

Monthly Migration Movements
Afghan Displacement Summary
Migration linked to conflict & political instability

July 2017

Introduction

This month, the CASWA 4Mi paper focuses on migration linked to ongoing conflict and political instability. Insurgent activities and attacks in Afghanistan are more intense during the spring and summer seasons, generating the assumption that more people may also report migrating from the country for reasons associated with lack of security. Based on months of 4Mi data, the report will analyse this hypothesis. It will also consider characteristics of those planning to migrate out of Afghanistan due to conflict and insecurity. The report will also look at potential destinations for migrants who list conflict as their primary cause for migration as well as the protection concerns they face on route.

The paper is based on 4Mi interviews with 1139 Afghans conducted during March-June 2017. Respondents started their journey within Afghanistan and wish to migrate abroad.

Conflict, Insecurity, and Political Instability

Continued conflict, political instability, lack of institutional structures and infusion of billions of dollars in assistance by the international community have led to continuous fragility in Afghanistan as well as significant issues with corruption, little economic development, constant insecurity and a steady increase in numbers of casualties and IDPs. Since January 2017, the number of IDPs has reached more than 164,000 people¹. According to UNAMA's mid-year report², more than 1600 Afghan civilians were killed and 3500 were injured in the first half of 2017. Many believe that the security situation in 2018 will only get worse.

Despite its own efforts and those of the international community, the National Unity Government in Afghanistan has not been able to keep itself integrated. From the first days of its establishment, complications rose between President Ashraf Ghani and Chief Executive Dr. Abdullah Abdullah; these continue to the present day. General Dostum, first Vice President, has ever since the election felt sidelined by the President³. New political alliances continues to emerge within the government showing the high level of disagreements among the parties who largely rely on familial

and ethnic ties. The Hazara Enlightenment Movement, Afghan Protection and Stability Council and Uprising for Change Movement are examples of movements that put pressure on the government and make it challenging for them to engage effectively in military operations⁴. Meanwhile, various insurgent groups further continue fighting with the government.

Conflict continues to be a feature of Afghanistan, with the government only claiming control over 57% of the country⁵. In the Afghanistan-Pakistan border region, there are 20 terrorist organizations and insurgent groups out of which 13 are in Afghanistan and the rest in Pakistan⁶. Some of the largest groups continue to be Taliban, Da'esh and the Haqqani Network. The Taliban claimed that 211 districts are controlled or contested by them⁷ and in 2016 they made many efforts to take over provinces such as Helmand, Kunduz, Faryab, Paktika, and Baghlan. During the last 2-3 years Da'esh has become a serious threat in Afghanistan however, Afghan National Defense Security Forces (ANDSF) and US operations have weakened their ability to conduct more subversive attacks. The Haqqani Network fights against US-led NATO forces and the government of Afghanistan and the recent huge explosion in a crowded intersection in Kabul is attributed to this network, killing over 150 and injuring more than 400 people⁸.

Peace talks with insurgent groups continue. As an example, a peace agreement was recently signed between Hezb-e-Islami (one of the largest militant groups in Afghanistan) and the government. Many believe this as a success that might encourage other groups such as Taliban to engage in peace talks. However, considering the recent increase in the offensive attacks in different parts of the country it seems unlikely to happen.

Migration due to conflict & political instability

In the four months from March to June 4Mi monitors

⁴ <https://www.afghanistan-analysts.org/the-politics-of-opposition-a-challenge-to-the-national-unity-government/>

⁵ Security situation in Afghanistan likely to get worse, available at: <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-afghanistan-military-idUSKBN1872TL>.

⁶ Afghanistan; special report, Defence and Security committee, NATO Parliamentary Assembly, April 2017.

⁷ Afghan Taliban lists 'percent of country under the control of Mujahideen', available at: <http://www.longwarjournal.org/>

⁸ Mashal, Mujib; Abed, Fahim (31 May 2017). "Huge Bombing in Kabul Is One of Afghan War's Worst". *The New York Times*. ISSN 0362-4331. Archived from the original on 31 May 2017. Retrieved 31 May 2017.

