

How access to development and social protection programming impacts on migration decision-making

The case of Afghanistan

February 2022



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In 2021 Seefar conducted one of the first mixed-methods studies focused on whether and how access to development initiatives including social protection programmes may influence migration in Afghanistan.¹ The research began before the fall of Kabul in August 2021 and bridges a gap between two major interests. On one side, donors around the world (including in Afghanistan up to 2021) have been keen to develop social protection programming across the humanitarian-development-peace nexus. On the other side, donors to Afghanistan and other countries of origin for asylum seekers have been keen to influence migration patterns. However, little primary research has attempted to examine interactions between social protection and migration in a context like Afghanistan.

This study delivers policy-relevant and actionable research on the connections between migration drivers and the influences of development and social protection programmes. We collected qualitative and quantitative data from five migrant groups: potential migrants, transit migrants, asylum seekers, returnees and family members. Findings and resulting recommendations aim to support donors, development and aid organisations, governments and civil society actors to tailor policy and programming to the needs of different migrant groups, and promote efficient resource planning across the humanitarian and development agendas.

Two overarching research questions guided the study:

- 1. In what ways does access, or lack thereof, to development interventions including social protection affect migration decisions?**
- 2. What development interventions, including social protection programmes, would allow individuals considering irregular migration to stay and live their lives in their origin country with dignity?**

We analysed quantitative and qualitative data along three themes: (1) whether knowledge of programmes and trust in organisations and/or the government to deliver programmes has any influence on migration decision-making; (2) whether and how access to and participation in programming meets the needs of potential migrants and addresses the underlying motivations and drivers to migrate; and (3) what constitutes effective programming from the perspective of different migrant groups.

Key findings

Our study has found that effective development and social protection programming can influence migration decisions, even during times of conflict and instability. The lack of access to social protection, for instance, was found to be a stronger driver of migration than insecurity – both before and after the fall of Kabul. Under the right conditions, however, the preferred destination was ‘home’ even if home is still largely insecure. For a high number of potential migrants, ‘the right conditions’ correlated with the government’s ability to provide access to healthcare, food, shelter and clean water. Access to these basic needs through social protection programming represented a critical intervention that could sway migration decisions of over two thirds of potential migrants as well as persuade over half of all transit migrants interviewed to return home.

¹ See Key Terms for what constitutes social protection in Afghanistan. [Social Protection. Government of Afghanistan, Ministry of Finance](#).

The study also found that actual awareness of and access to available support programmes is minimal across all migrant groups. Trust levels in the government and development actors to deliver effective, reliable, long-term and needs-based initiatives correlate to a remarkable degree with migration motivations; low trust levels in the government to deliver development pushes people to leave. For those migrants who have accessed programming, the duration of the benefits have been too short to impact their lives in a meaningful way, leading to minimal influence on migration intentions. The longer a social protection programme can benefit an individual or family, for instance, the more influence it has on migration intentions.

What makes a programme effective, however, is not simply a longer duration. Rather, **programming can sway migration plans and transform a migrant's wellbeing when the modality and type correspond to the needs, circumstances and profile of the individual migrant.** Data analysis confirmed that programme preferences differed based on reasons for migration, education level, number of children, employment and marital status. Each potential migrant is an individual with different levels of sensitivity to different services or programmes, and those sensitivities differ across and within each migrant group.

That means that the question of who wants access to which programme is much more important than the general type of the programme. For example, contrary to assumptions that seem popular in driving gender-based programming, women migrants had low levels of interest in support for women's groups and micro-loans. Instead, they prioritised basic needs assistance alongside business support and vocational training. If programming is to benefit humanitarian, development and migration objectives in parallel, then it must take account of differing levels of engagement and capacities across different migrant groups.

The study found that the most effective way to ensure needs are met is through 'combined programming' which involves offering both social protection and development programmes at the same time to an individual or family, a modality that was found to reduce migration intentions to a significant degree across all migrant groups. Business support, job creation, cash assistance and basic needs assistance were the top four support programmes identified generally that would allow individuals and families to stay and safely live their lives in origin countries with dignity.

In sum, the research results suggest that a paradigmatic and programmatic shift from state building to 'people building' will be most influential on migration patterns in, from and around Afghanistan. If donors are serious about achieving humanitarian, development and migration objectives simultaneously, then programming needs to be much more sensitive to different groups' migration interests and much more responsive to how these change over time. For traditional programme design, the beneficiaries' migration interests may be a minor concern, but for the beneficiary themselves, migration plans or experiences may be central and life changing. Programming that respects this about beneficiaries is much more likely to achieve positive impacts on development, social protection and migration.

RECOMMENDATIONS

For international donors and development actors focused on the implementation of development initiatives including social protection.

- 1. Ensure investment into programmes or policies targeting irregular migration includes components relating to, at a minimum, basic needs provision through development initiatives and/or social protection schemes.** The research established that interventions targeting irregular migration can be most effective if linked with programming that ensures that basic needs are met. This could include promoting combined programming, which would address basic needs at the same time as delivering development support to those most likely to migrate (i.e. income generation, livelihood development/job creation projects).
- 2. Support the development of migration-sensitive programming.** Actions may include commissioning a rapid evidence assessment on existing best practises in programmes that make deliberate efforts to be inclusive to migrants and adapting/developing an approach that is most suitable for donors, governments and IOs/NGOs to apply in the context of Afghanistan. Further actions could be:
 - **Link programming with research outputs focused specifically on gender** and the questions of (1) how migration-sensitive programming can be done best to really impact the lives of women in Afghanistan and reach those most in need; and (2) how need can be defined in this context where, at least among our potential migrant female population, access to programming is extremely limited.
 - **Delivering long-term, reliable support to vulnerable households while assessing migration intentions over time.** Emphasis should be on not only the type of programmes but the length and durability of the benefit.
 - **Targeting those most likely to consider migrating irregularly with multiple interventions – possibly using a type of graduation approach.** Combined programming that balances social protection (i.e. basic needs assistance) with traditional development approaches (such as vocational training or business start-up) can be implemented in a holistic graduated approach, tailored differently for different groups, i.e. those most vulnerable to human trafficking versus those migrating due to unemployment. It could include programming that is already happening or planned to happen and that could be designed in a migrant-sensitive way, so that both types can be effectively delivered.
 - **Invest in programme evaluations linked to pilot projects of a specific development intervention identified in this study (livelihood/vocational) or protection scheme (cash assistance/basic assistance) in Afghanistan or a transit country (within the region, in Turkey or the EU) to test effectiveness.** Implementing dedicated pilot projects will achieve two things. First, it will provide longitudinal data on how and why particular programmes can affect the migration decision-making of potential migrants. Second, it will allow for documentation of good practises and the development of monitoring tools that can allow organisations to measure/evaluate impacts of needs-based initiatives in the context of migration, or develop novel and innovative tools for needs-based migrant sensitive programming.

- 3. Promote awareness and access to information about availability of social protection schemes and development programmes available inside origin and transit countries.** This means targeting existing awareness-raising activities more specifically to people considering irregular migration as well as including the key messages in existing migration-related communications campaigns. The research also demonstrated that transit migrants are unlikely to continue travelling if offered support in transit countries that provide similar types of programmes (i.e. job creation etc). Increasing transit migrants' access to information about available programming would then also be valuable.
- 4. Invest in research to generate data to test, understand and improve applicability of this research to migrants in neighbouring countries, Turkey and the EU.**
- 5. Deliver programmes through development actors who are trusted to deliver effectively (IOs/NGOs) including those that are rooted in local communities, with operational independence from the Taliban regime.** Trust in an organisation's ability to change lives for the better emerged as a critical determinant of migration decision-making. Other actions to build trust could include:
 - **Specific research on trust levels in joint programming such as that delivered by external actors or donors and the Afghan government.** For instance, are people who access joint programming aware that they are funded by external actors, and does this impact trust? Though trust levels are a critical factor in ensuring programming is effective, this research component may not be immediately relevant in the current context, and will depend on how development actors decide to work with the current regime, or not.
- 6. Increase support to psychosocial support programmes for Afghans unable to leave, including families left behind.** The study shows that it is likely that lack of trust is pushing even more people to want to leave and, yet, many are physically and financially unable to leave the country. This has left many in a very hopeless situation. Psychosocial support provided through safe and trusted channels would help support those who want to leave but remain in the country.

KEY TERMS

Asylum seeker

An asylum seeker is a person who has left their country and is seeking protection from persecution and serious human rights violations in another country, but who hasn't yet been legally recognized as a refugee and is waiting to receive a decision on their asylum claim.² Although asylum seekers arrive in a country irregularly, the 1951 Refugee Convention states that they must be given access to fair and efficient asylum procedures and measures to ensure they live safely while their claims are processed. If an asylum application is accepted, a person is granted refugee status. Rejected asylum seekers must leave the country and may be expelled in the same way as any other irregular migrant.³

Country of destination

The country that is a destination for migration flows (regular or irregular).⁴

Country of origin

The country of nationality or, for stateless persons, of former habitual residence.⁵

Country of transit

The country through which migration flows (regular or irregular) move; this means the country (or countries), different from the country of origin, which a migrant passes through in order to enter a country of destination.⁶

Development programming

Development is a multidimensional undertaking to achieve a higher quality of life for all people. Economic development, social development and environmental protection are interdependent and mutually reinforcing components of sustainable development. Support can be provided to affected populations or beneficiaries by state and/or non-state actors that indirectly impacts household wellbeing through poverty reduction, vocational training, livelihood programming, and access to economic support (for example, micro-loans).⁷

Forced return

In the global context, forced return is a broader term which includes any action having the effect of returning the individual to a state, including expulsion, removal, extradition, rejection at the frontier, extra-territorial interception and physical return.⁸

2 Amnesty International (2022). Refugees, Asylum-Seekers and Migrants.

3 Ibid.

4 European Commission, Glossary of Terms (2022).

5 European Commission, Glossary of Terms (2022).

6 European Commission, Glossary of Terms (2022).

7 United Nations Library (key terms), ND.

8 European Commission (2022).

Irregular migration

The International Organization for Migration (IOM) defines it as “movement that takes place outside the regulatory norms of the sending, transit and receiving country”. This means that irregular migrants can be those who enter a country without legal papers or with false documents, those who overstay legal and valid visas or those who undertake employment or any other activity that is not allowed as per their visa norms.⁹

Migrant

An umbrella term, not defined under international law, reflecting the common lay understanding of a person who moves away from his or her place of usual residence, whether within a country or across an international border, temporarily or permanently, and for a variety of reasons.¹⁰

Potential migrant

A person who has not gone anywhere yet but has concrete plans to leave his/her country of origin. See also terms anyone who plans to travel within 12 months as a potential migrant.¹¹

Primary irregular movements

Irregular journeys taken for the first time, specifically the entry into the territory of another country, without the prior consent of the national authorities or without an entry visa, or with no or insufficient documentation normally required for travel purposes, or with false or fraudulent documentation.¹²

Quality of life

The standard of health, comfort, and happiness experienced by an individual or group. Quality of life is defined by the World Health Organization as “individuals' perception of their position in life in the context of the culture and value systems in which they live, and in relation to their goals, expectations, standards and concerns”.¹³

Refugee

A person who has fled his or her country due to fear of persecution because of their race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinions. In some countries, they may be registered with UNHCR or they may be recognised by the immigration authority of the country where they are located. A person must cross an international border to be recognised as a refugee. In the African Union, countries may recognise those who flee conflict or generalised violence as refugees. In the European Union, a strict definition of refugee is applied and refers to those who are personally at risk of persecution on one of the listed grounds.¹⁴

Returnee

The movement of a person going from a host country back to a country of origin, country of nationality or habitual residence usually after spending a significant period of time in the host country. This movement may be voluntary or forced, assisted or spontaneous.¹⁵

9 IOM, *World Migration report* (2018).

10 IOM Key Migration Terms (2022).

11 Lovo, S. (2014). Potential migration and subjective well-being in Europe.

12 IOM, Key Migration Terms.

13 WHO, Tools and toolkits, Quality of Life.

14 Convention and Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees (1951).

15 European Commission, Glossary of Terms.

Secondary movements

The movement of migrants, including refugees and asylum seekers, who for different reasons move from the country in which they first arrived to seek protection or permanent resettlement elsewhere.¹⁶

