Monthly Migration Movements
Social Media
August 2018

Introduction

This summary using the findings from 582 4Mi interviews analyses how Afghan respondents are interacting with social media/information & communication technology (ICT) in the decision-making process to migrate and while en route. The findings show that Afghan refugees and migrants use social media mainly as a secondary source of information to complement the information they get from their family and friendship networks in the countries of origin and destinations. Those with secondary or high school level education are more likely to use social media before departure and en route compared to Afghans with lower level of education.

The Afghans interviewed for the report are largely single and married Hazara and Tajik men coming from urban areas in Afghanistan. The majority have completed secondary/high school level education and were unemployed or students before they initiated their migration journey.

The prevalence of using social media for decision-making

Existing research which examines the relationship of migration and social media highlights how there are different communication and information needs for refugees and migrants at different stages of the migration process. These studies show that before leaving a country of origin, social media is used to collect information to facilitate the move, and once at the destination location, social media is used to obtain information about integration/asylum processes, create a sense of community with other diaspora members, and stay in touch with family members who are still in the country of origin.[1]

While there is growing interest in how technology is influencing global phenomena such as migration, there is not much existing data when examining a specific demographic, such as Afghan refugees and migrants. The 4Mi data shows that while social media does impact Afghan refugees and migrants, it comes second to the influence of personal contacts, such as family and friends. This finding is supported by a report published by UNHCR that looks at social media use among Arabic speaking and Afghan refugees and migrants based on data collected from March-December 2016. The report highlights that according to communication preferences in a cultural context, Afghans rely on word-of-mouth as a significant channel for dissemination of information.[2] In all the graphs displayed in

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. 4Mi is expanding to include data collection of the onward movements of Rohingya and other migrant and refugee groups in South East Asia. The purpose is to increase knowledge about drivers of movement and protection risks faced by migrants and refugees 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 visit the homepage: http://www.mixedmigration.org/

this report, interpersonal relationships outweighed social media when both were provided as a possible answer.

The 4Mi data for the current sample indicates social media has little impact on the decision-making process to migrate. Only 14 out of the 582 respondents referred to social media as an influence in their decision (Graph 1, Page 2); what matters most is familial and friendship networks combined with people making the decision on their own. It is further understood from a prior MMC Asia monthly summary, 'Afghan Migration to Europe - the Role of Smugglers', that if a refugee or migrant uses a smuggler to facilitate the journey, referrals to a smuggler are often made through the recommendation of family or friends. This places an emphasis on the role of interpersonal relationships in Afghan movements.

[1] The People for Change Foundation (August 2016), 'Migrants' Use of Social Media in Malta' [Online]. Available at: http://www.pfcmalta.org/uploads/1/2/1/7/12174934/social_media_report_08-2016_-_final.pdf (Accessed 25 September 2018)
[2] UNHCR (April 2017), 'From A Refugee Perspective' [Online], page 38. Available at: http://www.unhcr.org/publications/brochures/5909af4d4/from-a-refugee-perspective.html (Accessed 04 October 2018)

**Graph 1. Did anyone encourage you to migrate? (multi-select response)**
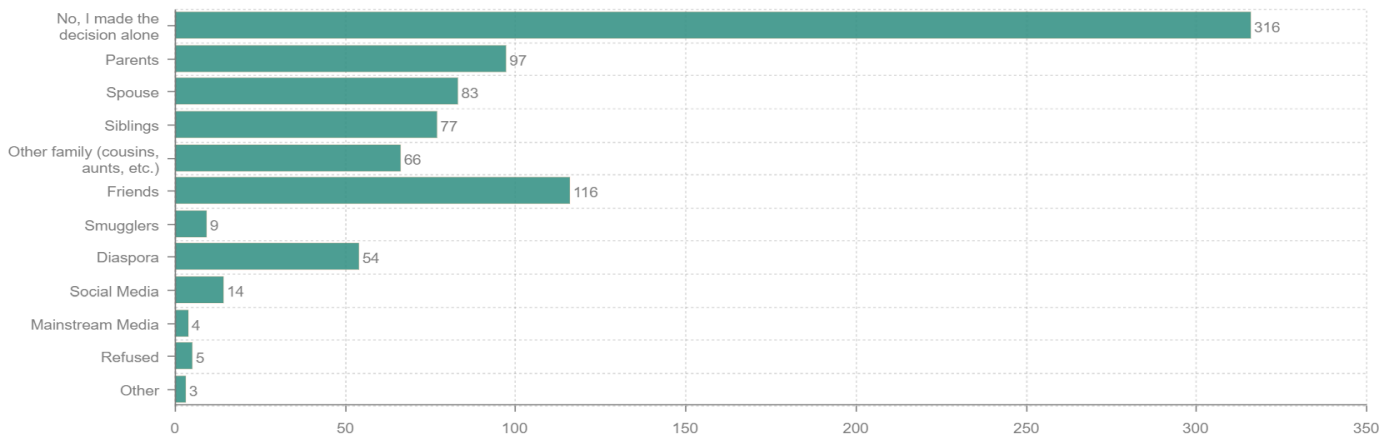
Social media use before migration and on route

