards registered Afghan nationals in Pakistan, and not those arriving on visa or irregularly. .¹³²

Secondly, there is a serious dearth of reliable, accessible, and transparent information on the safe and official legal migration pathways available to Afghan nationals. Long waiting periods to get appointments at embassies, lack of relevant documents and difficulty in acquiring those documents, as well as slow processing administrative procedures on humanitarian protection corridors and resettlement leave many in confusion.

Lack of services and work, lack of legal migration pathways, and lack of information about either make irregular migration a compelling alternative. Many attempt irregular migration without acquiring the necessary information to prepare for the journey. A survey conducted by Mixed Migration Centre (MMC) among Afghans who arrived in Türkiye after the Taliban takeover in 2021 shows that only 5% respondents mentioned they had the necessary information before setting on the journey to Türkiye. About 47% of respondents did not access information on routes, destinations, costs and risks before embarking on the perilous journey to Türkiye.¹³³ The main reason for not preparing oneself with sufficient information was the sudden departure that many had to make from Afghanistan considering the dire security situation.

Official information sources for accessible migration pathways are often not updated regularly to capture the changing scenario or are too slow to respond to queries of those seeking information. Many official sources also do not respond to queries of those interested to know more, hence driving people to other informal sources of information, including family and friends outside of Afghanistan, to gather required information.¹³⁴ Moreover, there is a general distrust among Afghans on the move toward official sources of information, especially in relation to attempting irregular migration, as most of the campaigns tend to discourage migration attempts towards Europe.¹³⁵

The void created by the lack of official reliable sources has been filled by smugglers with disinformation, or informal sources leading to widespread incomplete or misinformation on social

¹³⁰ Mielke et al., "Figurations of Displacement in and beyond Pakistan: Empirical Findings and Reflections on Protracted Displacement and Translocal Connections of Afghans."

¹³¹ Mielke et al.

¹³² International Rescue Committee, "Two Years on: Afghans Still Lack Pathways to Safety in the EU."

¹³³ Mixed Migration Centre, "Afghans En Route to Turkey: Access to Critical Information," 2022, https://mixedmigration.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/230_-Afghans_en_route_to_Turkey.pdf.

¹³⁴ International Rescue Committee, "Two Years on: Afghans Still Lack Pathways to Safety in the EU."

¹³⁵ Mixed Migration Centre, "Afghans En Route to Turkey: Access to Critical Information."

media and other platforms, especially once migrants are on the way.¹³⁶ With many official and non-official sources claiming to provide reliable information on safe and legal migration pathways, there is also confusion on how to identify actual trustworthy sources.

3.3.3. Micro or personal factors

Micro factors include individual's household, and personal characteristics and attitudes. These include individual's socioeconomic status including income level, education, age, geographic location, marital status, as well as perceptions, knowledge, confidence level, personal behaviour, attitude, and willingness towards migration.¹³⁷

With dearth of data on profile of irregular Afghan migrants transiting through Pakistan, this section broadly draws on information available on the general profile of Afghan migrants towards Europe in other contexts. Pre-fall of Kabul in 2021, the general profile of Afghan nationals migrating to Europe was predominantly young men. IOM's Survey on Drivers of Migration in Afghanistan presents a comprehensive assessment of demographic characteristics of potential migrants from that time, also differentiated for the intended countries of destination.¹³⁸ According to the IOM survey, a sweeping majority (99%) of the respondents were male, and half of them were between the ages of 16 and 24 years old, while 82% of the respondents were in the age category of 16 – 34 years. Among the women respondents (only 1%), the age group of 25 – 30 years was also significant (30% compared to 36% between the ages of 16 and 24 years). About half of the total respondents (48%) were married, and 42% had children.

Post-August 2021, there have been striking changes in socio-demographic characteristics of Afghan migrants. While migration was previously predominantly male, UNHCR reports that about 74% of Afghans arriving in neighbouring countries are women and children. Drivers include the shrinking space for women's participation in socioeconomic activities in Afghanistan as well as rising threat of gender-based violence and general discrimination.¹³⁹

Aside from UNHCR reports, there is limited empirical information on the personal characteristics of those arriving in Pakistan in the last two years and attempting onward migration, especially to Europe. Based on data gathered from ICMPD's Migrant Resource Centres (MRC) in Pakistan, Afghan nationals in Pakistan who have reached out to MRC have largely been in the age range of 18-45 years, with limited skillset and education. While MRC clients have been predominantly male (87% in 2022), Afghan women have also actively reached out to the MRC to seek guidance on migration-related matters.^{140 141}

Some inferences about Afghan migrants on their way to Europe can be drawn based on studies conducted elsewhere. MMC conducted a survey among recently arriving Afghans in Türkiye post August 2021 to understand their common information gaps and needs.¹⁴² Among the sample of 1,540 respondents 82% were men, largely between the ages of 18 and 30 (78%), hailing from urban areas in Afghanistan (64%), with majority having at least secondary level of education (45%). About 58% of the total sample had arrived in Türkiye without documents.

¹³⁶ Mixed Migration Centre.

¹³⁷ Castelli, "Drivers of Migration: Why Do People Move?"

¹³⁸ IOM, "Afghanistan - Survey on Drivers of Migration - Round 2 (November 2020 - March 2021)," 2021, <https://dtm.iom.int/reports/afghanistan-survey-drivers-migration-round-2-november-2020-march-2021>.

¹³⁹ UNHCR, "Regional Refugee Response Plan for Afghanistan Situation 2023."

¹⁴⁰ Migrant Resource Centre Pakistan, "Awareness Raising and Information Campaigns on the Risks of Irregular Migration in Pakistan (PARIM) - Monthly Reports," 2022.

¹⁴¹ Migrant Resource Centre, "Trend Analysis: Migrant Resource Centre - Afghanistan (Sep- Nov 2022)," n.d.

¹⁴² Mixed Migration Centre, "Afghans En Route to Turkey: Access to Critical Information."

Through their survey study completed just before the fall of Kabul (March 2021), Mielke et al. found that migration aspirations also intersect with the **timing** of their migration to, and according duration of stay, in Pakistan. First generation migrants, especially those that moved to Pakistan in the 1990s and 1980s prefer staying in Pakistan, while second and third generation Afghans, especially those born in Pakistan seek to move to third countries. In addition, it is also found that younger Afghans, particularly those born in Pakistan and better educated have higher aspirations to move to other countries.¹⁴³ Those with stronger **educational background** and English speaking skills strive for legal migration options. However, evidence suggests that migration aspirations among Afghans in Pakistan to Europe are also high among the less-skilled, less-educated and those with less income, however they have limited opportunities to migrate regularly.¹⁴⁴

It is also important to understand that those fleeing Afghanistan after August 2021 also include specific **at-risk population groups** that are directly under threat by the Taliban. These include Afghans engaged in the military during the US-supported government, judges, journalists, human rights activists, religious minority groups such as the Shia Hazaras, LGBTQ+, artists, musicians, and singers, etc.¹⁴⁵ A vast majority of these at-risk individuals did not receive any evacuation support, and hence were forced to resort to other temporary destinations or even opt for irregular channels for getting out of Afghanistan.¹⁴⁶

Ethnic minorities, such as the Shiite Hazara community – the majority of whom moved to Pakistan from Afghanistan and Iran - face persecution, discrimination and abuse in rising cases of sectarian violence in Pakistan. Identifiable because of their physical appearance, they are frequently targeted by Sunni extremist groups in Balochistan, where they have a community of 600,000.¹⁴⁷ To escape persecution, many Hazara men and women attempt to migrate to Europe through Iran and Türkiye.

In terms of **geographic location**, there is a lack of information on where the newly arrived Afghan nationals (post August 2021) are situated.¹⁴⁸ It is assumed that the newly arrived Afghans stay in areas where they have social connections including friends and family. These would be largely districts in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan. Based on queries received at the MRCs Pakistan, most Afghans in Pakistan reached out to the MRC from Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province.¹⁴⁹

In terms of **risk perceptions and knowledge** about the migration process, a 2016 Farsight (now Seefar) report finds that in general, Afghan (and Iranian) migrants are better informed about the migration process as compared to other nationalities that were attempting irregular journeys to Europe at that time, including Eriterians, Sudanese, and Syrians.¹⁵⁰ They find that Afghan migrants demonstrated greater degree of confidence and certainty in terms of what they will experience along the journey

¹⁴³ Mielke et al., “Figurations of Displacement in and beyond Pakistan: Empirical Findings and Reflections on Protracted Displacement and Translocal Connections of Afghans.”

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

¹⁴⁵ Ebrahim, “Afghan Refugees Fear Return as Pakistan Cracks Down on Migrants.”

¹⁴⁶ Bernhard Perching et al., “Analyse Der Zusammenhänge Zwischen Schutz, Entwicklungschancen Und Entscheidungen Über Irreguläre Migration In Einem Transitland,” 2022, https://www.icmpd.org/file/download/58145/file/IKAM%2520Final%2520Report_DE_2022.pdf.

¹⁴⁷ Shah Meer Baloch, “‘Every Year We Dig Mass Graves’: The Slaughter of Pakistan’s Hazara,” *The Guardian*, April 2021, <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2021/apr/05/mass-graves-pakistan-shia-minority-hazara-slaughter-imran-khan>.

¹⁴⁸ Cone and Khan, “‘They Left Us without Any Support’ Afghans in Pakistan Waiting for Solutions.”

¹⁴⁹ Migrant Resource Centre Pakistan, “Awareness Raising and Information Campaigns on the Risks of Irregular Migration in Pakistan (PARIM) - Monthly Reports.”

¹⁵⁰ Farsight, “Irregular Migration to the European Union What’s Special about Afghans?,” 2016, <https://seefar.org/wp-content/uploads/Seefar-Irregular-Migration-to-the-European-Union.pdf>.

and at the destination than others. More recently a survey conducted by MMC in 2022 among newly arrived Afghan migrants in Türkiye shows that even after personally experiencing the risks and hardships of an irregular journey from Afghanistan to Türkiye, 68% of the 1,540 respondents reported that they would have embarked on the journey anyway, knowing full well the dangers they could witness.¹⁵¹ This was also observed in an earlier study among Afghans in Türkiye (2020), which shows that 46% (n=341) reported that they would have still started the journey knowing the full extent of risks, while 19% said they were undecided.¹⁵² The same study also reported that almost 48% reported that nothing would make them abandon their migration journey. It may indicate that the risk of remaining in Afghanistan (or other areas along the journey) were much higher for them than setting on a perilous journey.

3.4. Destination choices of Afghan migrants

Majority of Afghans living in Pakistan, especially those settled for years or decades, **do not move out of the region**. Many of them lead a transnational way of life which largely includes temporary movements between Pakistan, Afghanistan and Iran.¹⁵³ However, as highlighted above, young Afghans and those newly arrived tend to have strong motivations to migrate out of the region. The idea of migrating “West” and to “Europe” is common, without having a particular destination in mind. Some studies have also noted that the presence of Western forces, international development agencies and INGOs in Afghanistan have also inspired a desire in many young Afghans to consider these destinations.¹⁵⁴ Afghan nationals who were affiliated with the Western and European missions in Afghanistan, and have not been evacuated but have managed to arrive in Pakistan since the Taliban takeover also experience a sense of abandonment by these countries and there is an expectation that they would be resettled to those countries if their resettlement referrals are processed.¹⁵⁵ There are very few studies specifically on Afghans living in Pakistan and their onward migration. This section therefore largely discusses destination choices of Afghans in general.

IOM’s survey conducted in Afghanistan on the drivers of migration shows linkages of personal characteristics comprising of socio-demographic factors that determine the choice of destination. For instance, age, marital status and family situation played a role in determining the destination choice. Potential migrants planning to migrate to Pakistan and Iran were more likely to be older than those with the intention to go to Europe and Türkiye. Majority of the married respondents (57%) chose Pakistan and Iran as their destination choice. Similarly, those with children also largely preferred the two neighbouring countries as their destination choice. In contrast, unmarried respondents, and female respondents were more likely to report Europe and Türkiye as their preferred destinations.¹⁵⁶

Europe as a destination is a popular aspiration for Afghans in general, but opportunities to legally reach there are extremely tight for Afghan migrants. Based on qualitative research conducted among Afghan migrants transiting through the Western Balkans, the project “Information measures and capacity building on asylum, legal and irregular migration in Afghanistan, Iraq and the Western Balkans (IKAM)” finds that journeys towards Europe often constitute a mix of regular and irregular migration phases. The report highlights cases of some Afghan migrants who arrived in their initial intended destinations with valid visas (e.g. in Pakistan or UAE), but later decided to migrate towards Europe irregularly in

¹⁵¹ Mixed Migration Centre, “Afghans En Route to Turkey: Access to Critical Information.”

¹⁵² Buz et al., “Destination Unknown Afghans on the Move in Turkey.”

¹⁵³ Mielke et al., “Figurations of Displacement in and beyond Pakistan: Empirical Findings and Reflections on Protracted Displacement and Translocal Connections of Afghans.”

¹⁵⁴ Farsight, “Irregular Migration to the European Union What’s Special about Afghans?”

¹⁵⁵ Cone and Khan, “‘They Left Us without Any Support’ Afghans in Pakistan Waiting for Solutions.”

¹⁵⁶ IOM, “Afghanistan - Survey on Drivers of Migration - Round 2 (November 2020 - March 2021).”

absence of feasible legal options.¹⁵⁷ Perceptions of Afghan migrants in transit, as reported in the IKAM study, also highlight how European countries are perceived as trustworthy, offering plentiful opportunities to start a new life.