Social protection

Mechanisms that allow access to the human right to social security, including initiatives that provide income or consumption transfers to the poor, protect the vulnerable against livelihood risks and enhance the social status and rights of the marginalised; with the overall objective of reducing the economic and social vulnerability of poor, vulnerable and marginalised groups.¹⁷

In Afghanistan, “Social protection comprises a set of public policies and intervention aimed to increase the capacities, opportunities and security of extremely poor and vulnerable Afghans through a process of economic empowerment in order to reduce poverty and increase self-reliance. Social protection policies also strengthen the targeting of current investment such as food aid and employment-based public works programs.”¹⁸

Subsidiary protection / humanitarian protection

A form of asylum or international protection for persons seeking asylum who do not qualify as refugees. In the European Union, a person eligible for subsidiary protection status means they are from a country outside of Europe and would face a real risk of suffering serious harm if s/he returned to their country of origin. This can include people who flee war or conflict.¹⁹

The protection given to a third-country national or a stateless person who does not qualify as a refugee but in respect of whom substantial grounds have been shown for believing that the person concerned, if returned to their country of origin, or in the case of a stateless person to their country of former habitual residence, would face a real risk of suffering serious harm.²⁰

Transit migrant or migrants in transit

Those migrants who have left their home and/or country of origin and are in a place for temporary periods, on the way to their main country of destination, i.e. they are in an ‘ongoing’ state of migration. Usually, migrants in transit face a lot of security and safety issues as well as threats to their human rights, while they undertake their migration journey.²¹

Voluntary return

The assisted or independent return to the country of origin, transit or another third country based on the free will of the returnee.²²

16 European Commission, Briefing (2017).

17 Schüring, E. and V. Kronenberg (2017). Social Protection as an Alternative to Migration?

18 Social Protection. Government of Afghanistan, Ministry of Finance.

19 European Commission, Glossary of Terms.

20 European Commission (2022).

21 IOM, Key Migration Terms.

22 Ibid.

INTRODUCTION

Background and Objectives of the Study

The European Union (EU) has spent over EUR 4 billion on development aid in Afghanistan since 2002.²³ The priority of the Afghan government and international actors delivering on development aid funding over the last five years was to implement humanitarian-development-peace 'triple nexus' policies and programmes. There was keen interest within the international community and donor governments to identify ways in which social protection can be developed for use across both humanitarian and development responses throughout the country.²⁴

In Afghanistan, social protection refers to "interventions aimed to increase the capacities, opportunities and security of extremely poor and vulnerable Afghans through a process of economic empowerment in order to reduce poverty and increase self-reliance". Programmes fall into three pillars: social assistance, social insurance and labour markets.

Development programming refers to support provided by state and by non-state actors that indirectly impacts household well-being through poverty reduction but includes vocational training, livelihood programming, and access to economic support such as micro-loans for business start-up.

At the same time, Afghans represent the second largest refugee population globally – an estimated 2.6 million people – 90% of whom are in neighbouring countries such as Iran and Pakistan.²⁵ They are also the second largest group of asylum seekers (after Syrians) in Europe. The EU has invested significantly over the years in migration management, with further promises of funds to neighbouring countries hosting Afghan refugees, aiming to prevent further migration flows to Europe.²⁶

It is unclear, however, whether the agenda to identify effective development initiatives including social protection programming across humanitarian and development responses has been linked with migration. There is surprisingly little known about whether and how a lack of access to development initiatives such as vocational training or business support, or access to social protection programmes – mechanisms that allow access to the human right to social security such as social assistance – may influence migration decision-making generally and in Afghanistan specifically.²⁷

It is against this backdrop that Seefar conducted one of the first studies to better understand if and how there is any such relationship, and how access to programming can shape migration decision-making.

Two overarching research questions guided the study:

1. *In what ways does a lack of access to development interventions including social protection affect migration decisions?*
2. *What development interventions, including social protection programmes, would allow individuals considering irregular migration to stay and live their lives in their origin country with dignity?*

23 European Commission, "Afghanistan" (N.D.), accessed December 2021.

24 Ibid.

25 UNHCR, "Afghanistan" (N.D.) accessed December 2021.

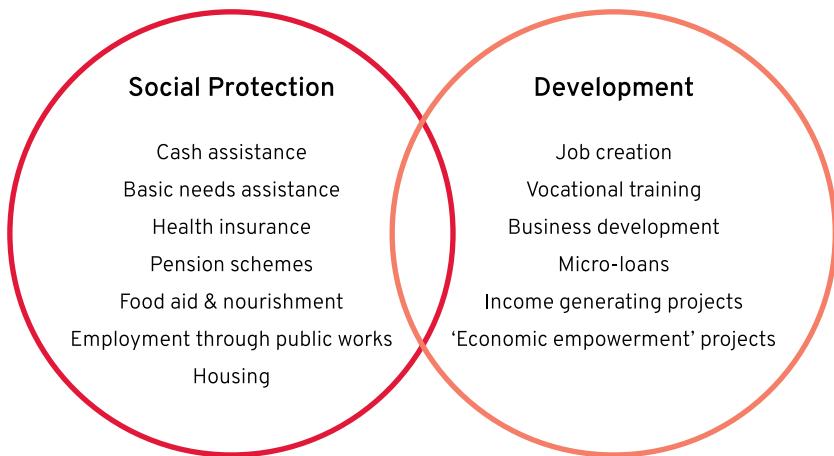
26 Reuters, "As war rages, EU weighs more funds to limit Afghans fleeing to bloc", July 2021.

27 See Key Terms for what constitutes social protection in Afghanistan. Social Protection. Government of Afghanistan, Ministry of Finance.

The objective was to produce policy-relevant and actionable research on the gaps between the drivers for migration and what development and social protection programmes can actually influence. Data was gathered to support donors, development and aid organisations, governments and civil society actors to tailor funding, programming and policy to the needs of different migrant groups, and promote efficient resource planning across the humanitarian and development agendas.

Definitions and Scope of Study

Figure 1: Conceptual division of social protection and development programming



In fragile states like Afghanistan, various United Nations (UN) agencies and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) often take the lead in delivering social safety nets and social protection programmes.

It is also a context where humanitarian and development objectives may blend into one; most social protection programming can also be considered ‘development’ as it may indirectly help boost the economy, reduce vulnerability and poverty and may be critical in a country achieving the sustainable development goals. Many development initiatives including social protection are often embedded into humanitarian programming and strategy, leading to more opportunities reaching more vulnerable groups through the same pool of funds. Despite the overlap of development and social protection programming, this study clearly distinguishes between the two in order to produce effective and efficient recommendations for specific programming types.

The categories of programming we looked at included cash assistance, basic needs assistance, vocational training and economic empowerment such as business support. These were selected after an online baseline survey conducted with potential Afghan migrants indicated they are the top four programmes Afghans felt are most closely linked to migration decision-making. While business support and vocational training are clearly development oriented, basic needs assistance falls under social assistance as a social protection intervention. Cash transfers straddle both types of programming; cash assistance is a means for development, meaning it can be used both for business start-up, for instance, as well as for basic needs. In this study preference for cash assistance was often a preference compared to in-kind support and is referred to as a social protection intervention or modality for social assistance. Some other interventions and subcategories discussed by respondents are included in the findings sections.

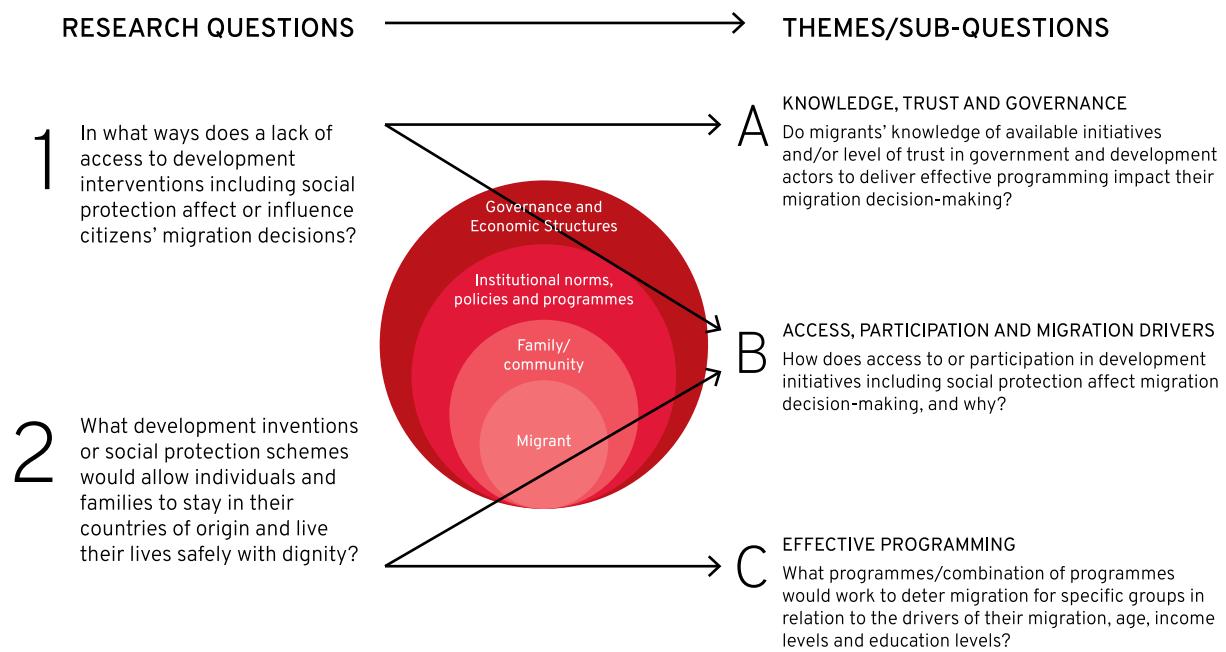
Analytical Framework

To explore the research questions and analyse the data in an effective way we adapted what is known as a socio-ecological framework.²⁸ Our adapted approach centres an individual migrant within a ‘life world’ of pressures and opportunities. Expanding out from the individual migrant are areas representing environments that yield protective factors and/or challenges. The approach explores connections between the individual and the family environments, for instance, with (1) institutional practises and provisions that influence decisions and agency at the individual level, as well as (2) the economic structures that govern availability of and access to resources and public services, including development and social protection programming. Such an approach allows us to understand how and why these factors or ‘environments’ affect well being and thus decision-making.

Using a socio-ecological approach for this research helped to generate a holistic evidence base on how access to development initiatives including social protection programming fits into the life worlds and decision-making of potential and transit migrants.²⁹ This includes a better contextualization of the potential effects that macro level policies and meso level interventions have on the more personal, and sometimes private or less vocalised, intentions to migrate.

The study included five migrant groups: potential migrants; transit migrants; asylum seekers; returnees; and families who have been impacted by the migration of an immediate family member and who are left behind in Afghanistan.³⁰ Including the five groups allowed us to assess trends and conceptualise programming impact on migration intentions from the family base to those who have been granted asylum, for instance. This provided a big picture view of how or why programming influences decisions on whether to migrate or how it may influence subsidiary choices being made in the moment by asylum seekers and returnees looking to make a secondary move or re-emigrate.

Figure 2: Analytical Framework



28 A well known approach used to understand and develop interventions for health as well as child protection in humanitarian and development contexts.

29 When we say transit migrant, regardless of the country, that respondent has self-identified him/herself as being in transit and not yet in the destination country. When we say asylum seeker, we are referring to the group of respondents who self-identified as having made it to a destination country and has either refugee status, subsidiary protection status, or is awaiting his or her application decision.

30 It was acknowledged very early on that the categories of transit migrant and asylum seeker can overlap and are not mutually exclusive, i.e. an asylum seeker in Greece very often is also a transit migrant. However, we demarcated the categories so that no one fit both definitions. We frontloaded the survey tools with well-designed demographics sections asking very specific questions regarding migration status in the country and/or intentions to move to another country. If they selected that they have applied for asylum already, then they were surveyed with the asylum seeker tool. If they had not submitted an application and are continuing to travel onwards, they were interviewed with the transit migrant tool.

To help us analyse these aspects in relation to the two overarching questions in a concrete way, we established three themes that linked the individual (micro) to the meso/macro levels of governance and access to programming to use for analysis.