Within the respondents, the 4Mi data showed those with a secondary or high school level education were more influenced by social media in the decision to migrate, in comparison to other respondents with lower levels of education. Following the same trend, the same group of high school level educated respondents were twice as likely to use social media for information en route than those with a lower education. When age, ethnicity, and gender were analysed in comparison to social media use, there was no considerable difference. The UNHCR study states that Afghan refugees and migrants rely entirely on the biased narrative of smugglers as their main source of information about the journey and cite that Afghans with lower levels of education follow the tradition of relying on fate and destiny which prevents them from questioning the narrative from smugglers.[3]

According to the UNHCR study, since Afghan refugees and migrants often use a smuggler, this has led to Facebook being a platform of information, advertisement and connection for the smuggler community. The report indicates that there are hundreds of pages of smuggling networks on Facebook, with prices and routes advertised publicly. If a personal inquiry is made on the page, the information seeker will be instructed by the smuggler to use a more private ICT such as Whats App, Messenger, Viber, etc. for further communication.[4] The 4Mi data reinforces this information; Facebook is the main media Afghan migrants use to access information (Graph 2, Page 2) and smugglers are a main source of information before starting the journey, followed by interpersonal relationships (Graph 3, Page 3).

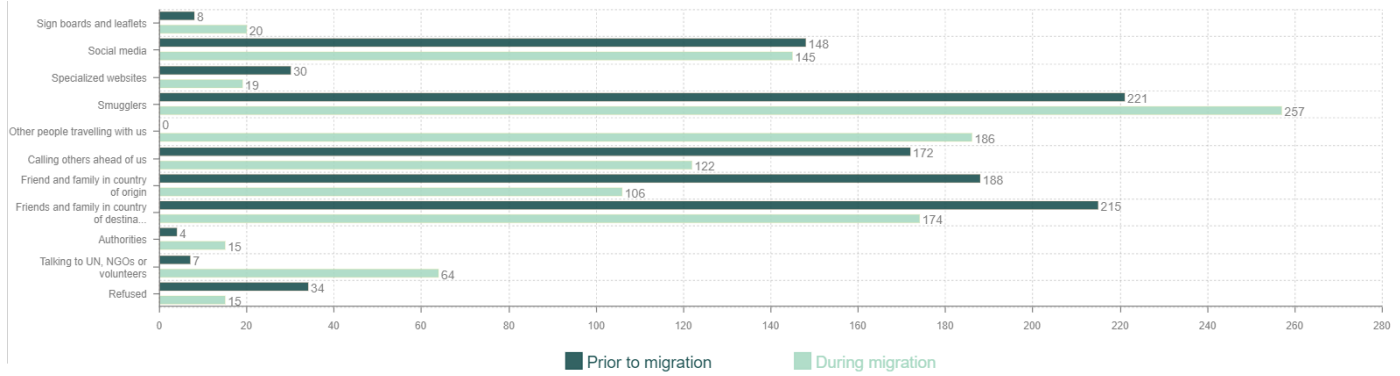**Graph 2. Which social media/ ICTs did you use during your journey?**
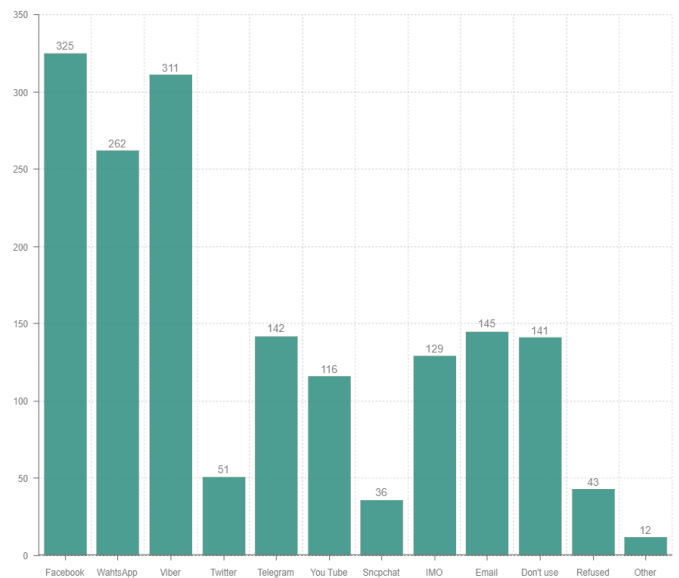
The frequency of social media use by Afghan refugees and migrants as a source of information during the migration process is almost at the same level prior to departure (Graph 3, Page 3). This may be attributed to the fact that most respondents reported that they had a smartphone during migration (Graph 4, Page 3). This is a contrary finding to the UNHCR report on Afghan's social media use, which communicated that Afghan refugees and migrants rarely possess mobile phones, much less smartphones, en route. However, the same report did indicate that one of the first things Afghan refugees and migrants buy upon arrival to their destination country is a smartphone, in order to contact family back home and communicate with Afghans in