Cumulative data on legal arrivals from Afghanistan to the EU-27 are not available, however, the Eurostat dataset¹⁵⁸ shows that based on selected reporting countries, 6,959 people immigrated to European countries in 2020 and 9,930 in 2021.¹⁵⁹ In 2021, about 60,475 Afghans were found to be “illegally”¹⁶⁰ present in the EU-27.¹⁶¹ The same year (2021), about 1,635 Afghans were denied entry at the EU external borders, compared to 2,275 in 2019 and 1,585 in 2020.¹⁶² Data is not available for the year 2022 on the Eurostat website. Between 2021 and July 2023, a total of 33,575 arrivals have been noted by IOM from Afghanistan to the EU.¹⁶³

In the past two years, especially considering the heightened humanitarian needs in Afghanistan, there is a significant increase in the number of Afghans arriving in the EU member states and applying for asylum, making Afghans the second largest population group seeking asylum in Europe. According to the Eurostat data, number of first time asylum applications by Afghans doubled in 2021 (84,555) from 2020 (44,285) and continued to increase in 2022 (114,290).¹⁶⁴

There has also been a change in the countries of asylum applications. In 2020, **Greece** received the highest number of asylum applications from Afghans (11,100).¹⁶⁵ In comparison, the highest number of applications in 2021 and 2022 were filed in **Germany** (23,275 and 36,360 respectively). In 2022, **France** and **Austria** have also received more applications than the previous years. First-time applications by Afghans went from 16,005 in 2021 to 22,585 in 2022 in France, and in Austria, the number increased from 8,050 in 2021 to 24,445 in 2022. Conversely, in **Italy**, the number of applications decreased in the same time period from 5,235 in 2021 to 2,100 in 2022, and in **Romania** from 3,905 in 2021 to 445 in 2022.¹⁶⁶ Considering the humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan, the EU+ recognition rate for Afghans increased from 31% in 2017 to 64% in 2021, but declined in 2022 to 54%.¹⁶⁷ The main reason cited for this decline is the higher number of cases granted humanitarian

¹⁵⁷ Perchinig et al., “Analyse Der Zusammenhänge Zwischen Schutz, Entwicklungschancen Und Entscheidungen Über Irreguläre Migration In Einem Transitland.”

¹⁵⁸ Eurostat, “Immigration by Age Group, Sex and Citizenship,” Immigration Dataset, 2022, https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/MIGR_IMM1CTZ__custom_6868388/default/table?lang=en.

¹⁵⁹ Reporting countries in 2020: Bulgaria, Czechia, Denmark, Croatia, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Hungary, the Netherlands, Austria, Romania (only in 2021), Slovenia, Slovakia, Finland, Sweden (only in 2020), Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway, and Switzerland.

¹⁶⁰ Terminology as used in the Eurostat dataset.

¹⁶¹ Eurostat, “Third Country Nationals Found to Be Illegally Present - Annual Data (Rounded),” Enforcement of Immigration Legislation, 2023, https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/MIGR_EIPRE__custom_6968167/default/table?lang=en.

¹⁶² Eurostat, “Third Country Nationals Refused Entry at the External Borders - Annual Data (Rounded),” Enforcement of Immigration Legislation, 2022, https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/MIGR_EIRFS__custom_6968127/default/table?lang=en.

¹⁶³ IOM, “Arrivals,” Displacement Tracking Matrix, 2023, <https://dtm.iom.int/europe/arrivals>.

¹⁶⁴ Eurostat, “Asylum Applicants by Type of Applicant, Citizenship, Age and Sex - Annual Aggregated Data,” Asylum Dataset, 2022, https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/MIGR_ASYAPPCTZA__custom_6863545/default/table?lang=en.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid.

¹⁶⁷ EUAA, “Latest Asylum Trends - Annual Overview 2022,” 2023, <https://euaa.europa.eu/latest-asylum-trends-annual-overview-2022#:~:text=The EU%2B recognition rate for Afghans was 54 %25 in 2022,towards the EU%2B recognition rate.>

protection under national law, which is not included in the definition of recognition rate.¹⁶⁸ In 2021, for Afghans recognition rates have ranged from 11% in Bulgaria to 99% in Poland and Spain.¹⁶⁹

The number of applications filed by Afghan unaccompanied minors arriving in Europe also witnessed an increase in the past two years. In total, the EU-27 countries received 12,375 in 2021 and 17,670 in 2022 as compared to 5,495 in 2020.¹⁷⁰ The majority were boys (17,430 in 2022) between the ages of 16 and 17 (12,610 in 2022). Austria received the highest number of applications by unaccompanied Afghan migrants (3,365 in 2021 and 9,370 in 2022).

In a 2016 report, Farsight reports that the main factors that determine Afghan migrants' preference for different destinations. The report shows that the main factor for preference for Germany is the perception that it is open to refugees, for the UK their social networks and perception of better labour market, any other EU state based on the assumption that "Germany is full", and Australia for positive perceptions of the society.¹⁷¹

For wealthier Afghan families, **Türkiye** is a popular preferred destination as it offers pathway to citizenship through investment. However, recently Türkiye has also increased the minimum investment requirement for Afghans, making this option more complicated for those aspiring to move to Türkiye.¹⁷²

Based on queries received at the Migrant Resource Centre Afghanistan, hints of a trend towards **Russia** could also be traced in the aftermath of the Taliban takeover. This is because the diplomatic mission of Russia was one of the very few embassies that remained open in the country, serving as the last resort option to many who sought to migrate with proper visa. However, a terrorist attack in front of the Russian Embassy in Kabul in September 2022 led to the suspension of all consular services in Afghanistan, however Afghan applications were still being processed through the Russian Embassy in Pakistan.¹⁷³ However, to reach the Russian Embassy in Pakistan, Afghan nationals require a valid Pakistani visa. Similarly, routes to **Gulf** countries have recently emerged, with anecdotal evidence suggesting migrant smuggling routes from south-eastern Afghanistan using Pakistani passports falsified or fraudulently obtained. Air routes from Pakistan, Turkey and Gulf states are also possible, for those Afghans who can afford the much higher cost.¹⁷⁴

Besides Europe, a number of Afghan migrants seeking protection head East. **Australia** is a popular choice. Official statistics show that as of June 2021, about 67,030 Afghan-born people were residing in Australia. The number of Afghans in Australia has almost doubled in the ten years to 2021, with 32,970

¹⁶⁸ EU+ recognition rate includes refugee status and subsidiary protection.

¹⁶⁹ EUAA, "Recognition Rates: Granting International Protection in EU+ Countries," 2022, https://euaa.europa.eu/sites/default/files/publications/2022-06/AR2022_factsheet9_recognition_rates_EN.pdf.

¹⁷⁰ Eurostat, "Asylum Applicants Considered to Be Unaccompanied Minors by Citizenship, Age and Sex - Annual Data," Eurostat Dataset, 2022, https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/MIGR_ASYUNAA__custom_6864207/default/table?lang=en.

¹⁷¹ Farsight, "Irregular Migration to the European Union What's Special about Afghans?"

¹⁷² Mielke et al., "Figurations of Displacement in and beyond Pakistan: Empirical Findings and Reflections on Protracted Displacement and Translocal Connections of Afghans."

¹⁷³ Muhammad Yunus Yawar, "Two Russian Embassy Staff Dead, Four Others Killed in Suicide Bomb Blast in Kabul," *Reuters*, September 5, 2022, <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/afghan-police-report-suicide-bomb-blast-near-russian-embassy-kabul-2022-09-05/>.

¹⁷⁴ ICMPD, "Migration Outlook Silk Routes 2022 South and West Asia."

in 2011.¹⁷⁵ In 2021, Australia resettled about 5,326 Afghans, and announced a humanitarian programme for 31,500 spots over a period of 4 years.¹⁷⁶ In comparison, the number of applications by Afghans for the humanitarian visa exceed 170,000.¹⁷⁷

Indonesia is also a popular destination, which hosts around 7,000 Afghan nationals as refugees and asylum seekers.¹⁷⁸ A study by MMC among Afghan, Rohingya and Somali refugees in Indonesia found that most Afghans used a smuggler to reach Indonesia.¹⁷⁹ It also explains further that smuggling services included getting across the border, documents, access to phone or internet and facilitating money transfers. Interestingly, the study further informs that according to Afghan migrants' reports, smugglers did not influence to migrate, rather friends or family in another country, parents and social media were their main influencers. Smugglers were also not reported to be main sources of information on migration routes, destinations, costs, risks etc. Rather, among Afghan participants in the study, they were rather seen as service providers or business people instead of criminals exploiting migrants.

On the other side of the globe, **Brazil** has become a popular spot as a route to eventually enter the **United States**. Brazil offers humanitarian visa to Afghans fleeing the Taliban rule since September 2021. About 4000 Afghans have reached Brazil through this programme. However, shelters and other services in Brazil are not adequately equipped to receive and provide for the incoming migrants offered protection. Many Afghans on arriving in Brazil further attempt an irregular journey spanning a route over 11 Latin American countries then to eventually reach the US.¹⁸⁰ In 2022, US border guards intercepted 2,132 Afghans trying to cross the US-Mexico border.

While the above discussion presents some of the common destination preferences, especially as relevant among Afghan migrants owing broadly to their policies towards acceptance of Afghan migrants, it is of course acknowledged that once on the journey, migrants may change or adjust their interim or long-term destinations in response to changing policy scenario as well other informational updates and experiences. As discussed by Optimity Advisors and Seefar in their research in West Africa, migrants en route, migrants in temporary stay in other countries may decide for Europe (or other destinations) based on dire economic circumstances or security risks in their existing country of residence, which may make onward migration a preferred option than staying or returning.¹⁸¹

¹⁷⁵ Australian Government, "Country Profile: Afghanistan," Department of Home Affairs, 2021, <https://www.homeaffairs.gov.au/research-and-statistics/statistics/country-profiles/profiles/afghanistan#:~:text=Country profile - Afghanistan-,Population,32%2C970>) at 30 June 2011.

¹⁷⁶ The Royal Children's Hospital Melbourne, "Afghan Refugees: Key Issues," Immigrant Health Service, 2023, https://www.rch.org.au/immigranthealth/clinical/Afghan_refugees_-_key_issues/#:~:text=As of end 2022 (also, under the family migration stream).

¹⁷⁷ Aania Tandon, "How Afghan Evacuees Are Faring in Australia 18 Months after Fleeing Afghanistan," *ABC News*, March 28, 2023, <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2023-03-29/afghan-refugees-feel-welcome-in-australia-cost-of-living-ames/102154360>.

¹⁷⁸ UNHCR, "Figures at a Glance: Indonesia," 2022, <https://www.unhcr.org/id/en/figures-at-a-glance>.

¹⁷⁹ Mixed Migration Centre, "Use of Smugglers on the Journey to Indonesia among Rohingya, Afghan and Somali Refugees," 2023, https://mixedmigration.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/288_Smugglers-on-the-journey-to-Indonesia.pdf.

¹⁸⁰ Mica Rosenberg, Kristina Cooke, and Jackie Botts, "Insight: Hundreds of Afghans Risk 11-Country Trek to Seek Haven in United States," *Reuters*, February 1, 2023, <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/hundreds-afghans-risk-11-country-trek-seek-haven-united-states-2023-02-01/>.

¹⁸¹ Optimity Advisors and Seefar, *How West African Migrants Engage with Migration Information En-Route to Europe* (Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2017).

4. Information campaigns targeting migrants in third countries

4.1. Introduction

This section focuses on understanding the main features of migration information campaigns aimed at those in transit in general, while specifically highlighting the cases where Afghan migrants are a priority focus. It includes ICMPD's work through the Migrant Resource Centres, but also highlights some other campaigns that have been aimed at Afghans in Pakistan to understand the main outreach and engagement features of those campaigns in the specific setting. Furthermore, this section gives a broad summary of the ethical considerations that should guide any design and implementation of migration information campaigns aimed at those on the route.

4.2. MRC Pakistan outreach and experience

As part of the Silk Routes project, ICMPD currently manages seven Migrant Resource Centres (MRCs), which work in close partnership with the government of the country to help people make informed decisions when considering to migrate. They provide outgoing, intending and potential migrants with information on a broad range of migration-related challenges and opportunities. Out of the seven, two MRCs are in Pakistan (in Lahore and Islamabad) and one in Afghanistan, which has been converted into a virtual MRC since August 2021.¹⁸²

In 2022, MRC Pakistan implemented the PARIM-I campaign in select districts of Pakistan. The premise of implementing PARIM-I was to support potential and intending migrants in making informed decisions about migration in order to influence safe migration behaviours. This was foreseen through the provision of accurate and balanced (neutral) information, awareness on dangers of irregular migration, knowledge generation on the legal and safe pathways of migration, and information-sharing on rights and realities of migrants' life abroad. While the campaign was initially planned for select districts in Punjab, it was later expanded to some districts in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa as well, also addressing Afghan nationals in Pakistan. Between July and December, the project staff conducted the Knowledge, Attitudes and Intentions (KAI) study to gauge any changes on the said parameters among those exposed to the campaign. Two rounds of surveys were conducted: i) Round 1- July – August 2022; and ii) Round 2 – November-December 2022. While the results are not segregated for Pakistani and Afghan nationals, findings of the survey demonstrate higher level of awareness among those exposed to community outreach and hotline counselling on parameters such as guidance on veracity of overseas purpose of visit visas, applicability of EU job offers, etc., as compared to the control group.¹⁸³

Moreover, there was also a difference in levels of "suitable" attitudes and intentions towards regular and irregular migration, measured through a series of likert scale questions, between the groups exposed to the campaign messaging and the comparison group. Results in round 2 of the KAI study showed decrease in difference between the group exposed to campaign messaging and the comparison group, likely indicating a degree of spill-over effect. The methodological gap that the study itself notes is that the KAI assessment was descriptive in its design, and as such, study results are neither directly attributable to the MRCs' campaigns and services nor generalisable to all potential migrants in Pakistan.

¹⁸² International Centre for Migration Policy Development, "Migrant Resource Centres (MRCs)," accessed June 6, 2023, <https://www.migrantresources.org/>.

¹⁸³ ICMPD, "The Influence of Information Campaigns and Outreach on the Knowledge, Attitudes and Intentions (KAIs) of Migrants in Pakistan," 2023.

Taking into account the need of the situation, and considering the already large Afghan population in Pakistan, the MRCs in Pakistan and Afghanistan have endeavoured to strengthen coordination to address the queries of potential Afghan migrants. Since 2022, both MRCs have conducted regular bi-monthly and quarterly regional meetings to discuss ways to best address the information needs of Afghans and assess the trends in queries as they develop. They also organised a joint Facebook live session to address queries and signpost clients to the responsible MRC.

