



Introduction

Since the late 1970s, the continuous movement of Afghans within and from Afghanistan has been shaped by a combination of security, conflict, political and economic factors. At the end of 2019, around 2.6 million Afghans were internally displaced, while around 2.7 million were registered as refugees, representing the world's most protracted displaced and dispossessed population under the mandate of the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR).

For decades, Turkey has been a host country and transit hub for hundreds of thousands of Afghan refugees, who constitute the second-largest group of refugees and asylum seekers registered in the country. In 2018, Turkey experienced a substantial increase of irregular arrivals (those lacking legal documentation) and Afghan nationals constituted the largest group of new irregular arrivals. In 2019, the number of Afghan arrivals doubled, and they remained the largest national group of new arrivals.

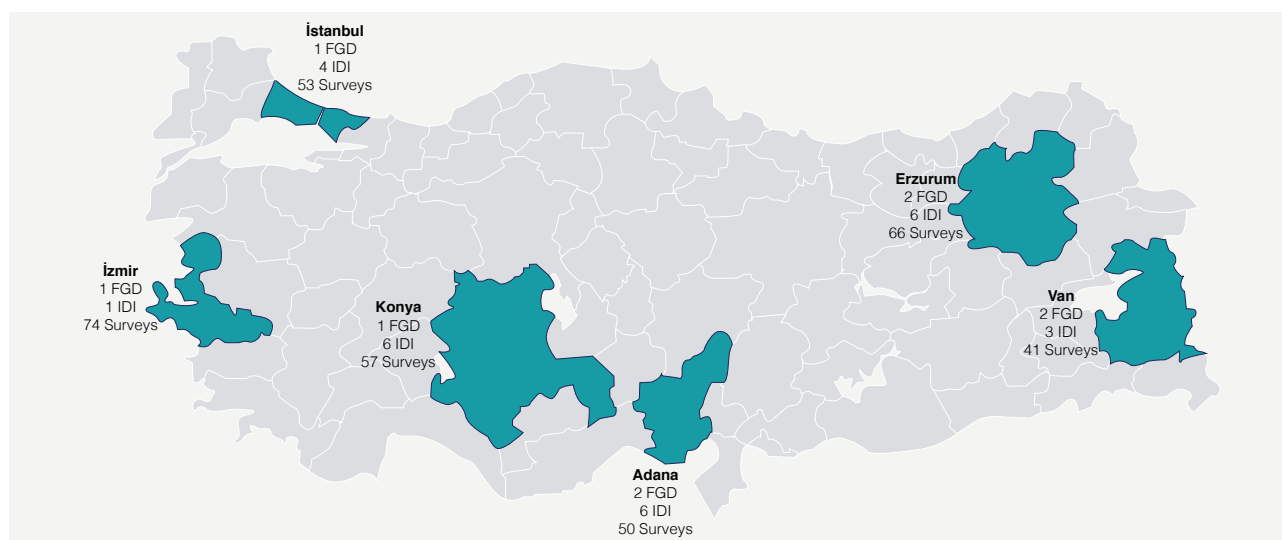
Triggered by this increase, MMC initiated a [study](#) that aimed **to improve understanding of the migration experiences of Afghans arriving in Turkey**. The study outlines key drivers behind Afghan migration and

examines the factors influencing short- to long-term intentions, such as decisions to either stay in Turkey or continue onward movement. It also details living conditions of Afghans in Turkey, focusing on the policy framework that shapes legal and socio-economic factors, while highlighting vulnerabilities and protection challenges they encounter. This brief summarises the full report.¹

Methodology

The methodological approach included desk research as well as fieldwork in six provinces (Van, Erzurum, Adana, Konya, Izmir and Istanbul). In each location, the research team simultaneously collected quantitative and qualitative data by conducting surveys², in-depth interviews (IDIs), and focus group discussions (FGDs) with Afghan refugees and migrants, as well as key informant interviews (KIIs)³ with officials from relevant provincial institutions and representatives of international agencies and NGOs. After the field work, the data was analysed and validated through expert interviews. From November 2019 to January 2020, the research team conducted 341 surveys, 27 IDIs, nine FGDs with a total of 69 participants, and 28 KIIs.

Figure 1: Number of surveys, IDIs and FGDs conducted per province



1 The full report can be found [here](#).

2 A bespoke survey, based on those conducted by MMC's Mixed Migration Monitoring Initiative (4Mi), posed a wide range of questions on issues such as: drivers of migration; decision making; demographics; information on migratory routes taken; protection incidents; use of smugglers and funding of migration journeys; access to information; assistance and access to services; aspirations; and challenges faced in Turkey. 4Mi is the Mixed Migration Centre's flagship data collection system, an innovative approach that helps fill knowledge gaps, and informs policy and response regarding the nature of mixed migratory movements and the protection risks for refugees and migrants on the move.

3 The FGDs, IDIs and KIIs served to complement the survey and reflect upon participants' general insights and perceptions on their migration reasons and experiences, their current living situation in Turkey, as well as their aspirations for the future. The respondents provided detailed accounts on housing, working conditions, access to education, healthcare and social services, and relationships with host communities.

Profiles

Young, male and in an irregular situation

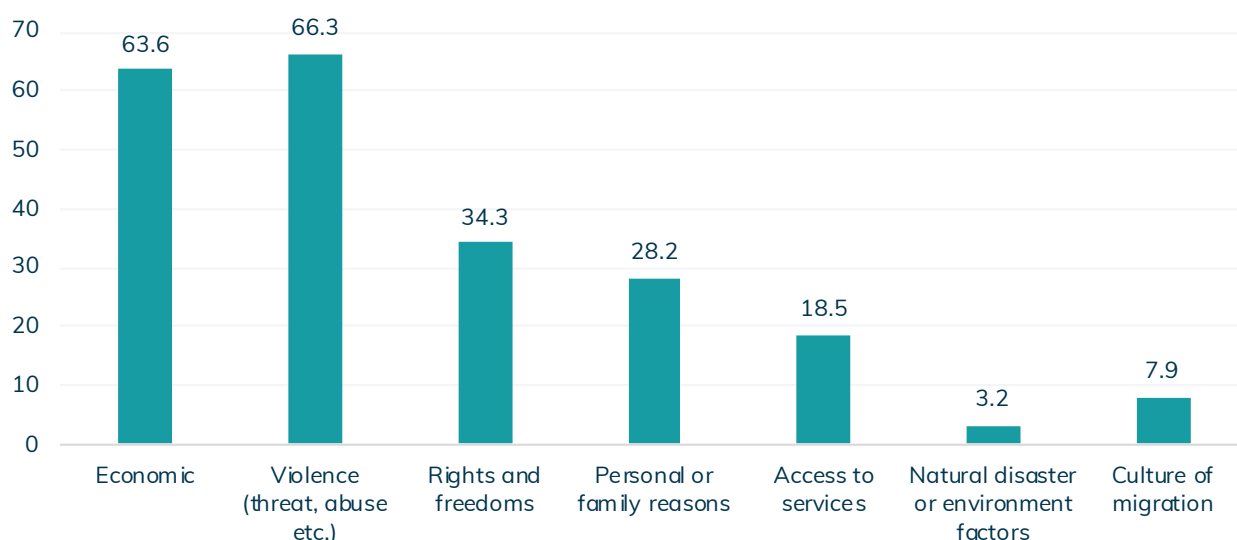
Overall, the findings on the Afghans' profiles align with secondary data as the majority of the surveyed Afghans were men (66%) and relatively young – between 18 and 30 years old (65%). As anticipated, a majority of respondents started their migration journey from Afghanistan (72%), followed by Iran (25%) and Pakistan (4%). A majority (69%) departed from an urban area and most (71.6%) had not lived in camps or informal tented settlements. A majority (65%) arrived in Turkey after January 2018, and most arrived irregularly (83%).⁴

