SEEFAR

Sustained Interest, Delayed Migration:

Emerging Irregular Migration Dynamics in Afghanistan

Results from the third wave of a longitudinal study of Afghans planning irregular migration to Europe

April 2019

SEEFAR

OUR VISION

is for a world in which vulnerable people have more opportunities to advance themselves.

THE PURPOSE

of our social enterprise is to work with those people to build a better future.

CONTENTS

Acronyms

eWOM - Electronic Word of Mouth

IDMC - Internal Displacement Monitoring Center

IDP - Internally displaced person(s)

IOM - International Organization for Migration

OCHA - United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs

NRC - Norwegian Refugee Council

UNHCR - United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

USD - United States Dollar

WOM - Word of Mouth

Introduction

Seefar is committed to helping stakeholders understand and responsibly respond to irregular migration. This requires a robust evidence base that allows the voices of affected populations to impact programmes and policies designed to address this critical issue.

This report is the third instalment (Wave 3) of Seefar's longitudinal study of 240 Afghans intending to irregularly migrate to Europe. The first round of data collection in August 2016 - referred to as Wave 1 in this report - piloted the research methodology on a small sample of 40 male Afghans from Nangarhar planning irregular migration to Europe.

The second round of data collection - Wave 2 - broadened the sample size to 210 respondents in 14 provinces. Seefar administered a structured survey to these respondents in January and February 2018. Ten respondents from Wave 1 were also present in Wave 2 and 200 respondents were new to the study.

The current round of data collection - Wave 3 - was conducted in July 2018. It administered the same structured survey to 187 Afghans in 16 provinces, each of whom had previously participated in the research.[1] A detailed description of the research methodology can be found in Annex 1.

This longitudinal research aims to understand how irregular migration dynamics and decision-making evolve over time. It provides insight into:

1. what motivates Afghans planning to use irregular channels to reach Europe;[2]
2. what conditions affect an individual's migration decisions;
3. what influences, motivates and facilitates the irregular journey abroad; and
4. what has changed in migration decision-making since the previous rounds of data collection.

Seefar will publish two subsequent reports in 2019 based on future waves of data collection. The longitudinal dimensions of the study will allow for a clear understanding of how these four dimensions continue to evolve in relation to rapidly-changing circumstances on the ground.

[1] Between Wave 2 and Wave 3, several respondents had moved to new provinces in Afghanistan, thereby expanding the geographic reach of the study.

[2] The study's screening criteria sought Afghans who hoped to migrate to Europe. Consequently the study's findings may not be applicable to Afghans interested in migrating to other destinations.

Key Findings

Most respondents still wanted to irregularly migrate

While migration decision-making is complex and highly dependent on the individuals and their unique situations, the majority of respondents in Afghanistan continued to express demand for irregular migration in light of local migration drivers. More than half of Wave 3 respondents (97 respondents, 52%) were planning to migrate irregularly within the next 12 months and about one third (63 respondents, 34%) indicated that they have delayed their migration plans but still intend to eventually leave. Few respondents had completely abandoned their irregular migration plans (27 respondents, 14%). Sustained interest in irregular migration reflects continued pessimism about economic opportunities in Afghanistan and increased worry about safety.

Security concerns sharply increased as migration motivator

Unemployment, underemployment and conflict featured prominently in all waves of data collection. While economic concerns have remained relatively constant as a primary migration driver across waves of data collection, there was a substantial increase in the percentage of Wave 3 respondents who mentioned lack of security as a reason to migrate. About half of the respondents said that security concerns motivated their plans to leave Afghanistan in both Wave 1 and Wave 2. In Wave 3, this figure rose to 84% of respondents, potentially signalling a link between new conflict dynamics and irregular migration interest. The increase in security as a driver of migration interest reflects broader deterioration of security in Afghanistan in 2018. Per the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) more civilians were killed in 2018 than any year before where records were kept (3,804 civilian deaths, including 927 children).[3]

Migrants engaging with Facebook in new ways

In Wave 1 and Wave 2, respondents reported that organic word of mouth (WOM) communication within the community was both the leading information channel and the most trusted information source. In Wave 3, there was a substantial drop in the use of WOM information channels among respondents. For example, the number of respondents who reported WOM communication as an information source about migration decreased from 38% in Wave 2 to 6% in Wave 3. A plurality of Wave 3 respondents said that Facebook was their most trusted information source.

These figures could suggest that respondents are engaging with Facebook in new ways. Most respondents previously viewed Facebook as a uni-directional

[3] UNAMA, 2019. "Afghanistan: Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Annual Report 2018."

information source; current evidence could indicate that respondents now view it as a platform providing space for personal exchanges (similar to traditional, in-person WOM conversations). This preliminary finding should be further examined in subsequent waves of data collection to better differentiate between information-sharing among friends and family through Facebook and exposure to news or reports on the platform. If Facebook's role as a trusted communications channel continues to grow, actors may need to more robustly engage with Facebook to improve migrant communications and collect more robust data.

Family and friends in Afghanistan remain top influence on migration plans

Ninety-one Wave 3 respondents (49%) cited friends or family in Afghanistan as the strongest influence on their final decision to depart from Afghanistan. Twenty-two respondents (12%) stated their friends abroad had the strongest influence on their decision to migrate. Among the 27 respondents who indicated they no longer had plans to irregularly leave Afghanistan, 17 (63%) said information from their friends and family in Afghanistan helped them make this decision. While Facebook's role as a key communications channel and information source increased in Wave 3, WOM sources (and particularly friends and family at home) remain key to decision-making.

Perceptions of migration dangers often delayed plans but high expectations of what happens after arrival continue

Physical risks of irregular migration journeys were often the primary reason that respondents deferred their migration plans. Among the respondents who reported delaying their irregular migration plans in Wave 3 (63 respondents, 34%), 24 respondents (38%) cited potential fears of dangers en route to their destination as the reason they had delayed their plans. Such a dynamic leads to the perception that potential migrants are unable to take actions to improve their lives: highly motivated to leave due to security concerns at home, but afraid to leave due to the risk of violence abroad.

Respondents also held very high expectations of what life would be like once in their preferred destination. Half of the respondents with plans to depart in the next 12 months believed they would gain legal status within the first six months after arrival at their preferred destination, which almost certainly underestimates the amount of time an asylum process would take (and assumes a successful asylum process).

