

Monthly Migration Movements Afghan Displacement Summary Special issue on Women

June 2017

Introduction

This month, the CASWA 4Mi paper focuses on Afghan women and migration, a largely understudied topic to date¹. It is commonly understood that men are more willing to leave the country than women.² In particular young Afghan men are highlighted as the major group migrating from Afghanistan to Europe³. However, Afghan women also make the migration journey, but questions about their migration – who migrate? How? Where to? Why? – are rarely asked. These are some of the questions that will be addressed in this report together with discussions about protection concerns on route.

The paper is based on 4Mi interviews with 153 women conducted during April and May 2017. Respondents are women who started their journey within Afghanistan and wish to migrate abroad.

Women's situation in Afghanistan

Afghan women generally have limited access to their rights to education, free movement, justice etc. Importantly though, trends differ significantly from province to province and from urban to rural areas.

Afghanistan has high incidence of violence against women, including forced marriage. According to reports from AIHRC⁴, the most common forms of violence against women are physical (mostly beating) and sexual assaults (mostly rape). Women's right to justice is weak compared to men across various justice mechanisms⁵.

Few women contribute financially to the household economy; Hazaras are most likely to mention that women contribute to economic income whereas numbers are lower for Uzbeks, Tajiks and Pashtuns. This trend may be related to the fact that Hazaras are the poorest ethnic group in Afghanistan and thus in need of all household members to seek employment. According to the Survey of Afghan People from 2016 there is however an increase in both men and women reporting that women should be allowed to work outside of home⁶. Similarly, there is an increasing number of people who find it positive that women have the right to vote⁷.

International migration of Afghans has historically been male dominated. As the breadwinner, it was the responsibility of the man to migrate in search of work to provide for his family. In contrast, migration of women for work is not acceptable in the Afghan society and migration of Afghan women mostly occurs in the form of accompanying other family members. The waves of forced migration during the Soviet invasion, the outbreak of civil wars and the emergence of Taliban in the 90s resulted in large forced migration movements including, for the first time, also women⁸.

Today one will find that women, like other groups, migrate from Afghanistan due to multiple complex reasons. Fewer Afghan women migrate compared to men, and it continues to be frowned upon in the Afghan society for women to migrate on their own. Nonetheless instances of single women migrating do occur.

Who are migrating and why?

To date, there is little information about women migrating; there is correspondingly little data on trends and vulnerabilities among migrant women, and comparisons between women and men on migration paths.

The majority of women interviewed by 4Mi represented the two ethnic groups in the Afghan society that are most likely to migrate, namely Hazaras and Tajiks⁹. Most respondents were married and between the ages of 22 and 30 years. The majority of the interviewees were traveling with at least one of their close family members (63%) or extended family members (13.6%) reflecting societal restrictions on migration for Afghan women. However, 12.3% of the interviewees did report to be travelling alone¹⁰. Data indicates that these interviewees are younger educated women primarily migrating from urban areas with the intention to move further to Turkey and European countries; they prefer not to travel irregularly for the entire destination due to risks en route especially from Turkey and onwards.

Approximately 2/3 of the women interviewed were migrating from urban areas and a total of 28% of the interviewees hold

¹ IOM, Afghan migration profile 2014: pp. 234-235

² Survey of Afghan People 2016, The Asia Foundation, pp. 175

³ UNHCR, Profiling of Afghan Arrivals on Greek Islands in January 2016, 2016, pp. 2

⁴ Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Watch Commission 2015, Violence against women in Afghanistan, pp 5-6.

⁵ Survey of Afghan People 2016, The Asia Foundation, pp. 145

⁶ Survey of Afghan People 2016, The Asia Foundation, pp. 65-66

⁷ Survey of Afghan People 2016, The Asia Foundation, pp. 124

⁸ IOM, Afghan migration profile 2014: pp. 231

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

¹⁰ Female migration seems higher in other regions, e.g. East Africa: <http://4mi.regionalmms.org/4mi.html>

a secondary or high school education which is considerably lower than for men where 46% hold a similar education. 24% reported that they have no education. The rest informed that they have a primary level of education or hold a higher level education from a university or a religious school. More than 53% reported that their journey interrupted their study, mostly among those with secondary or high school education.