Drivers and decisions

Violence, economic factors, and access to rights drive mixed migration

The research findings on drivers confirm the mixed nature of Afghan migration. **The majority left Afghanistan because of violence (66%) and/or economic factors (64%).**

Figure 2: Reasons for leaving Afghanistan (Multiple choice, %, n=341)



The empirical findings from IDIs and FGDs confirm these key factors driving Afghan mixed migration movements, and also provide context to reported oppression by Taliban and other armed groups, lack of rights, discrimination, and lack of access to basic services. In the words of two respondents:

"I had to flee [from Afghanistan] because of the war. But my actual desire is to study. There is no such chance in there, our economic situation did not allow this either."

21, Male, Erzurum

"War and oppression [were the main reasons to migrate]. Taliban was threatening my son because he works with the Americans. They shot him twice, he is now disabled. We had to flee [from Afghanistan] because I did not want Taliban to kill my son or my grandchildren, to rape me or my daughter-in-law. We could no longer live there [in Afghanistan]. I was praying every single day for God to save us. We could not even sleep."

59, Female, Adana

While some referred to direct consequences of conflict such as explosions in villages destroying their homes, others cited indirect effects, including reduced access to livelihoods and services in Afghanistan. As also noted in other studies, **security concerns, unemployment, and challenges in accessing education and healthcare often intersect and confirm the mixed nature of Afghans' movements.**⁵

⁴ Purposive sampling was applied to prioritise understanding recent irregular movements, so a high number of irregular arrivals was anticipated.

⁵ Seefar (2018) [Examining Return and Reintegration in Afghanistan: Why Psychosocial Interventions Matter](#); Mixed Migration Centre (2019) [Distant Dreams. Understanding the aspirations of Afghan returnees](#)

Women pushed by personal traumas

Family reasons were reportedly influential in the migration decision-making process, especially for women who feared forced or early marriage. **Female respondents who either fled on their own or with other family members indicated having been subjected to domestic violence, sexual abuse, verbal and physical threats, and forced marriages, often perpetrated by older male family members and relatives.** During FGDs and through IDIs, women reported that they decided to migrate to protect themselves or their children from these types of violence and threats. As described by a FGD participant:

“After my husband passed away, my brother-in-law kept threatening to marry me. I did not want to. When my daughter turned 15, he started threatening her in the same manner. I have been through a lot. He physically abused me so many times. I lost my health because of him; I have a serious heart condition. I am illiterate, but I wanted my daughter to have a different fate, a better future. My neighbour helped me to arrange the journey to Turkey. I came with my daughter. We know no one in Turkey. I try to stay away from Afghans, because I am still afraid that he might come and find us”.

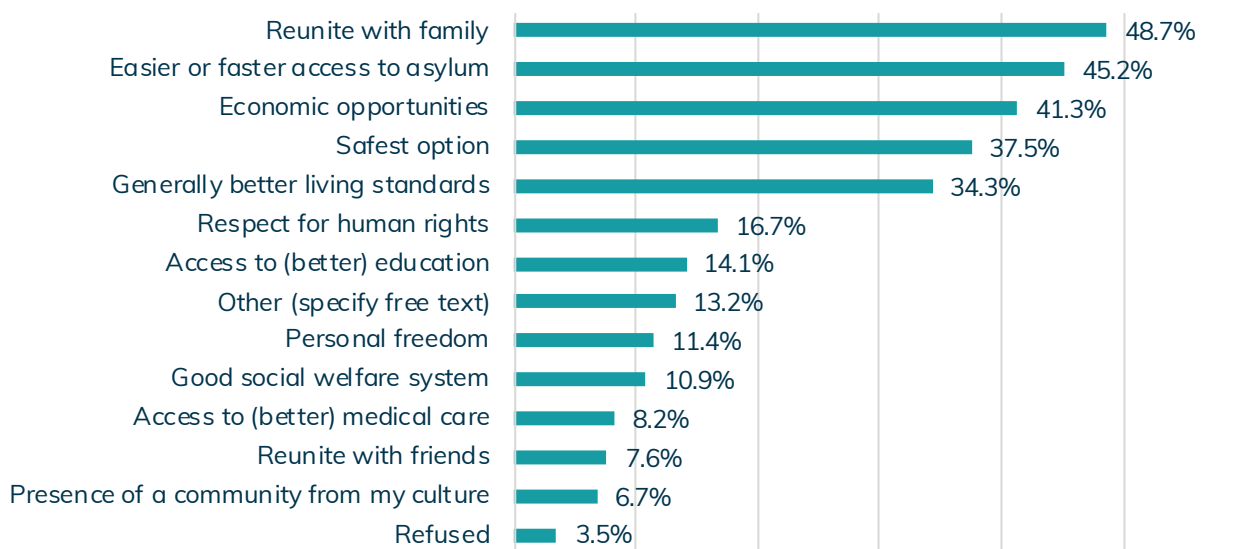
Focus Group Participant, Female

While this study did not compare drivers of Afghan migration to those of other population groups in Turkey, family reasons do seem to represent a much stronger push factor among Afghan migrants and refugees than among other populations, such as Syrians.

Family reunification main pull to Turkey

Respondents chose to travel to Turkey to reunite with family (49%), for easy and fast access to asylum (45%), economic reasons (41%), and better living standards (34%). The strong motivation to reunite with family chimes with the findings that 23% had relatives in Turkey before starting their journeys and that 24% indicated having relatives who came to Turkey, received refugee status and then resettled to another country. These numbers suggest that even though family reunification was a reason to come to Turkey, respondents may actually want to reunite with family members in Europe (or other destinations).