[3] UNHCR (April 2017), 'From A Refugee Perspective' [Online], page 16. Available at: http://www.unhcr.org/publications/brochures/5909af4d4/from-a-refugee-perspective.html (Accessed 04 October 2018)
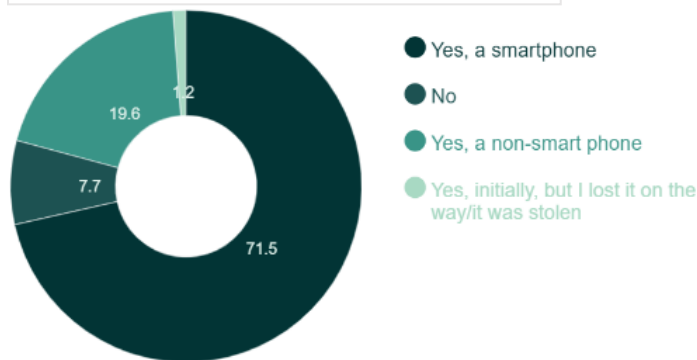[4] UNHCR (April 2017), 'From A Refugee Perspective' [Online], page 17. Available at: http://www.unhcr.org/publications/brochures/5909af4d4/from-a-refugee-perspective.html (Accessed 04 October 2018)

Europe.[5] Both the UNHCR report and 4Mi data emphasis how social media influences the migration process by keeping people in touch as is illustrated with the 4Mi data in Graph 5, Page 3.
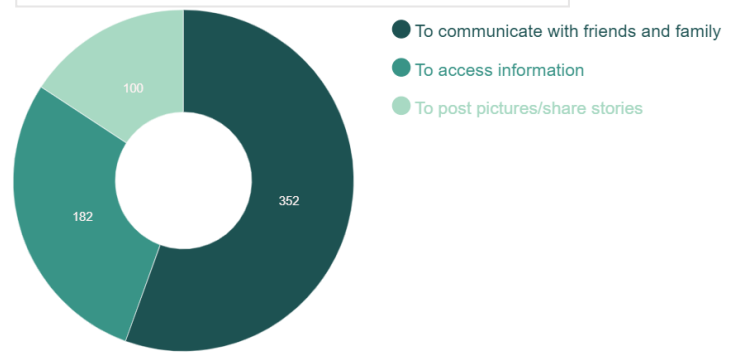
Graph 3. What were your main sources of information prior and during migration?

Prior to migration · During migration

Graph 4. Did you have a phone with you during your migration journey so far?

- Yes, a smartphone
- No
- Yes, a non-smart phone
- Yes, initially, but I lost it on the way/it was stolen

Graph 5. What do/did you use social media/ICTs for?

- To communicate with friends and family
- To access information
- To post pictures/share stories

[5] UNHCR (April 2017), 'From A Refugee Perspective' [Online], pages 11 & 24. Available at: http://www.unhcr.org/publications/brochures/5909af4d4/from-a-refugee-perspective.html (Accessed 04 October 2018)