While multiple competing factors often lead to migration, political (28.4%) and economic factors (20.3%) unsurprisingly stand out among the women interviewed. Data shows that as the level of education gets higher so does the tendency to migrate for economic opportunities - findings that correspond well to the 'brain drain' syndrome and the fact that the job situation in Afghanistan in general is poor and probably even poorer for Afghan women¹¹. The survey of the Afghan people similarly reports that migration is strongly linked to education and further that strong support for equal education for men and women is associated with a marginally higher willingness to leave the country (33.7% and 28.3% respectively)¹².

As for interviewees reporting migration due to political reasons, the main push factor is related to conflict, war and political violence (81%). It is primarily Hazara women who report migration for political reasons, which may not be surprising given the history of persecution and being treated as outsider in the Afghan society¹³. Women who leave for political reasons have limited education, in contrast with those who leave for economic reasons, who are highly educated.

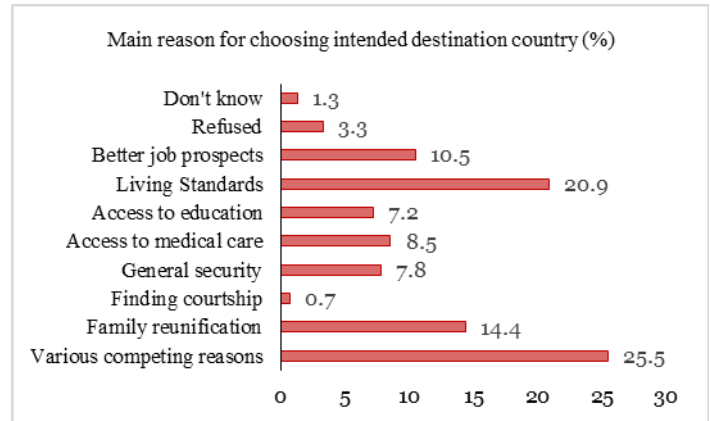
Pull Factors

A higher proportion of women, compared to men, report travel only to a 'transit' country, not the traditional 'destination' countries. For example, 16.3% of women interviewed informed monitors that they wished to travel to Turkey while only 10.5% men reported the same destination. Once they reach the transit country migrant women will apply for asylum with the hope that their application will be accepted. The current data does not reveal the reason behind this trend but it may be related to the fact that women are exposed to great risks travelling irregularly by land, and are only willing to take these risks for a limited period, not for the entire journey. Alternatively, the 'transit' countries may be a destination in and of themselves. According to the 4Mi monitors, many Afghans in Turkey are encouraging their young family members, women and men, to reach Turkey as the country continues to be perceived as a place with better living conditions compared to Afghanistan and Iran.

The overall percentage of women reporting migration to neighboring countries continues to be high for women as for

men, despite the above result. Nearly 40% of women interviewed mentioned Iran as their destination country. 9.2% mentioned Germany. A total of 21% mentioned general better living standards as the main pull factor. A significant percentage migrate to reunify with their families abroad (14.4%).

Graph 1: Main reason for choosing intended destination country (%)



Protection Risks for Women on Route

Irregular migration for female Afghans involves a high degree of risk. The 4Mi data in general indicates alarming numbers of protection concerns. It is highly likely that these issues are compounded for women, both due to the fact that they are generally poorly treated in the Afghan society and due to the fact that there are societal restrictions on migration. Women are therefore likely to be particularly vulnerable to protection concerns linked to migration. For instance, high rates of violence against women in Afghanistan, including forced marriage, render women particular vulnerable for trafficking within country¹⁴. In addition, reports indicate that women are trafficked to neighboring countries, and to a lesser extent India, for the purpose of forced marriages, prostitution and domestic services¹⁵. Female victims, trafficked for the purpose of forced prostitution, are currently criminalized and imprisoned in Afghanistan¹⁶. However, subjects related to smuggling, trafficking, gender-based violence, rape and sexual abuse are sensitive topics and it will require more in-depth research to fully understand the scale and nature of the issues. DRC will continue to analyze the issues at greater depth.