Figure 3: Reasons for coming to Turkey (Multiple choice, n=341, 1,021 responses, %)



During FGDs and IDIs, participants also stressed moving to Turkey because of their desire to be safe, have better living standards and access to decent employment and education opportunities for their children. Afghanistan and Iran were not considered as countries where these rights could be guaranteed, and respondents from FGDs and IDIs explained their reasons for leaving Iran primarily in relation to restrictive living and worsening economic conditions. Some Afghans also struggled to secure these rights in Turkey, **expressing a high degree of uncertainty about their short- and long-term future. As described by an interviewed man and female FDG participant:**

“I can't find a job. We're spending money we brought from Iran. I need to find a job, or we will be going to Europe with the rest of our money. I do not know.”

28, Male, 2019

“Mom, what are our plans? Are we going to stay here? Are we going to get deported? Are we going to go back?” I want to be able to answer these questions. I am having nightmares every single day, asking myself what if I have to take my children back to the war zone [Afghanistan].”

Focus Group Participant, Female, Adana

“It could be any country as long as they accept us and offer better living standards. What we do not want is to ever go back to Afghanistan.”

Focus Group Participant, Female, Adana

“We want to find a decent job, but this is really difficult. There are 13 people in my family, I cannot provide financial means here. I have to go to a third country.”

Focus Group Participant, Male, Erzurum

Routes, means and conditions of travel

On the move, but destination unknown

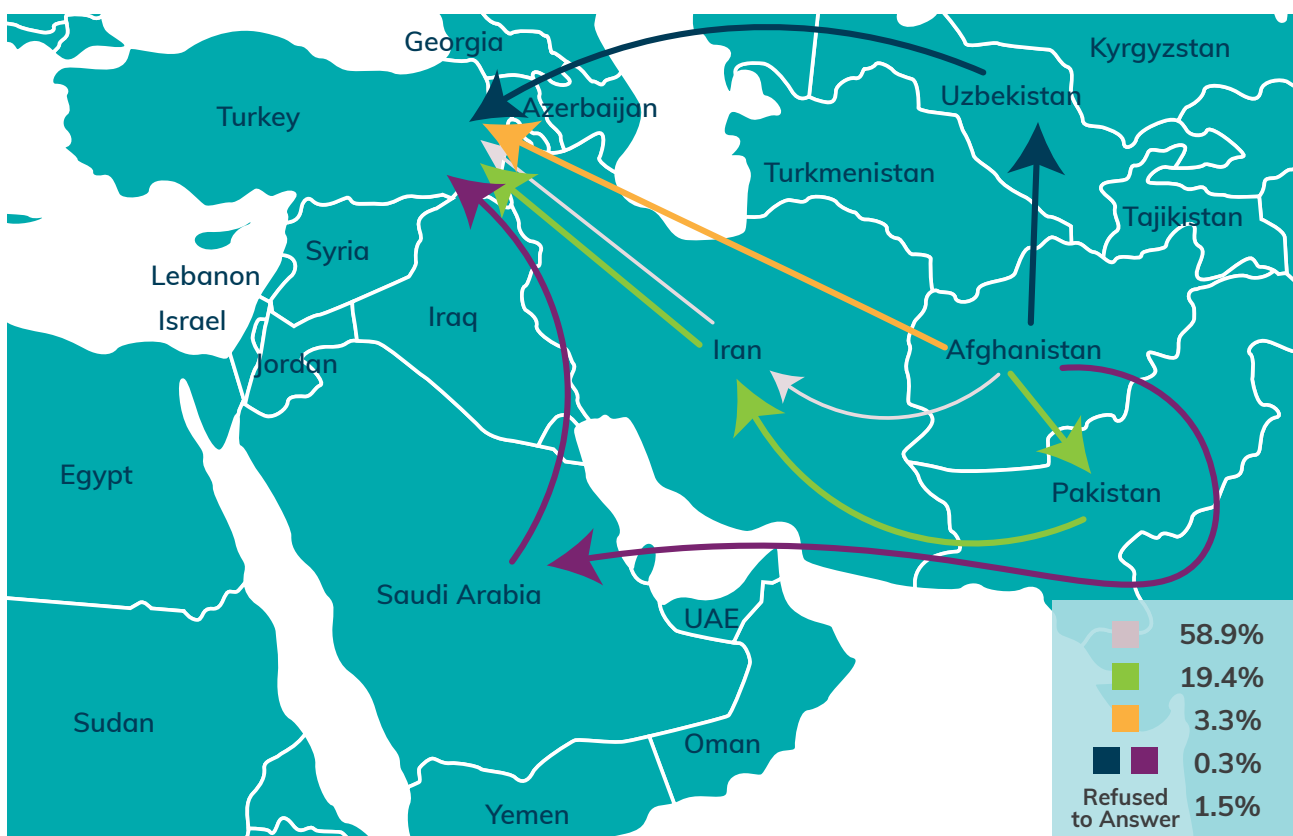
Nearly half (48%) of respondents indicated they had not reached the end of their migration journey. Another 30% said they had, which implies that for them Turkey was or had become their de-facto destination country. This aligns with the findings on Afghan’s intended destination, which 43% of respondents identified as Turkey. This was followed by European countries (19%), Canada (18%), and the United States (11%). These figures show that Europe is not the main destination for the surveyed Afghans that currently reside in Turkey irregularly. **The majority expressed the intention to move within 12 months, but primarily within Turkey (51%), with a smaller percentage (17%) intending to move to another country.** In the FGDs, participants highlighted that the specific country of destination did not matter as long as they would be safe, welcomed and benefitted from improved living conditions. As described by two FGD participants.

Although mixed, the overall findings on intentions and plans confirm that Afghans are highly mobile and still on the move, although not so much with the intention to cross borders into Europe in the short term, but rather to continue movement to somewhere within Turkey.

Eastern land route preferred

The majority of respondents came to Turkey via fragmented journeys through Iran and Pakistan. Although confronted with many challenges, as described below, most respondents considered this either the cheapest (23%), sole (19%), or fastest (15%) option. While the country of departure differs, for those arriving irregularly, the point of entry into Turkey remains the same: whether their journey started from Afghanistan, Iran, or Pakistan, Afghans cross the Iran-Turkey land border into eastern border provinces of Turkey (60% arrived in Van, and 20% in Ağrı, Doğubeyazıt).