MRC Pakistan's services were extended to Afghan nationals in Pakistan based on need-identification. During outreach sessions in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa under PARIM-I, MRC counsellors noted a strong demand for migration-related information among Afghan communities living in the province. Between August 2022 and April 2023, **MRC Pakistan** has received over 700 queries from Afghan nationals through different channels, including the MRC Hotline, WhatsApp and other social media platforms. Out of these, 125 of them were provided detailed counselling and referral services. The queries were related to resettlement and study opportunities. They were also referred to MRC Afghanistan for further assistance.

Based on an observable upsurge in number of queries regarding asylum, evacuation and finding resettlement options, as well as reported increase in incidents of smugglers extorting Afghan and Pakistani nationals with exorbitant fees to facilitate migration, the need for providing targeted information to Afghan nationals regarding their rights and options was identified. This led to the extension of PARIM-I campaign towards including Afghan communities residing in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Pakistan. As part of this campaign, 31 outreach sessions were organised, reaching out to 1,362 Afghans, including 132 females residing in Pakistan. In terms of demographics, majority of these clients were between the ages of 18-45 years, with limited skillset.

In addition, campaigns targeting general population, such as a rickshaw campaign in three districts of KP (including Peshawar, Mardan and Haripur) also has the tendency to reach Afghan nationals living in these districts. The rickshaw campaign reached about 4,0500,000 community members approximately. Following such targeted measures, there was a notable increase in the number of Afghan nationals reaching out to MRCs with information requests. Other activities under PARIM-I also contributed to highlighting the need for providing targeted information support to the Afghan community in Pakistan. For instance, under PARIM-I's journalists training component, four of the 50 journalists trained covered issues related to Afghan nationals in Pakistan.

In terms of the nature of queries received at the MRCs in Pakistan from Afghan refugees and nationals, the following broad categories can be drawn:

- **Queries regarding outmigration of Afghan nationals**
This category includes queries related to family resettlement processes, emigration opportunities for Afghan nationals, educational opportunities for Afghan nationals, asylum application process in the EU countries, application of Afghan passport from Pakistan, legal opportunities to work abroad etc. Most of these queries were referred to the MRC Afghanistan for more detailed and customised information.
- **Queries regarding life and work in Pakistan for Afghan nationals**
This category includes queries related to bureaucratic processes for staying in Pakistan, including queries regarding delay in issuance of Pakistani visas and their renewals, procedures for Proof of Registration (PoR) card application, benefits of PoR cards, procedure of applying for Afghan Citizen Cards in Pakistan, procedure of acquiring a driver's licence in Pakistan, procedure for getting a policy clearance certificate (which is a requirement for renting an accommodation in Pakistan etc. This category also includes questions related to enrolment of

Afghan students in Pakistani educational institutes, skills development and work opportunities in Pakistan etc.

Moreover, queries received by the remote **MRC Afghanistan** also offer some useful indications of information needs. In the period of September – November 2022, the top three queries received by MRC Afghanistan include asylum options for migrants (1,222 queries), general information about the role of MRC and general migration guidance (1,111 queries), and migration options for residence and long-term stay (899 queries).¹⁸⁴ Moreover, data generated through MRC Afghanistan operations also shows that perceptions on policy and regulation changes, and interceptions and push-backs along the route also influence the nature of queries. Whereas in the quarter of May – August 2022 most questions revolved around border-crossing issues, the time period between September to November included more questions related to the security situation in Türkiye and the stay within the country itself owing to the increase in violent push backs at the Iran- Türkiye border. Between September and November 2022 the MRC team received 388 queries on migration to Türkiye. MRC Afghanistan also reports receiving increasing queries regarding potentially fraudulent visas, in particular widespread advertisements on social media offering lucrative student visas to Türkiye, Russia and the EU.¹⁸⁵

It is also important to note that MRC Afghanistan is strategically positioned to offer accurate and timely information about the EU Member States' pledges to Afghan population. Since November 2022, MRC Afghanistan became an official partner in the EUAA's Experts' Platform for Legal and Safe Pathways for Afghans, which has a mandate of developing coordination mechanisms among EU Member States on their pledges in 2023 for Afghans.

In 2022, six MRCs¹⁸⁶ across four countries were evaluated to assess their effect. The evaluation was based a survey of 2215 individuals who reached out for a MRC service with participants randomly allocated to programme exposure and comparison groups. The evaluation found that exposure to MRC activities including online counselling, telephone counselling, pre-departure session, and technical and vocational training institutes' outreach had the following effects: i) the self-reported likelihood of irregular migration decreased by more than half (reduced by 68.7%); ii) slight increase in the overall self-reported likelihood to emigrate (a 4.5% increase); iii) a 71% increase in awareness on safe migration options; and iv) a 65% increase in awareness on government entities that they can call for assistance while abroad.¹⁸⁷

In particular, for MRC Kabul, effect was found to be significant with telephone counselling, particularly in terms of reported decline in intention to migrate irregularly, awareness of safer migration options, and awareness of relevant government entities. Similarly, in Islamabad and Lahore, the effect of telephone counselling was noted to be significant on the indicators measuring awareness of safer migration options and awareness of government entities, and intention to emigrate in general (in Lahore), but not on reported intention to migrate irregularly. On the other hand, technical and vocational training institute outreach in Lahore and Islamabad was found to be significant in leading to a statistically significant decline in self-reported intention to migrate irregularly.

These results should be interpreted in light of the methodological limitations, as noted in the evaluation itself, which include lack of a measurement of effect over time, lack of a genuine RCT set-

¹⁸⁴ Migrant Resource Centre, "Trend Analysis: Migrant Resource Centre - Afghanistan (Sep- Nov 2022)."

¹⁸⁵ Ibid.

¹⁸⁶ The six MRCs included Baghdad (Iraq), Cumilla, Dhaka (Bangladesh), Islamabad, Lahore (Pakistan), and Kabul.

¹⁸⁷ James Dennison, "Impact Assessment of the Migrant Resource Centres in the Silk Routes Region," 2022, https://www.budapestprocess.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/ICMPD_MRC_impact_assessment_2022.pdf.

up, likelihood of social desirability bias, and the fact that intention is not a true representative of actual behaviour. Despite these caveats, the evaluation elucidates that different outreach channels lead to different effects, among different target groups, highlighting the need for careful selection of messaging and channels in migration information campaigns suited to the needs of the audience.

4.3. Overview of other awareness raising campaigns in Pakistan aimed at Afghans

While a detailed mapping of awareness campaigns aimed at Afghans in Pakistan would be conducted during the field research phase of PARIM-II, this sub-section provides an overview of a few campaigns that have been implemented in this context. Based on available information online and a few informal discussions with relevant stakeholders,¹⁸⁸ there is a dearth of information campaigns aimed at Afghans in Pakistan that specifically focus on migration issues. Most of the campaigns that target Afghans in Pakistan related to health, including water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH), awareness on legal rights, capacity building, social cohesion and gender-related issues including gender-based violence. These may have indirect impact on migration aspirations and decisions, but campaigns specifically targeting migration information needs of Afghans in Pakistan are limited.

The Refugee Rights Network in Pakistan, coordinated by INSPIRE Pakistan and UNHCR aims to promote protection environment in Pakistan for refugees. The network aims to coordinate the efforts and initiatives of partners working in the field of refugee protection through advocacy on refugee rights through information sharing, capacity building, and coordination among institutions involved. MRC Pakistan is also a key member of the Network. The Network administers a Facebook and Twitter account on which it posts news and information that relate to refugees, including on services available in Pakistan and policy developments in other country contexts (however, the social media pages have not been updated since 2016).¹⁸⁹ Information on their recent activities will be collected during the field research phase of the project.

Many relevant international and national stakeholders may be engaged in regular information sharing and awareness raising activities targeting Afghans as routine part of their humanitarian work, rather than a campaign style implementation. More information on what mechanisms have proved to be helpful in reaching out and engaging with Afghans in Pakistan can therefore, be drawn based on stakeholder interviews during the field research phase. Nevertheless, campaigns that target Afghan population in Pakistan are insightful for understanding the implementation mechanisms, including methods to ensure outreach and engagement. Below, some of these campaigns are summarized to learn the common practices as applied in campaigns that reach Afghan community in Pakistan (Table 1).

The summary table highlights two major findings: i) **there is a dearth of awareness campaigns aimed at Afghans in Pakistan that purposefully focus on migration-related topics and offer interaction-based platforms;** and ii) **existing awareness campaigns, regardless of their topic, indicate that the most common outreach method to Afghan community in Pakistan is through in-person engagement.** That said, as found in PARIM-I research as well, in-person events and broadcasted information on print, TV, and digital media, as well as rickshaw campaigns may be a good method to increase awareness on available services for migration information (e.g. the MRCs). However, they may not be the best platform to engage potential (irregular) migrants, especially for the Afghan community in Pakistan, who already navigate life in Pakistan in fear of being targeted by law enforcement authorities. They

¹⁸⁸ Stakeholders included representatives at Chief Commissionerate for Afghan Refugees, Society for Human Rights and Prisoners' Aid (SHARP), and Needy Poor People Foundation (NPPF).

¹⁸⁹ INSPIRE Pakistan, "Refugee Rights Network Pakistan," accessed July 31, 2023, <https://www.facebook.com/RRN.Pakistan>.

may hesitate to ask relevant questions on queries they have in public events, or even in-person counselling. While further information on the best channels of communicating with them will be identified through a survey, it is assumed that potential migrants from the Afghan community in Pakistan may prefer interactions that allows a degree of anonymity to them e.g. hotline calls.

Table 3 Overview of awareness campaigns aimed at Afghan refugees in Pakistan

Campaign name and year	Intended outcome	Migration as main focus?	Implementer and donor	Target population	Geographical focus	Channels	Messengers	Messaging
Refugee Rights Network Pakistan (RRN-P)	Ensure refugee protection	Yes	INSPIRE Pakistan – implementer UNHCR - donor	Refugees in Pakistan	Nation-wide	Social media (Facebook and twitter)	Project team and stakeholders	The posts relate to policy developments in Pakistan and other countries related to Afghan refugees (although last update on their social media accounts was in 2016)
The Documentation and Information Verification Exercise (DRIVE) 2021 ¹⁹⁰	Updating and verifying the data of Afghans holding a Proof of Registration (PoR) card	Indirect	SAFRON, CCAR, NADRA, and UNHCR	Afghan refugees with PoR cards	Nation-wide	Digital and print broadcast media, SMS, mobile registration vans, call centres	Project team	The purpose of the campaign and how to participate.
WASH project ¹⁹¹	Enable the refugees and host communities to have access to safe drinking water and appropriate sanitation services, in addition to encouraging safe hygiene practices to keep their environments clean.	No	UNHCR – implementer Qatar Charity - Donor	Afghan refugees and host population	38 refugee villages in Balochistan	Info sessions	Project team	Awareness on how to wash their hands, use safe water, and hygiene behaviour, protection from water-borne diseases
WASH campaign ¹⁹²	Improving refugees and host communities' access to water and	No	UNICEF – Implementer	Afghan refugees in Pakistan	Refugee settlements in Peshawar	Community Liaison Cell, info sessions	Teachers, project team	Improve communities' knowledge and practice of good hygiene and safe water handling

¹⁹⁰ UNHCR, “Government, UNHCR Verify 1.3 Million Afghan Refugees in Pakistan,” 2022, <https://www.unhcr.org/pk/13933-government-unhcr-verify-1-3-million-afghan-refugees-in-pakistan.html#:~:text=Government%2C%20UNHCR%20verify%201.3%20million%20Afghan%20refugees%20in%20Pakistan,-3%20Jun%202022&text=ISLAMABAD%2C%203%20June%202022> – The Afghan refugees residing in Paki.

¹⁹¹ Qatar Charity, “Qatar Charity Implements Fresh WASH Project for Afghan Refugees in Pakistan,” 2022, <https://reliefweb.int/report/pakistan/qatar-charity-implements-fresh-wash-project-afghan-refugees-pakistan>.

¹⁹² Sami Malik, “Improving Refugees and Host Communities’ Access to Water and Sanitation in Peshawar,” UNICEF, 2022, <https://www.unicef.org/rosa/stories/improving-refugees-and-host-communities-access-water-and-sanitation-peshawar>.

	sanitation in Peshawar		JICA, UNICEF, Water and Sanitation Services Peshawar – donors					
IPLAAR (2017-2019) ¹⁹³	Provision of protection services for Afghan refugees in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province	Indirect	SHARP – implementer Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation - donor	Afghan refugees in Pakistan	Peshawar, D.I.Khan, Kohat and Mardan	Info sessions, workshops, radio, IEC material and broadcast channels	Project team, community volunteers	Raise awareness on legal aid available, provide psychosocial assistance, awareness on gender-based violence issues and promote social cohesion at the community level
Provision of Integrated Protection Assistance to Afghan Refugees and Other Affected Communities in Pakistan ¹⁹⁴	Providing legal assistance	Indirect	SHARP and ICMC – implementer European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations (ECHO) - Donor	Afghan refugees and other affected communities in Pakistan	Peshawar, Chitral, Bunair and Lower Dir	In-person sessions, counselling,	Project team, legal counsellors and lawyers	Awareness on legal rights, including repatriation procedures
SSARC project ¹⁹⁵	Promoting social cohesion between refugees and host communities	Indirect	GIZ and Government of Pakistan – implementer German Cooperation - donor	Vulnerable Afghan refugees and host community, women and adolescent boys and girls	Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP)	Info sessions, capacity building courses, social gatherings, digital portal	Project team, community volunteers	Range of topics, including: mental health, gender-based violence, stress management and menstrual health, digital skills, self-esteem boosting sessions,
Empower young refugees through SMS technology (2017)	Highlight issues of young refugees in the areas of health, education, protection, water sanitation and hygiene and social welfare through the use of technology and mobile phones	No	UNHCR and UNICEF - Implementer	Young Afghan refugees	Nation-wide	Weekly SMS messages and polls were sent out to the community of U-Reporters, who respond to the polls and exchange views on a	Volunteer community members, mostly young people - primarily between the ages of 10-25 years	Young people reported on the issues related to their communities through SMS, Twitter and Facebook.

¹⁹³ SHARP, “Integrated Protection and Livelihoods Assistance for Afghan Refugees in Khyber Paktunkhwa Province (IPLAAR),” 2019, <https://sharp-pakistan.org/projects/iplaar/>.