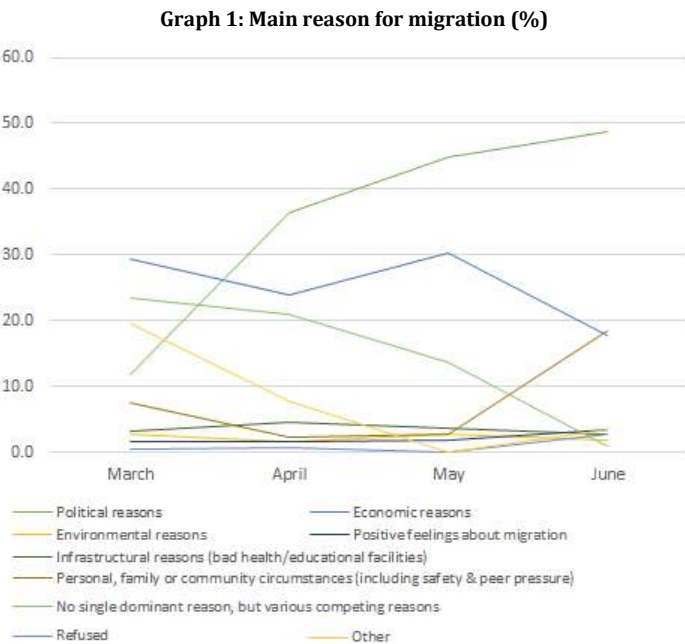
¹ <http://www.unocha.org/afghanistan>

² Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict: Mid-year report 2017, July 2017, available on: <https://unama.unmissions.org/>

³ <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/aug/04/afghan-vice-president-militia-taliban-general-dostum#img-3>

interviewed a total of 1139 people in Afghanistan. All interviewees were asked about the main reason for migration. One of the categories is political; this category is defined as corruption, ethnic or religious discrimination, previous persecution/fear of future persecution, fear of conscription/forced labor, conflict/war/ political violence and other.

According to the 4Mi data from the 4 months, 33% mentioned political reasons as the main push factor for migrating from Afghanistan. As illustrated in graph 1, this number is rapidly increasing during spring and summer; the same seasons where insurgent activities and attacks are intensifying thus tentatively confirming the initial hypothesis that the fighting season leads to outmigration from the country.

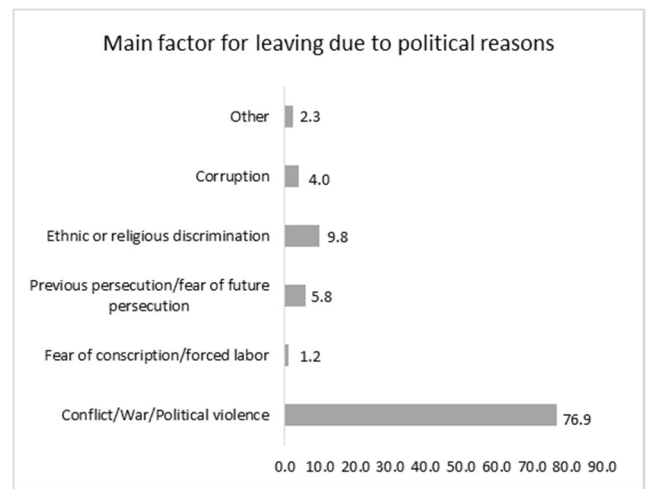


The majority of interviewees who reported to leave for political reasons are Pashtun and Hazara adult men between 18 – 30 years old. More than half of them are married and they migrate primarily from rural areas. Approximately 50% are travelling with extended family members, friends and/or colleagues, almost 25% are travelling with their entire nuclear family or at least some close family members and another 25% are travelling alone. In contrast, those travelling for other reasons come primarily from urban areas and travel alone (almost 50%). In the previous 4Mi monthly summary focused on women, it was described how mainly younger educated women seems to travel alone and primarily migrating from urban areas with the intention to move further to Turkey and European countries. Approximately half of the interviewees (47%) who mentioned migrating due to political reasons had previous

internal displacement experience within Afghanistan, which shows the high level of mobility in the country in general. Most of them came from Nangarhar, Kunduz, Kandahar, Herat, Daykundi, and Ghazni.

Among the interviewees reporting to leave for political reasons 77% mentioned conflict/war/political violence as the main political factor (illustrated in graph 2). This trend is particular for those who are migrating from Kunduz, Nangarhar and Faryab province. Almost 10% are fleeing from ethnic or religious discrimination; most such discrimination is reported by Hazara and Shia respondents, and is likely to be linked to the history of persecution for these communities⁹.