Figure 4: Routes to Turkey (arrows are indicative only)



Majority migrate while lacking information

Over half (53%) of respondents indicated not having obtained information regarding the routes, destinations, costs, conditions, and risks of their journey. A lack of prior knowledge about Turkey is also represented in the qualitative findings from the FGDs and IDIs; many had no or little such knowledge before arrival. As described by a participant:

“We knew some people here, but we still did not know much about Turkey [before coming to Turkey]. We only knew it was a safe country and had better living conditions than India, our second choice.”

42, Male, Adana

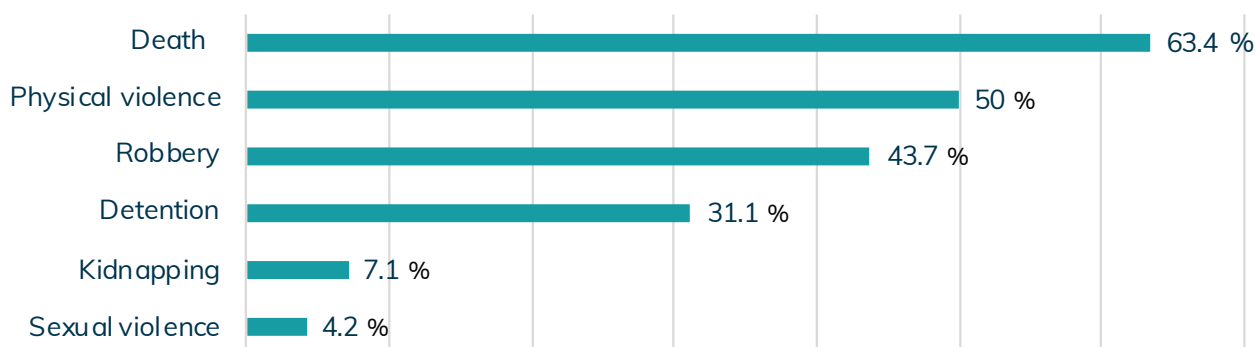
Of the 45% of respondents who did obtain information, a majority (73%) used their friends and family – either in the country of departure or in another country – as their main sources of information. Other sources accessed before departing include returned migrants (46%), smugglers (24%), and online communities or networks (18%). The fact that a considerable number of respondents consult

returned migrants aligns with the secondary data analysis which shows that circular migration is a common phenomenon among the Afghan population, and that forced return or deportation back to Afghanistan does not deter Afghans from trying again. With nearly two million returns from 2017 to 2019, it is not a surprise that nearly half of those who gathered information before departure did so from returned migrants.

Death, violence and separation among the main risks during the journey

The migration route from Afghanistan and Pakistan to Iran and then to Turkey is long and difficult to navigate. Most Afghans did not attempt this journey alone and half (50%) of all respondents were traveling in groups of three to eight people, composed of their families (36%), other migrants (31%), friends (24%) and spouses (21%). However, among the 316 (93%) who travelled with someone else, **100 (46%) were separated from the ones they were with initially**. Separation was not the only risk faced during the journey. **A majority of 70% reported facing risks during their journey, including death (63%), physical violence (50%), robbery (43%), and detention (31%).**

Figure 5: Risk reported (Multiple choice, n=237, 475 responses in total, %)



FGD and IDI participants also stressed other problems related to harsh weather and other physical conditions of the mountainous route, which had to be taken primarily on foot. This was especially problematic for the elderly and those with health problems. As described by two women participating in the research:

“It was a long way from there [Afghanistan] to Turkey: it was cold, icy cold. My father almost fell from the cliff. Sometimes we thought we would die there.”

Focus Group Participant, Female, Adana

“We came by car until the Iranian border [from Afghanistan]. Then we passed through the mountains by foot and it took 18-19 hours. We walked for six hours in Turkey, too. There was no food nor water. We were hungry for 24 hours. My grandchild was almost dying.”

Female, 59, Adana, arrived in 2018

There were also reports of pregnant women traveling. Despite the risks of traveling while pregnant, some people indicated to have no time to wait:

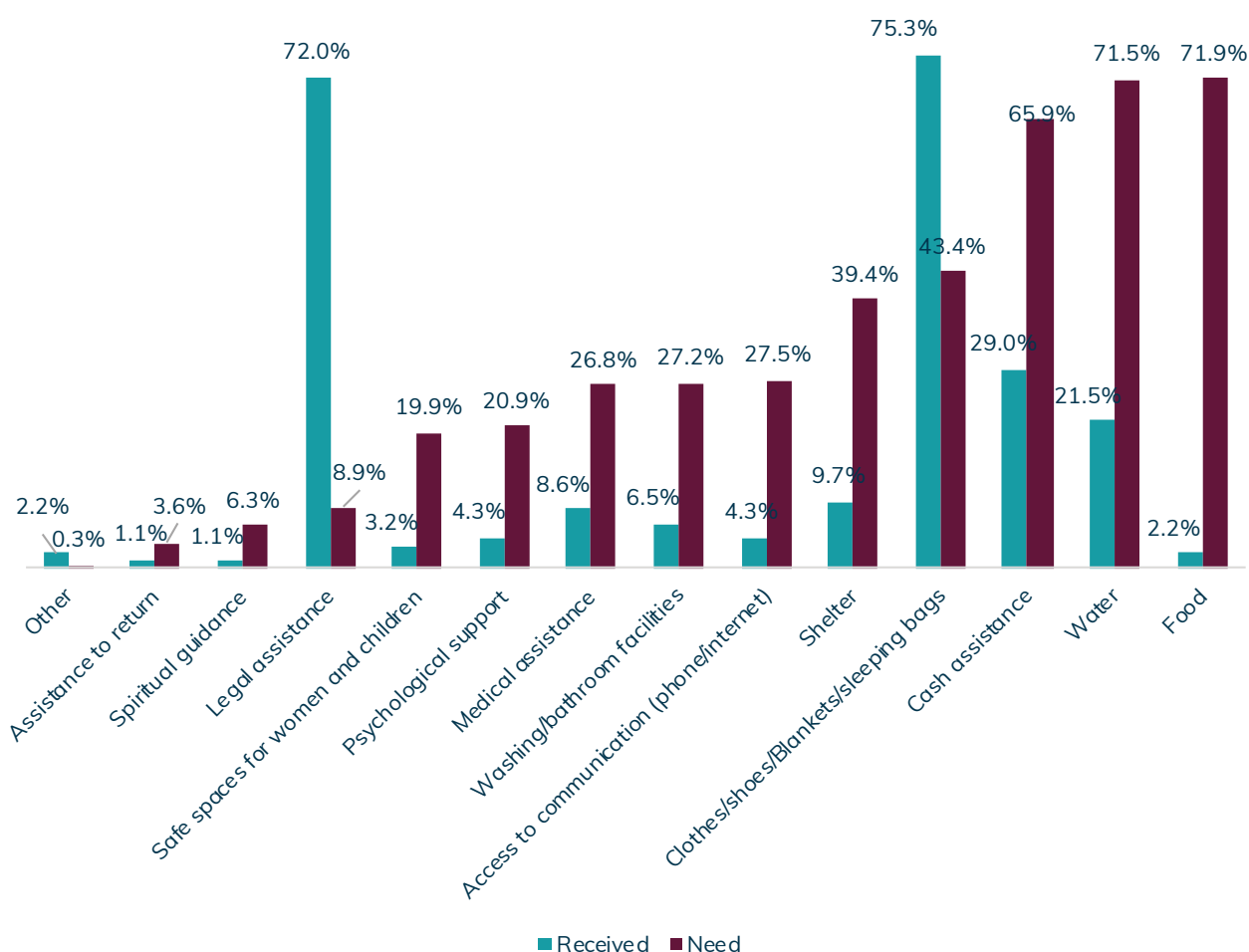
“My wife was pregnant during the journey. She fell a lot. But after 15 days we came to Turkey, she gave birth to twins. We had no other choice. We had to migrate even though she was pregnant. My mother was also too old and sick. They (the group) left us behind. We continued ourselves. It took 23 days.”

