MMC Asia Quarterly Report
Afghan Migration Aspirations
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Introduction

This report, published by MMC Asia and based on 4Mi data collected in Afghanistan, focuses on the Afghan migration culture and migration aspirations. Two questions are asked: 1) How can we talk about an Afghan 'culture of migration'? 2) What are some of the migration aspirations among Afghans?

The 4Mi data confirms that migration from Afghanistan is a long-standing tradition; 87% say that migration from their community has been taking place for many years. Further, and inspired by Carling's conceptual model[1] about migration aspiration, it is exemplified with the 4Mi data that migration from Afghanistan is influenced by the interplay of:

a) Political, socio-economic and conflict situation in the country of origin
b) Characteristics of the individual
c) Intervening factors such as protected borders and lack of funds to support the migration journey.

About the data

The findings in this report are based on a sample size of 1427 surveys with Afghans interviewed in Afghanistan from October 2017 to March 2018 who are in a process of migrating from the country. The data is collected in 7 provinces (Kabul, Nangarhar, Nimruz, Mazar-e-Sharif, Kunduz, Herat, and Kandahar) and at 4 border points (Zaranj, Islam Qala, Spin Boldak, and Torkham) by 18 trained local monitors.

The Afghans interviewed by the 4Mi monitors in Afghanistan, which form the basis of analysis in this report, were mainly single Pashtun, Hazara and Tajik men from both urban and rural areas and originating from different provinces in Afghanistan, mainly Nangarhar, Kunduz, Balkh, Herat, Ghazni and Kabul. More than 40% of the interviewees have either primary or no education while a little less than 40% have a secondary or high school level education. 25% were unemployed prior to initiating their migration journey.

Introduction to 4Mi Asia
The Mixed Migration Monitoring Initiative (4Mi) in Asia region aims at gathering data on regional mixed migration flows. Data is currently collected in Afghanistan as well as with Afghans on the move toward the East and West and analysis are produced monthly. The purpose is to increase knowledge about drivers of movement and protection risks faced by Afghans on the move.

Introduction to the Mixed Migration Centre
4Mi is a core activity for the Mixed Migration Centre (MMC), which has been established in February 2018. It brings together various existing regional initiatives – hosted or led by the Danish Refugee Council (DRC) – engaged in data collection, research, analysis and policy development on mixed migration issues into a new global network of mixed migration expertise. The MMC focuses on five core regions: Eastern Africa & Yemen, North Africa & Southern Mediterranean, West Africa, Middle East & Eastern Mediterranean and Asia. The 30 staff members of MMC are based in Geneva and Copenhagen and in its regional hubs Amman, Dakar, Nairobi, Tunis and Kabul, where it works in close cooperation with regional partners, stakeholders and donors. To read more about MMC please look at: Introduction to Mixed Migration Centre.pdf

Culture of migration

According to the 4Mi findings (see: Graph 1 and 2) and other research[2] we have identified a culture of migration among Afghans.

The phenomenon 'migration culture'[3] refers to the back and forth movements leading to material and human capital as well as cultural values and new behaviors being imported to a country and affecting perceptions and norms of local communities resulting in aspirations to migrate by others. Typically, migrants differentiate themselves from non-migrants by providing material capital in migration or sending money back to their families in the community of origin, gradually leading to the belief among the home community that one of the ways to access the material

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[1] Carling, J., 2002: *Migration in the age of involuntary immobility: Theoretical reflections and Cape Verdean experiences*, Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies, p. 12.

[2] For example: Monsutti, A. 2008: *Afghan migratory strategies and the three solutions to the refugee problem*, Refugee Survey Quarterly, Oxford University Press; Monsutti, A. 2007: *Migration as a rite of passage: Young Afghans building masculinity and adulthood in Iran*, Iranian Studies, Vol 40(2).

[3] Van mol, C. et al. 2017: *Migration aspirations and migration cultures. A case-study of Ukrainian migration towards the European Union*, Population Space and Place, p.3.

resources is to migrate. As a result, the aspiration to migrate gradually appears among other members of the community.[4] If there are no major constraints to migration at the community level and the movements increase over time, migration becomes normal, a 'habit'.[5] In such a context, a 'culture for migration' is formed in which, people are migrating because everyone else is migrating.[6]

In the 4Mi data, nearly half of the respondents in the present study have described migration as a very common phenomenon in their community, while 37% consider it quite common (see: Graph 1). Likewise, nearly 90% describe that migration from their community has taken place for many years (see: Graph 2). This is not surprising given that Afghans have a long-standing history of migrating to neighboring countries for work, pilgrimage and education and have been fleeing due to civil wars for decades.
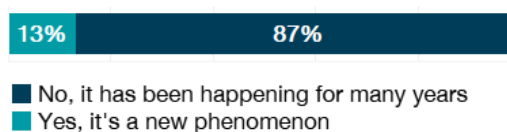
Graph 1.