In the current 4mi data on women experiencing or witnessing protection concerns a common trend is that the incidents are not reported (65%) to the police as it is seen to be useless; this finding correspond well to the fact that Afghan women in

¹¹ IOM, Afghan migration profile 2014: pp. 232

¹² Survey of Afghan People 2016, The Asia Foundation, pp. 124

¹³ Survey of Afghan People 2016, The Asia Foundation, pp. 174

¹⁴ IOM, Trafficking in Persons in Afghanistan: Field Survey Report, 2008, pp.

¹⁵ According to IOM, Afghan migration profile, 2014, women are also

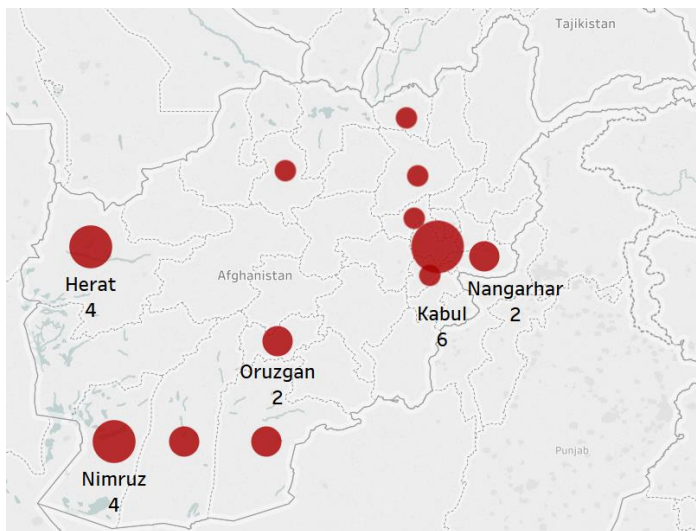
trafficked into Afghanistan from countries like Philippines, Pakistan, Iran, Tajikistan and China.

¹⁶ IOM, Afghan migration profile 2014: pp. 234

general have poor rights across all justice mechanism in Afghanistan. In the 4Mi data, however, 9 interviewees described experiencing or witnessing sexual physical assault or harassment mainly in the form of indecent assault or touching (5 cases) or rape (3 cases). These assaults or touching happened in Kabul and Balkh and single unknown individuals and host communities are reported as responsible for the incidents. It is assumed that numbers may be higher but that they are not reported. Based on knowledge from 4Mi monitors, women are mostly at risk of sexual assault when they are held as hostage by smugglers on the irregular route. Monitors explain that once a family reach Iran or Pakistan and has to pay for the journey it is often women and children that are taken in hostage if they cannot pay the sum or wait for their relatives in a destination country to pay for the journey. According to the two months data, 5 women reported being detained all by the police; 3 cases were in Herat and 2 were in Nimruz province. In average, they were detained for 3 days, mostly inside a room where they could lie down, unrestrained/not handcuffed. In addition, 2 women reported that they've been held for ransom. Both of them mentioned use of force and threat of violence as the primary elements used to prevent their escape.

A total of 18% reported to be exposed to physical assaults, which is slightly lower than for men (21%)¹⁷. The incidents for women mostly happened in the form of verbal abuse (68%) and moderate physical abuse (slapping, beating, and punching) (23%). Data indicates that single unknown individuals, smugglers, and host community are the main groups responsible for these incidents.

Map 1. Physical assaults (number of cases reported per province)



Bribery is another issue also reported slightly fewer times among women compared to men (13% and 19% respectively). The cases reported by women took place in

Kabul, Nimruz and Herat. These bribes were paid to security forces/police or other authorities in the form of cash money. The average amount of money paid was 57 USD.

Do you want more information about 4Mi?

The Mixed Migration Monitoring Initiative (4Mi)¹ 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.

¹⁷ The data is not representative and the number of men interviewed are higher than women.