Focus Group Participant, Male, Konya

In need of very basic assistance while on the move

Nine out of ten people (89%) reported that they needed assistance along the way. They were primarily in need of food and water (72%), cash (66%), and clothes or blankets (43%). However, most (69%) did not receive the assistance they needed. The 31% who reported receiving assistance mainly indicated they had received clothes or blankets (75%) and legal assistance (72%).

Figure 6: Needed and received assistances (Needed: n=302, 1,309 responses in total / Received: n=93, 224 responses in total)



The key service providers were reportedly fellow migrants (40%) and local communities or volunteers (37%), rather than authorities or NGOs. Despite the variation in assistance received, it all fell short of meeting needs. The survey findings align with what participants in FGDs and IDIs reported about a lack of access to basic needs (food and water in particular), poor means of transportation (e.g. over-crowded trucks), and indecent accommodation (e.g. lacking proper sanitation).

Determined to move, despite the risks

Had they known in advance about the risks they would face, 46% said that they would still have started their journey, compared to 33% who would not. Some 58% stated that they never considered abandoning their journey, while 43% considered doing so at least once. Nearly half (48%) indicated that nothing would make them even consider abandoning their journeys. A widowed Afghan woman, who came to Turkey with her three daughters and one granddaughter expressed her feelings as follows:

“Despite all the difficulties, I came here by walking for 12 hours in snow and cold. I risked death. Even if I die, I would not return.”

FGD Participant, Adana

Almost three quarters (73%) said that it was not likely that they would encourage others to migrate, compared to almost one quarter (24%) who would encourage others. In other words, **while the respondents were determined to move themselves, and would have migrated even if they had known the risks in advance, the majority would not encourage other to migrate as well.**

Role of smugglers

Critical role of smugglers, primarily for crossing international borders

As opportunities for migration through legal channels are very limited, migrant smugglers play an increasingly central role in the mixed migration journeys of Afghans. Irregular border crossings usually require the use of smugglers, especially when refugees and migrants need to travel long distances between the countries of origin and destination, or to pass through tight border control systems. The primary data collected in this research confirm that **a large majority (82%) resorted to the services of smugglers during their journey. Almost all indicated resorting to smugglers for crossing borders (91%),** as smugglers know how to avoid detection and where and when to move. Almost 40% paid the agreed full amount to the smugglers upon arrival at their destination and 19% paid a deposit initially and paid the rest upon arrival via a hawala money transfer. To fund their journey, 42% of respondents borrowed money, 40% used their own funding/savings, 29% had family who paid for them, and 27% sold assets. Being indebted to smugglers may result in debt bondage and makes migrants and refugees extremely vulnerable and dependent on smugglers.⁶ In this study, no cases were identified where migrant smuggling transformed into forms of human trafficking. However, several FGD and IDI participants had negative experiences with migrant smugglers. The most often cited problems related to lack of access to basic needs on the route, deception, abandonment, mistreatment, and threats of physical violence and force. Because of this, some tried to resort to different smugglers or to continue their journey on their own.

Smugglers “only care for the ones who are alive”

The general perception of migrants and refugees on the move was that smugglers did not do much to mitigate that risk and generally did not care about the well-being of their clientele. Respondents witnessed

deaths in the group they travelled with, but these dead people were not buried and ignored by the smugglers. This aligns with findings from the survey as **some 70% of respondents stated that smugglers were the perpetrators of incidents and violence** (Figure 5). According to a female respondent, a smuggler said that he would “only care for the ones who are alive”:

“The smuggler told us not to be afraid because the road was short, and he would take us by car. However, after a certain point we started to walk. Two Pakistani men died in front of my eyes. One of them, a young man slipped and fell from the mountain. We told the smuggler that we could go and search for him; but he told us he would only care for the ones who are alive. They only care for the money.”

25, Female, Istanbul, 2018

As respondents explained in FGDs and in-depth interviews, there are also incidents where smugglers, while being on route, ask for more money than what has been originally agreed or paid in advance. And even if the Afghans agree to pay more, smugglers may still abandon them on route. A male FGD participant shared his experience with smugglers and described this as follows:

“We were deceived by the smugglers. They [smugglers] said the route was short and would only take 3-4 hours. When we arrived in the city of Urmia in Iran, they (smugglers) asked for more money to buy a horse if we wanted to continue the journey. In total I paid them USD 2,200 before and after leaving Afghanistan. After riding the horse for over 20 hours passing through mountainous areas with my wife on the back, they took the horse back in the middle of the night, told us to continue on foot. Because I am old, I could no longer walk. We were stranded by the smugglers in the middle of nowhere. When my son-in-law noticed we were missing, he walked back to find us and carried me on his back for the rest of the journey. We finally managed to enter through Van.”

Focus Group Participant, Male, Erzurum

Reportedly, once Afghans arrived in Turkey, their use of smugglers decreased, although smugglers were sometimes needed to cross provincial borders. As described by a FGD participant.

⁶ Triandafyllidou, A. and M.L. McAuliffe (2018) [Migrant Smuggling Data and Research: A Global Review of the Emerging Evidence Base](#)

"I stayed in the place of smugglers for five nights. They brought me to Batman from Van and bought bus tickets [for us] to Erzurum. They have friends in terminals. They communicate with an encrypted document and buy tickets. They gave me that document as ASAM's document, but I realized that it was a forged one after coming to here."