Number of self-employed respondents increased since Wave 2

Between Wave 2 and Wave 3, there was a change in employment status among respondents. Whereas just 1% of Wave 2 respondents were self-employed, 37% of Wave 3 respondents indicated they were self-employed. Accordingly, the number of unemployed and part-time employed respondents decreased between Wave 2 and Wave 3. Fifty-eight percent were unemployed in Wave 2, but slightly less than half (48.5%) of Wave 3 respondents were unemployed. More respondents were part-time employed in Wave 2 (26%) than in Wave 3 (5%). It is unclear whether the shifting employment profile of the respondent pool is reflective of short-term changes or longer-term trends, requiring monitoring in subsequent rounds of data collection.

Few respondents expressed positive perceptions of returnees

Ninety-three respondents (50%) said they have a negative opinion of other Afghans who had tried to migrate but eventually returned home (returnees). Only 13 respondents (7%) had overall positive feelings towards returnees. This broad negative view of returnees echoes literature highlighting steep social and psychosocial reintegration challenges awaiting migrants who come back to Afghanistan.[4]

[4] See also: MMC and Seefar, 2019. "Distant Dreams: Understanding the aspirations of Afghan returnees." And Seefar, 2018. "Examining Return and Reintegration in Afghanistan: Why Psychosocial Interventions Matter."

Background

Afghanistan has experienced decades of political instability, economic challenges, conflict and insecurity. This context has created a complex picture of migration and displacement marked by large numbers of internally displaced persons (IDPs), migrants and returnees. There are over 1.3 million IDPs in Afghanistan, many of whom have been displaced multiple times or live in protracted displacement.[5] Such numbers are representative of broader humanitarian and development needs across the country. As of 21 December 2018, the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) reported 6.3 million people in need in Afghanistan.[6]

In addition to widespread internal displacement and humanitarian needs, an estimated 2.4 million Afghans have returned since 2016, many of whom face difficult reintegration processes.[7] The majority of returnees come from neighbouring Iran and Pakistan. While needs post-return vary, many returnees display acute psychosocial needs that impact other dimensions of their lives (such as ability to find work) that can grow worse over time.[8] Over 800,000 undocumented Afghans returned in 2018 alone.[9]

An evolving migration context

There have been several changes to Afghanistan's migration landscape since Wave 2 data collection. These changes include drought-induced displacement, rising conflict and high levels of involuntary returns, especially from Iran.

Drought-induced displacement increased - OCHA reports 2.2 million people are estimated to have been affected by drought, and by September the number of people displaced as a result had surpassed 250,000 in the Western Region of Afghanistan.[10] Farmers have lost the season's harvest and few have enough seeds for the upcoming season.[11] Food, water, cash and other livelihood assistance has been given to Afghans who are affected by the drought but the emergency has already displaced many. Such conditions may also motivate internal and cross-border migration decisions.

Rising conflict-induced displacement - Afghan conflict-induced IDPs have nearly tripled from 492,000 in 2012.[12] The vast majority of Afghanistan's IDPs are civilians whose lives have been uprooted by conflict, violence or persecution.

[5] Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC). "Afghanistan Country Information." Accessed: March 2019.

[6] OCHA. "Afghanistan: Key Figures." Accessed: March 2019.

[7] IOM and UNHCR, 2018. "Returns to Afghanistan in 2017."

[8] MMC and Seefar, 2019. "Distant Dreams: Understanding the aspirations of Afghan returnees."

[9] OCHA. "HDX, OCHA Afghanistan: Key Figures." Accessed February 2019.

[10] OCHA, 2018. "Afghanistan: Drought Response Situation Report No. 2 (as of 16 September 2018)."

[11] Ibid.

[12] IDMC. "Afghanistan Country Information." Accessed: March 2019.

A report published by Samuel Hall and the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) in January 2018 similarly showed that seven out of ten Afghans who return home are forced to flee again due to violence.[13] Upon or after their return, some returnees experience conflict-induced displacement.[14] Such experiences may encourage irregular migration interest as a coping mechanism for families.

Continued high levels of involuntary returns - Even though Afghanistan was reclassified as a country in active conflict in 2017[15], many countries currently hosting refugees are returning Afghans to their home country. In addition, Afghans experience increased marginalisation by host communities in countries such as Pakistan and Iran, along with many others, spurring refugees to return. Police brutality, arbitrary detention, deportation threats from government officials, police raids on refugee shelters and apartments, exclusion of Afghan children from state schools and closure of Afghan refugee schools, and unlawful use of force may play a role in many complex return decision-making processes.[16] With unstable environments in Pakistan and Iran, as well as rising violence at home, Europe may be a viable option for safety and opportunity to Afghans who are willing to make the journey.

Longitudinal research overview

Seefar began a longitudinal research study in 2016 to assess how shifting economic, conflict and political dynamics in Afghanistan contributed to changes in migration interest, trends and decision-making. The study has a total sample of 240 Afghan men who were purposively sampled for intention to migrate onward to Europe within 12 months.[17] Respondents were identified using a snowball sampling technique through referral of other Afghans within the same target group.

This report is the third instalment - Wave 3 - of Seefar's longitudinal study of 240 Afghans intending to irregularly migrate to Europe. The first round of data collection in August 2016 - referred to as Wave 1 in this report - piloted the research methodology on a small sample of 40 male Afghans from Nangarhar planning irregular migration to Europe.

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[13] Samuel Hall, NRC and IDMC, 2018. "Escaping War: Where to next? The Challenges of IDP Protection in Afghanistan."

[14] MMC and Seefar, 2019. "Distant Dreams: Understanding the aspirations of Afghan returnees."

[15] OCHA, 2017. "Humanitarian Needs Overview 2018."; UN General Assembly Security Council, 2017. "Special report on the strategic review of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan."

[16] Human Rights Watch, 2017. "Pakistan Coercion, UN Complicity: The Mass Forced Return of Afghan Refugees."

[17] Screening criteria were only applied to respondents during the wave of data collection when they first joined the study. This permits interest in irregular migration to change for each respondent over time.

	Wave 1	Wave 2	Wave 3
#1 reason for staying/ migrating	Economic	Economic	Economic
Most preferred destination	Germany	Germany	Germany
#1 source of information	Word-of-mouth	Word-of-mouth Facebook	Television Facebook
Most expected length of the journey	1-3 months	4-6 months	1-4 weeks

Highlights from Wave 1, Wave 2 and Wave 3 data collection

This longitudinal research aims to understand how irregular migration dynamics and decision making evolve over time. It provides insight into:

1. what motivates Afghans planning to use irregular channels to reach Europe;[18]
2. what conditions affect an individual's migration decisions;

[18] The study's screening criteria sought Afghans who hoped to migrate to Europe. Consequently the study's findings may not be applicable to Afghans interested in migrating to other destinations.