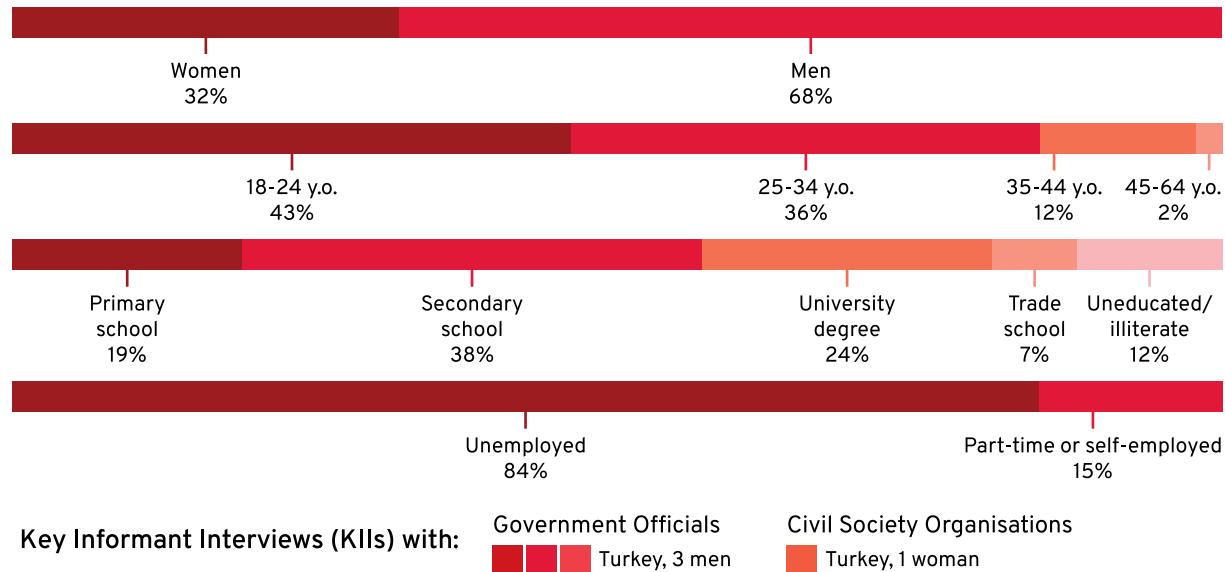
- A Knowledge, trust and governance.** This relates to whether and how the knowledge of interventions and the trust levels in organisations and/or the government to deliver programmes are linked, and whether that has any influence on migration decision-making.
- B Access, participation and migration drivers.** This relates to whether and how access to or availability of development initiatives including social protection affect drivers of migration and, possibly, choice of destination. This theme directed the analysis of whether and how access to or participation in programming addresses the underlying drivers of migration.
- C Effective programming.** This relates to what particular programmes or combination of programmes can address the drivers of migration across the different groups. This theme directed the analysis of what programmes different migrant groups may consider being transformative and leading to sustainable changes to their wellbeing and thus provide an alternative to migration.

Figure 3: Survey Respondents

1,115 total Phase 2 quantitative survey respondents



Figure 4: In-Depth Interviews (IDIs) with transit migrants and asylum seekers based in Belgium, Germany, Turkey, and Greece



Methods

The findings of this study are based on data generated through a range of both qualitative and quantitative methods that were implemented in a phased approach. Phase 1 included a desk review and an online baseline survey reaching 400 respondents across nine provinces in Afghanistan in June 2021.

PHASE 1

May-June 2021

- | Desk review
- | 400 online surveys (baseline)

PHASE 2

July-September 2021

- | 1,115 face-to-face and telephone surveys with potential migrants, returnees and families in Afghanistan, those in transit in Turkey, Greece, Iran, Italy, Bosnia, and Serbia and asylum seekers/refugees in Belgium, Germany, France, Greece, Turkey and Austria

PHASE 3

September-November 2021 (only with transit migrants and asylum seekers)

- | 80 IDIs with transit migrants in Turkey, Greece, Iran, Italy, Bosnia, Serbia and asylum seekers/refugees in Belgium, Germany, France, Greece, and Turkey
- | 4 KIIs with government officials, NGOs and Civil Society Organisations in Turkey and the EU
- | 1 FGD with transit migrants in Turkey
- | 1 FGD with asylum seekers in Belgium

Drawing from the baseline survey results, during Phase 2 (July-September 2021) 14 Afghan researchers carried out 1,115 face-to-face and telephone surveys. These surveys were conducted with potential migrants, returnees, and families of migrants located across all 34 provinces in Afghanistan. Transit

migrants were in Belgium, Germany, France, Greece, and Turkey, and asylum seekers were based in the EU including Belgium, Greece, Germany, and Austria.³¹ See Annex for more details.

The surveys were developed in partnership with Afghan field researchers in Afghanistan and the EU.

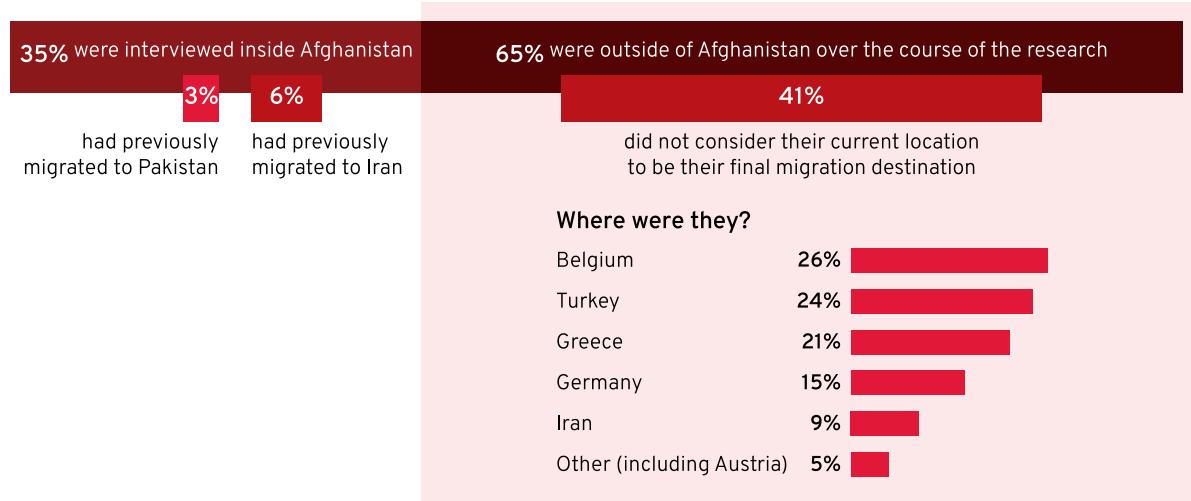
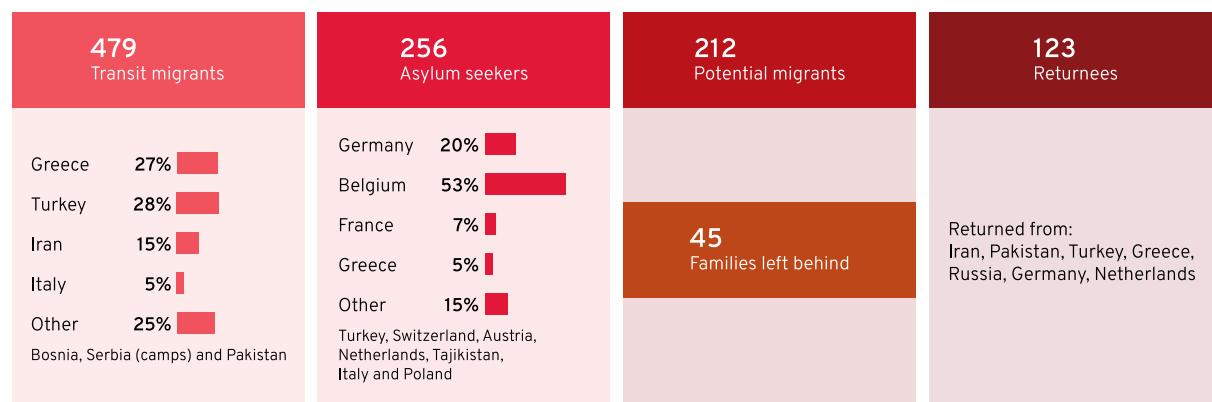


Figure 5: Sample size and location of respondents when surveyed/interviewed



Phase 3 (September–November 2021)³² was implementation of the qualitative component of the study and involved Afghan migrants and key informants based in Turkey and the EU. We conducted eighty In-depth Interviews (IDIs) with transit migrants in Turkey and asylum seekers/refugees in Greece, Cyprus and Belgium. Six Key Informant Interviews (KII) with government officials, NGOs and Civil Society Organisations in Turkey and Belgium gave depth to the analysis of challenges that government and development actors face in delivering programmes/services effectively. An additional two Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) with transit migrants in Turkey and asylum seekers based in Belgium provided a holistic picture of how a lack of access to social protection and development programming played a key role in their decision-making.

³¹ The choice or sample of countries was convenience-based as well as based on the connections the field researchers had with Afghan migrant groups in the EU and Turkey. Afghan researchers were based in Afghanistan, Belgium, Greece and Turkey.

³² Phase 3 reflected how the change in government and the subsequent crises required a rapid adjustment to the research approach and methodology in order to conduct research inside Afghanistan. This involved re-strategizing in dialogue with the researchers to understand how to proceed and which studies could be carried out without jeopardising their safety. This led to a decision to suspend in-depth face-to-face qualitative research in Afghanistan.

The survey and interview participants were recruited face-to-face through snowball sampling and Seefar's network in the different study locations. See Annex for more details on the methodology and analysis.

Study Limitations

a) Number of qualitative interviews with potential migrants in Afghanistan: Though we collected a substantial amount of data across the five migrant groups, we were unable to safely conduct qualitative interviews with potential migrants and key informants located inside Afghanistan after August 2021. This represents a limit to the depth of the study, and we recommend contacting migrant groups in Afghanistan post August 2021 for potential follow-on research activities.

b) Self-reporting/perception and recall bias: Respondents were asked questions related to access to programmes up to five years ago. It may have been difficult for respondents to recall what type of programming they received (i.e. was it social protection or development?). In addition, the Afghan government, IOs/NGOs, local civil society organisations and mosques can each deliver development initiatives including social protection. Though we included distinct survey questions on the 'government' and IOs and others, the answers for who the provider was for the programming may not be strictly reliable. Though this lack of detail somewhat limits the depth of the study, it does not pose any limitations on the conclusions or recommendations.

Likewise, asking those in transit, asylum seekers or returnees to retrospectively evaluate what they would have done if they had access or had received certain information, for instance, there is a degree of bias of the situations they are currently in and how those lived experiences shape their responses to a question like this. At the same time, there is also the power of hindsight, and relaying to us what it would take to not migrate having already been through the decision-making process.

c) Research does not represent a programme review or evaluation: As this was a scoping study focused on the views of different migrant groups, we did not conduct an in-depth discourse or policy analysis nor a review or evaluation of any specific programming. When we discuss programming we draw on the desk review and respondents' recollection of initiatives that may have been accessed or generally available.

d) It is a retrospective study considering the fall of Kabul: The study is somewhat backward looking considering the current crisis. There is now a smaller set of tools to engage with Afghan migrants, displaced people and those planning irregular migration in Afghanistan. However, the research can be applied to those in transit and seeking asylum within the region, Turkey or the EU. It also has relevance to other contexts where the humanitarian, development and migration agendas overlap.

Report Outline

The findings of this report are split into three sections to present based on the key themes described in our analytical framework:

- Section I reports on findings related to knowledge, trust and governance.
- Section II details how access, participation and migration drivers are linked.
- Section III describes what programming is considered by migrants to be effective and transformative to their wellbeing and, thus, influential on their migration decisions.

Analysis in each section links the findings back to the two key research questions. The concluding chapter summarises key findings and outlines recommendations for policy makers, donors and development aid and migration practitioners. Annex explains our research methods and the limitations of the study in further detail.