Graph 2: Main factor for leaving due to political reasons



The primary destination country for migrants who are leaving Afghanistan for political reasons is Iran (40%), which in the current 4Mi data is similar to those leaving for economic reasons. However, it may be assumed that people who leave for economic reasons to a larger extent do not intent to stay in Iran but rather over time find solutions to continue their journey onwards to Europe. Surprisingly very few choose Pakistan as their intended destination (only 4%); this may partly be due to the continued deportation of undocumented Afghans in Pakistan as well as the harsh policies of the Pakistani government towards Afghan refugees and migrants. Turkey (15%) and European countries (22.5%, particularly Germany) are other main destinations reported by interviewees leaving for political reasons and insecurity.

Protection issues: Context and Determinants

As previous reports indicate, the number of different protection concerns related to migration from Afghanistan are very high. Based on 4Mi data and discussions with

⁹ Survey of Afghan People 2016, The Asia Foundation, pp. 174

monitors in different provinces, there are four main factors causing high number of protection incidents occurring for migrants who are leaving the country:

1. *Conflicts and general insecurity:* As mentioned earlier, many migrants originate from provinces and cities that are contested between government and insurgents. The continued conflict in migrants' home districts increases their vulnerability to violence, abuse, and mistreatment. Many 4Mi monitors and interviewees report witness people who, while fleeing from conflict, were killed, injured or mistreated by both insurgents and government forces on the route.
2. *Dominant presence of insurgents in border areas:* Most journeys are made through irregular means and take a starting point in border provinces like Nimruz, Nangarhar, Herat, and Kandahar. All these provinces have witnessed a high level of insurgent activities. In most of the provinces, militia groups even have cities and villages under their complete control and are trying to gain more territory. This fight for territory has consequences for civilians and increases risks for migrants at order areas. The risk is particularly high for certain ethnic and religious groups directly targeted by insurgents.
3. *Increased activities of gangs and criminal groups:* Due to the worsening economic situation many Afghans are involved in gangs and criminal groups and engage in activities such as violent theft and kidnapping. Corruption and lack of functioning rule of law systems help to enable such activities. Based on monitor interviews, migrants (and returnees) are one of the main target groups for criminals and gangs as they always have cash in hand. Besides, as most migrants are using irregular routes, it is difficult for the government and other authorities to follow up on their cases.
4. *Irregular nature of journeys:* As mentioned before, most of those who are migrating from Afghanistan use irregular means to cross the border. The irregular nature of these journeys makes it very easy for smugglers, police or border authorities to violate migrant's human rights. As the data shows a considerable proportion of those who are responsible for protection incidents are smugglers and border authorities.

All the above factors together create a context in which migrants are at risk, especially those who are fleeing from contested areas with continued conflicts. The high number of death, physical and sexual assault, robbery, ransom, and other incidents that happened to migrants en route, show exactly the perilous context in which Afghans are trying to migrate from the country.