3. what influences, motivates and facilitates the irregular journey abroad; and
4. what has changed in migration decision-making since the previous rounds of data collection.

Several key findings emerged from Wave 1 and Wave 2:

- Income and security concerns motivated migration decisions of respondents in Wave 1 and Wave 2.
- Immediate, one-off financial gains were viewed by many respondents as a means for financing migration; when respondents saw economic improvements as long-term or sustainable, they were more likely to stay.
- Migration decisions were made over a period of months.
- Social networks and family heavily informed migration decisions. Personal networks - particularly friends and family - strongly influenced migration planning, as did conversations with returnees and word of mouth information more broadly.
- Respondents understood that irregular journeys are risky.[19] Respondents were generally aware of the dangers of an irregular migration journey, listing dangerous border crossings, police brutality and the possibility of drowning in the case of sea voyages as examples.
- Respondents found smugglers easy to access. Many respondents said that a smuggler could easily be found through family and friends and 40% had already contacted a smuggler.

In Wave 3, researchers attempted to recontact all respondents from Wave 1 and Wave 2. In total, 187 Afghans were successfully contacted in 16 provinces in July 2018. Each respondent had previously participated in the research.[20] Respondents were not screened for intention to migrate. They were given an expanded survey that included specific questions targeting respondents who had abandoned their migration plans between waves of data collection.

In 2019, Seefar will continue to implement the longitudinal study in at least two subsequent waves of data collection from the current respondents. For more information on the research design and approach, see Annex 1 - Methodology.

[19] See also: Seefar, 2018. "3E Impact: Ethical, Engaged and Effective: Running Communications on Irregular Migration from Kos to Kandahar."

[20] Between Wave 2 and Wave 3, several respondents had moved to new provinces in Afghanistan, thereby expanding the geographic reach of the study.

Understanding the Wave 3 Sample

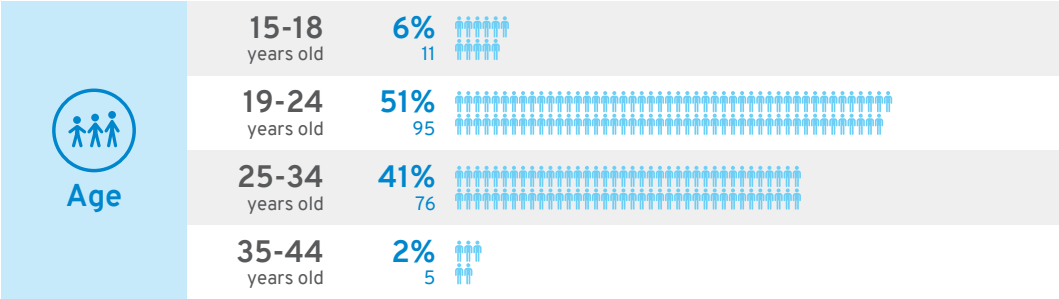
The research focused specifically on Afghan men (aged 15 and older) who plan to migrate to Europe - a sampling decision reflective of the overwhelmingly male composition of Afghan arrivals in Europe.

Between Wave 1 and Wave 2, a total of 240 interviewees participated in the survey. In Wave 3, Seefar researchers attempted to contact all 240 past respondents. Of the 240 interview subjects, 187 Afghans were reached and participated in Wave 3 of the study. Twelve respondents in Wave 3 had first participated in the study in Wave 1 data collection.

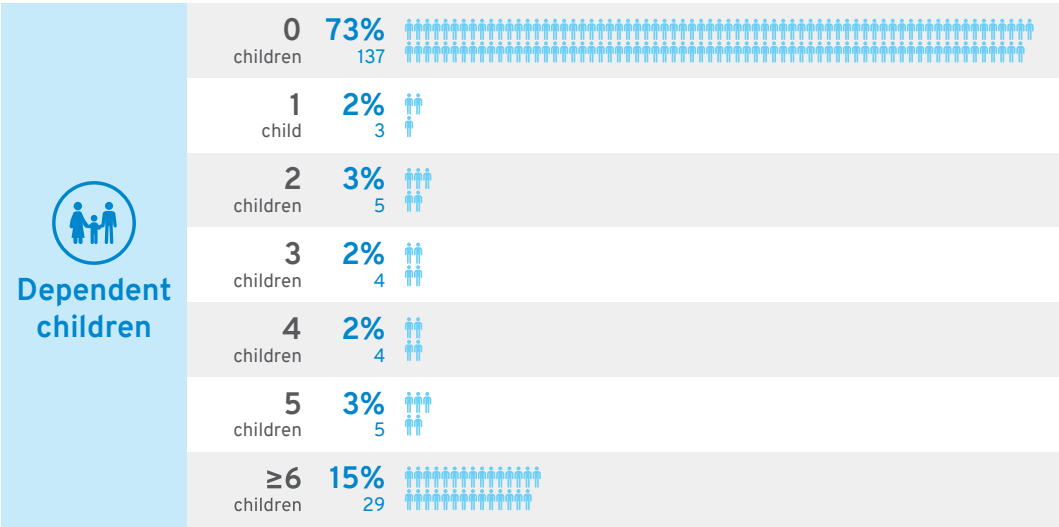
Demographic and economic profiles

The demographic composition of the sample remains largely similar to previous waves of data collection and consequently detailed demographic data are not displayed. Respondents lived in a variety of locations and represent diverse age and educational backgrounds.

Age: Most respondents (171 out of 187, 92%) to the Wave 3 survey were between 19 and 35 years old (92%).