SNAPSHOT: SOCIAL PROTECTION IN AFGHANISTAN

While a social protection system has still not been developed in Afghanistan, the country has developed some social transfer programmes which the former government had committed to for more than a decade.³³ In early 2008, for instance, the government appointed the Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs, Martyrs and Disabled and the Afghanistan National Disaster Management Authority (ANDMA) to manage the country's Social Protection Strategy (2008–2013).³⁴ Their projects included, for example:

- a cash transfer programme (in partnership with the World Bank);
- basic health insurance for groups with the greatest needs (e.g. people living in poverty, people living with disabilities, women and children etc.); and
- a child protection response mechanism.³⁵

To bolster the Social Protection Strategy, in 2013 the World Bank designated USD 12.5 million to Afghanistan for the Safety Nets and Pension Support Project.³⁶ From 2017, Afghanistan's National Peace and Development Framework 2017–2021 further articulated intentions to move toward an actionable social protection strategy linked with development responses. The framework also highlighted the challenges in developing social protection in the context of Afghanistan, including weak state-level technical and financial capacity and a still-emerging tax base.³⁷ In 2021 and as a result of these structural challenges, only a minority of the workforce was covered by social protection programmes by the government while “non-humanitarian, non-contributory, flagship social assistance programmes targeting the individual or household level only cover an estimated 0.9 per cent of the population, with local initiatives lacking government support.”³⁸

33 WFP. 2019. Afghanistan: Developing a Strategic Framework of Action for Social Protection.

34 UNICEF, Social Protection in Afghanistan, 2020, pg. 44.

35 Samuel Hall. (2014). Social Protection System. (2014). An Afghan Case Study. Analysing the Potential of a Child-Focused Social Protection Cash Transfer Programme in Balkh.

36 World Bank. (2013). Emergency Project Paper on a Proposed Additional Grant and Project Restructuring in the Amount of SDR 8.3 million (USD 12.5 million equivalent) to the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan for the Safety Nets and Pensions Support Project.

37 IPCIG, COVID-19 and social protection in South Asia_Afghanistan, 2021.

38 Ibid.

KEY FINDINGS

Section I: How knowledge of and trust in social protection and development programming influences irregular migration decision-making.

1.1 Low levels of awareness about which development or social protection programmes are available or accessible influences migration intentions.

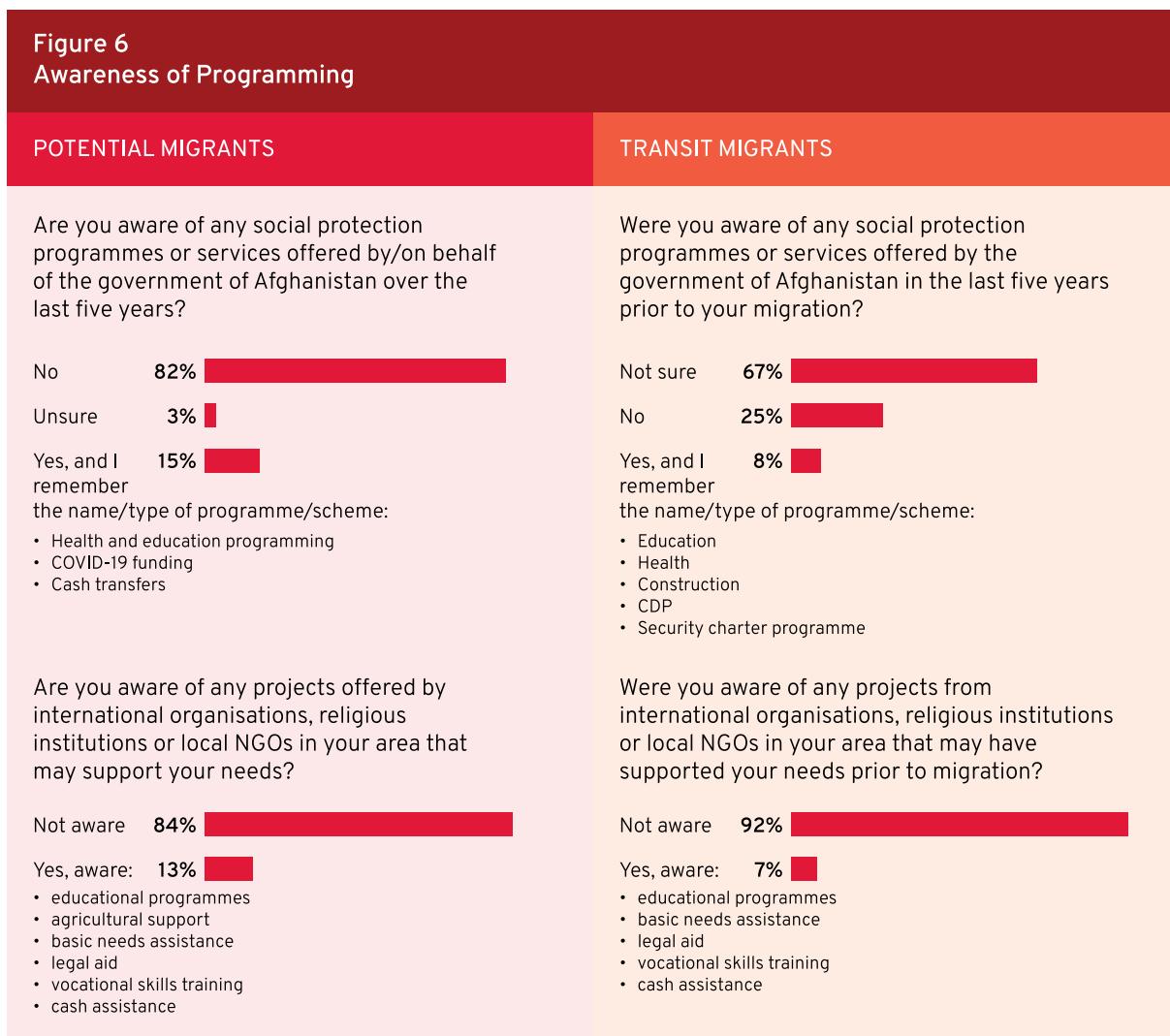
All five migrant groups reported only minimal levels of awareness and knowledge of any social protection or development programmes available and offered by IOs/NGOs or the Afghan government. This is despite the efforts of those development actors and the former Afghan government in the last decade to expand the coverage and reach of both development and social protection programming. On average, eight out of ten potential migrants reported having no knowledge of development interventions or social protection programmes offered by either the government or international development actors including the UN. Nearly seven out of ten transit migrants reported no knowledge of government programming at home in Afghanistan and nine out of ten reported no knowledge of any type of programming offered by IOs/NGOs.

62% of female respondents across all migrant groups reported no awareness of any programming offered by IOs/NGOs in Afghanistan. That nearly two thirds of women who participated in the survey have no idea about available programmes is surprising in light of the amount of investment into empowerment programmes, including policies focused on increasing gender equality (see section 2.1 of this report). This indicates that the campaigns on gender inequality have not reached those women who intend to migrate.

67% of families reported being aware of basic needs assistance, education programmes and cash transfer programmes delivered by IOs/NGOs in their areas. The higher levels of knowledge or awareness of programming may be due to children and youth in the household being exposed to more information while at school or outside of the household for various reasons and imparting that information to family members. Alternatively it may be that low income families are targeted for social protection programming.

Yet, the study found that having knowledge of what is available may be critical to migration decision-making. More than half of the potential migrants surveyed suggested that access to information about such support programmes would possibly impact their decision-making: 47% were willing to reconsider their migration plans if they knew more about what programmes were available, and an additional 15% were undecided, mentioning that it would depend on the length of the programmes.

Figure 6
Awareness of Programming



Though it varied, the influence of having such information on migration decision-making was found across all migrant groups involved in the study.

- The effect of receiving information about available programming on migration decision-making was lowest amongst asylum seekers and those with refugee status of both genders. Only 39% of asylum seekers surveyed reported that receiving information on what benefits they could have had while they were still in Afghanistan may have swayed their intention to migrate.
- Over two thirds (69%) of transit migrants reported that having had such information while still in Afghanistan may have impacted their migration decision.
- The most striking impact of receiving information on available support programmes on migration intentions was found with returnees; 80% reported that knowing of available programming in Afghanistan would have convinced them not to leave.
- 57% of impacted family members reported that if their migrant relative had known more about programmes available in their area then they may not have migrated.

SPOTLIGHT: RETURNNEES

13% of interviewed returnees were offered assisted return.

They received:

Immediate post-arrival assistance (i.e. non-food items)	41%
Cash or in-kind assistance	35%
Flight and transportation	24%
Psychosocial counselling	18%
Return ticket home	12%

They were gone for:

3-12 months	39%
1-2 years	15%
2-3 years	20%
3+ years	26%

44% of returnees had a plan to leave the country again in the 6-12 months following the interview in July 2021.

An additional 41% were planning to leave but had no set date.

1.2 Programme access is low

Data on actual access to programmes has established two interrelated key findings:

First, the actual number of people accessing programmes – either government or IO/NGO led – is very low.

- Approximately 48% of the 15% of potential migrants who are aware of projects (15 out of 31 as detailed in sub-section 1.1) responded that they have accessed and benefited from government-led programmes within the last five years. Most of the programmes mentioned fall under the social protection framework while some may also be considered development. Examples of programmes are highlighted in Figure 7.³⁹
- Meanwhile, only 8% out of the 13% of potential migrants who were aware of projects offered by IOs/NGOs reported having been enrolled in such development or social protection projects in the last five years. The remaining 88% reported not having had access to programmes delivered by IOs/NGOs, while 4% were uncertain.⁴⁰ Examples of programmes the 8% had accessed also fall under both social protection and development (see Figure 8).

Transit migrants appear to have had less access to or participation in government-led programmes than potential migrants. 93% of transit migrants reported that they did not benefit from any government social protection programming while still in Afghanistan. Of the 7% who said yes or were unsure, examples of programming given fall under both development and social protection. They included free education for any of my children, food transfers, community service subsidies, school feeding, employment from the government through public works programmes, and health insurance. Strikingly, transit migrants' levels of access to development and/or social protection programmes offered by IOs/NGOs prior to leaving Afghanistan was higher than that for potential migrants. 15% reported that they had been enrolled

39 This was a multiple response question and some may have benefited from several programmes.

40 There may have been a misunderstanding of who delivered the programmes, i.e. government vs international or local NGOs. We did not test for this in the survey. Also, while the survey asked directly, there was also little recall about who delivered these programmes.

in projects and an additional 6% were enrolled but were not sure who delivered the project. Together, 21% of transit migrants had benefited from vocational skills training, cash assistance, basic needs, educational programmes and livelihoods/artisanal work projects.⁴¹ This finding may imply a correlation between participation in IO/NGO development programming and departures but there are too many unknown variables that may be impacting decisions that cannot be determined from this study alone.

11% of asylum seekers had been enrolled in social protection/development programmes offered by the government in the years before they left Afghanistan. Examples of programmes included poverty reduction, vocational training, free education for children, public works, and school feeding. Focus group participants in Turkey and Belgium had also reported minimal access to government or IO/NGO programming prior to leaving. As one male transit migrant reported: "No, we didn't receive any assistance from our [Afghanistan] government or others before our migration."

Access for females was found to be strikingly low. Only 2% of female respondents across all five migrant groups reported ever having accessed programming delivered by the government or IOs/NGOs. In a patriarchal context like Afghanistan where gender inequality is maintained through social and cultural norms, and where the situation of women in the country was difficult already prior to the Taliban, this finding is unsurprising. However, what is striking is that access is low despite the amount of investment organisations had made into programming directed at women. The findings of this study thus suggest that those programmes are failing to reach female potential migrants. It also begs questions regarding targeting and where on the vulnerability spectrum a female Afghan potential migrant falls. Not a lot is known about the socio-economic and marital status of female Afghan migrants, for instance.

The gap between awareness of programmes and access to them was particularly wide among family members. While 67% of families reported being aware of programmes delivered by IOs/NGOs in their areas, only 3% reported ever having been enrolled in such programming. Possible reasons may be the programmes never took off or were interrupted, or that the families who are impacted by migration may not meet the eligibility criteria, for instance, because of socio-economic status.

⁴¹ In contrast, access to some form of assistance while in transit is much higher than access to assistance at home. 49% of the Afghan transit migrants interviewed reported benefiting from basic assistance programmes in their transit countries from IOs/NGOs. Access was high amongst those who were married with children and had a lower educational status, and who were of an older age, with 44% of 18-24 year olds and 78% of older migrants reporting benefiting from programming.