Focus Group Participant, Male, Erzurum

Challenges faced in Turkey

Afghan migrants and refugees face various challenges in their daily lives in Turkey which are mainly related to access to protection, healthcare, education, employment, and general living conditions (housing and shelter). The language barrier is a frequently cited obstacle in access to basic services, coupled with a general lack of knowledge about the scope of legal rights and obligations.

Protection

A majority (83%) of respondents arrived irregularly without legal documentation. Regardless of their irregular arrival, over half (55%) of respondents did apply for international protection. Most Afghans who applied did so at the Provincial Directorate of Migration Management (PDMM) (42%) or the UNHCR (32%). A majority (85%) of those who applied had been provided with documentation at the time of data collection. Nevertheless, **a majority (71%) do not know their rights as an asylum seeker or migrant.** Additionally, this research confirmed that delays in registering and obtaining official documents cause various vulnerabilities and protection challenges for Afghans in Turkey, including an inability to access basic rights and services such as healthcare, and the risk of deportation due to irregular status.⁷ Single Afghan men in particular described major obstacles in several cities to registering at the PDMM as international protection applicants. For those who are registered as international protection applicants, the requirement to reside in the assigned satellite city⁸ is considered to be one of the major challenges as reported by IDI and FGD participants. **There is a great desire to have more freedom of movement and the right to choose the city of residence.**

Health

A significant proportion (31%) of respondents reported having health problems or disabilities, such as physical impairments (48%) which were possibly caused by armed conflicts in Afghanistan or dangerous conditions during their journey towards Turkey; chronic diseases such as diabetes (32%); and intellectual disabilities such as cognitive or learning problems (29%). In line with the findings on protection, **most problems in accessing healthcare services are faced by those who are not**

registered as international protection applicants. Furthermore, as is also the case in accessing other services, the language barrier is a challenge in accessing health services: IDI and FGD participants reported a lack of translators who speak Dari/Persian. Medical expenses also create a financial burden, especially for those with chronic diseases. As described by two women:

"I'm diabetic. I have a lot of diseases. There's no interpreter when we get to the hospital. We can't communicate. Translator wants 70-80 TL; how can we pay that much money?"

59, Female, Adana, 2018

"Even though the examination is free, we have to pay for the medicine ourselves, and the drug costs are very expensive [in Turkey]."

Female, Van, 2019

Another key challenge is access to mental health services. In the Turkish healthcare system, psychological and mental health support services are not covered by the health insurance provided to international protection applicants. However, **many research participants mentioned suffering from migration-related traumas (e.g. imprisonment, physical and emotional torture, loss of family members due to displacement and death) and stressors (social-cultural adjustment difficulties and lack of social support) which can impair mental health and cause stress disorders.** In turn, this weakens people's ability to socio-economically integrate in Turkey. For example, the following quote comes from a 19-year-old male adult. He left Afghanistan as minor and faced a troubled childhood and issues with coming of age. In Turkey, however, he would be treated as an adult.

"When I was 11, I had to go from Afghanistan to Iran. My mother, father and sister went to Pakistan for a wedding, they did not come back. I lived in Iran for 7-8 years. One to two years ago, I came to Turkey illegally. I work in daily jobs here. Sometimes I suddenly fly into a temper, I get angry at once. (...) I have no mother or father. I do not have a house to support, I live only for myself. Sometimes I question why I live. What do we have to do?"

19, Male, Adana, 2018

Some key informants and participants of the FGDs expressed that local NGOs provide psychosocial support, but there seems to be a need for more.

⁷ Also see, Leghtas, I., & Thea, J. (2018) [You Cannot Exist in This Place: Lack of Registration Denies Afghan Refugees Protection in Turkey.](#)

⁸ 'Satellite cities' are provinces designated by DGMM where applicants for international protection are required to reside pending the decision on their asylum application.

Education

Relatively few survey respondents indicated better educational opportunities as one of the main reasons for starting their migration journey (12%) or coming to Turkey (14%). However, accessing better education or wanting children to have access to better education was mentioned as an important reason in the IDIs and FGDs. As described by a female FGD participant.

"I left [from Afghanistan] for my children; they couldn't go to school. The Taliban threatened [us] every day."

Focus Group Participant, Female, Adana

Nonetheless, a significant **49% of the survey respondents experienced problems accessing education in Turkey**, especially because of the language barrier which was mentioned by 76% of those who reported issues. The language barrier and difficulties in paying school-related expenses were also reported as reasons behind dropouts, leading to lack of access to education.

"They [children] had difficulty because they did not speak the [Turkish] language. They don't get along with the other kids. There is no help for language [learning]. They learn by themselves."

59, Female, Adana, 2018

The proportion of children who are not enrolled in schools was also high, with 53% of those who reported problems indicating not having such access.

Employment

Employment opportunities are a major reason for leaving Afghanistan and coming to Turkey, as Turkey's economy is more stable than that of other countries in the region, such as Iran and Pakistan. However, for many respondents, securing work and a stable income is a major problem: **74% of respondents said they faced problems in employment**. Most of those who reported such problems indicated lacking legal access to the job market (73%), followed by 69% who reported language barriers, which also makes them more vulnerable to discrimination and exploitation.

While finding a job is a key priority for many migrants and refugees, most participants are only able to find day jobs in construction, sheepherding, factories, and textile workshops. **International protection beneficiaries work mainly in sectors that do not require work permits, such as agriculture and sheepherding.**⁹ As some of the respondents highlighted, they always need to look for new day jobs due to lack of regular income and financial stability:

"I'm trying to get a day job every day. We can't find regular jobs. I didn't get my payment for the last 2 days."

Focus Group Participant, Male, Izmir

"We're going out on the street to find a job. I work daily. We're going to the bazaar. If there's a job, we talk to the boss, but we're always concerned whether he's going to pay us, or whether we're going to get a job the next day."

23, Male, Konya, 2017

New arrivals seem to be among those in the most disadvantaged positions in terms of language proficiency and access to a social network in Turkey, which would help them find employment. Problems with getting paid or being underpaid were some of the other problems reported. In some cases, business owners threaten Afghan refugees and migrants when they claim their payments. Living in a constant fear of being deported, the business owners reportedly misuse the worker's situation. As described by two respondents:

"I worked in textile. We work without insurance and we have a small salary, but sometimes they don't even pay that."

Focus Group Participant, Female, Adana

"We have a friend, who was attacked because he asked for payment from his employer. He was killed. Everybody around here knew about this, but no one cared. Because he was unregistered."

23, Male, Konya, 2017

Consequently, financial hardship was reported as another major issue as most of the research participants reported either being unemployed or not having a regular job. Finally, people reported difficult conditions at work, including long working hours.