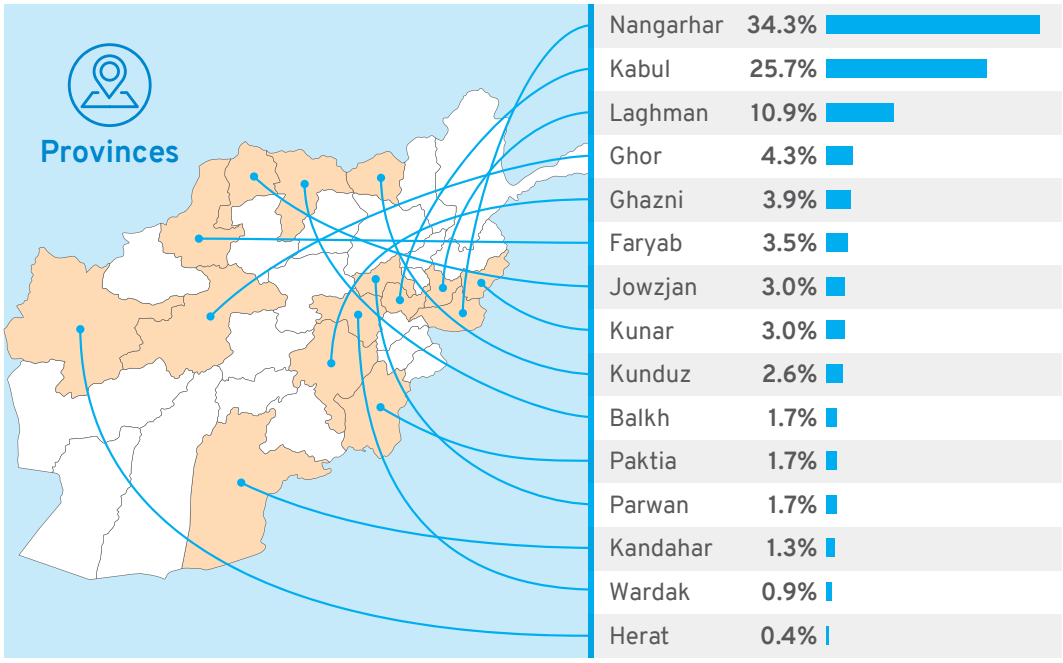


Dependent Children: Nearly three quarters of respondents (137 out of 187 respondents, 73%) did not have any dependent children and about 27% of the sample (50 out of 187 respondents) had children:

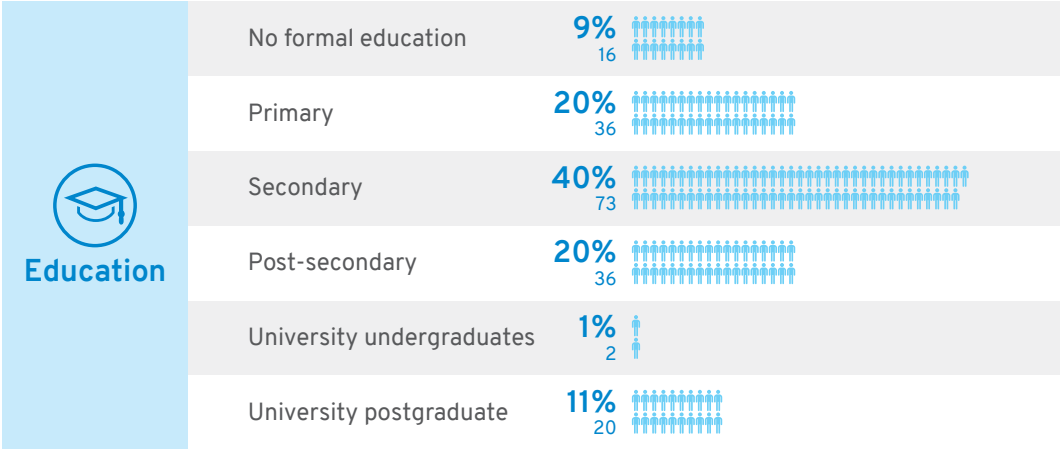


Province: The majority of Wave 3 respondents were born in Kabul and Nangarhar provinces, with a total of 16 provinces represented in the sample. Three respondents were born in Pakistan (though they currently lived in Afghanistan). 78% of respondents were located in urban areas.

At the time of the interview, most respondents were living in Kabul, Nangarhar and Laghman. However, 12 other provinces were represented in the data including Balkh, Ghazni, Ghor, Herat and others.

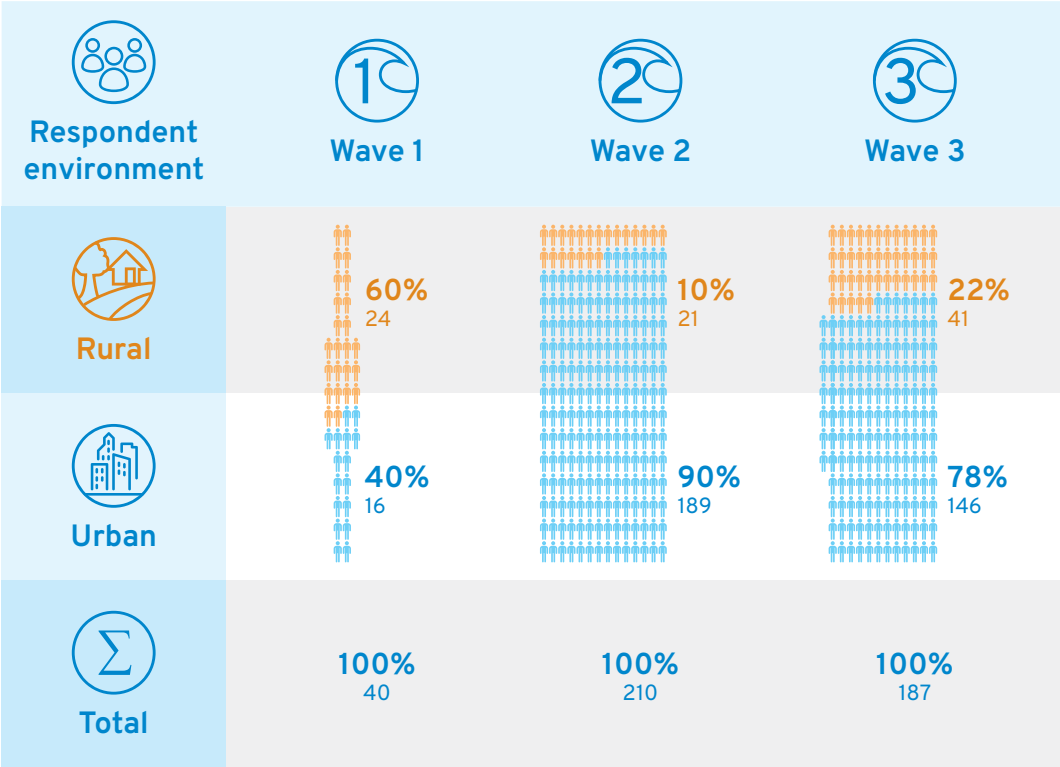


Education: The majority of respondents had completed either their primary, secondary, or post-secondary education. Twenty-two respondents also had university degrees.