¹⁹⁴ SHARP, “Provision of Integrated Protection Assistance to Afghan Refugees and Other Affected Communities in Pakistan,” accessed July 27, 2023, <https://sharp-pakistan.org/projects/echo/>.

¹⁹⁵ GIZ, “SSARC Project, Pakistan: Promoting Social Cohesion between Refugees and Host Communities,” 2022, <https://www.giz.de/en/downloads/giz2022-en-ssarc-project-pakistan.pdf>.

						wide range of subjects.		
16 Days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence 2015 ¹⁹⁶	Ensuring safe education for all	Indirect	UNHCR and partners	Youth in refugee and host communities	Nation-wide	Puppet shows, drawing competition, exhibition, arts competition, essay writing competition, TV and radio, posters campaigns, cricket match	UNHCR staff, partner organisations, teachers, parents	Awareness sessions for Afghan students, highlighting the importance of education and child rights, challenges affecting enrolment and dropout rates, strengthening social cohesion
HIV/AIDS campaign (2004) ¹⁹⁷	Raise awareness on HIV/AIDS	No	UNHCR and UNAIDS	Afghan refugees, street children, Pakistani students, general public	Quetta	Culture show, inter-college debate	Afghan children, experts from religious, health and social backgrounds, UNHCR and UNAIDS team	How HIV is spread and what steps are needed to prevent it from happening

¹⁹⁶ UNHCR, "UNHCR Underlines the Need for Ensuring Safe Education for All," 2015, <https://www.unhcr.org/pk/2789-uhncr-underlines-the-need-for-ensuring-safe-education-for-all.html>.

¹⁹⁷ Babar Baloch, "UNHCR Pakistan Targets Refugees, Host Community in HIV/AIDS Campaign," UNHCR, accessed July 27, 2023, <https://www.unhcr.org/us/news/news/unhcr-pakistan-targets-refugees-host-community-hiv-aids-campaign>.

4.4. Global overview: Migration information campaigns aimed at displaced populations in third countries

This section focuses on migration information campaigns that are designed towards targeting migrants in countries along the route and those displaced in third countries. As such, this section aims to provide an overview of the geographical focus of such campaigns, their target audience, and assesses the type of messaging these campaigns disseminate using specific messengers and channels. It aims to highlight the complexities and considerations that are required to design a campaign that is well-aware of its own responsibility and positionality in the field of migration governance. Focus will be on discussing campaigns that have been specifically designed for Afghan migrants. This discussion focuses only on migration information campaigns, and does not encompass other relevant initiatives such as vocational training initiatives etc. that may also influence migration decisions. Moreover, it should be noted that this discussion does not claim to be a systematic analysis, comparing different campaigns, but rather maps some prominent ones in order to identify the main themes.

4.4.1. Migration information campaigns targeting migrants en route

Majority of the migration information campaigns tend to focus on “potential migrants” – those who have intentions or may eventually migrate. However, there is a growing focus on targeting migrants already en route.¹⁹⁸

Geographical focus

Review of available information on migration information campaigns, funded by the EU and European governments targeting migrants in transit show geographic concentration towards countries in the Horn of Africa, Mediterranean and towards the South Eastern European countries, including the Western Balkans.¹⁹⁹

Some notable examples targeting the Mediterranean route include the Norwegian government’s Facebook campaign called “Stricter Asylum Regulations in Norway”,²⁰⁰ IOM’s partnership with the Italian government for the web-based campaign called “Aware Migrants”,²⁰¹ and UNHCR’s “Telling the Real Story”.²⁰² All three of these campaigns targeted the Mediterranean route, which includes Khartoum, Sudan as a major transit hub. Furthermore, the Migrant Project, implemented by Seefar in multiple settings, also implements a campaign in Ethiopia focusing on Eritreans that may potentially migrate onwards along the Mediterranean route.²⁰³

¹⁹⁸ EMN, “Migration and Communication: Information and Awareness-Raising Campaigns in Countries of Origin and Transit,” in *Austrian National EMN Conference 2019*, 2019, https://publications.iom.int/system/files/pdf/emn_conference.pdf.

¹⁹⁹ Brekke and Beyer, “Everyone Wants to Leave” *Transit Migration from Khartoum-The Role of Information and Social Media Campaigns*; EMN, “Migration and Communication: Information and Awareness-Raising Campaigns in Countries of Origin and Transit.”

²⁰⁰ Sarah C Bishop, “An International Analysis of Governmental Media Campaigns to Deter Asylum Seekers,” *International Journal of Communication* 14 (2020): 1092–1114.

²⁰¹ “Aware Migrants,” 2023, <https://www.awaremigrants.org/category/news>.

²⁰² UNHCR, “Telling the Real Story,” 2023, <https://www.tellingtherealstory.org/en/>.

²⁰³ Seefar, “The Migrant Project,” Migration Info, accessed July 18, 2023, <https://www.themigrantproject.org/migration-info/>.

Campaigns focusing more on the Balkan route include Seefar’s “On the Move”,²⁰⁴ and InfoMigrants²⁰⁵. On the Move campaign is a remote communication project that has a geographical focus on Türkiye and Serbia. Campaigns such as “InfoMigrants” do not focus purely on migrants en route, rather target both potential and transit migrants. Such campaigns may not have a specific geographical focus and may be broader in the scope of population groups they target along the journey, including countries of origin and transit. Another example like this includes Seefar’s the Migrant Project²⁰⁶ (discussed further in 4.5)

Messaging and framing

Campaigns aimed at migrants already along the route tend to deter onward migration especially towards the EU, often with frightful depictions of the dangers of the journey, combined with narratives of adverse “realities in Europe” and strict policies in countries of destination that will welcome them if they manage to reach their intended destination. Other campaigns tend to portray “objective” information on changes in border and asylum policies, number of apprehensions on the border, and general news updates regarding migrants.²⁰⁷ Campaigns targeting migrants in transit may also depict the benefits of staying in the region of origin. In a way, they tend to conduct “negative branding” of their countries to make them appear less attractive.²⁰⁸ However, there are limited awareness campaigns that purely focus on protection rights of migrants en route.²⁰⁹

Messengers

Campaigns aimed at migrants en route engage a variety of ways to convey the message to make it more trustworthy, much like campaigns aimed at potential migrants. UNHCR and IOM campaigns used stories of actual migrants, telling their own story. On the other hand, government-run social media campaigns, including the Norwegian campaign offered relevant news pieces and videos on their Facebook page to convey updates and latest developments in the field of asylum policy in Norway.²¹⁰ They often use dramatic audio and visuals, but give no or limited voice to migrants themselves.

Yet some other projects, such as the Migrant Project, used locally contracted migration experts and counsellors to disseminate project messages. Such measures do facilitate in building trust with the target community, especially if the audience is reached through their own networks.²¹¹ However, Majidi notes that in case the focus is on a population group displaced in another country (e.g. Eritreans in Ethiopia), it is more difficult to build trust and the target group may be hesitant in sharing their actual aspirations and intentions on migration based on their vulnerable situation.

²⁰⁴ Seefar, “One-in-Three Irregular Migrants in Transit Choose Safer Migration Options after Receiving Counselling from On the Move Campaign,” 2020, <https://seefar.org/news/projects/one-in-three-irregular-migrants-in-transit-choose-safer-migration-options-after-receiving-counselling-from-on-the-move-campaign/>.

²⁰⁵ “InfoMigrants,” 2023, <https://www.infomigrants.net/en/>.

²⁰⁶ Seefar, “The Migrant Project.”

²⁰⁷ “InfoMigrants.”

²⁰⁸ Thomas Gammelthoft-Hansen, “Refugee Policy as ‘negative Nation Branding,’” in *Danish Foreign Policy Yearbook*, ed. K Fischer and H Mouritzen (Danish Institute for International Studies, 2017).

²⁰⁹ Nassim Majidi, “Deterring Migration in Times of Crises: The Ethics of Behavioral Change in Migration Information Campaigns,” *American Behavioral Scientist*, 2023, <https://doi.org/10.1177/00027642231183268>.

²¹⁰ Nancy Bazilchuk, “Social Media Campaign for Asylum Seekers Draws Angry Trolls.,” *Science Norway*, September 11, 2017, <https://sciencenorway.no/forskningno-immigration-policy-norway/social-media-campaign-for-asylum-seekers-draws-angry-trolls/1448896>.

²¹¹ Majidi, “Deterring Migration in Times of Crises: The Ethics of Behavioral Change in Migration Information Campaigns.”

Further discussion on the role of messengers, particularly returnees is discussed in Section 5.2. In addition, more information on the effectiveness of different types of messengers in migration information campaigns in general is detailed in the final report of PARIM-I project.²¹²

Channels

To target migrants en route and those considering onward migration, campaigns are largely using social media tools for not only outreach, but also specifically targeting certain population groups. Some campaigns also employ the technique of word of mouth and group events to spread information in relevant groups.²¹³ Filtered advertisement as offered by a number of social media applications now have given campaign implementers new tools for targeted social marketing, allowing profiling of target audience and sharing tailored messaging with them based on their online likes and interests.²¹⁴ To employ such big data tools opens a plethora of ethical and moral questions on part of donors and implementers, especially in relation to data protection issues and racial profiling.

Moreover, there are further complexities in evaluating the effect and impact of online information campaigns, especially those that are largely implemented through social media. Such channels allow wide outreach, measured in terms of content reach, impressions and engagement, however, it is extremely difficult to assess whether the audience reached comprises the target audience, and to receive feedback from them and assess whether the messaging influenced their knowledge, attitude, and intentions towards migration.²¹⁵

Effectiveness

There is widespread acknowledgment in the scholarly community about the methodological limitations of assessing the impact of migration information campaigns.²¹⁶ Most impact evaluations are only based on a small number of participants, capture differences in knowledge, attitudes and intentions at a point in time, and are insufficient to gauge any difference in actual migration behaviour to measures success or lack of for an information campaign.²¹⁷ It is near impossible to measure with confidence any causal link between information campaign and migration behaviour.²¹⁸

²¹² Qaisrani, Hahn-Schaur, and Hendow, "Irregular Migration Dynamics from Pakistan and the Role of Information Campaigns: PARIM Final Report."

²¹³ Majidi, "Deterring Migration in Times of Crises: The Ethics of Behavioral Change in Migration Information Campaigns."

²¹⁴ K Brändle, Verena and Petro Tolochko, "The 'Who Is Who' of Migration Information Campaigns On Social Media," *Journal of Borderland Studies*, 2023, <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1080/08865655.2023.2202210>.

²¹⁵ IOM, "Assessing the Effectiveness of Online Facebook Campaigns Targeting Potential Irregular Migrants: A Pilot Study in Three West African Countries," 2020, <https://publications.iom.int/books/assessing-effectiveness-online-facebook-campaigns-targeting-potential-irregular-migrants>.

²¹⁶ Chinedu Obi, Fabio Bartolini, and Marijke D'Haese, "Evaluating the Impact of Information Campaign in Deterring Irregular Migration Intention Among Youths. A Randomised Control Experiment in Edo State, Nigeria," *African Conference of Agricultural Economists*, 2019, 1–23; Anne-Line Rodriguez, "European Attempts to Govern African Youths by Raising Awareness of the Risks of Migration: Ethnography of an Encounter," *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 45, no. 5 (2019): 735–51; Jasper Tjaden, "Assessing the Impact of Awareness-Raising Campaigns on Potential Migrants – What We Have Learned so Far," in *Migration in West and North Africa and across the Mediterranean*, ed. F. Fargues and M. Rango (Geneva: IOM, 2020), 426–34.

²¹⁷ Raffaella Pagogna and Patrick Sakdapolrak, "Disciplining Migration Aspirations through Migration-Information Campaigns: A Systematic Review of the Literature," *Geography Compass* 15, no. 7 (July 1, 2021): e12585, <https://doi.org/10.1111/GEC3.12585>.

²¹⁸ Florian Trauner, Omar N Cham, and Rosangela Caleprico, "EU-Funded Information Campaigns Targeting Potential Migrants: State of the Art," 2022.

There are two distinctive aspects that may make migrants less receptive to messages surrounding deterrence along the journey. Firstly, these migrants have already invested sufficient time and resources in their migration journeys.²¹⁹ Resources are needed whether to go ahead towards their intended destinations or even returning to their countries of origin. In such a scenario, when further resources have to be spent to even return, migrant may decide to try their luck and continue with the journey.

Secondly, migrants along the journey may have already experienced first-hand the risks that information campaigns warn them about. Unless practical and feasible alternatives are offered (e.g. meaningful employment or regularization status) where they already are, mere information may add little value to their knowledge levels and further decisions. For instance, Brekke and Beyer's study on the role of migration information campaigns on migrants transiting through Khartoum, Sudan (a key transit hub for migrants from the Horn of Africa) shows that their respondents felt they had sufficient information through their own experience and that of others they knew who made the journey. The authors conclude that this perception of having adequate information for the journey makes them dismissive towards information shared by government-sponsored campaigns.²²⁰ That said, the context for Afghans in Pakistan may be different, as not all Afghans who decide on onward migration irregularly from Pakistan may previously have arrived in Pakistan irregularly.

Another implication for measuring effectiveness, especially for campaigns that focus on migrants in transit or en route is that it is even more difficult to determine change in behaviour among migrants who are already on the way as compared to those who have not set on their journey yet. This may relate to the case of PARIM-II as well, as among the Afghan nationals in Pakistan, some may already be in Pakistan in transit with their journey starting in Afghanistan, while others may have been in Pakistan on a longer term in protracted displacement.

While acknowledging the extensive criticisms on migration information campaigns, including the role they play as alternative tools for migration management, there is some merit in offering potential and en route migrants access to sources where they can draw on verified information, get to know what their rights are and how they can access certain services in case of extreme risk, including awareness on how to avoid being tricked by smugglers, and legal opportunities for migration to preferred destinations.²²¹ Research among potential migrants carried out under the PARIM-I project also identified the topics on which respondents would like more information including on what institutions and services can support in their migration decisions and preparation, information on job opportunities fit to their skill level, costs of safe migration, as well as risks and dangers related to irregular migration.²²²

²¹⁹ EMN, "Migration and Communication: Information and Awareness-Raising Campaigns in Countries of Origin and Transit."