Shelter

Two thirds (68%) of the Afghan refugees and migrants surveyed stated that they faced accommodation-related problems, such as high rents (84%) and lack of basic utilities (73%). In the interviews and focus groups, people cited poor housing conditions, including inadequate household goods and lack of heating facilities. As a result of not being able to afford rent, some opted for sharing overcrowded houses with others, a problem noted by 40% of respondents. While it is mostly students and single men who share living quarters, there were

⁹ "Applicants for conditional refugee status and those who have conditional refugee status can work in seasonal agriculture or animal husbandry without a work permit." Official Gazette (2016) [Regulation for the Owner of the International Protection Application and the Owners of the International Protection Status](#)

also reports of families living with other families to reduce costs. The survey findings also confirm that new arrivals experience more challenges in finding accommodation. Respondents who came to Turkey after January 2018 had twice as many problems than those who came before then.¹⁰

In the FGDs and IDIs, almost all participants and interviewees stated that they had faced challenges when they first arrived in Turkey. As stated by two male Afghans in Adana:

“We stayed on the street first. Then the people we met found us home. We had a lot of trouble until we found a house. We were hungry.”

46, Male, Adana, 2018

“When we first came to Adana, we slept in the park. Someone saw our situation in the park and rented us his house. Afghans lived here before. We have no household goods, nothing to wear, very little to eat. I don't know how to pay the bills; I haven't found a job yet.” (Participant who came to Turkey one and half months ago from Iran)

28, Male, Adana, 2019

Access to service providers

The research for this paper assessed service provision to Afghan refugees and migrants. **Half (50%) of respondents indicated not knowing how to access public institutions for service provision. Two-third (66%) of respondents indicated that public services are inadequate** and only 10% reported that the services provided by public institutions were adequate. A possible explanation for this low level of satisfaction is a fear of approaching the authorities. Those who lack documentation or reside in cities other than the assigned satellite cities are especially reluctant to interact with public institutions because of the risk of deportation. There is also a widespread concern that young and single Afghan men are being deported because they are considered as “economic migrants” and not as people in need of international protection.

“I didn't go to any institution (referring PDMM) because I am unregistered. I don't know where to obtain an ID.”

Male, 21, Erzurum, 2016

Some 68% of respondents consider the services provided by national and local NGOs to be inadequate.

An additional 26% stated they had no information on services of NGOs, which can be explained by the limited interaction between Afghan refugees and migrants and NGOs. **The services of international NGOs did not score better: 66% of respondents found them inadequate.** An additional 28% stated that they did not know about, or receive service assistance from, any international NGOs. There were also participants who expressed their dissatisfaction of NGOs that are **perceived as giving priority to Syrian over non-Syrian refugees:**

“They [NGOs] are helping Syrians more [than other migrants and refugees] and favouring them [Syrians] more. We [Afghans] are invisible. We do not exist at all.”

Focus Group Participant, Female, Konya

More than half (58%) of respondents stated that they were not (or not completely) satisfied with their situation in the province they lived in, compared to 39% who were satisfied. Overall, job opportunities and the attitude of the host community towards migrants were among the key factors affecting the satisfaction rate, as cited by IDI and FGD participants. Istanbul, and urban areas in general (such as Ankara and Konya) were among the most preferred places to reside. This aligns with the secondary data analysis that suggested that the majority of refugees and migrants intend to go to urban areas to sustain livelihoods or consider onward movement. Even though irregular arrivals cannot legally reside in a province like Istanbul and risk deportation, the province is still regarded an attractive place to reside. Istanbul stood out with the highest satisfaction rate (72%). Arguable, not only because of informal labour opportunities but also because of its proximity to the border with Greece if indeed onward movement to Europe is considered.

10 156 persons out of 231 (67%) who stated experiencing accommodation-related difficulties came to Turkey after January 2018.

Conclusion

The findings of this study show that the majority of the Afghans surveyed in Turkey are young males who arrived irregularly. They were mainly driven to travel by violence and lack of economic opportunities and access to rights in Afghanistan. For some women, domestic violence, sexual abuse, verbal and physical threats, and forced marriages were reasons for embarking on migration journeys. The main reasons for coming to Turkey are expectations of family reunification, easy and fast access to asylum, economic opportunities, and better living standards. At the time they were surveyed, most respondents were still on the move to another location within Turkey or abroad. Of those who planned to travel on beyond Turkey, many expressed no particular preference for a specific country, saying this was less important than finding safety, a welcoming environment and improved living conditions.

Nearly all respondents came to Turkey via fragmented journeys through Iran and Pakistan, but prior to departure, a majority did not obtain information regarding the routes, destinations, costs, conditions, and risks that their trips would entail. Most also relied on the services of smugglers, who were mainly needed for crossing international borders. Along with problems related to harsh weather and physical conditions of the mountainous route, which had to be taken primarily on foot, Afghans reported witnessing death, physical violence and family separation along the route. However, the general perception was that smugglers did not do much to mitigate risks and generally did not care about the well-being of their clientele. Some 70%

of respondents even stated that smugglers were the perpetrators of incidents and violence. Nine out of ten respondents needed very basic assistance during their journey, which was not available in most cases. Despite all the risks and challenges faced, most were determined to move and continue migration. However, while the respondents were determined to move themselves, and would have migrated even if they had known the risks in advance, the majority would not encourage other to migrate as well.

Upon arrival in Turkey, respondents reported a variety of challenges related to access to protection, healthcare, education, employment, and general living conditions (housing and shelter). Restricted freedom of movement, risk of deportation, limited access to formal employment, language barriers, and lack of knowledge about the scope of legal rights and obligations were among the most cited problems. Over two-third of respondents reported not being aware of their rights as an asylum seeker or migrant. On top of that, a majority reported they did not receive adequate assistance from public institutions or non-governmental organisations (NGOs).

The qualitative findings show that if Afghan refugees and migrants are provided with permanent residency and legal employment, their incentive to consider onward movement decreases. If those preconditions are not in place, and no long-term solution is in sight, Afghan migrants' and refugees' final destinations remain unknown.

Recommendations

International community:

- Implement and live up to the objectives set out in the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration and the Global Compact on Refugees with specific regard to Afghan refugees and migrants, who constitute a large but neglected and vulnerable group.
- Together with the Government of Turkey increase efforts to disseminate information and raise awareness about the asylum rights of Afghan refugees, including by guiding them through the application process and informing them of the direct risks of being unregistered in Turkey.
- Ensure that funding for migrant and refugee support is non-discriminatory and not status based, and effectively benefits Afghan refugees and migrants and those of other nationalities.