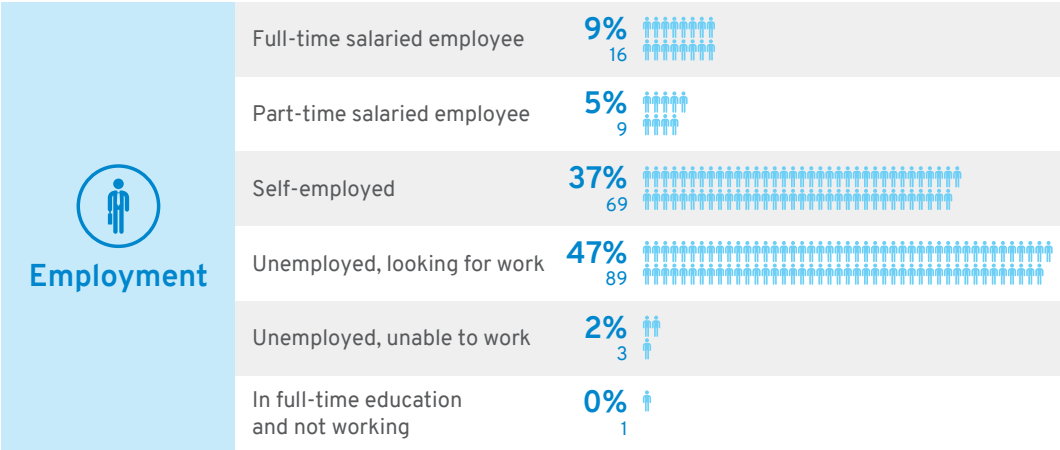


Environment: A total of 78% of respondents (146 respondents) in the Wave 3 survey were currently living in urban areas, a slight decrease from the Wave 2 sample (90% of respondents in urban areas). Given the small sample size, it is

unclear if this change signals a new trend or is simply reflective of the sample composition. Data on urbanisation more broadly in Afghanistan remains lacking.[21]



Employment: Fifty-four respondents (29%) described themselves as the principal breadwinner in their household. Overall, about half of the sample (94 respondents, 50%) held some kind of employment status while 49% (91 respondents) of respondents were unemployed. One respondent did not provide employment information.



The key change from the Wave 2 sample is a sharp increase in self-employment. Correspondingly, the overall unemployment rate decreased by about 10 percentage

[21] Pinney, Andrew, 2012. "An Afghan Population Estimation."

points between the Wave 2 and Wave 3 samples. The relatively large number of self-employed Afghans mirrors findings of the International Labour Organization (ILO) which reports that 67.3% of the Afghan population are self-employed.[22]

Despite higher numbers reporting self-employment, underemployed is still high among respondents. Only 16 respondents (8.5%) reported being employed full-time, indicating possible stagnation in respondents' overall financial situation between Wave 2 and Wave 3.

[22] International Labour Organization, The World Bank, 2018. "ILOSTAT database: Self-employed, total." Accessed: March 2019.

Deciding to Leave

Of the Wave 3 respondents who were planning on migrating irregularly in the next 12 months following their interview (97 respondents), nearly all (90 respondents) reported that they were in a preliminary stage of the planning process: making plans and/or arranging finances for travel. In these early stages of planning, many details are often unknown (e.g. routes, costs, destination).

Migration drivers

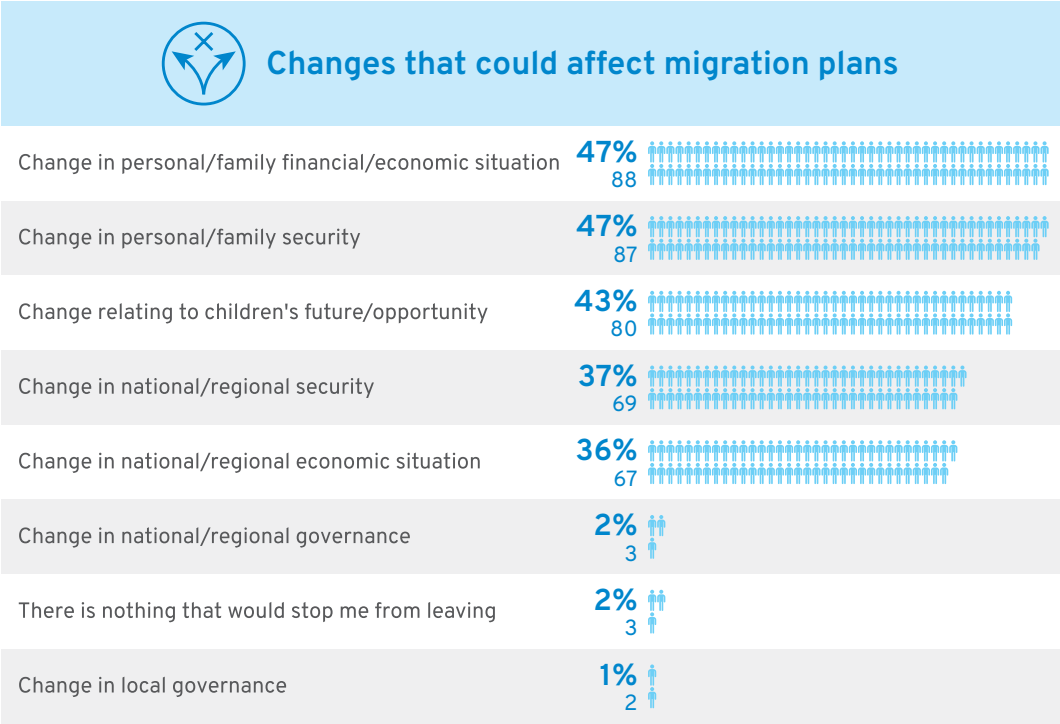
Consistent with findings from earlier rounds of data collection, security challenges at home and perceived employment opportunities abroad continued to be leading reasons for why respondents were interested in irregular migration. However, security-related drivers featured more prominently in Wave 3 than in previous waves. Security concerns were cited by 84% of respondents in Wave 3 as a migration reason, contrasting with 55% and 50% in Wave 1 and Wave 2 respectively.

Reasons for migrating	Wave 1	Wave 2	Wave 3
Unemployment and economic reasons	85% 34	78% 161	91% 88
Insecurity and/or violence	55% 22	50% 104	84% 81
Other	18% 7	7% 15	3% 3

Economic concerns were expressed by nearly all Wave 3 respondents (91%) who were interested in irregular migration. This represents a slight increase from previous waves, where unemployment was mentioned by 85% and 78% of respondents in Wave 1 and Wave 2 respectively.

Secondary migration drivers expressed by Wave 3 respondents included poor quality of life in Afghanistan, lack of education and pessimism about Afghanistan's future.