²²⁰ Brekke and Beyer, "Everyone Wants to Leave" *Transit Migration from Khartoum-The Role of Information and Social Media Campaigns*.

²²¹ 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 (September 1, 2021): 105488, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.worlddev.2021.105488>; Frederic Kamta, Ravi Baghel, and Johanna Kern, "Evaluation of Awareness Raising Campaigns for (Potential) Migrants," 2023, <https://www.government.nl/documents/reports/2023/01/19/evaluation-of-awareness-raising-campaigns-for-potential-migrants>.

²²² Qaisrani, Hahn-Schaur, and Hendow, "Irregular Migration Dynamics from Pakistan and the Role of Information Campaigns: PARIM Final Report."

4.4.2. Migration information campaigns aimed at Afghans

There is a long history of migration information campaigns specifically designed towards potential and in-transit Afghan migrants attempting to migrate to various Western destinations including Europe, the UK and Australia. Almost all of the campaigns highlighted below are funded or supported by the countries of destination in the “Global North”. A retrospective analysis shows that the intended objectives and outcomes of campaigns aimed at potential Afghan migrants have not changed much since the mid-2000s, although the socioeconomic, human rights and security situation in the country has adversely intensified over the course of time amidst an ongoing conflict situation, with matters significantly worsening with the Taliban takeover in August 2021.

Considering the scope of PARIM-II, discussion in this section relates to campaigns that are targeted towards Afghans still in Afghanistan or en route to their preferred destination. Information campaigns aimed at Afghans can be traced to late 1990s, with Australian government’s campaign “Pay a People Smuggler, You’ll Pay the Price” that ran between 1999-2001, and seem to have gained momentum since the mid-2000s.²²³ In 2006, **IOM launched a UK-funded campaign** aimed at raising awareness among potential Afghan migrants about the dangers related to irregular migration, and the opportunities for regular migration through legal channels.²²⁴ Based on available information on IOM website, the campaign targeted young men between the ages of 16 and 40, with at least primary level of education. The geographical focus of the campaign was districts in Afghanistan that have high emigration rates, including Kabul, Jalalabad, Kandahar, Mazar, Logar, Laghman and Kapisa. In addition to the potential migrants themselves, the campaign targeted the parents and families of potential migrants. However, there’s no further information about the outcomes of this campaign and for how long it was continued.

Germany’s “**Rumours about Germany**” campaign, implemented by the German diplomatic missions in countries of origin is another example. The project was introduced in Afghanistan in 2015 and has garnered much scholarly criticism since its inception.²²⁵ The campaign uses both, social media and traditional print and television media, as well as mass-advertisement through billboards to share migration-related information among Afghans in general. Billboards were put up in Kabul, Herat and Mazar-e-Shari in 2016. While some of the messages of the campaign, as reported by Oeppen and on the website, relate to conveying information on asylum procedures, bulk of the messages are negative, highlighting risks of irregular journey, hardships in Germany, implications of asylum application rejection, as well responsibility of return to Afghanistan to rebuild the country. Oeppen’s criticism is based on the fact that the campaign fails to consider in its messaging the reasons why Afghans would want to flee from the country, and completely turns a blind eye to the prevailing security risk and conflict in the country. The website²²⁶ of the project also offers a glimpse of the subjects they cover, and provide information on a range of languages reflecting the target audience, including Farsi, Urdu, Arabic, Russian, French (aimed at West and North African migrants), and Tigrinya (spoken in Eritrea and northern Ethiopia). For Afghans and general population, relevant website articles currently on the front page include FAQs on Federal Admission Programme for Afghanistan, frequent lies told by

²²³ Ceri Oeppen, “Leaving Afghanistan! Are You Sure?’ European Efforts to Deter Potential Migrants through Information Campaigns,” *Human Geography* 9, no. 2 (2016): 57–68, <https://doi.org/10.1177/194277861600900206>.

²²⁴ IOM, “Raising Awareness on Irregular Migration,” News- Global, 2006, <https://www.iom.int/news/raising-awareness-irregular-migration>.

²²⁵ Oeppen, “Leaving Afghanistan! Are You Sure?’ European Efforts to Deter Potential Migrants through Information Campaigns.”

²²⁶ <https://rumoursaboutgermany.info/>

traffickers and smugglers, visa navigator, information brief on Germany, migration options for skilled labour, etc.

Another actor in the field of implementing migration information campaigns focused on Afghan migrants is Seefar. Since 2016, **Seefar** has been implementing communication campaigns in Afghanistan. More recently, in 2020, Seefar implemented an information campaign in Afghanistan under its **Migrant Project** which claims that “more than half of the consultees (made) safer and more informed migration decision, and (avoided) potentially deadly encounters on the journey to Europe”. This assessment is based on its 4000 consultations with potential Afghan migrants, in which reportedly more than half of the individuals counselled discontinued their decision to migrate irregularly. However, the evaluation methodology is not publicly available, and methodological questions therefore remain whether claims of discontinued decisions of migrating irregularly are matched with actual behaviour.

On the website of the Migrant Project, there are several weblinks that are aimed at informing potential and current Afghan migrants.²²⁷ These include information briefs that focus on risks of irregular migration (including information on physical and financial risks as well as risks for women and children), safe and legal alternatives (comprising topics on employment, education, family reunification, asylum, resettlement, and alternative job opportunities), life in Europe as a migrant (with further links to Frequently Asked Questions about Europe in general but also particularly on France, the UK, and EU entry pathways to different countries), and a general information sheet offering links to various support platforms in Afghanistan. Based on the topics covered on the website, it can be assumed that while the campaign highlights the dangers related to irregular migration, it attempts to offer more well-rounded and balanced information that include available legal options and information on some relevant questions that potential migrants may have about life in Europe.

In 2020, Seefar also implemented the campaign “**On the Move**” in Türkiye and Serbia, targeting migrants in transit, especially those from Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Iraq, and Pakistan. The main objective of the campaign was to inform the transit migrants about the risks of continuing their ongoing journey to Europe, asylum procedures in the country of transit, and other legal options they have.²²⁸ The campaign was implemented remotely using social media, lead generation advertising, and hotline counselling. The campaign was implemented at the peak of COVID-19 pandemic and hence it also provided some information on COVID-19 protocols and ways to be protected. In total, its messaging through social media is claimed to reach 16 million people, about 3.1 million engagements, and about 3400 calls to the hotline during the course of the project. The project webpage claims that 34% migrants cancelled or delayed their irregular migration plans through this particular campaign, and 10% considered returning to their countries of origin through assisted return schemes. However, more detailed information about how this evaluation was conducted and how long after exposure to the campaign messaging is not publicly available.

Another relevant initiative in the migration awareness raising field is the website “**InfoMigrants**”, which was launched in 2017 with support from three media and press networks including France (France Médias Monde), Italy (ANSA), and Germany (Deutsche Welle). The mission of InfoMigrants, as mentioned on its website, is “To supply migrants with reliable, verified, objective and balanced news and information about the countries they have left, the countries they travel through, and the

²²⁷ Seefar, “The Migrant Project.”

²²⁸ Seefar, “One-in-Three Irregular Migrants in Transit Choose Safer Migration Options after Receiving Counselling from On the Move Campaign.”

countries to which they are headed”.²²⁹ As such the website features news articles and updates on policies in the EU member states, general information on EU countries, migrant interceptions along the route, new arrivals, international protection schemes, as well as personal stories from migrants, their families and returnees. Information on the website is available in six languages which gives an indication of its target population: Pashto, Dari, Arabic, Bangla, English and French. The main channels of communication used by the initiative are regular updates on the website, as well as the social media channels of the initiative across a wide variety of platforms including Facebook, Instagram, Telegram (only in Dari), Viber, Twitter, Youtube and Soundcloud.

In 2015 the Norwegian government launched an information campaign on “**Stricter Asylum Regulations**” targeted at potential Afghan asylum seekers in Afghanistan or in transit, as well as those fleeing conflict in Iraq, Syria and Eritrea. The campaign was formulated around conveying the message to asylum seekers that Norway has tightened its rules and regulations around asylum, and there is a higher rate of return and reduction in benefits offered to those that seek asylum in Norway. The campaign used video messages on national television, articles and graphics in leading local newspapers, posters in international transit hubs, as well as social media. Facebook content of this campaign had a reach of 11.5 million, whereas the YouTube videos posted as part of the campaign together had 21 million views.²³⁰ While not an official evaluation, research by Sarah Bishop shows that the Norwegian campaign resulted in provoking fear and alarm among Norwegian citizens, rather than the target population. In a matter of days, there was a rise in hate speech against Muslims, and asylum seekers due to which the Norwegian government had to disable comments on their posts on social media.²³¹

In 2016, the **Austrian government** also launched an information campaign targeting potential migrants from Afghanistan. The campaign addressed “economic migrants” and warned them about the difficulties of asylum procedures in Austria, informing them not to expect a welcoming reception in the country, and also warning them against chances of being tricked by smugglers. The campaign used advertisement of slogans on buses in Kabul and other cities, local websites, mass media (television) and social media (Facebook).²³²

In addition to the EU member states, the **Australian government** is also an active stakeholder engaged in sponsoring and implementing public information campaigns targeted at Afghans. These campaigns called “**Zero Chance**” were launched in 2013 under **Australia’s Operation Sovereign Borders**, a military-led border security programme that aims to protect Australia’s borders, combat people smuggling in the region, and prevent people from risking their lives at sea.²³³ Despite the third point, putting human security in the operations’ mission, Australia’s main line of messaging has been predominantly on deterrence, with the aim to inform potential migrants of the strict policies adopted by the Australian government on migrants arriving irregularly through boats. The campaign uses digital and print media content, including graphics, a novel, posters, videos, as well as film.²³⁴ As part of its campaign, the Australian Department of Immigration and Border Protection spent \$6million in 2016

²²⁹ “InfoMigrants.”

²³⁰ Bazilchuk, “Social Media Campaign for Asylum Seekers Draws Angry Trolls.”

²³¹ Bishop, “An International Analysis of Governmental Media Campaigns to Deter Asylum Seekers.”

²³² The Local, ““No Asylum in Austria’ Adverts in Afghanistan,” March 2, 2016, <https://www.thelocal.at/20160302/no-asylum-in-austria-adverts-in-afghanistan>.

²³³ Australian Government, “Operation Sovereign Borders,” accessed July 21, 2023, <https://osb.homeaffairs.gov.au/>.

²³⁴ Oliver Laughland, “Australian Government Targets Asylum Seekers with Graphic Campaign,” *The Guardian*, February 11, 2014, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/feb/11/government-launches-new-graphic-campaign-to-deter-asylum-seekers>.

creating a telemovie called “The Journey”, deterring potential migrants and asylum seekers from heading to Australia. This short-film was not just targeted at Afghans, but also potential migrants from Pakistan, Iraq and Iran.²³⁵ Moreover, posters were put up in international airports in Pakistan, targeting ethnic Hazara groups, many of whom fled from Afghanistan during times of increase ethnic violence. The message on the poster read “No way: you will not make Australia home”.²³⁶ Even after the Taliban takeover, Australian government uses its official media sources such as the government YouTube account to inform potential migrants that they are unwelcome in Australia if they arrive without documents. The recent posts included statement such as: “No one who arrives in Australia illegally will ever settle here. Do not attempt an illegal boat journey to Australia. You have zero chance of success”.²³⁷ The Australian government has been severely criticised for its approach in migration information campaigns, as well as their restrictive policy approaches towards migrants arriving irregularly by boats.²³⁸

In 2023, the Dutch government published an independent evaluation report of four awareness raising campaigns funded by the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Nigeria, Iraq and Afghanistan.²³⁹ Among these, the campaigns targeting Afghan migrants include the “Information and Dialogue on Irregular Migration” which was implemented between May 2019 and April 2021 in Afghanistan by Internews Europe, and the “Diaspora Awareness Raising Campaign” aimed at Afghan diaspora and implemented by the Danish Refugee Council between June 2019 and June 2022.

The campaign “**Information and Dialogue on Irregular Migration**” targeted potential migrants in rural areas of Afghanistan. The campaign divided its focus along three types of beneficiaries: the main target group migrants and potential migrants with focus on young Afghan men, between the ages of 18-26. The campaign also included returnees, IDPs, women and other family members in its interventions, and included a segment of training journalists to cover and increase outreach for the campaign. Communication channels included radio and social media. The independent evaluation of this project shows that outreach and effects of campaigns that primarily use mass media channels are difficult to assess and also offer room for campaign implementers to overstate the number of people actually reached through the campaign channels.

The “**Diaspora Awareness Raising Campaign**” was an online campaign that engaged with Afghan diaspora members and diaspora organisations in Europe with Afghan migrants en route to Europe as the main beneficiaries of the project, but also targeting potential migrants, women, and family members. With focus on migrants that are already on the route, the main purpose of this campaign was to make the journey safer and less dangerous through dissemination of relevant information related to migrants’ rights and protection services, and ways to mitigate risks. Hence, this is one of the rare migration information campaigns that prioritises protection messaging over prevention, and still has potential to discourage dangerous journeys. What sets this project further apart from other migration information campaigns is that Afghan migrants and diaspora members were leading the design and implementation of the campaign, with input from multiple stakeholders and experts, rather

²³⁵ D Schans and C Optekamp, “Raising Awareness, Changing Behavior? Combatting Irregular Migration through Information Campaigns,” 2016, 1–39, www.wodc.nl.

²³⁶ Bishop, “An International Analysis of Governmental Media Campaigns to Deter Asylum Seekers.”

²³⁷ Yan Zhuang, “Australia Tells Afghan Refugees: ‘Do Not Attempt an Illegal Boat Journey.’,” *New York Times*, August 23, 2021, <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/08/23/world/asia/australia-tells-afghan-refugees-do-not-attempt-an-illegal-boat-journey.html>.

²³⁸ Schans and Optekamp, “Raising Awareness, Changing Behavior? Combatting Irregular Migration through Information Campaigns.”

²³⁹ Kamta, Baghel, and Kern, “Evaluation of Awareness Raising Campaigns for (Potential) Migrants.”

than the project staff. A major factor contributing to its design was also in-depth background research, backed by sufficient budget allocation, that informed the campaign about the actual information needs of relevant population groups.