Is it common for people from your community to migrate
(n=1427)
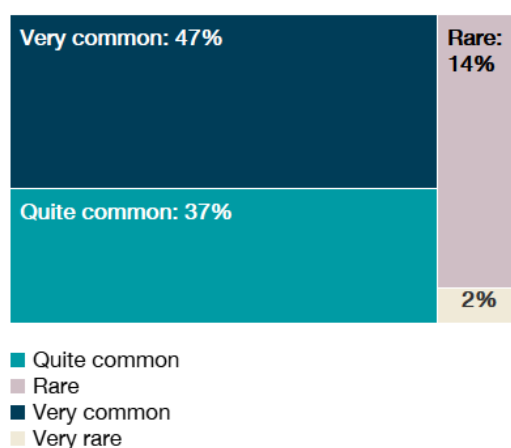
Graph 2.

Is migration a new phenomenon for people from your home area/community
(n=1427)

- No, it has been happening for many years
- Yes, it's a new phenomenon

Migration aspirations among Afghans

Various factors at different levels are affecting individuals' aspirations to migrate, as for example visualized by Carling J. in 'Migration in the age of involuntary immobility' (2002).[7] His conceptual model highlights the importance of both considering the emigration environment such as socio-economic and political conditions in the countries of origin and destination, individual characteristics and intervening factors (incentives and disincentives) such as immigration policies, border controls but also lack of funds and family pressures to stay or migrate. Importantly, Carling also highlights that aspirations to migrate does not necessarily lead to actual migration but rather the *potential* for migration. Only if people can migrate, migration is likely to happen. Otherwise, people will stay in their country of origin involuntarily.[8]

Influence of socio-economic and political situation

In Afghanistan, the level of political instability has increased and the security situation in the country is getting worse with increasing levels of civilian casualties between 2011 and 2017.[9] Taliban and other groups have expanded their activities and control territories throughout the country.[10] The threat and influence of these opposition groups has led to an increase in the suppression of civil rights and limited space especially for the educated young generation. Cities are the main target of suicide attacks and in addition to government centers, hospitals and schools are targeted.[11] The deteriorating security situation has likewise a negative impact on the Afghan job market. According to the World Bank, the economic growth rate has been declining since

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[4] Stark, O. and Taylor, J. E. 1989: *Relative deprivation and international migration*, Demography, 26(1).

[5] Timmerman, C. et al. 2014: *The relevance of a culture of migration in understanding migration aspiration in contemporary Turkey*, Turkish Studies, 15(3).

[6] One should not overlook the role of factors that have a negative effect on the aspiration to migrate. In some cases, returnees, in some ways, suppress the desire for migration with disappointing stories that narrate the difficulty of living in migration such as unemployment, social discrimination etc. In fact, migration cultures can sometimes negatively affect the migration aspirations (ibid, p. 500).

[7] Carling, J., 2002: *Migration in the age of involuntary immobility: Theoretical reflections and Cape Verdean experiences*, Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies, p. 12.

[8] Carling, J. 2002: *Migration in the age of involuntary immobility: theoretical reflections and Cape Verdean experiences*, Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies, Vol. 28(1), pp. 5-42.

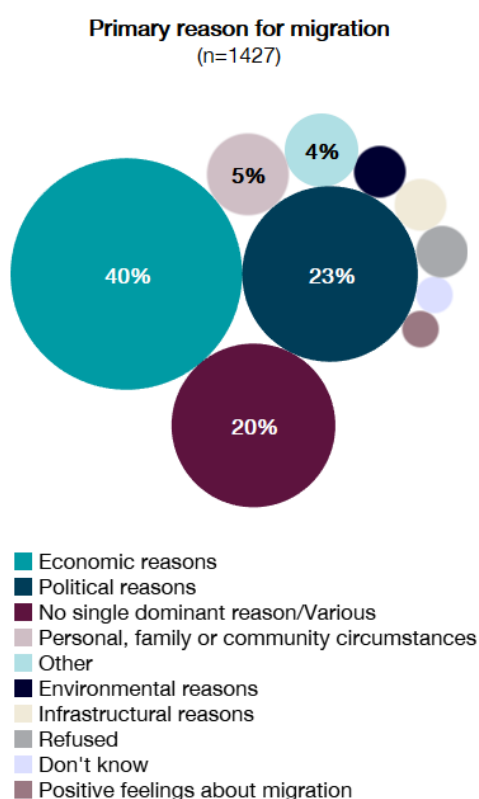[9] UNAMA, 2017: *Afghanistan Midyear Report on Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict*.