Despite these drivers, most respondents said that they would be willing to adjust their plans if they experienced a change to their environment or personal circumstance in Afghanistan. For example roughly half of the respondents stated they would stay in Afghanistan if there was a positive change in their personal or family's economic opportunities, while just three respondents said that they would leave regardless of changes. Family well-being was a common theme behind these factors.



Respondents continue to hold unrealistic expectations of migration

Wave 3 respondents continued to demonstrate key knowledge gaps and unrealistic expectations highlighted in earlier reports. For example, 87 out of 97 respondents (90%) among those planning to migrate in the near future expected to pay their service provider after they arrived at their destination, thereby expressing ignorance of costs incurred during the journey itself. Eighty-four respondents believed it would take one to four weeks to arrive at their destination, which likely underestimates the time required to reach a European destination. This compared to expectations of several months of travel in Wave 2. Similarly, 77 out of 97 respondents (79%) who said they were planning to migrate irregularly in the next 12 months believed the cost of migration would be between USD 6,000 - 8,000, which likely slightly underestimates the cost of a typical irregular migration journey.

Respondents also held very high expectations of what life would be like once in their preferred destination. Half of the respondents with plans to depart in the

next 12 months believed they would gain legal status within the first six months after arrival at their preferred destination, which almost certainly underestimates the amount of time an asylum process would take (and assumes a successful asylum process). Half of the group further believed they would feel safer and more free upon reaching their destination. Half also believed they would get a job at the destination, but only 40% believed they would make more money than they made in Afghanistan.

Most Wave 3 respondents did not expect to receive government assistance at their destination and many stressed that they may experience challenges abroad. For example, just three respondents believed they would receive housing aid and eight believed that they would have access to education at their destination. Half of the group said they may face discrimination at their destination, have problems in finding a job and/or struggle financially.

Rising migration popularity

Perceptions of migration popularity	Wave 1	Wave 2	Wave 3
Migration has become more popular during the past year	83% 33	31% 65	55% 103
Migration popularity has not changed during the past year	0% 0	30% 64	24% 44
Migration has become less popular during the past year	15% 40	13% 27	18% 34
Don't know/not sure how migration popularity changed during the past year	2% 1	26% 54	3% 6

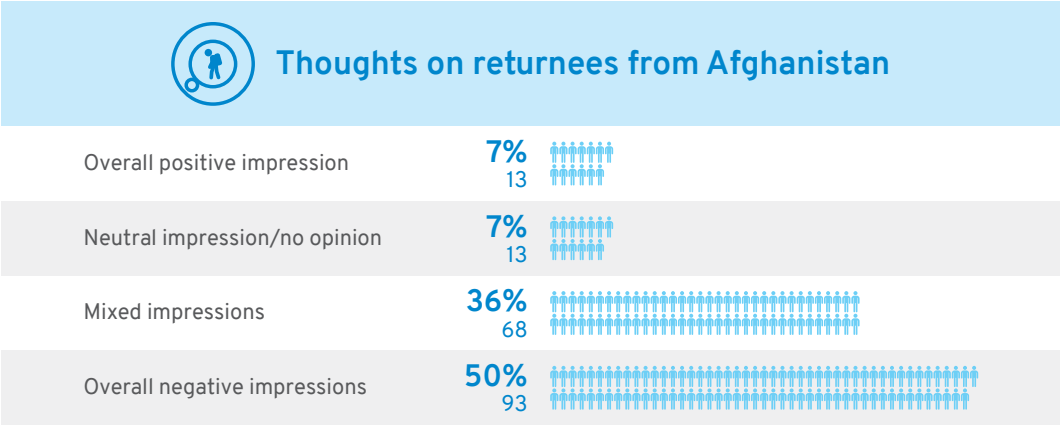
About half of the respondents (103 respondents, 55%) believed that migration had become more popular in the past six months, while less than a quarter of respondents (44 respondents, 23%) believed migration had become less popular. The remaining respondents did not have an opinion or did not see a change in

the popularity of migration. This evidence suggests that among the respondents, migration is generally seen as more popular than during the previous round of data collection. Wave 2 data showed that 31% of respondents believed migration had become more popular, whereas 13% believed migration had become less popular.

Those who said that migration had become more popular tended to cite insecurity, unemployment and a broader pattern of migration (e.g. one respondent noted "everyone [is] leaving") as explanations for this trend. In contrast, respondents who said that migration had become less popular listed migration dangers as a primary reason for their view (e.g. one respondent said irregular migration was a "deadly game").

Many respondents held negative views of returnees

Ninety-three survey respondents said they have a negative impression of Afghan returnees. Mixed feelings about returnees were held by 68 interviewees, 13 had neutral feelings and 13 had overall positive feelings. This indicates that social pressure on potential migrants to be successful in their migration plans is likely high.[23] This finding also links with evidence that returnees often face challenging psychosocial reintegration experiences.[24] However, these trends require more qualitative insights that will be featured in the Wave 4 report.



Migration plans remain similar to Wave 2

Most elements of the migration planning process (e.g. routes, duration, destinations) remained consistent with findings from Wave 2. For example, the most popular migration routes expressed by respondents intending to migrate irregularly were via Iran and Turkey. Respondents continued to list Germany, France, Belgium and Austria as top destination choices.

[23] Respondents were not asked about their perception of pressure to be successful in their migration journey.
[24] MMC and Seefar, 2019. "Distant Dreams: Understanding the aspirations of Afghan returnees."

Respondents overwhelmingly listed personal networks and WOM sources as their top influences on choice of destination. Members of their household and family in Afghanistan were the primary influence on destination choice, followed by friends abroad and friends within Afghanistan. A small minority of respondents noted that information from Afghan authorities was useful.

Few in contact with smugglers

Seefar's previous research has highlighted how contacting a smuggler is one of the final steps of the migration planning process. As most Wave 3 respondents were in an early stage of the migration planning process, just five out of 97 respondents intending to irregularly migrate in the next 12 months were in contact with someone who could help them migrate. All five of these respondents said the person who is planning on helping them is a friend, family member or family friend.

Respondents expected the service providers to organise a passport, find work opportunities, ease gaining refugee status once arrived at the destination and provide contact information for other service providers along the route. Two respondents said their service provider guaranteed safe travel and arrival at the destination while the other three stated their service provider offered no guarantees. The level of trust in the service provider fluctuated among this group. One respondent stated he did not trust his service provider at all. The remaining four had varying levels of trust (from complete trust to no opinion).

Changing Migration Plans

While all 240 participants in the longitudinal study were originally purposively sampled for their interest in irregular migration, many respondents in the Wave 3 sample had changed their migration plans. One group of respondents still intended to migrate but had delayed their journey, while a second group had abandoned their plans to leave. None of the Wave 3 respondents who indicated they had changed their migration plans stated they currently planned to exclusively pursue legal migration options.