However, as the campaign was implemented using mass-media formats e.g. videos and stories on social media, it offered limited room for direct interaction with the target audience. Moreover, tailored information as per individual needs could also not be shared owing to the channels used for the campaign. Nevertheless, due to its innovative design and priority on protection needs, the “Diaspora Awareness Raising Campaign” can be seen as catering to the needs of the intended beneficiaries. However, to what extent it resulted in behavioural change could not be assessed.

The independent evaluation of the campaigns funded by the Dutch government offers meaningful lessons that can be considered in the design of new migration information campaign.²⁴⁰ Among other conclusions as mentioned above, what is extremely important to consider is clarity from the donor’s side on the intended outcomes of the campaign. Without a clear idea of what the goal is, not only is designing and prioritising campaign messaging complicated, but messaging can be confusing for the beneficiaries as well. As validated in extensive research, including PARIM-I’s experience, if the messaging is evidently aimed at discouraging migration, beneficiaries may be less responsive and may dismiss the campaign as “propaganda”.²⁴¹ Similarly, if the campaign provides messages on both prevention and protection, the messaging may inherently be contradictory and confuse beneficiaries.

Moreover, ICMPD’s **Awareness raising and information campaigns on the risks of irregular migration in Pakistan (PARIM-I)** campaign has already been discussed in section 4.2.

²⁴⁰ Kamta, Baghel, and Kern.

²⁴¹ Qaisrani, Hahn-Schaur, and Hendow, “Irregular Migration Dynamics from Pakistan and the Role of Information Campaigns: PARIM Final Report.”

Table 4 List of migration information campaigns targeting Afghans (non-exhaustive)

Campaign name and year	Intended outcome	Implementor and donor	Target population	Geographical focus	Channels	Messengers	Messaging
IOM information campaign (2006)	Countering misconceptions surrounding irregular migration and life abroad, while publicizing relevant information on possibilities for regular migration through legal channels	IOM – implementer UK Government - donor	Potential migrants (men b/w ages 16-40, with at least primary education) and their families (specifically parents)	Districts in Afghanistan (Kabul, Jalalabad, Kandahar, Mazar, Logar, Laghman and Kapisa)	TV, radio, hotline, photo booklet	Afghan returnees and irregular migrants in the UK, counsellors	Real life hardships, dangers and risks, possibilities for regular migration.
Rumours about Germany (2015)	Providing fact-checked information for making an informed migration decision	German Ministry of Foreign Affairs	Afghans in Afghanistan and abroad	Afghanistan (but also other countries of origin)	Mixed media (TV, print, social media, bill boards, speeches)	German Ministry of Foreign Affairs	Dispelling rumours about life in Germany, highlighting risks on the journey, lies told by smugglers and traffickers, information on asylum procedures, admission programmes for Afghans etc. Most frequently used headlines: “Leaving Afghanistan, Are you sure” and “Leaving Afghanistan? Think about it again!”
InfoMigrants (2017)	To supply migrants with reliable, verified, objective and balanced news and information about the countries they have left, the countries they travel through, and the countries to which they are headed.	France Médias Monde (France), Deutsche Welle (Germany) and ANSA (Italy) EU – co-sponsor	Migrants (linguistic focus includes Pashto, Dari, Arabic, Bangla, English, and French)	In countries of origin, along the route, and places where they intend to start a new life	Website and social media (including Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, Viber, Telegram, Youtube and Soundcloud)	Project staff through website and social media posts, migrants, returnees, families of migrants	Broad topics include: news updates on migration-related matters in EU, personal stories from migrants, their families, and returnees, and information on Europe and the EU.
The Migrant Project (Feb – Dec 2020)	Raise awareness about the dangers of irregular migration and empower potential migrants to make more informed decisions.	Seefar	Students, women, potential Afghan migrants	Afghanistan	Online, unbranded media outreach, and educational platforms, radio shows, hotline, social media	Teachers, counsellors	Dangers of irregular migration, including component on risks of gender-based violence during irregular migration journeys, life in Europe as a migrant, safe and legal alternatives, and support platforms in Afghanistan

On the Move (April – December 2020)	Raising awareness on risks of continuing irregular migration towards Europe	Seefar - implementer	Migrants in transit (from Pakistan, Bangladesh, Afghanistan, Iraq)	Türkiye and Serbia	Social media, and hotline	Project team through social media posts and counselling	Risks of irregular migration towards Europe, asylum procedures in countries of transit, support schemes for voluntary return
Diaspora Awareness Raising Campaign (2019 – 2022)	Deliver protection information based on the needs among potential and current migrants from Afghanistan.	Danish Refugee Council and Mixed Migration Centre along with Diaspora Organisations – implementers Dutch Government – donor	Afghan migrants en route to Europe	Denmark, Germany, and the Netherlands	Social media (Facebook and Youtube)	Diaspora organisations	Information on risks and dangers, how to mitigate those risks, practical information on better preparation for migration journey, information on rights and available services.
Information and Dialogue on Irregular Migration (May 2019 – May 2021)	Increased awareness on rights, knowledge of legal/safe migration procedures, understanding of Trafficking in Persons, better understanding of negative experiences of returnees	Internews Europe – Implementer Dutch Government – donor	Potential Afghan migrants, young men between 18-26 ages	Rural areas of Afghanistan	Radio and social media platforms	Journalists, family members, radio hosts	Migrants' rights, safe and legal migration opportunities, threats of trafficking in person and secondary migration, negative experiences of returnees
Awareness raising and information campaigns on the risks of irregular migration in Pakistan (PARIM-I) – (2022)	sensitise and empower potential migrants to make informed decisions about migration, particularly irregular migration, and in turn contribute to reducing irregular migration towards European and other destination countries	ICMPD – implementer European Union and Co-funded by the Austria and Bulgaria - donors	Young Pakistanis and Afghan nationals in Pakistan interested in acquiring information on migrants.	Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa	Hotline, social media, rickshaw campaign, community outreach sessions, SMS, websites, diaspora engagement, IEC material	Project staff, diaspora members, journalists	Outreach and mass-mediated messaging focused on informing people interested in migration to get in touch with MRCs, while hotline offered one on one counselling based on the callers' needs
Stricter Asylum Regulations Campaign	Inform asylum seekers about the reduction of benefits and stricter asylum regulations	Norway – donor and implementer	Potential migrants, migrants in transit, and asylum seekers from Afghanistan, Syria, Eritrea and Iraq	Afghanistan, Syria, Eritrea and Iraq	Print media, posters, television and video content on social media, targeted facebook ads	Project team and journalists	Reduction of benefits, increased rate of return, why risk your life!

Zero Chance	Protecting Australia's borders, combatting people smuggling in the region, preventing people from risking their lives at sea	Australian government – implementer and donor	Potential irregular migrants	Afghanistan (but also Pakistan, Bangladesh, Iraq, Sudan, Somali, and Myanmar)	Print and film media (posters, graphic novel, film, YouTube videos)	Australian border guards, military officials and state representatives	Australia's borders are closed to unauthorised maritime arrivals.
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4.6. Information needs of Afghan migrants along the route

While a thorough analysis of Afghan migrants along the route beyond Pakistan is out of the scope of this report, some information is drawn based on existing research to understand their main information gaps along the journey. Based on interviews with migrants, including those from Afghanistan and Pakistan), in the Western Balkan route, a study by Crisis Response and Policy Centre concludes that migrants have limited information about the journey and overwhelmingly rely on smugglers or personal contacts for information, who often misinform them about the circumstances.²⁴² Female migrants were more likely to lack information on the specificities of the journey than male migrants. Migrants were especially misinformed on the length of the journey and the means of transport along the route. Many set off on the journeys with limited information but hopes for being able to overcome whatever comes at them. The report notes that only a few migrants knew about the risks, but they had “no choice but to face them”.

Since 2021, MMC has been actively working on assessing the information needs and decision-making processes of Afghan migrants (among others) in Türkiye. A series of surveys and interviews conducted by MMC among newly arrived Afghans in Türkiye offer insightful detail on their needs and requirements, as well as how they have accessed and used information along the journey. According to the study, the most commonly reported information gaps were conditions of the journey (40%), security along the journey (37%), rights as a migrant or refugee in country (22%), information on routes (21%), how to access services (20%), duration of the journey (19%), cost of the journey (18%), conditions of destination (17%), and legal processes regarding migration and asylum (17%).²⁴³ In another similar study conducted by MMC in 2023, the most commonly reported information gap among Afghans was on official requirements to enter a country (57%).²⁴⁴ Compared to these recent information needs, in an earlier study in 2020 Afghans in Türkiye ranked “how to find a smugglers” highest followed by “duration of the journey”, and “conditions of the journey”.²⁴⁵

Furthermore, an important finding to note is that the **sources of information** may vary depending on the phase of the journey.²⁴⁶ For instance, the survey shows that before departure from Afghanistan, 43% of the 1,540 respondents relied on “friends/family in another country”, 17% used “online community/networks” for seeking relevant information, 12% got their information from smugglers, and 12% received information from “friends/family” in Afghanistan.

However, along the route, the dependence on friends/family declined steeply with only 13% relying on friends/family in another country and only 2% relying on friends/family in Afghanistan. The reliance on smugglers increased from 12% before-departure to 20% along the journey, with no significant difference in terms of reliance on other migrants. Reliance on national government authorities, foreign embassies and consulates, NGOs and the UN was non-existent on the route, as reported in the survey. This is a particularly stark finding, especially if analysed in light of the number of campaigns implemented by governments and (I)NGOs, directed at Afghan migrants.

²⁴² Vještica and Dragojević, “Game People: Irregular Migration and Risks.”

²⁴³ Mixed Migration Centre, “Access to Information and Decision-Making among Refugees and Migrants in Türkiye,” 2023, https://mixedmigration.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/290_Refugees_migrants_Turkiye.pdf.

²⁴⁴ Mixed Migration Centre.

²⁴⁵ Buz et al., “Destination Unknown Afghans on the Move in Turkey.”

²⁴⁶ Mixed Migration Centre, “Afghans En Route to Turkey: Access to Critical Information.”

Parallels can also be drawn with studies conducted elsewhere. In Africa, a report by Optimity Advisors and Seefar show that before reaching Libya, migrants from West African countries in transit rely heavily on smugglers for receiving information about the conditions on the route. However, trust levels for the information received from smugglers varied across migrants from different countries, with Malians more likely to trust information received from smugglers.²⁴⁷ Once in Libya, their reliance was reported to be higher on diaspora members and other migrants who had crossed to Europe to get updates on the conditions for the crossing (including process, risks, availability of boats, contacts of smugglers etc.). In this phase, reliance on friends and family in countries of origin was negligible.

In terms of **channels**, again a prominent distinction could be observed in the most common means to access information among Afghans in Türkiye.²⁴⁸ While as high as 80% reported receiving relevant information via phone calls before departure, this percentage decreased to 54%. In comparison, reliance on in-person conversations increased from 59% pre-departure to 78% along the route. Reliance on social media and messaging apps also declined from 45% before embarking on the journey to 24% along the route. A major reason for this difference is that during the journey, when many migrants are at the behest of the smugglers, they have limited access to phone sets or networks, decreasing their usage of phone calls and communication apps and increasing their reliance on in-person conversations. Reliance on other sources, such as websites, mass-media means (TV, radio, newspapers), as well as street advertising remained negligible pre-departure and along the route. Another study by MMC on Afghans in Türkiye showed that the use of WhatsApp was very popular among Afghans on the journey (67% of 405 respondents), however, this percentage was lower than WhatsApp use of other migrants on the move (including Somali, Iranian and Iraqi).²⁴⁹

4.7. Ethical considerations

While PARIM-I research focused on potential migrants from Pakistan, research under PARIM-II is interested in identifying the information needs and knowledge gaps of Afghan migrants who are intending to migrate irregularly. The two contexts are different, with conflict in Afghanistan, and lack of safe and legal channels accessible to them especially after the Taliban takeover making the Afghan case an even more sensitive issue, which entail serious ethical considerations. Afghans in Pakistan experience a situation of protracted displacement in a country where their rights are restricted, their options of permanent settlement are non-existent, and the idea of return may be unconceivable due to the human rights and security situation in Afghanistan, and the persecution they may experience under the Taliban rule. Thus, migration information campaigns aimed at Afghans in Pakistan should be carefully framed, according to the limited legal options they have in terms of migration and/or settlement in Pakistan.

While a more thorough discussion on ethical considerations particularly applicable to the PARIM-II will be provided in the final report (D2.2.), this section summarises some key considerations that have been highlighted in relevant literature, in an attempt to offer some initial guidance when designing migration information campaigns aimed at migrants in third countries.

1. A first step to developing an ethical communication strategy with a community at risk is to understand their needs through research, in-depth dialogue and participation.

²⁴⁷ Optimity Advisors and Seefar, *How West African Migrants Engage with Migration Information En-Route to Europe*.

²⁴⁸ Mixed Migration Centre, "Afghans En Route to Turkey: Access to Critical Information."

²⁴⁹ Mixed Migration Centre, "Access to Information and Decision-Making among Refugees and Migrants in Türkiye."

Including target audiences' feedback in messaging is important to ensure that the content of campaigns is meaningful and useful to them.²⁵⁰ UNICEF's guidelines on strategic communications for social and behavioural change recommend that before implementing information campaigns, understanding the barriers to behavioural change are as important as understanding the specific information needs of the target population.²⁵¹

2. Campaigns should attempt not to club together all potential migrants based on their intended means of migration (irregular) and towards specific destinations.²⁵² This is often the case when specific messages are broadcasted, or channels of mass outreach are used to share specific information. Rather, one on one exchange should be preferred which allows for understanding potential migrants' unique circumstances, their stories, their specific drivers of migration, and particular information needs.
3. Migration information campaigns should keep the principle of "do no harm" at their core and focus on providing migrants and asylum seekers with information that would actually help their particular case. Campaigns should be careful to avoid unconscious bias in messaging, and ensure that migrants' rights are at the core of the campaign. The UNHCR recommends that content and messaging, including visuals should avoid perpetuating negative stereotypes. Images that show migrants in large groups, including visuals of boats "overflowing" with people or large groups of people on the move or at borders should be avoided. In addition, campaigns should also refrain from negative narratives by using sensationalized images associated with criminal activity, prison, violence or which portray migrants solely as victims.²⁵³

An example of a campaign that puts messaging around the rights of migrants central would be the Dutch government's Diaspora Awareness Raising campaign aimed at Afghans that offered specific information required by migrants en route, rather than general warnings about the dangers in attempting irregular migration. Another relevant example is the Alarme Phone Sahara campaign which is implemented by a network coordinated by migrants' rights associations, groups and individuals based in Sahel-Saharan region (Niger, Mali, Burkina Faso, Togo, Morocco) and Europe (Austria and Germany) that promotes freedom of movement of migrants against restrictive policies, does not intervene to influence migration decision, and aims to sensitise migrants on their rights, and raise awareness on the support structures and services available to rescue them in times of distress.