Figure 7
Governmental programmes accessed by potential migrants

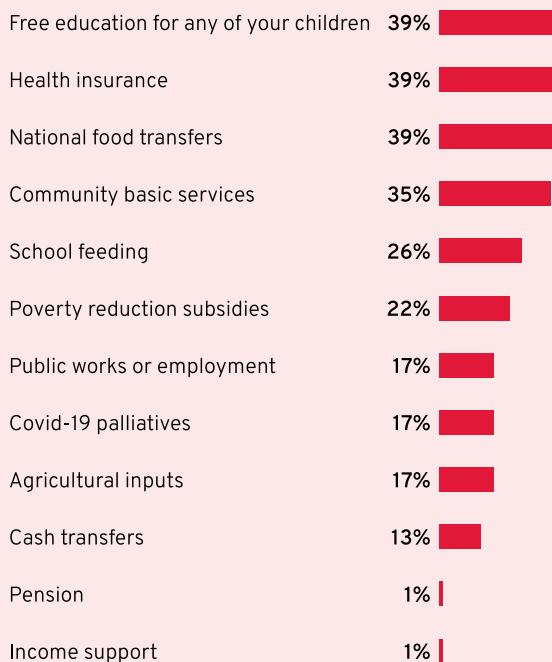
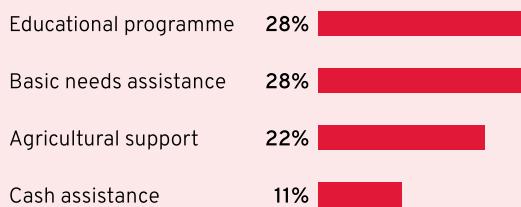


Figure 8
IOs/NGOs programmes accessed by potential migrants



That all five migrant groups reported such low degrees of access implies that coverage is inadequate for many who consider migration. As will be shown below, there is reason to believe that access to adequate programming influences migration decisions. Yet, as so few potential migrants in fact have access, drawing firm conclusions around lasting benefits of social protection and development programming with a view to migratory movements remains difficult.

1.3 For those who do have access, programme duration is too short to sway migration intentions.

Potential and transit migrants reported minimal impact of social protection and/or development programming because the short durations and benefits cannot impact their lives in a meaningful way. Enrolment or benefit from the programmes that migrant groups are actually accessing lasts on average three to six months. Our evidence suggests that actual access to programming does not influence migration decisions because the duration of benefit is too short.

- For nearly two out of three (63%) potential migrants, the benefits of the programmes lasted for less than six months in total. Just one in five received benefits for two years or longer. Over half of the potential migrants who accessed programming reported having benefited from the programmes in the 12 months prior to our interview.
- A similar trend emerged across transit migrants who had benefited from programming. Almost half of the transit migrants who had accessed programming prior to migrating reported that they participated in these programmes in the six months before they began their journey. The projects and/or benefits lasted less than six months for 76% of beneficiaries. A further 13% had benefited for 6–12 months.

Though most of the programmes delivered by IOs/NGOs were short-term, the duration of benefit was slightly longer than for government social protection initiatives as described above.

- Half of the IO/NGO programmes reportedly lasted for less than six months but an additional 36% lasted between 6–12 months.
- Just 7% of potential migrants benefited from the programme for 1–2 years and another 7% for more than two years.
- 2% of impacted families who had access to programming from the government reported having benefited for 6–12 months.
- 78% had benefited for less than six months.

The programmes listed above in sub-section 1.2 such as poverty reduction subsidies, national food transfers or public works/employment would suggest a longer timeframe may be needed to make an impact on people's wellbeing or on their personal circumstances to the point that they would abandon their migration plans. A public works scheme, for instance, that lasts three months as opposed to say one year or two would be of little long-term financial benefit to an individual or a family. Food transfers that happen once or twice in three months would be beneficial in the moment but not long-term.

Alongside the short timeframes, there is also a striking trend of almost immediate departure soon after participating across the migrant groups. Most of the transit and asylum seekers interviewed who accessed programmes while in Afghanistan left shortly after the programme ended. 57% of the potential migrants interviewed benefited from government-led programming in the 6–12 months before speaking to us. **Because this study did not do a thorough programme review, as highlighted in the study limitations section, we cannot speculate on why this might be. Further research is needed to demonstrate how or why particular programming may affect migration decisions.**

What we can surmise from the evidence we gathered, however, is that there is a direct connection between long-term effects of programming and migration intentions. When needs are not being addressed or needs are being met but only for a short duration little is done to sway migration intentions. But, as shown in sections II and III, it is not as simple as implementing longer programming but long-term meaningful programmes that address the wellbeing of an individual and their families.

1.4 Trust levels in IOs/NGOs to deliver effective and meaningful programming is higher; low trust levels in government programmes is pushing people to leave.

The short duration of programming in general but of government programming in particular is linked to migration: short-lived programming has led to an erosion of people's confidence in the government's capacity or willingness to provide them with long-term opportunities to live with dignity. Overall, 8 out of 10 potential migrants reported a lack of trust in government-led initiatives to effect change in their lives, whether that be development initiatives or social protection. And the study found that trust is strongly linked to migration motivations:

- 88% of potential migrants feel that the government does not have any meaningful plan or programme for their wellbeing.
- 81% of potential migrants reported that even if they benefited from government programmes, they do not trust that it would help them enough or that the government would deliver it in the way they say they will and so they would still migrate.
- 78% of potential migrants reported that they do not trust that the programming would last over the long term so they would still migrate.
- A little over half (57%) of the transit migrants surveyed believed the government would not deliver in the way they promised and thus would still migrate.
- Female potential migrants reported similar levels of distrust as the overall sample: 79% would still migrate because they do not trust government programming would last and 84% would still migrate because they felt that it wouldn't be delivered effectively.

Interestingly, however, levels of trust were found not to erode at the same rate or in the same way for IOs/NGOs or the UN actors who are delivering programmes that last only slightly longer. This is despite less access: most potential migrants benefited more from projects implemented by the government than by development actors. And yet, potential and transit migrants report that they trust international development organisations to deliver more effective and beneficial programmes than the government. 67% of potential and 78% of transit migrants reported trusting international organisations, religious institutions and local NGOs more than the government to deliver projects that can help young Afghans live a decent life and not have to migrate.

There may be a couple of reasons for the differences in trust levels, such as programmes delivered by IOs or NGOs lasting slightly longer. But it may also be because IOs or the UN are viewed as having obligations to be politically neutral and so citizens of fragile states feel that these organisations are inherently more trustworthy. Overall, trust levels in the provider can be considered a major determinant in how effective programming can be in influencing migration intentions.

1.5 Migration is broadly perceived as a type of informal social protection and the best option to financially safeguard family safety and wellbeing.

Our study confirms the relevance of remittances to provide for families left behind.⁴² Specifically, we found that family wellbeing played a significant role in migration motivations; many potential and transit migrants and their families considered migration to be a type of informal social protection, as the best option to protect their families against poverty and insecurity and to safeguard their wellbeing.

The data revealed that being able to send remittances and contribute to the wellbeing of those remaining at home fueled the motivation to migrate for the vast majority of potential migrants in Afghanistan and those in transit. 87% of potential migrants agreed that “Migrating [will] allow me to protect my family from poverty by sending back money to them once I reach my destination.” The number of those still in transit who felt that migration would enable them to protect and provide for their families through remittances was only slightly lower at 82%. Yet, while expectations of such support were high, a lower number (62%) of asylum seekers confirmed that they can in fact support their families financially from their destination country.

This finding validates other studies on social protection and migration that show that migration can be considered a form of informal protection against poverty.⁴³ This importance of remittances was most strongly felt by those who migrated due to insecurity, unemployment and lack of access to basic needs, as compared to those seeking better education, for instance or business opportunities.

“When we get good jobs and good salaries then we can support our families here and also in Afghanistan.”

- FGD, male asylum seeker, Belgium.

In terms of the impact remittances have had on families left behind, the results are mixed. On the one hand, over half of the family members interviewed in Afghanistan have benefited financially through the migration of a family member. On the other hand, only a third of families reported having a better quality of life through remittances. In addition to not doing that much better financially, many families also reported feeling loneliness, missing the family member, anxiety about them being physically unsafe or insecure as well as anxiety that the family members left behind are at greater risk of violence or threat.

This implies that the remittances which are being sent are serving as a basic assistance measure – a social protection measure – as a means for survival as opposed to lifting a family out of poverty or enabling a family to thrive.

42 See Desk Review - Afghanistan for more details.

43 As opposed to formal social protection, which is assistance provided by the state and non-state organisations. Informal social protection is understood as that provided by interpersonal networks. These can also be bi-directional: as migrants navigate formal state-bounded social protection provisions to informally provide for themselves or their families back home. <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/1369183X.2018.1429900>.

Section II: How access to social protection and development programming influences migration drivers.

Figure 9
TOP REASONS FOR MIGRATION

POTENTIAL MIGRANTS	TRANSIT MIGRANTS
Insecurity/conflict	85% 
Unemployment	66% 
To get a better job or income	48% 
To protect my family through remittance	33% 
Better education	27% 
Pressure from my family	12% 
Insecurity/conflict	74% 
To get a better job or income	55% 
Lack of livelihoods	42% 
Better education	37% 
To get better healthcare services	27% 
To protect my family through remittance	24% 

2.1 Lack of access to social protection is a stronger driver of migration than insecurity – both before and after the fall of Kabul.

"I left the country 3 months ago. The main reason was the civil war and the killing of innocent people. I had just lost my cousin in a bomb attack; he was a Banker in the city center. In the last 4 years, though, 5 of our relatives and family members were injured and killed in the civil war. They were all innocent. It was hard for us to be patient, so my family decided for me to leave the country for a better life. Germany is a country which offers education, healthcare, job, and social activities programs to migrants or asylum seekers. So, I am confident that this is my destination"

- IDI, male transit migrant, Turkey.

Though very little financial investment has gone into implementing Afghanistan's social protection framework, the country has benefited greatly from funding for development. On top of the EUR 4 billion the EU has spent on development aid in Afghanistan since 2002,⁴⁴ an estimated USD 2 trillion has been spent on Afghanistan by the USA over the last decade to support access to higher education (USD 95 million), economic development (USD 105 million), election monitoring and participation (USD 89 million) and gender equality campaigns (USD 800 million). Together, these efforts sought to promote peace and stability, reduce conflict and work towards achieving a more equal and equitable society.

Despite these development and peace efforts, insecurity remained a major driver of migration from Afghanistan during our research period prior to the Taliban takeover, with 85% of potential migrants reporting that conflict is one of the main reasons they wanted to flee the country.⁴⁵ Some interviewees expressed they had lost hope of Afghanistan ever achieving stability and good governance. Many also reported that migrating to the EU may be their only chance at security and finding a peaceful life worth living.

44 European Commission. (N.D.). "Afghanistan".

45 This was a multiple answer question.

An even higher number of potential migrants reported a direct correlation between their migration plans and a lack of the government's ability to provide access to basic needs assistance for its citizens such as access to sufficient food, health services and adequate shelter. 91% reported "My government cannot help me satisfy my basic needs. This is why I am migrating." 88% of potential migrants felt that the government failed to consider their wellbeing or that of their families, and that is also why they are migrating.

The same results held true when conducting research during the collapse of the government and emerging humanitarian crisis. While most Afghans with whom we spoke still hoped to flee Afghanistan because of insecurity, it was the limited access to healthcare, food, shelter and clean water and other needs that were driving the migration plans for two thirds of these potential migrants. More than 75% of Afghan respondents who were planning to leave the country in early December, and over half of those with a plan to leave as soon as they could, were migrating out of a desperation to gain *access to adequate levels of food, shelter, and water to ensure survival.*

To some degree this is unsurprising. Effectively, the humanitarian situation and transition in government led to the removal of any existing donor-backed government-led social safety nets. This fueled the need for humanitarian aid under emergency support to step in and provide/replace donor-backed government programming. Regular development programming offered by IOs/NGOs were also quickly replaced with emergency programming. Given the resistance of the Taliban to fully engage the international community (and vice versa) as well as the amount of funding required to fund an adequate humanitarian response across a whole country, nearly two out of three (64%) Afghan respondents in our November survey reported to be struggling to meet their basic needs and those of their family members (access to food, clean water and shelter).

Overall, this finding relates to how, without programming that provides basic needs assistance, for instance, the underlying motivations and drivers to migrate remain unaddressed. Specifically, the findings suggest that addressing a lack of access to basic needs assistance may reduce intentions to flee. This may be achieved through either humanitarian response or social protection programming in a more development response (see sub-section 2.2).