Many delayed their irregular migration plans

A sizeable minority of the Wave 3 sample expressed that they have delayed their migration plans since Wave 2 (63 out of 187). This was measured with a direct question to respondents in Wave 3, and thus was not always consistent with responses provided in Wave 2.[25] For example, a majority (73%) of this group said that they decided to delay their migration plans between October and December

Reasons respondents delayed migration plans

Travel is dangerous	39%	24
Route is blocked	19%	12
Life is better in Afghanistan	10%	6
Fear of being caught	8%	5
Distrust of the migration process	5%	3
Insufficient funds	5%	3
Job improvement at home	5%	3
Refused to answer	5%	3
Personal issue	2%	1
Someone talked them out of it	2%	1

[25] Respondents who did not intend to migrate irregularly within 12 months were asked "Are you considering migrating (legally or illegally) to any country at any time in the future? That is, do you still plan to leave Afghanistan, even if you do not expect to depart for at least 12 months?"

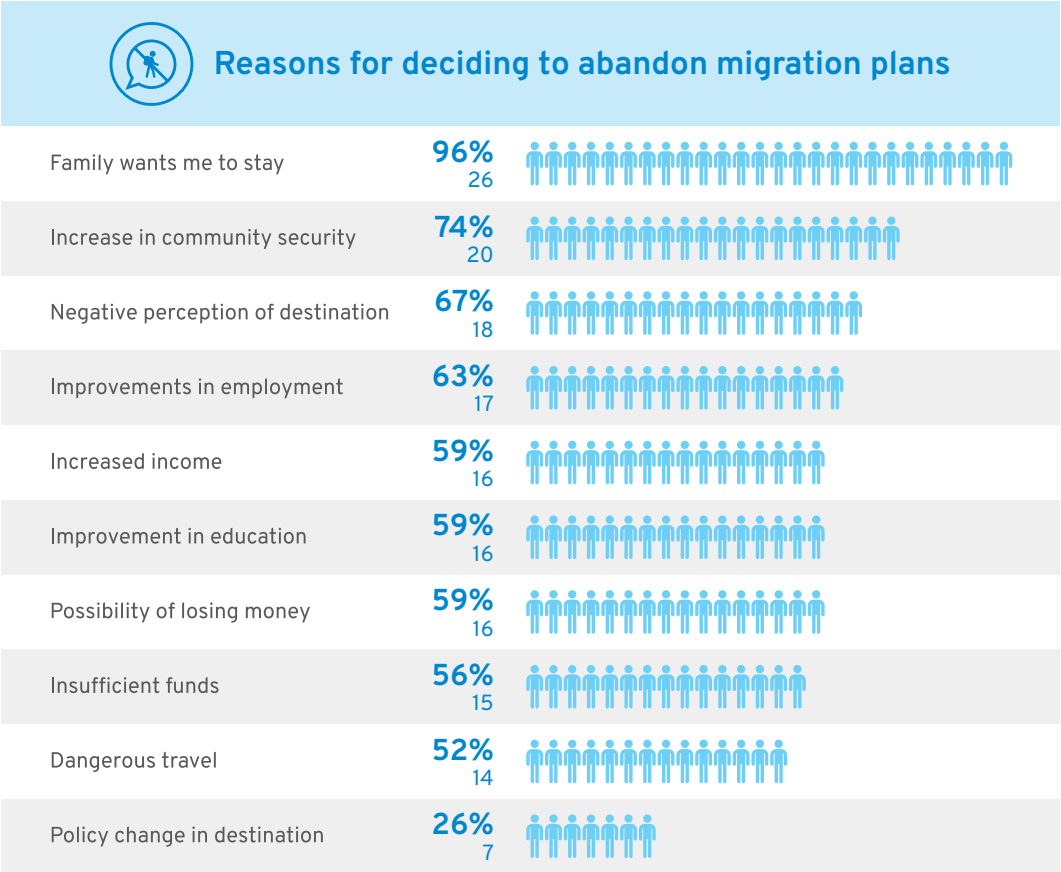
of 2017, when Wave 2 data from those same respondents illustrates their interest in migration at that time. This disconnect could suggest that research subjects have a challenging time expressing or recalling their decision-making timeline, though future waves of data collection will provide stronger evidence on this point.

Respondents highlighted many reasons for their delayed plans. The most frequently-reported reasons for the change in plans were perceptions of the dangers of migration and concerns that migration routes were impassable.

Many respondents in this group voiced an emotional connection to their home country while pointing out their struggle to survive financially in Afghanistan. Nineteen of the 63 respondents who delayed their migration plans were willing and interested in completely abandoning their migration plans if there was improvement in employment opportunities and security.

A minority abandoned their irregular migration plans

Twenty-seven respondents had abandoned their plans to migrate completely between Wave 2 and Wave 3 data collection. They cited multiple and overlapping factors to explain this change, but the single most powerful reason for many was increased community security (8 out of 27 respondents) and dangers of migration (7 out of 27 respondents).



When asked to list all of the reasons for their change, the most frequently-cited reason for respondents to abandon their plans was that their family wanted them to stay (listed by 26 out of 27 respondents). However, most respondents did not list family as the top reason for abandoning their plans, as noted above.

Consistent with findings from earlier waves of data collection, friends and family in Afghanistan maintained their impact on decision making for Wave 3 respondents who abandoned their migration plans.

Most important influencers on the decision not to migrate

Friends and family in Afghanistan	67%	18
Friends and family abroad	15%	4
Didn't answer	7%	2
Other	7%	2
Facebook	4%	1

Shifting Information Sources

Wave 1 and Wave 2 highlighted the powerful role of word of mouth (WOM) communications among respondents, both as an information source about migration and a source of trusted advice. Wave 3 respondents instead emphasized the role of social media, but it is unclear whether this shift conflates electronic WOM (eWOM) communication with more conventional uses of social media (discussed below). Future research will aim to explore this dynamic.

Shifting information sources

Wave 3 respondents cited different sources of information on migration than the Wave 2 sample, though Facebook remained a top information source. In Wave 2, the three primary sources of information were Facebook (38%), WOM communication (38%) and television (34%). In Wave 3, respondents relied more heavily on television (36%), Facebook (34%) and radio (17%), while WOM communication was no longer among the top three sources (just 6% of Wave 3 respondents).