4. When focusing on vulnerable and at-risk population, for instance Afghans in Pakistan, with limited legal options available for continuation of stay in Pakistan or migrate onwards, focus should be more on providing information on practical and feasible alternative options, and actual choices that are available to them. It is important that the campaign staff are aware of and trained in available options for third country migrants in order to provide relevant information to the target population.

²⁵⁰ Majidi, "Deterring Migration in Times of Crises: The Ethics of Behavioral Change in Migration Information Campaigns."

²⁵¹ UNICEF, "Social and Behaviour Change at UNICEF," 2023, https://www.sbcguidance.org/sites/default/files/2023-04/UNICEF_SBC_Programme_Guidance_All_Tools.pdf.

²⁵² Bishop, "An International Analysis of Governmental Media Campaigns to Deter Asylum Seekers."

²⁵³ OHCHR, "#StandUp4Migrants," 2023, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/get-involved/campaigns/stand-up-for-migrants>.

5. Information on risks and hardships during the irregular journey and on arrival, may have limited practical value to potential migrants.²⁵⁴ It is quite likely that potential migrants are receptive to warnings about possible risk, and are even aware of them through lived experience, but have no other choice and no option of going back, as discussed earlier based on the survey findings of MMC.²⁵⁵
6. When sharing new and information about new policies in countries of destinations, campaigns should ensure that announcements are not just related to the restrictive policy updates, rather positive policy updates are also shared widely. For instance, a study analysing three migration information campaigns launched by Australian, Norwegian and American governments concluded that often campaigns that focus on communicating policy changes in countries of destinations, including changes in asylum procedures, rules and regulations “offer an illusion of transparency through frequent updates”, while at the same time obscuring and withholding certain information from the public.²⁵⁶ This was particularly the case in Australia’s Zero Chance campaign which conveniently omitted or de-prioritised updates that relate to provision of rights to asylum seekers, and focused predominantly on communicating regulations that may deter arrivals. Bishop labels this as “strategic omission” of information.
7. For campaign funders, designers and implementers, it is also an ethical responsibility to be fully cognizant of the power play and political economy at hand in relation to the target population and design of messages. Creating messaging around the risks and dangers of the journey and putting the blame on smugglers and migration brokers for exploitation and abuse shifts the focus away from the real reason behind the vulnerability. The reason for a thriving smuggling business and vulnerability of migrants along the way is because the parameters of legal migration to certain destinations are unachievable for many that are in vulnerable situations in their home countries, and in most cases it is the enforcement of that “legality” that leads to risks and abuses along the way.²⁵⁷ Indeed, a survey conducted by Buz et al. in 2020 among Afghans in Türkiye shows that majority reported border guards and immigration officials as the main perpetrators of protection risks (38%), followed by smugglers (34%), and military or police (31%).²⁵⁸

²⁵⁴ EMN INFO Working Group, ““Don’t Come” or ‘Be Prepared before You Come’? An Introduction to Information and Awareness-Raising Campaigns,” in *Annual EMN Conference* (Vienna, 2019).

²⁵⁵ Mixed Migration Centre, “Afghans En Route to Turkey: Routes, Protection Risks, and Access to Assistance”; Buz et al., “Destination Unknown Afghans on the Move in Turkey”; Mixed Migration Centre, “Afghans En Route to Turkey: Access to Critical Information.”

²⁵⁶ Bishop, “An International Analysis of Governmental Media Campaigns to Deter Asylum Seekers.”

²⁵⁷ DIIS, “Migration Risk Campaigns Are Based on Wrong Assumptions,” no. May (2015).

²⁵⁸ Buz et al., “Destination Unknown Afghans on the Move in Turkey.”

5. Role of returnees in information provision (with focus on Pakistani returnees)

5.1. Introduction

Responding to a research need identified in PARIM-I, this section focuses specifically on understanding the role of returnees in migration decision-making. This section sets the context for a dedicated research stream of PARIM-II which will provide an in-depth account of the role of returnees in influencing migration decision-making in Pakistan. Particularly, this research stream will focus on the role of Pakistani returnees influencing migration decisions of potential Pakistani irregular migrants. As a starting point, this section offers some available information on the profile of Pakistani returnees, and offers some discussion on the effectiveness of engaging returnees in migration information campaigns. These lines of discussion will be further developed in the dedicated report on the role of returnees.

5.2. Profile of Pakistani returnees

IOM's Returnee Longitudinal Survey (2021) presents insight about the profile of people who have returned to Pakistan from Europe through the Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration (AVRR) programme. According to the study based on a sample of 417 returnees from Greece, Germany and Bosnia and Herzegovina, the profile of Pakistani returnees matches the profile of migrants – they are mostly young men from Punjab province. The majority fall within the age group of 25-34 years, with most having up to secondary school education.²⁵⁹ While most surveys of potential migrants and Pakistani migrants show that the ratio of married and unmarried migrants are close to 50%,²⁶⁰ the percentage of married individuals is higher in the profile of returnees (65%).

Despite being part of the AVRR programme which supports returnees reintegration process, the majority of returnees in the sample reported insufficient income as a major personal challenge. Income status shows that the majority (38%) were earning between USD 65-130 per month when interviewed, with about 19% earning between USD 131-195 per month. This is also validated by the fact that at the time of the interview, 21% were unemployed and looking for jobs. About 57% reported to be self-employed or in business. Most of the respondents were engaged in the agriculture sector on return (42%), followed by wholesale/retail trade.²⁶¹

Considering that these economic issues coincide with their main drivers of migration in the first place (reported as unemployment, dissatisfaction over income, and lack of hope in a future in Pakistan), 21% of the returnees in the sample reported intentions of re-migrating.²⁶² The main factors contributing to the decision of re-migration are also the perceived higher income levels in intended destination countries, and a lack of security.

Against this background, careful consideration is required to understand how best to engage returnees as messengers in migration information campaigns.

²⁵⁹ IOM, "Snapshot Report: Pakistani Returnees from Greece, Germany and Bosnia and Herzegovina," 2021, <https://www.migrationdataportal.org/resource/snapshot-report-pakistani-returnees-greece-germany-and-bosnia-and-herzegovina>.

²⁶⁰ Qaisrani, Hahn-Schaur, and Hendow, "Irregular Migration Dynamics from Pakistan and the Role of Information Campaigns: PARIM Final Report"; IOM, "Comprehensive Profile of Pakistani Potential Migrants 2016," 2016; IOM, "Snapshot of 2018 Arrivals in Europe from Pakistan," 2018.

²⁶¹ IOM, "Snapshot Report: Pakistani Returnees from Greece, Germany and Bosnia and Herzegovina."

²⁶² IOM.

5.3. Are returnees effective messengers in information campaigns?

As discussed at length in the PARIM-I research findings and other relevant literature, albeit important, information is just one aspect that influences migration aspirations and decision.²⁶³ The way information is received and taken into account depends a great deal on who the source and messenger of that information is. More than the objective soundness and factuality of the information, it is the perception of the messenger in the eyes of the potential migrant that influences whether the information received would be deemed credible or not.²⁶⁴

With mounting evidence that potential irregular migrants may avoid and dismiss institutional sources of migration information and consider them biased and focused on deterring migration due to external influence,²⁶⁵ campaign designers and implementers are increasingly exploring engagement with informal but trusted “messengers” relying on peer-to-peer information sharing activities.²⁶⁶ Based on the well-researched body of literature that social networks play an important role in migration decision-making, there is an increasing focus on engaging with proxies of potential migrants’ social networks through diaspora members and returnees.²⁶⁷ In this regard, peer-to-peer communication in migration information campaigns has gained popularity in recent years, with the intended objective that information shared by those who have been through the process would be trusted more, owing to the shared experience and assumed credibility. Many campaigns engage diaspora members and/or returnees as peers to share information on migration.

Research from PARIM-I shows that returnees may be more effective as messengers for migration-related information than diaspora members. PARIM-I project dedicated a research stream to understand diaspora members’ role in migration decision-making and the scope of engaging diaspora members as messengers in migration information campaign.²⁶⁸ The report discussed the specific positionality of the diaspora members in terms of their engagement in migration information

²⁶³ Qaisrani, Hahn-Schaur, and Hendow, “Irregular Migration Dynamics from Pakistan and the Role of Information Campaigns: PARIM Final Report”; 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, 2018); Sandra Morgenstern, “Theoretical Models and Empirical Results Supporting Migration Information Campaigns. Background Note for the PARIM Project.” (Vienna: ICMPD, 2021).

²⁶⁴ Sandra Morgenstern, “Strong & Longlasting Attitude and Intention Change? Causal Field Evidence on Sender Credibility,” 2022, submitted for review.

²⁶⁵ María Hernández-Carretero and Jørgen Carling, “Beyond ‘Kamikaze Migrants’: Risk Taking in West African Boat Migration to Europe,” *Human Organization* 71, no. 4 (2012): 407–16; Kira Kosnick, “Mediating Migration: New Roles for (Mass) Media,” *Media and Diversity*, no. 5 (2014), <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.4000/inmedia.761>.

²⁶⁶ Anissa Maâ, Julia van Dessel, and Ida Marie Savio Vammen, “Can Migrants Do the (Border)Work? Conflicting Dynamics and Effects of ‘Peer-to-Peer’ Intermediation in North and West Africa,” *Journal of Borderland Studies*, 2022, <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1080/08865655.2022.2108111>.

²⁶⁷ de Haas, “The Internal Dynamics of Migration Processes: A Theoretical Inquiry”; Jacob Townsend and Christel Oomen, “Before the Boat: Understanding the Migrant Journey,” 2015, 1–26; Yordanos Seifu Estifanos, *Social Networks, Dreams and Risks: Ethiopian Irregular Migrants into South Africa* (United Nations Economic Commission for Africa and Social Development Policy Division, 2017); Ali Nobil Ahmad, “The Romantic Appeal of Illegal Migration: Gender, Masculinity and Human Smuggling from Pakistan,” in *Illegal Migration and Gender in a Global and Historical Perspective*, ed. Marlou Schrover et al. (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2008), <https://doi.org/10.5117/9789089640475>; Rianne Dekker et al., “Smart Refugees : How Syrian Asylum Migrants Use Social Media Information in Migration Decision-Making,” *Social Media + Society* 4, no. 1 (2018): 1–11, <https://doi.org/10.1177/2056305118764439>.

²⁶⁸ Qaisrani and Jokic, “Engaging Diasporas in Information Campaigns on Migration.”

campaigns, and one of its main findings is that diaspora members in general may not be effective proxies for “friends and family abroad”, especially if the intention is to share messaging on risks of the journey and hardships in the destination. Therefore, it calls for caution when engaging diaspora members as messengers in migration information campaigns. Therefore, engaging diaspora members as messengers is not foreseen in PARIM-II.

Moreover, results from the PARIM-I survey and qualitative research highlighted the important role that returnees play in migration decision-making in select districts of Punjab, Pakistan.²⁶⁹ Returnees were highlighted as the main source for migration related information, with 76% of the sample reporting that they acquire relevant information from returnees, with a slightly higher percentage (80%) for those that mentioned having intentions to migrate irregularly.

In addition, two surveys conducted by IOM: one in 2020 and another in 2021 among 160 Pakistani migrants in Europe also highlighted the important role that returnees play as a source of information during migration decision-making.²⁷⁰ In both surveys, 15%²⁷¹ and 16%²⁷² of the sample reported that they received information on Europe and how to migrate there through friends and family that returned to Pakistan from abroad. This was the third most common response, preceded by social contacts at work, and social media and messaging applications with friends and family abroad.

However, besides these statistics and a general understanding of role of friends and family in facilitating migration through information sharing, there is limited published literature that explores the interactions and exchange between returnees and potential migrants in detail in the context of Pakistan. While a number of studies as cited above and anecdotal accounts emphasise the role of the returnees in providing relevant information to migrants in Pakistan,²⁷³ more in-depth understanding is required on the nature of information shared, the degree of influence this information has on the migration decision, the timing of receiving information in the decision-making phase, the reason of return, the impression and social standing of the returnee within the community, and the relationship between the returnee and the potential migrant.²⁷⁴ In addition, the role of returnees could also be explored within the context of specific destination countries. Williams et al. posit that a potential

²⁶⁹ Qaisrani, Hahn-Schaur, and Hendow, “Irregular Migration Dynamics from Pakistan and the Role of Information Campaigns: PARIM Final Report.”

²⁷⁰ IOM, “Pakistan: Survey on Drivers of Migration - Migrants in Europe during Covid-19”; International Organisation for Migration (IOM), “Pakistan: Survey on Drivers of Migration - Regional Evidence for Migration Policy and Analysis,” 2020.

²⁷¹ for Migration (IOM), “Pakistan: Survey on Drivers of Migration - Regional Evidence for Migration Policy and Analysis.”

²⁷² IOM, “Pakistan: Survey on Drivers of Migration - Migrants in Europe during Covid-19.”

²⁷³ Betsy Joles, “They Set Sail with Dreams and Met Disaster: Stories from the Ill-Fated Migrant Ship,” *NPR*, June 27, 2023, <https://www.npr.org/sections/goatsandsoda/2023/06/27/1184484364/they-set-sail-with-dreams-and-met-disaster-stories-from-the-ill-fated-migrant-sh>; Ali Nobil Ahmad, *Masculinity, Sexuality and Illegal Migration. Human Smuggling from Pakistan to Europe* (London: Routledge, 2011), <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315594200>.