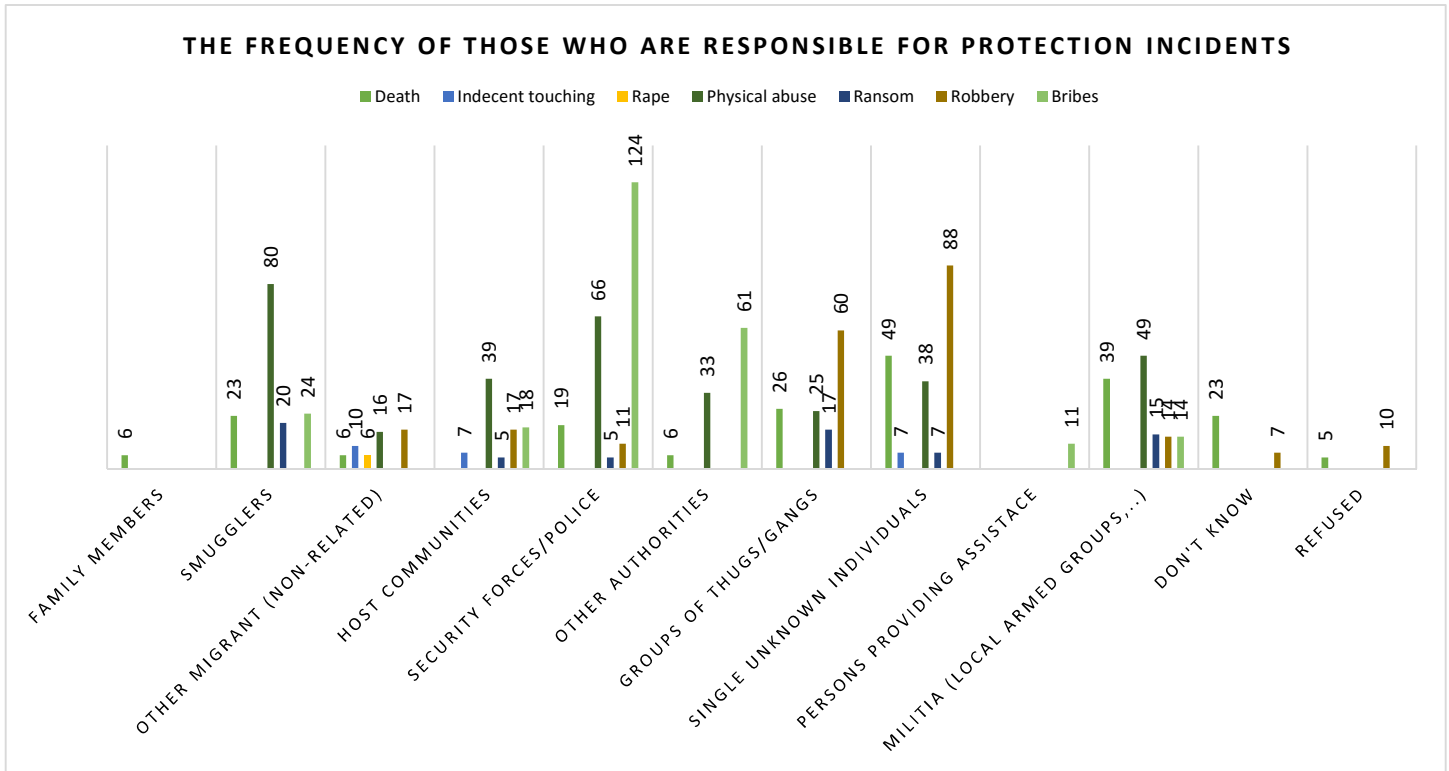
Which provinces are most dangerous for migrants?

Based on the last four months data, 185 interviewees witnessed death of migrant(s) en route, mostly shot/stabbed or killed in a vehicle accident. The victims were mostly adult male (54%) and teenage male or female (30%). Nimruz, Nangarhar, and Kandahar are the main provinces in which death incidents are reported. 47 cases of sexual assaults were reported, 26 indecent assault or touching and 18 rapes, mostly in Nimruz and Kabul. Physical assaults were experienced by almost ¼ of interviewees, mostly in the form of mild physical or verbal abuse and in Nimruz, Herat, Nangarhar. Bribery was mostly reported in Nimruz, Kabul and Herat. Based on the interviews, bribes are mostly in cash handed to the police and border authorities (mostly in Nimruz) or to brokers and officials in order to provide necessary travel documents (particularly in Kabul and Herat). Beside these incidents, 190 cases of robbery were reported mainly in Nimruz (52), Nangarhar (27), and Kabul (26). Also, 56 cases of ransom (half of them in Nimruz) and 140 cases of detention (70% in Nimruz) were reported by interviewees.