[10] According to US Army estimates, the Afghan Government can only claim control over 57% of the country. (*Security situation in Afghanistan likely to get worse*, available at: http://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-afghanistan-military-idUSKBN1872TL.)

[11] According to the *Report of the UN Secretary-General on Children and Armed Conflict*, in Afghanistan, 163 schools and 38 health facilities were attacked, 2016 (https://www.unicef.org/media/media_91119.html).

2012 (from 10.9% to 3.6% in 2016)[12] while unemployment and poverty rates are still rising.[13]

These issues related to unemployment, poverty and political instability in Afghanistan are reflected in the 4Mi data as drivers of migration. Graph 3 shows that most of the interviewees are migrating for economic reasons (40%) to find a better job or send money back to their family in Afghanistan. The main destinations indicated among those migrating primarily for economic reasons are to neighboring countries; Iran is indicated at 71%. Only 3% of those indicating that they want to leave Afghanistan due to economic reasons mention European countries as their preferred destination. However, it is unknown how many move onwards once reached their initial destination.

Graph 3.

Primary reason for migration
(n=1427)

- Economic reasons
- Political reasons
- No single dominant reason/Various
- Personal, family or community circumstances
- Other
- Environmental reasons
- Infrastructural reasons
- Refused
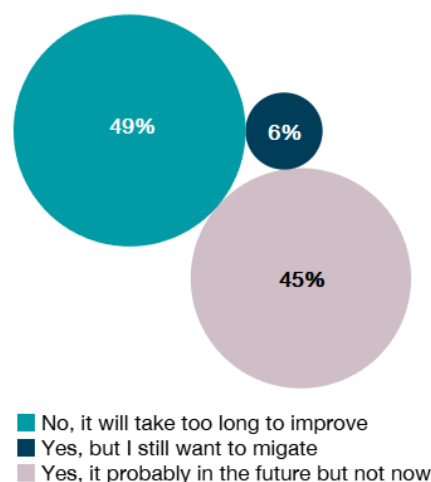- Don't know
- Positive feelings about migration

Political reasons are likewise an important factor for migration from Afghanistan and 77% of those 4Mi respondents highlighting that they want to leave for political reasons further mention that it's because of political instability and insecurity. Among those, 33% indicate Iran as their destination while 18% mention Pakistan. This is not surprising given that Iran and Pakistan have been the two main destinations for Afghan refugees during the last decades and there is a well-established Afghan community in the countries providing financial and social support. Turkey is indicated as a destination country by 20% of those migrating for political reasons.

The poor economic and political situation has led many Afghans to believe that in the long run, the country will not be able to recover and migration is the only choice ahead, as shown in graph 4. Half of the 4Mi respondents do not have any hope of improvement in the conditions in the country and see migration as the only way forward. A total of 45% indicate the possibility of change in the future but still aspire to migrate due to the current unstable situation in the country.

Graph 4.

Do you think your own country will be able to offer the kind of life you want for yourself in the longer term
(n=1427)

- No, it will take too long to improve
- Yes, but I still want to migate
- Yes, it probably in the future but not now

Influence of individual characteristics

Education level and residence background seem, according to the 4Mi data, to be some of the factors that impact migration aspirations among Afghans (see Graph 5).

According to the data, people with an advance degree indicate that they have been aspiring of migrating for many years while those with no education seem to indicate that they suddenly felt compelled to migrant. Likewise, those who live in urban/semi urban areas are more likely to have been thinking about migration. Those living in rural areas seem to have fewer migration aspirations and migrate due to the urgency of the situation.

Analysis also shows that people from rural areas with primary or no education usually select neighboring countries as their destination while those who live in urban areas and with a higher education degree tent to choose countries further away, especially European countries. The linkage between rural/urban and education/no education and the correlation between those requires additional exploration.