²⁷⁴ Jessica Hagen-Zanker and Gemma Hennessey, “What Do We Know about the Subjective and Intangible Factors That Shape Migration Decision-Making? A Review of the Literature from Low and Middle Income Countries” (Oslo, 2021).

migrants' social capital, including returnees, play a stronger role when the preferred migration corridors and destinations are logistically difficult to navigate and reach.²⁷⁵

To further explore the role of returnees, especially within the purview of migration information campaigns, this section reviews available global literature to understand the role that returnees play in providing relevant information to potential migrants. However, more research is required to understand this dimension specially for the case of Pakistan – a gap that PARIM-II research aims to fill.

McCroskey and Teven posit that credibility of a messenger is a function of their **expertise and know-how** on the subject matter, their **trustworthiness and reliability** to provide correct information, and the **goodwill** to help with relevant information.²⁷⁶ Many migration information campaigns involve returnees (and diaspora members) based on the assumed universal credibility of these peers among potential migrants.²⁷⁷ For instance, in Senegal the IOM campaign “Migrants as Messengers” uses returnee testimonials to influence migration decision-making of potential migrants.²⁷⁸ The assumption is that potential migrants would trust the information shared by people who have attempted irregular migration about their own lived experiences through emotional identification and because they are perceived to have the “insider” perspective. Other similar EU-funded campaigns engage local youth, immediate family members of those who have lost someone from their household in the migration attempt, as well as existing return migrant associations.²⁷⁹

When engaging returnees as messengers in information campaigns, there are a few aspects that warrant further consideration in such a design. While returnees have a strong influence, McCroskey and Teven’s conceptualisation of credibility when applied to migration information campaigns requires the understanding that merely the experience itself is not sufficient to make them the most effective messenger. Although they might have the necessary “expertise” and lived experience of the journey, for potential migrants, expertise is often only considered relevant if it is associated with success. A Seefar study found that returnees are often trusted for migration-related information as long as migrants do not consider them as having failed in their migration attempt.²⁸⁰ This is also validated by Morgenstern, who notes that forcibly returned migrants are often stigmatised in their home communities, hence reducing their potential credibility for migration information.²⁸¹ In PARIM-I research, it was found that 64% of the sample perceived forced returnees as a source of shame, yet 27% considered them a source of potential migrants.

“Failure” may also be judged based on the phase of migration from which a migrant returns. For example, those who are deported or forcibly returned before having reached their intended

²⁷⁵ E Nathalie Williams et al., “When Does Social Capital Matter for Migration? A Study of Networks, Brokers, and Migrants in Nepal,” *International Migration Review* 54, no. 4 (2020): 964–91, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC8016173/>.

²⁷⁶ James C McCroskey and Jason J. Teven, “Goodwill: A Reexamination of the Construct and Its Measurement,” *Communication Monographs* 66, no. 1 (1999): 90–103.

²⁷⁷ IOM, “‘Migrants as Messengers’: The Impact of Peer-to-Peer Communication on Potential Migrants in Senegal. Impact Evaluation Report.” (Geneva, 2019).

²⁷⁸ Felipe Alexander Dunsch, Jasper Tjaden, and William Quiviger, “Migrants as Messengers: The Impact of Peer-to-Peer Communication on Potential Migrants in Senegal. Technical Annex,” no. September (2019): 80.

²⁷⁹ Maâ, van Dessel, and Vammen, “Can Migrants Do the (Border)Work? Conflicting Dynamics and Effects of ‘Peer-to-Peer’ Intermediation in North and West Africa.”

²⁸⁰ Seefar, “3E Impact. Ethical, Engaged & Effective. Running Communications on Irregular Migration from Kos to Kandahar,” n.d.

²⁸¹ Morgenstern, “Strong & Longlasting Attitude and Intention Change? Causal Field Evidence on Sender Credibility.”

destination may not be considered to have the required expertise of making it, while those who return voluntarily or forcibly from the desired destination may be perceived to have sufficient information to guide others about the experience.

Secondly, trustworthiness is not just a matter of whether a person can be trusted in general, but whether they can be reliable for providing the relevant information, and trusted to understand the potential migrants' aspirations. This relates to specific social and relational dimensions of the interaction between the potential migrant and the messenger. Based on a campaign implemented in Senegal through "peer educators", Maâ et al. elucidate how community workers or peers implied in their interviews that in order to maintain the trust of the target audience (migrant communities), they sometimes had to turn a blind eye towards some illicit activities that some community members were involved in.²⁸² This highlights that even among returnees, potential migrants may look for specific trusted individuals who they know they can personally trust and who would not disclose their intentions to migrate irregularly.

Involving returnees (or other messengers) in migration information campaigns also requires some thinking in terms of returnees' own motivation in providing information to potential migrants. There may also be potential conflict of interest with the campaign implementers – returnees may not necessarily want to give the same message as the campaign. Community experts involved in PARIM-I research shared that there are numerous cases where returnees themselves are in pursuit of re-attempting irregular migration.²⁸³ Most migration information campaigns are designed with the broader goal of dissuading intentions of potential irregular migration, and in such scenarios they may not be ideal candidates for motivating others to opt for legal migration channels. Drawing on the experience of Migrants as Messengers campaign implemented in Senegal, Maâ et al. discuss how the campaign had to be put forth in a humanitarian framing rather than as migration management to encourage returnees' participation as messengers.²⁸⁴

Furthermore, the timeline of their own initial migration journeys is important. Based on the IOM survey on returnees to Pakistan, the majority of the respondents reported that they spent 3-5 years in Europe before returning (33%), followed by those that spent between 1-3 years (31%), and those that had spent more than 5 years (26%).²⁸⁵ The timing of the original journey as well as return can have two types of implications. First, in response to ever-changing border management practices and policies in countries along the route and destination, the conditions of the journey and arrival may be ever changing. Returnees who made the journey a considerable time ago (more than three years) may not have the most updated details to inform potential migrants about the actual situation that they may experience along the journey. Their own information and experience may be outdated compared to the actual circumstances. That said, the second type of implication relates to the point of re-migration. Returnees who returned within the first three years of migration may be more likely to have motivations to re-migrate, as the desired outcome of migration may not have been achieved yet. They may feel more confident about their preparation to migrate again based on prior knowledge and experience. This is also evident in the IOM survey on returnees which shows that among those with

²⁸² Maâ, van Dessel, and Vammen, "Can Migrants Do the (Border)Work? Conflicting Dynamics and Effects of 'Peer-to-Peer' Intermediation in North and West Africa."

²⁸³ Qaisrani, Hahn-Schaur, and Hendow, "Irregular Migration Dynamics from Pakistan and the Role of Information Campaigns: PARIM Final Report."

²⁸⁴ Maâ, van Dessel, and Vammen, "Can Migrants Do the (Border)Work? Conflicting Dynamics and Effects of 'Peer-to-Peer' Intermediation in North and West Africa."

²⁸⁵ IOM, "Snapshot Report: Pakistani Returnees from Greece, Germany and Bosnia and Herzegovina."

prior migration experience, 29% reported intentions to re-migrate within the next six months when interviewed.²⁸⁶

Last but not the least, involving returnees in migration information campaigns, especially to recount their difficult experience while on the journey or on arrival comes with a potential ethical cost of re-creating trauma in case of tragic experiences during the journey and on arrival. They should not be insisted on sharing their detailed experiences if they are not willing to. Campaign implementers should also be responsible for providing psychological support if participating returnees are triggered by recalling their migration experience. Additionally, in most cases returnees (and other peers) are engaged to work on a voluntary basis with little compensation for their contributions. This is especially problematic when returnees themselves are struggling to economically reintegrate back in the community. Research conducted among returnees engaged in the Migrants as Messengers campaign in Senegal highlighted that lack of any compensation and restricted access to reintegration programmes motivated some returnee volunteers to consider re-migration.²⁸⁷

Nevertheless, besides these considerations, there is also merit in engaging with returnees not just as “messengers” but rather designers and informants for the campaign. They can be the right sources to inform the campaign through highlighting the actual information deficits they experienced when making their migration decision and can better reflect on what type of information would have actually helped them in making safer migration decisions and mitigating risks along the journey.

²⁸⁶ IOM, “Snapshot Report: Pakistani Returnees from Greece, Germany and Bosnia and Herzegovina.”

²⁸⁷ Maâ, van Dessel, and Vammen, “Can Migrants Do the (Border)Work? Conflicting Dynamics and Effects of ‘Peer-to-Peer’ Intermediation in North and West Africa.”

6. Conclusion

This background report serves as a reference document to further develop the evidence base on three aspects within the purview of PARIM-II research:

- Aspirations, motivations as well as information needs of Afghan nationals in Pakistan in relation to migration decision-making.
- Migration information campaigns aimed at displaced populations in third countries, with a focus on Afghan population
- Role of returnees in information provision to potential migrants in Pakistan

Aspiration, motivations and information needs of Afghan migrants in Pakistan

This report sets the base for research activities planned under PARIM-II by providing a contextual overview of the socioeconomic situation of Afghan nationals residing in Pakistan on various legal statuses, as well as providing a bird's eye view of the mobility patterns of Afghans that relate to or take place through Pakistan. The confluence of the existing situation of Afghans in Pakistan, and the latest geopolitical developments, including in Afghanistan and Pakistan, may contribute to influencing migration patterns of Afghan nationals from Pakistan towards third country destinations. This background report puts this discussion in the perspective of onward migration in forced migration context, and identifies several macro, meso and micro level dynamics that may shape migration aspirations of Afghan nationals displaced in Pakistan.

- The study identifies that among the **macro drivers of onward migration from Pakistan**, Afghans experience a shrinking legal protection space, limited resources for humanitarian support, lack of a pathway to citizenship, limited validity of legal status, lack of a right to work for recent Afghan arrivals on visit visa, and a general situation of economic, environmental and political instability in Pakistan.
- **Meso drivers** that may influence aspirations and decisions of onward migration include policy narrative and treatment of Afghan nationals by law enforcement authorities, increase in repatriation rate from Pakistan, slow resettlement processes to other destinations, eroding social cohesion, as well as lack of information on available safe migration pathways.
- Lastly, assessing some of the personal characteristics that influence migration motivations among Afghans in Pakistan show that **micro drivers** include age (18-35 years), gender (mostly male, but increasingly women and children as well due to the security situation in Afghanistan), education (less educated more likely to migrate irregularly), ethnicity (Hazara community more vulnerable), occupation and affiliations (e.g. those formerly working with previous US-supported regime, human rights activists, musicians, artists, LGBTQ+ community more vulnerable), timing of migration to Pakistan, as well as risk perceptions and information on migration, etc. Micro factors also include intangible elements that contribute to aspirations and decision-making around migration, including feelings, emotions, and attitudes towards migration.
- That said, most of the research focusing on onward migration decision-making of Afghans concentrate on Türkiye and Greece, as reviewed in this report, with limited attention to other countries that may have been part of the fragmented journey towards Europe. There are very few studies that delve deeper into the dynamics at play in neighbouring countries of Afghanistan, especially in Pakistan.

Migration information campaigns aimed at displaced populations in third countries, with a focus on Afghan population

This report also provides an overview of migration information campaigns that target migrants displaced in other countries or in transit. It maps some of these campaigns, highlighting their target group, geographic focus, messages and framing of the content, as well as available evidence on the effectiveness of such campaigns. It maps campaigns on three levels: overview of migration information campaigns aimed at displaced population groups, overview of migration information campaigns aimed specifically at Afghan populations, and an overview of awareness campaigns aimed at Afghans in Pakistan (that may or may not relate to migration directly). The following main points summarise the discussion.

- Review of available information on migration information campaigns targeting migrants in transit shows geographic concentration towards countries in the Horn of Africa, Mediterranean and towards the South Eastern European countries, including Türkiye, and the Western Balkan countries. A number of these projects, especially those focusing on the Western Balkan route target Afghan migrants as their target group.
- Campaigns targeting displaced populations in neighbouring countries or along the route tend to overwhelmingly focus on deterrence messages including risks of the journey, realities of life in intended countries of destination, including changing policies in these countries, as well as options for return to their home countries or region. There are very few campaigns that focus purely on protection and rights of migrants, using positive messaging.
- There are numerous campaigns implemented with Afghans as the target group, largely supported through the funding of European governments. Among nine campaigns examined in this report that focus on Afghans, only one categorically focuses on sharing protection information based on the needs of Afghan migrants already on their journey.
- Most campaigns targeting such vulnerable population groups use social media platforms for dissemination, while some use local counsellors in countries of residence to share relevant information.
- Targeting conflict-displaced population in countries along the journey comes with a massive ethical responsibility, which campaign designers and implementers should uphold. Unless campaigns messaging includes practical options for alternatives that these population groups can use, messages focused on risk may have limited effect in terms of migration decisions, and may actually trigger re-traumatisation through negative framing focused on risks and challenges. Campaigns should adhere to a “do no harm” policy, including emotional harm. Campaigns should also conduct a thorough assessment of the actual information needs of the target population before designing the content of the campaign.

Role of returnees in information provision to potential migrants in Pakistan

Lastly, this background report provides a brief overview of the role of returnees in migration decision-making among Pakistani potential migrants, a research need identified through the experience of PARIM-I research. While this research stream will be developed in detail in the following months, a brief snapshot of the profile of Pakistani returnees, and their involvement in migration decision-making in the broader scholarly context is presented in this report. Following are the summary points of the discussion.

- To understand the role of returnees in influencing migration decisions in Pakistan, more in-depth understanding is required on the nature of information shared, the degree of influence this information has on the migration decision, the timing of receiving information in the decision-making phase, the reason of return, the impression and social standing of the returnee within the community, and the relationship between the returnee and the potential migrant.
- Involving returnees (or other messengers) in migration information campaigns also requires some thinking in terms of the conflict of interest with the campaign implementers – returnees may not necessarily want to give the same message as the campaign.
- Returnees may be useful contributors to the design of the campaign, highlighting the actual information needs during the journey and on reaching their destination, before they are engaged as “messengers” in the campaign.
- Based on existing surveys and research, the profile of Pakistani returnees, especially those that returned through AVRR programmes, mirrors the profile of potential or existing Pakistani migrants: mostly young men in the age group of 25-34 years from Punjab province. Even on return, the majority mentioned the issue of insufficient income and employment challenges – these issues coincide with the factors behind their migration in the first place.

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