SNAPSHOT ON SMUGGLING

As a tipping point, the lack of availability of basic needs also may increase reliance on smugglers and thereby escalate both migration and humanitarian crises. Many potential migrants interviewed planned to use a smuggler to get out of the country, even those without resources. The cost of a smuggler had reportedly fallen in the period from September to December 2021, making smugglers more accessible. This may be a function of more people engaging in human smuggling activities as their resources are depleted by the crisis. This places Afghans at risk of debt-bondage. Three quarters of survey respondents in November 2021 said that smugglers are offering to front all or part of the funds needed to migrate. Respondents hoping to travel to the EU reported that smugglers are charging between USD 8,000–15,000 (EUR 6,800–12,800) per person to get to Europe.

2.2 Consistent access to basic needs assistance via social protection programming in Afghanistan could significantly influence migration decision-making regardless of insecurity or conflict.

Contrary to assumptions, under the right conditions, the preferred destination is 'home' even if home is still largely insecure. In relation to sub-section 2.1 above, the study further found that, over two thirds potential migrants would prefer to stay home if they had confidence that they would have access to long-term social protection and development support. Specifically, the provision of social assistance programming that meets basic needs (food, water, health and shelter) would convince them to stay put.

The significant influence that having consistent and reliable access to social assistance has on migration decisions is maintained regardless of insecurity levels. 85% of potential migrants who selected insecurity and conflict as the main driver of their migration decision agreed (36%) or strongly agreed (49%) that if the government were able to provide and guarantee provisions to meet their basic needs (food, shelter, health and clean water) then they would not migrate.

"Basic needs are the most important which is hard for us to have in our home country"

- Survey (open text), male potential migrant, Afghanistan.

This finding was also found to be true amongst other migrant groups. 75% of those in transit reported that they would not have migrated because of insecurity if their basic needs had been met. 60% of asylum seekers, despite being content within their destination country, agreed that if their basic needs had been met in Afghanistan, they could see themselves living a decent life at home and may

not have migrated. This finding is also especially strong amongst returnees in Afghanistan planning to migrate for a second time: 88% of returnees agreed that access to basic needs is what it would take for them to remain in Afghanistan indefinitely.

Finally, 89% of families who are impacted by the migration of an immediate family member agreed that if the government were able to provide and guarantee provisions to meet basic needs over time, then families could have a decent life in Afghanistan and not feel as much pressure to have some members migrate.

Figure 10

Afghan asylum seekers and refugees contemplating a secondary movement within the EU are largely motivated by limited access to opportunities for income, basic needs and family connections in their current country

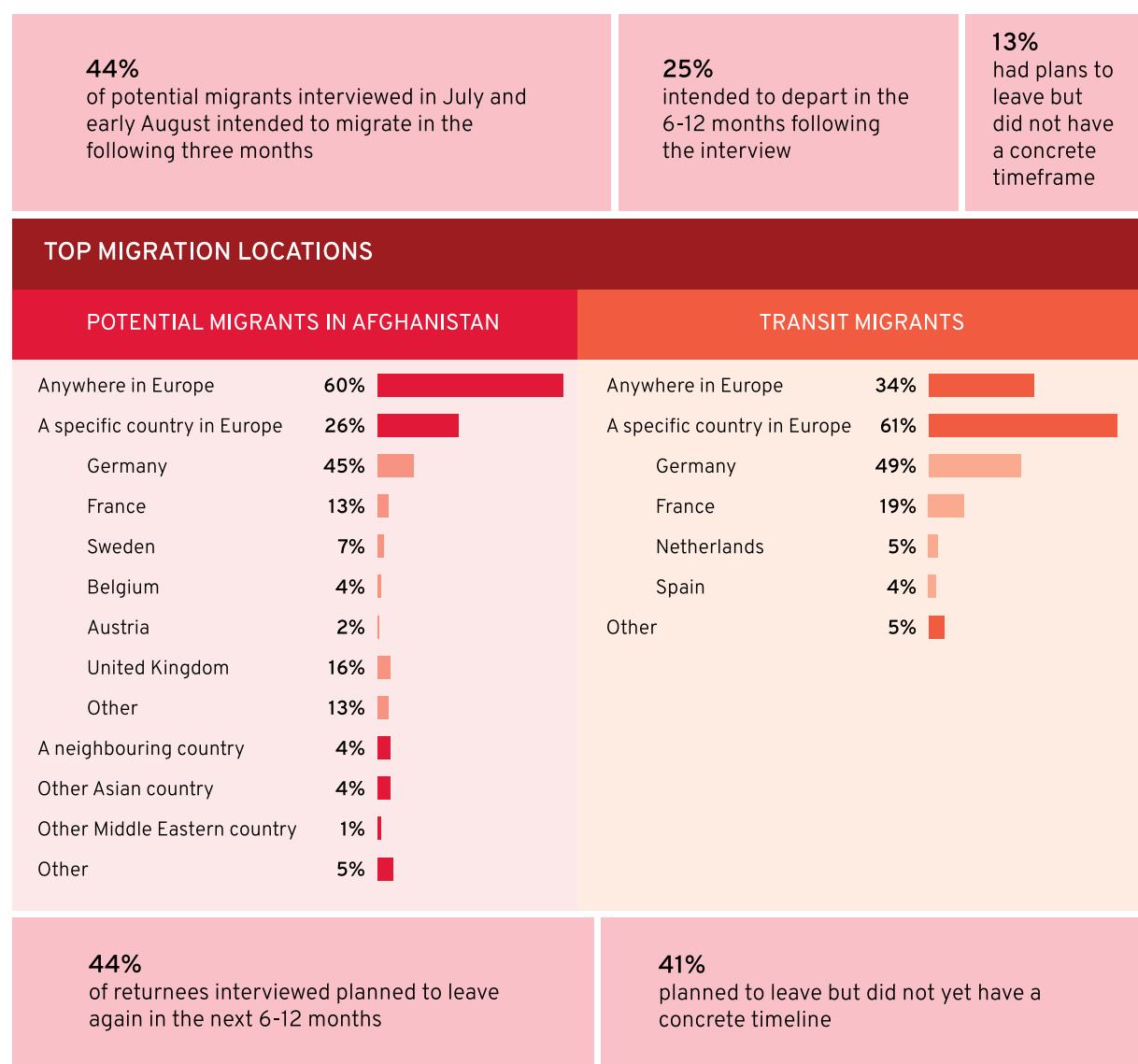
Asylum seekers who did not have access to social protection programmes or development initiatives in their destination countries reported intentions to go somewhere else. Reasons they cited for embarking on a secondary movement included:



2.3 A major appeal of the EU specifically as a destination is ‘good governance’.

EU Member States have long been the primary destinations for potential and transit migrants from Afghanistan. Almost 9 out of 10 potential migrants surveyed in July and August 2021 planned to migrate to the EU, with 26% having a specific country in mind. In addition, according to our research, preferences to migrate to the EU did not change between August and November during the unfolding humanitarian and political crisis in the country. There was a slight increase in the number of potential migrants open to ‘anywhere in Europe’, as shown in Figure 11 below.

Figure 11: Desired Destinations of Potential and Transit Migrants documented July-August 2021



Against the backdrop of basic needs provision being a driver of migration generally, this study found many potential migrants aim to migrate to the EU because they believe they will have their basic needs met there. Most potential Afghan migrants who participated in this study perceive EU countries to practice good governance. According to focus group discussions and interviews with transit migrants and asylum seekers, good governance is defined as a government who addresses the basic needs of all citizens through supportive services to increase quality of life (quality of life meaning support with education, income, healthcare and basic amenities such as constant electricity, adequate shelter and clean water).

Many respondents across all groups stated that because they cannot access their basic needs in Afghanistan, they are motivated to leave to find a better life. This ‘better life’ desire acts as a major pull factor for most migrant groups who participated in the research.

- 87% of potential migrants reportedly hold the belief that they will ‘find good governance’ in the EU, and that once they arrive at their destination, they will have access to a better quality of life (quality of life meaning support with education, income, healthcare and basic amenities such as constant electricity, adequate shelter and clean water).
- Surveys showed that 83% of transit migrants are under the same impression.
- 81% of potential and 83% of transit migrants believe that they will be able to benefit from what the destination country government is doing for their own citizens; that they too will have the same benefits.

Between September and November, the theme of good governance and belief that a migrant can access his/her basic needs in the EU continued to be a dominant finding in the surveys. It also emerged in the IDIs with transit migrants and asylum seekers who are living across the EU and Turkey. Below are some excerpts from the IDIs with transit migrants in Greece and Turkey.

“As I heard in the beginning (of my journey) they send you to the camp and give you money every month as a salary, also food, and there’s German class in the camp that you could go to and it’s free. When you get your asylum then they transfer you to the house and increase your salary, supporting you with studying and working.”

“I heard that most of them (asylum seekers) have social benefits, such as food, clothing, and financial support. If I get the job opportunity, I will be able to earn enough for all needs.”

“As my friends told me, they [will] support us with money, shelter, food, education, and a job, I think those are the same in [all] European countries.”

This finding shows how the *promise* of available development programming and social protection can also inform choice of destination.

Section III: Development and social protection interventions that could impact on plans to irregularly migrate.

3.1 Standalone programming addressing a specific area of social protection can be effective but combined programming would reduce migration intentions to a significant degree across all migrant groups.

Having access to both social protection and development programmes at the same time reduces migration intentions to a remarkable degree across all migrant groups. 62% of potential migrants reported that they would abandon their migration plans and stay in Afghanistan only if they had access to combined programming involving vocational training, cash assistance and basic needs assistance such as healthcare and food security.⁴⁶ An additional 19% would “very likely stay home” but may continue to think about migrating if they received combined/both types of programming. Only 13% would migrate regardless of what was offered to them.

When presented with only one option, a slightly smaller number of potential migrants interviewed said they would stay home. 54% stated that they would remain in Afghanistan if offered only cash assistance and likely only for a short while. 45% would likely stay if they were offered vocational training.

“Basic needs, livelihood programs, education programs, job opportunities and cash assistance will make stability in the current situation of migration.”

- FGD, female transit migrant, Turkey

Once potential migrants begin their journey and are in transit the idea of combined programming gains a slightly stronger influence. 65% of transit migrants reported that they likely would have stayed home or would return home if able to benefit from combined programming involving skills training and cash and basic needs assistance at the same time, and over the long term. An additional 21% said they would have stayed home but may have also continued to think about migrating. Only 7% said they would have continued to migrate anyway. That such a low percentage claim they would migrate anyway highlights how development initiatives including social protection programming clearly have at least some influence over migration decisions.

Further emphasising the effects of combined programming, 25% and 27% of transit migrants reported respectively that offering only cash assistance or only vocational training would have convinced them to remain at home and not migrate.

Responses from migrants’ family members strongly confirm the influence access to combined programming may have on migration decisions: 62% believe that the family member who migrated abroad very likely would have remained in Afghanistan with the promise of combined programming. 40% felt that access to vocational training alone may have influenced their decision and, similarly, 41% felt cash assistance would have been a pull factor to remain home, at least temporarily.