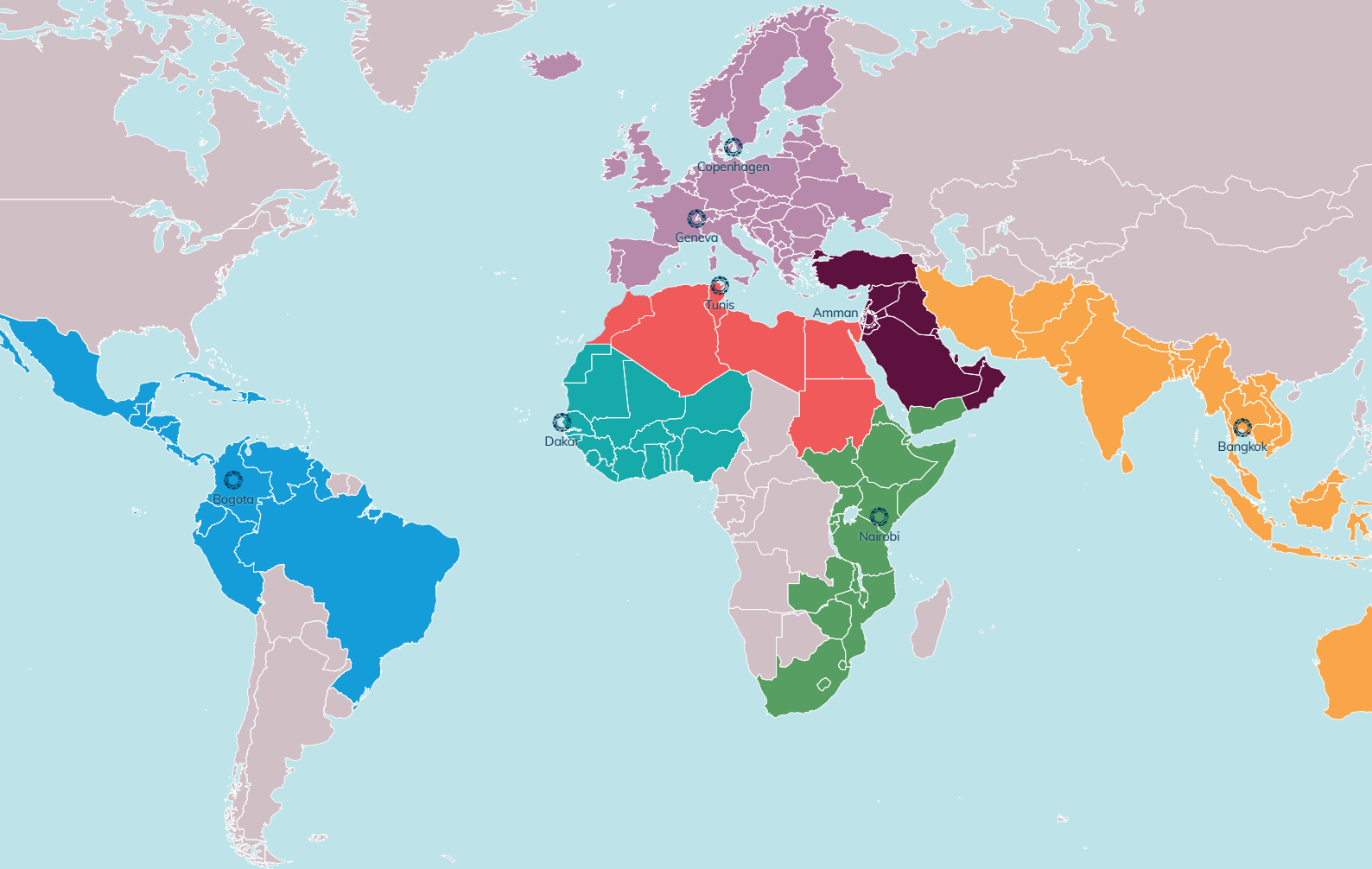
International and national NGOs:

- Conduct needs assessments of migrants and refugees using representative samples; inform the authorities about the assessed needs; advocate for the lifting of any restrictions on NGOs' response; and implement an evidence-based response.
- Provide refugees and migrants with improved access to protection, basic needs, health, shelter, education, and employment. Proposed interventions should prioritise:
 - Advocating for the protection of refugees and migrants, regardless of nationality;
 - Strengthening the capacity of public service providers, at all levels, as well as local NGOs and civil society organisations;
 - Overcoming language barriers in service provision by providing translation services and/or language courses, in all sectors and for all age-groups;
 - Facilitating migrants' and refugees' access to current and accurate information on national and international asylum processes and relevant legislation;
 - Expanding vocational training and economic livelihood opportunities to improve access to the labour market;

- Bolstering specialised assistance and psychosocial support services to help migrants and refugees deal with their stress and traumas;
- Facilitating cross-cultural dialogue and cooperation between local authorities, host communities and refugees and migrants.

Turkish authorities:

- Prioritise overcoming obstacles and delays in asylum application procedures by increasing staffing capacity and supporting domestic and international NGOs to provide legal assistance to unregistered refugees and migrants.
- Support and encourage NGOs to conduct more outreach activities in Turkey which enhance their capacity to assess and identify needs and expand their operations to different geographical areas.
- Increase investment in the employment of qualified personnel with appropriate language (and other) skills to improve communication with Afghan migrants and refugees, especially at local and provincial levels, where interaction is most critical (e.g. in the realms of healthcare and education).
- Expand legal pathways for international protection applicants to work and provide for their livelihoods in all sectors (e.g. ease restrictions on work permit applications and procedures).
- Provide information to new arrivals about asylum rights and legislation in Turkey (including the risks of not being registered) through dedicated information desks that also facilitate coordination and communication with relevant public institutions and services.
- Support initiatives that address cultural misperceptions by providing spaces for host as well as migrant and refugee communities to interact (such as through implementing programs that raise awareness and increase dialogue through joint activities).



The MMC is a global network consisting of seven regional hubs and a central unit in Geneva engaged in data collection, research, analysis and policy development on mixed migration. The MMC is a leading source for independent and high-quality data, research, analysis and expertise on mixed migration. The MMC aims to increase understanding of mixed migration, to positively impact global and regional migration policies, to inform evidence-based protection responses for people on the move and to stimulate forward thinking in public and policy debates on mixed migration. The MMC's overarching focus is on human rights and protection for all people on the move.

The MMC is part of and governed by the Danish Refugee Council (DRC). Global and regional MMC teams are based in Amman, Copenhagen, Dakar, Geneva, Nairobi, Tunis, Bogota and Bangkok.

More information

For more information visit mixedmigration.org and follow us at [@Mixed_Migration](https://twitter.com/Mixed_Migration). MMC Middle East can be contacted via: middle-east@mixedmigration.org.