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[12] Trading Economics: https://tradingeconomics.com/afghanistan/gdp-growth-annual
[13] The World Bank: http://www.worldbank.org/en/country/afghanistan/overview
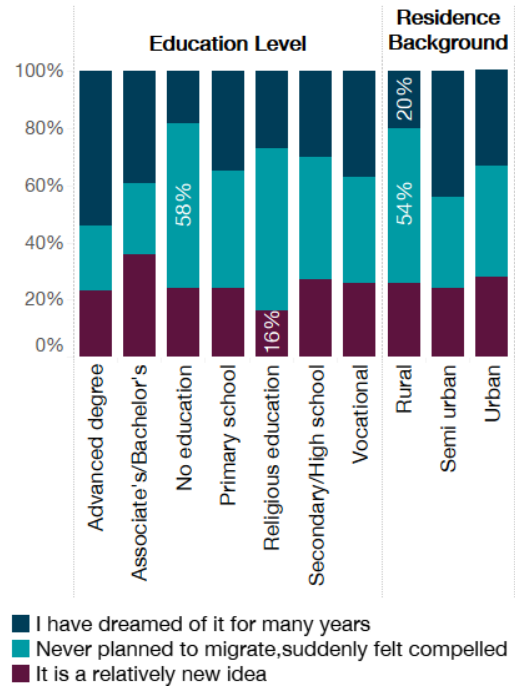
Influence of intervening factors

Intervening factors are generally related to policy and transnational migration networks that directly or indirectly affect migration aspirations.[14] It can thus for example be related to countries trying to restrict movements or increase border controls, as seen in some European countries in recent years given the increase of refugees and migrants seeking asylum.
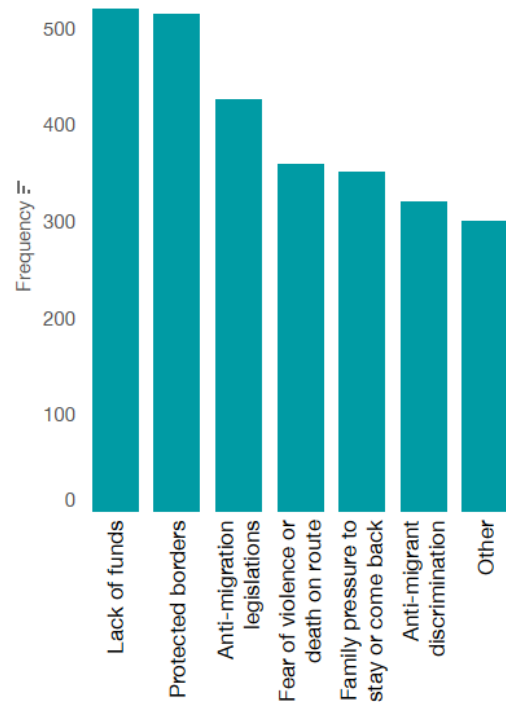
Some literature shows how policies of deterrence and containment are ineffective in stopping migration while others indicate that changes in policies to some extent may have an impact on people's decision to migrant and their choice of destination.[15] Research for example shows that unilateral preventive measures by an EU country might shift migration flows from one country to the next, but at the regional EU level, they make little difference. Anti-migration messages transmitted by European governments are however unlikely to drastically alter people's decision to migrate; decisions are often based on 'trusted information' from family and friends who have already migrated as well as others whom they share a social connection with rather than information from European governments.[16]

According to the 4Mi data, the main intervening factors identified by the Afghan respondents where lack of funding (see: graph 6). However, protected borders and anti-migration policies were also ranked as blocks to aspirations to migrate; more research is needed to unfold these aspects. Another important factor is the risk of violence during migration; 360 respondents mentioned fear of violence or death as a barrier to migrate and 4Mi has previously documented some of the protection violations that take place to Afghans on route.

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Graph 5
Have you dreamed of migrating for many years or is it a new idea
(n=1427)

- I have dreamed of it for many years
- Never planned to migrate, suddenly felt compelled
- It is a relatively new idea

Graph 6.
Blocks to aspirations
(n=1427)

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[14] Some consider these factors in the meso-level of analysis in the related models while others refer them to the policy intervention level (Van mol, Ch. et al 2017; Carling, J. 2002; Timmerman, Ch. et al 2014). In this report, they are referred to as intervening factors.
[15] The Mixed Migration Platform 2017: *How powerful is policy? The role of policy in shaping migrant decision-making*, The Mixed Migration Platform; Hagen-Zanker, J. & Mallett R. 2016: *Journeys to Europe - The role of policy in migrant decision-making*, IOD Insights
[16] Hagen-Zanker, J. & Mallett R. 2016: *Journeys to Europe - The role of policy in migrant decision-making*, IOD Insights