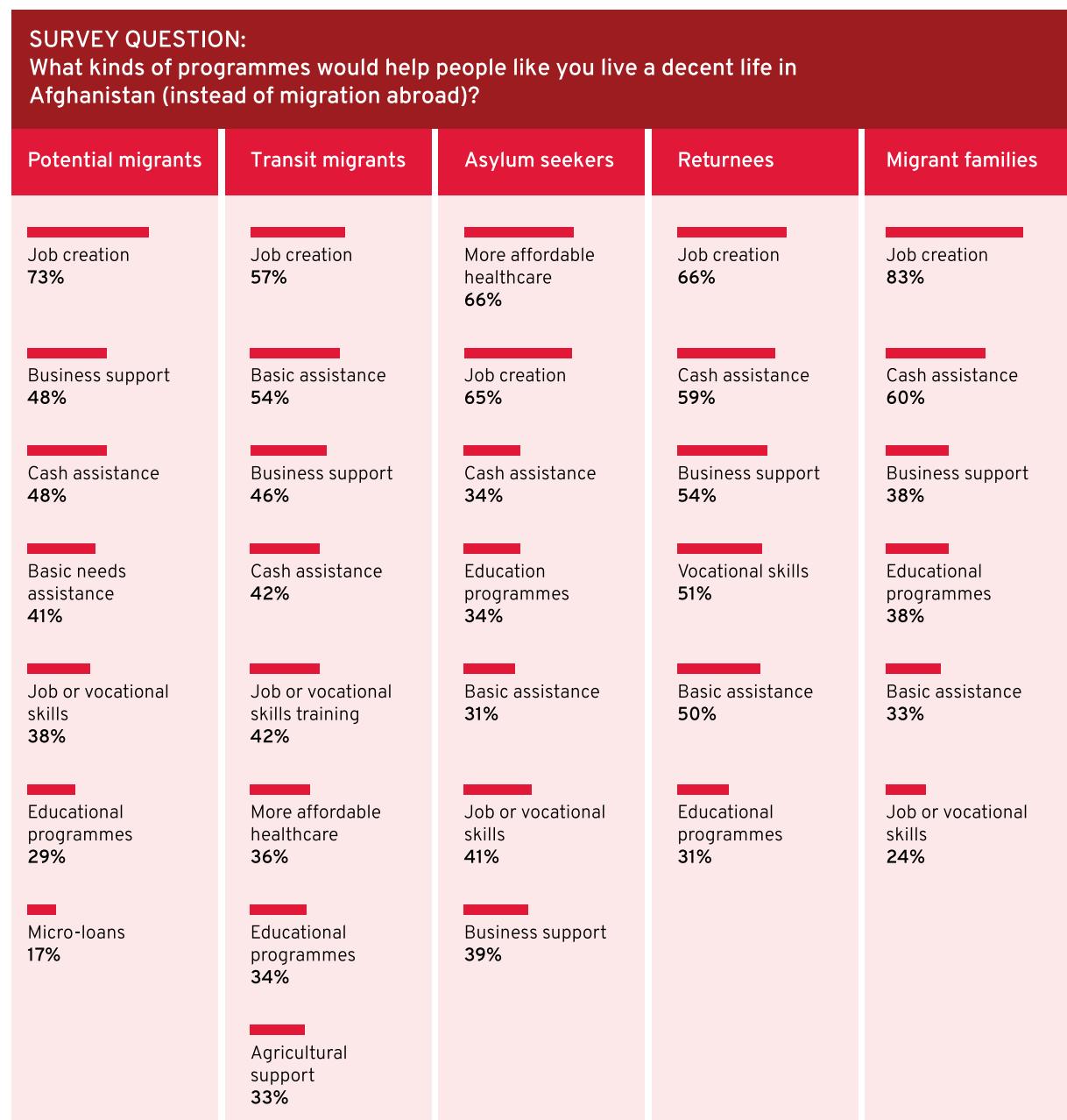
46 The baseline survey indicated that cash assistance, vocational training and basic needs assistance were the top three programmes that would deter migration plans and allow people to live a decent and dignified life in Afghanistan. So the survey tool implemented during Phase 2 focused on these three programmes.

3.2 Job creation, cash assistance, business start-up and access to basic needs could discourage irregular migration and draw transit migrants home.

Potential migrants and those in transit reported that different types of programmes related to social protection and development may be transformative to their wellbeing and may help create an alternative to migration:

- Support for start-ups and job creation were the top two development programmes selected by potential migrants as the type of development programming that would help people live a decent life in Afghanistan instead of having to migrate.
- 75% of potential migrants also reported that receiving economic empowerment through cash assistance or loans can help Afghans more than migrating abroad.

Figure 12: Type of programmes considered transformative and prioritised by the migrant groups



The research found that more important than the type of programme available is the question of *who* wants to access *which* programme. That is, **programming is effective in swaying migration plans and transformative to a migrant's wellbeing when the modality and type corresponds to the needs, circumstances and profile of the individual migrant**. Data analysis confirmed that programme preferences differed based on reasons for migration, education level, employment and marital statuses, and the number of children one has. This makes sense considering each potential migrant is an individual and so the rankings of what types of services or programmes can be considered transformative to their wellbeing will differ across and within each migrant group.

For instance, almost half of all potential migrants stated that cash assistance would enable them to live a decent life in Afghanistan instead of migrating abroad. Yet the data suggests that cash assistance was less popular among those with primary school education than those who have a first degree or those with secondary education. One might assume that cash would be the most popular amongst those without options. The suggestion of this finding is that the preference for cash amongst those with higher education levels may be because they want to use it for development purposes (i.e. injection into business) as opposed to using it for their own social assistance such as to buy food or find safe shelter.

Those who were married ranked, for instance, cash and job creation the highest priority. But again, that depended on other circumstances such as education levels. Interestingly, more married people (53%) chose business development than single people (42%), and it was ranked especially high amongst those with three or more children. For job creation as well, the more children someone had the more they valued job creation: i.e. among potential migrants, compared to 94% of those with four or more children, only 48% of those without children chose job creation.

Those who are planning to migrate primarily because of insecurity ranked cash and business support as the types of programming most likely to make them choose to stay. Meanwhile, those whose migration plans have been triggered by a lack of jobs or livelihoods prioritised basic needs and job creation. Essentially, those with no income to meet their basic needs want jobs, they want to be able to take care of themselves and their families. With that, the more children one has the higher income-generating or cash assistance programmes will be prioritised.

“I think opportunity programmes will develop our country if there is the possibility to assure a comfortable life for our future generation, such as: part time and full time job opportunities for all high school graduates, new projects for teachers, lecturers, shop keepers, cash assistance with all those family who are disabled or not able to work (the elderly) and all other young talents which could be the reason to develop the country.”

- FGD, male transit migrant, Turkey

Age is a determinant of programme preferences with the younger potential migrants aged 25–34 years ranking cash assistance highest, as well as younger migrants in transit ages 18–24 years. A striking finding regarding age was that, while younger *potential* migrants valued job creation, it was the older transit migrants who ranked it at the top: 46% of those aged 18–24 years, 60% of those aged 25–34, 65% of those aged 35–44, and 56% of those aged 45–64 years. It is difficult to say why, though possibilities include older transit migrants being more likely to have left families back home with children to whom they must provide financial support. Without income it is impossible to send remittances, for instance.

What is unsurprising is that business support was a popular choice of younger potential and transit migrants ages 18–34 who were university-level educated and those who were self-employed. Business support would allow them to apply their education, become entrepreneurs and generate income.

More than half of transit migrants also chose basic assistance as the thing that would help people live a decent life in Afghanistan instead of migrating. This is true for people of all ages and all forms of education. There is an only slightly higher preference among migrants who are married (64% versus 51% of single migrants) and those with university education (60%+), and those with no formal education (63%) over those with primary education (58%) and secondary education (46%). For those in transit, basic assistance was prioritised for those who had no source of income. Unsurprisingly, basic assistance became more popular with people the more children they had.

Figure 13: Summary of programming preferences based on demographics and migration drivers

SOCIAL PROTECTION		DEVELOPMENT	
BASIC NEEDS (SOCIAL ASSISTANCE)	CASH ASSISTANCE	BUSINESS START-UP	JOB CREATION
Prioritised by potential and transit migrants who are			
Migrating to get a better job (61%), because of insecurity (59%) and because of lack of livelihoods (55%).	Migrating because of insecurity (77%), to get a better job (53%) and lack of livelihoods (38%).	Migrating because of insecurity (86%), to get better income (64%) and lack of livelihoods (46%).	Migrating to get better income (76%) and because of lack of livelihoods (72%) and because of insecurity
Of any age and any level of education.	Between the ages of 25-34 years.	Between the ages of 25-34 years.	Between the ages of 18-24 years. If in transit, are between the ages of 25-44 years.
Slightly higher amongst those with no formal education (63%).	Of any level of education.	A graduate with secondary or university level education.	Illiterate or have primary and secondary school certificates.
Married with more than two children.	Of any marital status but preferred by those who are married. Married with children, especially more than three.	Married with children.	Of any marital status with or without children.
Unemployed.	Of any employment status.	Self-employed.	Self or unemployed.
From Kandahar (70%), Herat (67%), Kabul (59%) or Iran (56%).	From Nangarhar (71%), Kandahar (68%), Herat (65%) and Kabul (68%).	From Kabul (62%), Kandahar (59%) or Herat (45%).	From Kabul (79%), Kandahar (68%) or Nangarhar (95%).
More trusting of IOs/NGOs than the government.	More trusting of IOs/NGOs than the government.	More trusting of IOs/NGOs than the government.	More trusting of IOs/NGOs than the government.

3.3 Providing young women with access to basic needs alongside remote work opportunities and/or educational programming safeguards basic rights and reduces risk.

Often young Afghan males are driving migration from Afghanistan. Our data found a spike in migration interest from women, even before the fall of Kabul. Educated women were almost entirely focused on leaving Afghanistan, driven by fear and the severe restriction of their rights. Approximately half of women who want to leave say it is because they are worried about their future or their children's future, another one quarter because they fear for their lives, and the last 25% say it is because they lost their jobs.

A striking preference for basic assistance was reported in the survey from women across all migrant groups, while interventions such as job creation was ranked as low. Surprisingly, against common development and humanitarian practice and perceptions, access to women's groups were ranked the third lowest, followed by two other interventions that protection actors often feel critical to women's empowerment: micro-loans and security. Instead, they reported vocational skills, business and cash as the top three following basic needs.

During the IDIs Seefar conducted in November,⁴⁷ all potential female migrants interviewed had been working prior to the Taliban takeover, and all had since lost their jobs. Many were the primary financial providers for their family, working as teachers, government officials, journalists and for local organisations. The conditions in which they now find themselves with no source of income attests to the need for social protection programming that would address the basic needs of them and their children.

At the same time, these women ranked livelihoods programming as a priority as well. All Afghan women interviewed suggested that programming needs inside Afghanistan include jobs that can be done safely, and humanitarian support. Based on IDIs the programmes that they consider transformative include:

- Livelihood opportunities that can be done in the home
- Remote/online professional work opportunities
- Remote education opportunities
- Skills training with digital technology

“The basics are needs, vocational programmes and job skills programmes. Having a safe job and enough income can help us and our family. If we receive vocational training, we will have a suitable job (even online), if we have a suitable job, we will have enough income and if we have enough income then we can easily help our family and yours too.”

- IDI, female evacuee, Belgium.⁴⁸

47 These were a part of the rapid studies Seefar conducted in Afghanistan in September and November.

48 This quote taken from the qualitative interviews Seefar conducted with female Afghan evacuees in November.

Figure 14
Preferences in support measures by women”



CONCLUSION

Afghanistan and its donor partners have generally failed to achieve sustainable development. A weak economy and unstable government continue to drive migration and forced displacement. Our study has found that lack of access to development interventions, including social protection, influences migration decisions and that, by addressing one, you address the other.

On the one hand, awareness of available support programmes is minimal and programme coverage is low, both of which are influencing migration decisions towards leaving. Family wellbeing plays a significant role in migration motivations, as do trust levels in the government and IOs/NGOs to deliver effective, reliable, long-term and needs-based initiatives. Programming that potential and transit migrants have accessed over the last five years has not influenced migration intentions due to the short duration of benefits. Lacking trust in the Afghan government whilst also perceiving all EU countries as havens of good governance are strong determinants of intentions and plans to migrate abroad.

On the other hand, the research has shown that programming can be influential in migration decisions if it is done right. The longer a social protection programme can benefit an individual or family, for instance, the more influence it has on migration intentions. It is not simply duration, however, as the intervention also must be meaningful and address the actual needs and wellbeing of the individual migrant and their families. Provision of basic needs emerged across all migrant groups as the essential intervention that could sway migration decisions of potential migrants as well as persuade transit migrants to return home.

The research established that holistic and combined programming balancing social protection with development interventions will effectively reduce migration more than delivering one single programme to a beneficiary at any given time. Business support, job creation, cash assistance and basic needs assistance were the top four support programmes identified generally that would allow individuals and families to stay and safely live their lives in origin countries with dignity. Specifically, the type and ranking of the programming considered to be ‘transformative’ differs across individual potential migrants according to marital status, gender and education and employment levels. While women migrants prioritised basic needs assistance over all the rest, business support and vocational training were also in the top three.

In sum, the research results suggest overall that a paradigmatic and programmatic shift from state building to ‘people building’ will be most influential on migration patterns in, from and around Afghanistan. If donors are serious about achieving humanitarian, development and migration objectives simultaneously, then programming needs to be much more sensitive to different groups’ migration interests and much more responsive to how these change over time. For traditional programme design, the beneficiaries’ migration interests may be a minor concern, but for the beneficiary themselves, migration plans or experiences may be central and life changing. Programming that respects this about beneficiaries is much more likely to achieve positive impacts on development, social protection and migration.