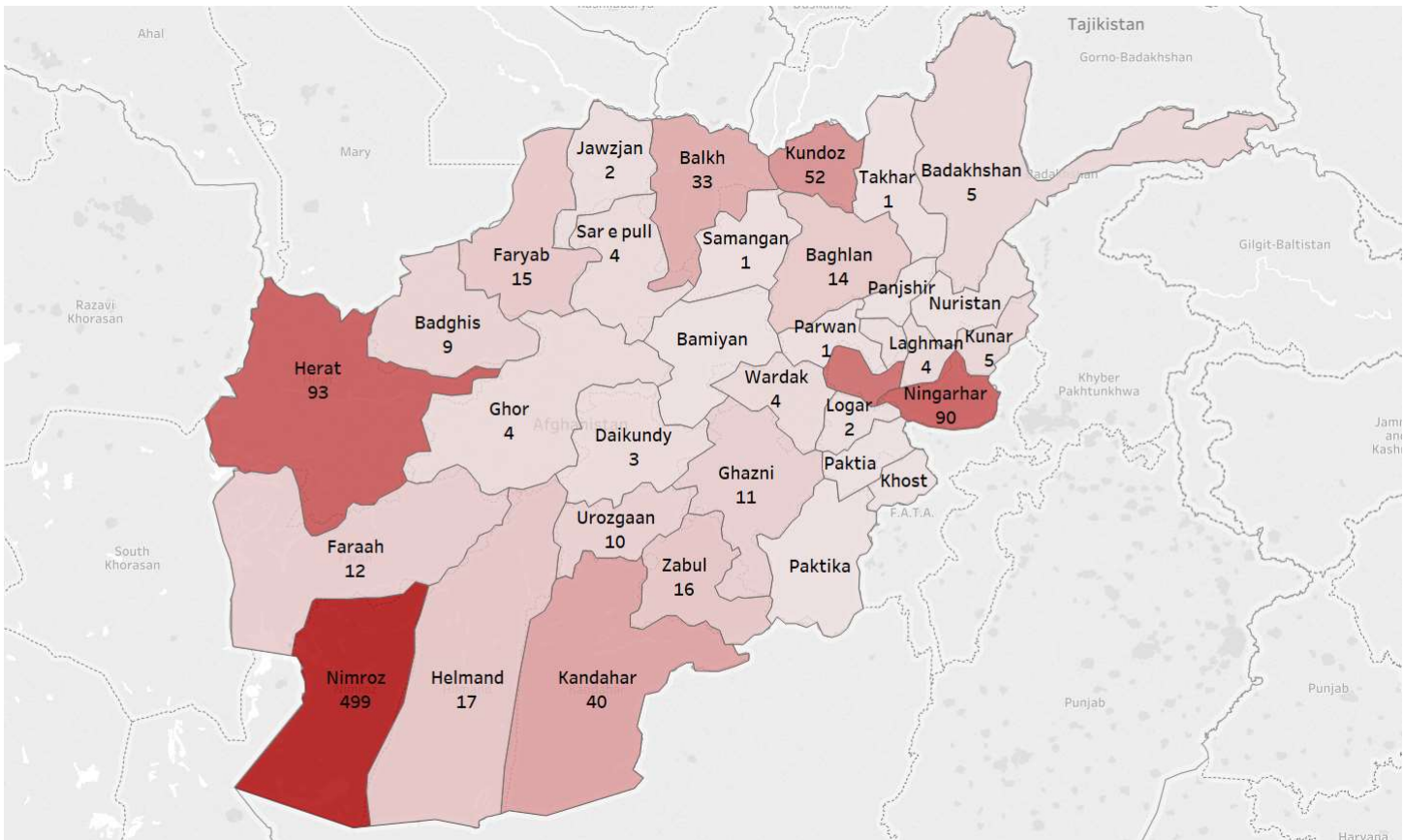
In total, as the data shows, Nimruz, Herat and Nangarhar are the three main provinces in which all sorts of incidents happen in high numbers to migrants. Nimruz is located in southwest of the country and its capital, Zaranj, near Iran and Pakistan borders is the starting point for irregular migration towards these two neighboring countries. In addition, many forced returnees are deported from Iran to Afghanistan through this border area. In Herat, a western province located close to Afghanistan-Iran border, a high number of migrants cross the border regularly and using legal pathways. It is however also from this border point that the majority of forced returnees from Iran are deported. Nangarhar is located in east and many Afghans use its border point, Torkham, to travel back and forth to Pakistan. Many forced returnees from Pakistan are deported from this border. Kabul is other province with many incidents of robbery and bribery.

As graph 3 shows, single unknown individuals, militia and smugglers carry the main responsibility for death of migrants according to the 4Mi data. Other migrants and smugglers seems to be responsible for sexual assaults, both indecent touching and rape, while in case of physical assaults, the role of smugglers and security forces/police is more prominent. Robbery is mostly done by unknown individuals and groups of thugs/gangs while ransom is commonly done by smugglers, militia and groups of thugs/gangs. Security forces, the police and other authorities are reported to be responsible for bribery.

Graph 3: The Frequency of those who are responsible for protection incidents



Map 1. Total number of reported incidence per province



Do you want more information about 4Mi?

The Mixed Migration Monitoring Initiative (4Mi) in Central Asia and South West Asia (CASWA) region aims at gathering data on displaced Afghans on the move. The initiative is part of DRC's global 4Mi data collection project. For more information about this initiative please visit:

<http://4mi.regionalmms.org/4mi.html>.

As part of 4Mi, DRC CASWA publishes monthly series of trend analyses about movement within Afghanistan and towards the East and the West. Analysis is based on interviews collected by 4Mi monitors with the purpose to increase knowledge about drivers of movement and protection risks faced by Afghans.

The 4Mi data published monthly only represents a small section of those on the move in Afghanistan. Any generalizations about the total population of Afghan migrants on the move must be made with an understanding of the sampling methodology of 4Mi.