ANNEX

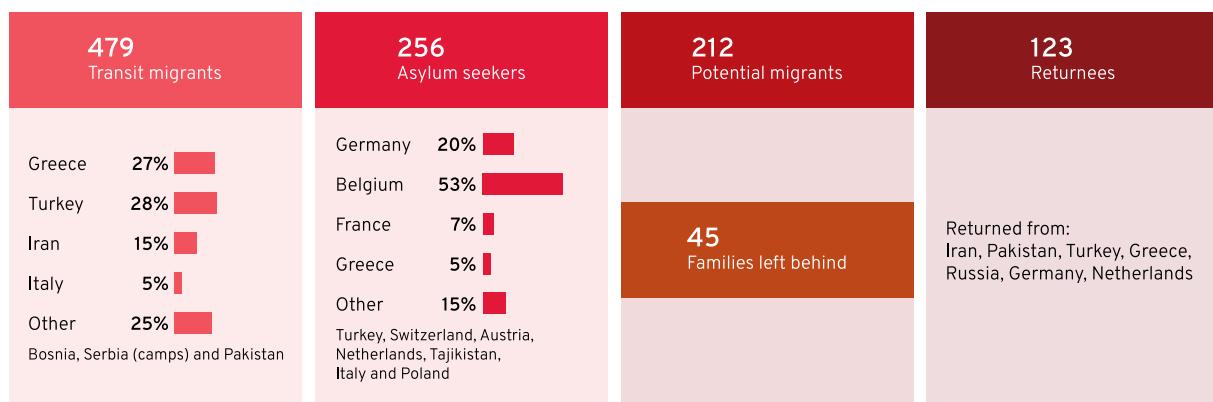
RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Methods

The findings of this scoping study are based on data generated through qualitative and quantitative methods implemented in a phased approach. The first phase included a desk review and an online baseline survey reaching 400 respondents across nine provinces in Afghanistan in June 2021.

Drawing from the baseline survey results, during Phase 2 (July–September 2021) 14 Afghan researchers carried out 1,115 face-to-face and telephone surveys. These surveys were conducted with potential migrants, returnees, and families of migrants located across all 34 provinces in Afghanistan; transit migrants in Greece and Turkey; and asylum seekers in Turkey as well as various EU countries including Belgium, Germany, France, Greece, and Austria.

Figure A1: Sample size and location of respondents when surveyed/interviewed



Phase 3 (September–November 2021) reflected how the change in government and the subsequent crises required a rapid adjustment of the research approach and methodology in order to conduct research inside Afghanistan.⁴⁹ This involved re-strategizing in dialogue with the researchers to understand how to proceed and which studies could be carried out without jeopardising their safety. This led to a decision to suspend in-depth face-to-face qualitative research in Afghanistan. We did implement the qualitative component of the study involving Afghan migrants and key informants that were already based in Turkey and the EU. This phase resulted in 80 In-Depth Interviews (IDIs) with transit migrants in Turkey and asylum seekers/refugees in Greece, Cyprus and Belgium. Six Key Informant Interviews (KIs)

⁴⁹ Two additional rapid studies were implemented in September and November 2021. The surveys assessed how the humanitarian risks faced by Afghan women and men, and their most urgent needs, relate to and influence the current displacement patterns within the region and their migration intentions toward the EU. The goal was to further inform donors on the needs within Afghanistan the country and in the neighbouring countries. These rapid studies have also helped in gathering information relevant for the analysis in this study. Many of the potential migrants who participated in the rapid surveys also participated in Phase 2, thereby linking the research outcomes/results from the different streams.

with government officials, NGOs and Civil Society Organisations in Turkey and Belgium gave depth to the analysis of challenges that government and development actors face in delivering programmes/services effectively. An additional 2 Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) with transit migrants in Turkey and asylum seekers based in Belgium provided a holistic picture of how a lack of access to social protection and development programming played a key role in their decision-making.

Figure A2: Key informant interviews

SURVEY RESPONDENTS				
GENDER	ORGANISATION	LOCATION	TYPE OF INTERVIEWEE	TITLE/ROLE OF INTERVIEWEE
Woman	Local Guidance Desk (name withheld by respondent)	Turkey	Employee of local organisation	Consultant/data analyst
Man	Ministry of Foreign Affairs	Turkey	Government official	Interpreter
Man	Immigration	Turkey	Government official	Executive assistant
Man	Istanbul Migrants Consultancy of children and families	Turkey	Government official	Employee/consultant

Design and Sampling Framework

Five surveys were developed – one per migrant group. They were essentially a slight variation on the same core survey to account for the different circumstances. For instance, questions asked to transit migrants or asylum seekers sought to understand access to programming in the past, prior to their migration. Likewise, questions posed to families centred on the family member who migrated, as well as their experience and access to programming as a family. The surveys were developed in partnership with Afghan field researchers in Afghanistan and the EU.

The surveys were descriptive and captured only a moment in time (as opposed to comparative surveys). They were semi-structured with the opportunity to provide additional feedback/information by selecting ‘other’ text boxes. The design of the survey questions followed the thematic template set out by the analytical framework. The survey first asked questions about trust, knowledge of programming and governance. It moved on to questions regarding access and impact of programming (hypothetical and actual) on migration drivers. The third section of the survey posed questions about what types of programming would be most transformative.

The survey was translated into Pashto and Dari.

The sampling for the survey respondents from each group was purposive, predetermined by the groups we clustered: potential migrants, transit migrants, asylum seekers, returnees and family members. In accordance with purposive sampling, a pre-screening was conducted before the survey began. This also allowed for researchers to collect demographic data. If the person did not fall into one of the five categories all the information was dismissed and not calculated or submitted to Kobo. Also, in accordance with purposive sampling, the survey and interview participants were recruited face-to-face through snowball sampling and Seefar’s network from migration awareness raising campaigns.

The minimum sample size for each migrant group was calculated by Raosoft. The margin of error/bias that we tolerated was set at a confidence level of 95% with a response distribution of 50%.

The locations were chosen based on convenience as we had researchers living in or in close proximity to these countries or had strong connections with the diaspora. Turkey and Greece were chosen also because of the significance of these transit and asylum countries for Afghan migrants.

Overall, 65% of respondents were outside of Afghanistan over the course of the research, 41% of whom did not consider their current location as their final migration destination. In total across all migrant groups, respondents were in: Belgium - 26%, Turkey - 24%, Greece - 21%, Iran - 9%, Germany - 15%, Other (including Austria) - 5%. Of the 35% who were interviewed inside Afghanistan, 6% had previously migrated to Iran and 3% to Pakistan.

Risk Mitigation

All data collection tools (quantitative and qualitative) were pre-tested. This allowed us to catch and delete duplicates, identify ethical concerns and rephrase questions that may be culturally sensitive.

We also put complaint mechanisms in place to log any issues that emerged throughout the project.

Some concepts or terms used in the questionnaire were predefined to streamline the answers and mitigate measurement bias. The terms we defined for the respondent were quality of life and basic needs. Quality of life was defined using the definition of the WHO: support with education, income, healthcare and basic amenities such as constant electricity, adequate shelter and clean water. Basic needs referred to water, food, shelter and clothing.

Data Analysis and Quality Control

Quantitative

Once the target numbers were reached, the survey phase was ended. The quantitative data was checked and cleaned for data entry errors, missing data, duplications etc. The final number of surveys was re-calculated. To account for data cleaning, the survey did not end until we well surpassed the initial target number to ensure the target would still be met after cleaning the database.

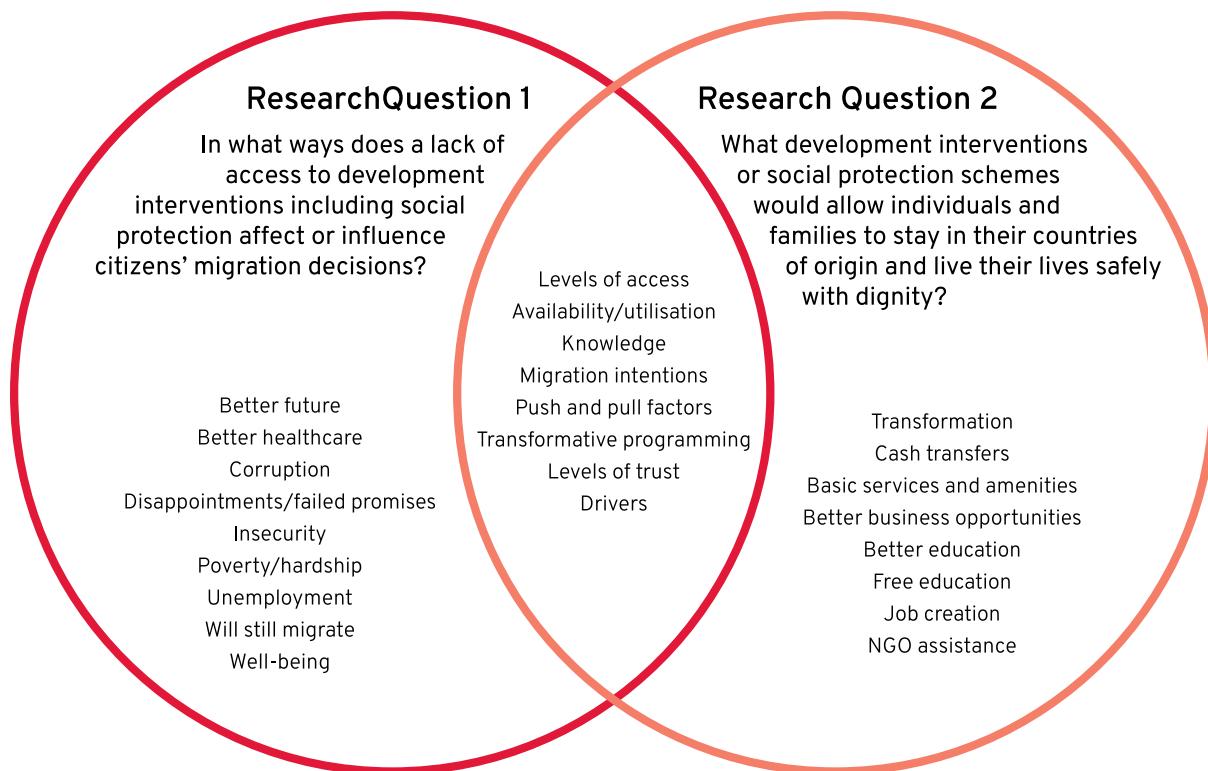
The cleaned quantitative dataset was analysed using Stata statistical software. Over 100 cross tabulations were performed on the quantitative data after a glance analysis was conducted with the Kobo data report.

Once the cross tabs were completed, a process of descriptive analysis began and continued for approximately four weeks. Every crosstab was individually described and related to the broader research questions, ranked according to themes and documented in excel data files.

Qualitative

The qualitative data were thematically analysed using the NVivo software (see Figure 1.1), which allowed us to have deeper insight into our data, discover hidden themes and produce an in-depth analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). After coding our data for emerging themes, we further coded them using a directed qualitative content analysis to find specific themes and mentions of specific words or phrases to shed more light on the focus of this study which is the link between social protection and migrants' decision-making (see Figure A3).

Figure A3: Codes for analysis



Triangulation

The qualitative and quantitative data were then assessed together and synthesized according to themes, linkages between themes and outliers.

Capacity Building of Local Researchers

The research design was participatory. Each phase began with intensive training in the specific methodology (either for quantitative or qualitative) and a two-three-week pilot phase. During the quantitative phase all researchers were trained in survey design, how to administer surveys while mitigating measurement and/or observer bias. During the qualitative phase, researchers were given a full day workshop on how to administer qualitative interviews with different stakeholders. Midway through the pilot phase the research team were checked on and then at the end of pilot phase another full day workshop was held to discuss the tools and check on comfort levels in administering the tools and whether there was a need for further capacity development.

The surveys as well as all qualitative tools were designed by the research team at HQ, but the field team provided feedback over the course of pilot periods. At the end of each pilot period, the tools were revised, agreed upon and the phase would only then officially begin. All pilot data was considered unusable and wiped from the Kobo tool.

Data Management

Data was secured through password protected files which only the research team could access. All surveys were anonymised and no names were taken and given to the research team. Names and numbers were given to the field researchers for purposes of follow up/re-interview, but these were never shared and were destroyed on the last day of fieldwork.

Limitations of Methods and Research Tools

Measurement bias is always a risk in quantitative research. We mitigate this risk with high targets and the use of Kobo, which uses automated skip logic that reduces faulty data collection.

How access to development and social protection programming impacts on migration decision making

The case of Afghanistan

February 2022