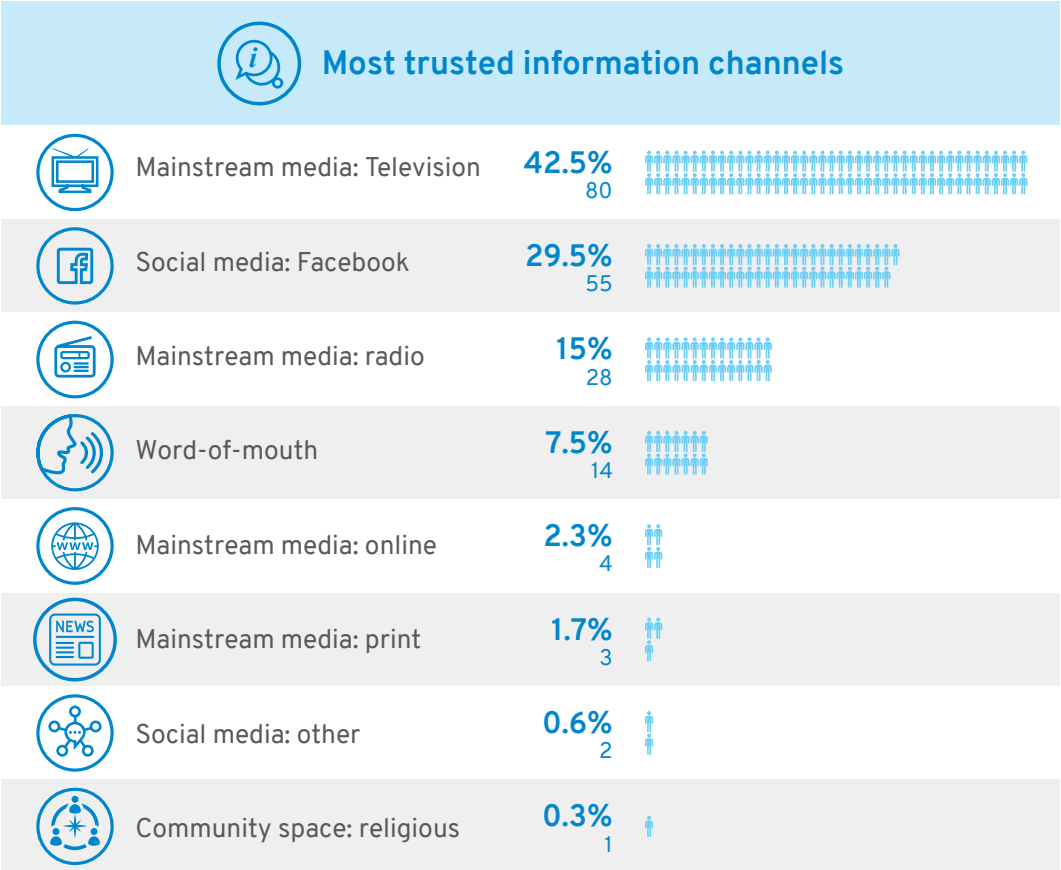
It is unclear whether respondents conflated eWOM communication and traditional WOM communication when answering this question. eWOM refers to

Information channels respondents use to learn about migration	Wave 1	Wave 2	Wave 3
Facebook	58% 23	38% 80	34% 151
Word-of-mouth	93% 37	38% 79	6% 28
Television	5% 2	34% 71	36% 163
Other social media	3% 1	10% 22	0% 2
Online	25% 10	8% 16	2% 8
Radio	0% 0	2% 4	17% 76
Twitter	0% 0	1% 3	3% 15

communication between people (who often have pre-existing relationships) on social media networks.[26] This dynamic will be explored more in future research.

Television and Facebook are most-trusted information sources

In Wave 3, television and Facebook emerged not only as top information sources but also as the information sources most trusted by respondents. Television (43%) and Facebook (30%) were the most-trusted source of information in Wave 3. In contrast, WOM communication was the most-trusted source of information in both Wave 1 (74%) and Wave 2 (39%).



However, among respondents planning to irregularly migrate in 12 months or less, TV and radio are more trusted than Facebook. Among this group, 85% reported television as the most trusted information channel and just 27% referred to Facebook. In contrast, respondents without concrete migration plans noted that Facebook is their most trusted source, indicating that Facebook has a wide reach but appears to be less trusted once plans become more concrete.

[26] Evans and Wurster, 2000. *Blown to Bits*. Boston: Harvard Business School Press.

Conclusions

Findings from the Wave 3 report build on previous data to highlight long-standing migration dynamics in Afghanistan, including:

- Economic and security factors in Afghanistan continue to drive migration interest in Afghanistan;
- Family and friends in Afghanistan play a key role in the decisions regarding migration;
- Many potential migrants hold unrealistic expectations of their migration timelines; and
- Many potential migrants still prefer Germany and generally hold positive views of life abroad.

However, the Wave 3 data reveals emerging patterns that are of key interest moving forward. Specifically, the study draws attention to the following:

- Despite evolving circumstances in Afghanistan, most of the sample still wants to irregularly migrate - just 15% of the sample had abandoned their migration plans;
- Security concerns played a more prominent role in migration decision-making;
- Respondents engaged with Facebook in new ways, as highlighted by its role as a top source of migration information that was also highly trusted;
- Perceptions of migration dangers delayed migration plans, but a variety of factors influenced decision-making; and
- Many respondents expressed negative views of returnees, underscoring the challenging social context awaiting returning Afghans.

Wave 3 of this study raised several interesting questions for exploration in future research. Specific areas for follow-up in Wave 4 include:

- How do plans continue to change over time, what motivates these changes and how effective are respondents at recalling their migration decision-making?
- Do Wave 3 respondents who said they have abandoned their irregular plans sustain this change?
- Was the response on WOM communications reflective of changed perceptions? How do respondents view WOM communications compared with eWOM communication channels and information?
- How have recent changes in migration and refugee asylum policies in the UK, Germany, Italy and other countries affected migration planning?

Annex 1 - Methodology

The first wave of data collection - Wave 1 - sampled 40 Afghans in Nangarhar in August 2016. Respondents were purposively sampled for their intention to migrate onward to Europe within 12 months. Respondents were identified using a snowball sampling technique through referral of other Afghans within the same target group. While this technique reduces risk, it comes at the expense of introducing bias because the technique itself reduces the likelihood that the sample is representative of the larger population.

This study adopted a non-representative and non-random sampling strategy for several reasons. There is no central list of Afghans considering migration. A random sampling approach through enumeration poses security concerns, raises costs, and introduces bias in location selection. Last, the goal was to identify respondents who plan to migrate today and who would be willing to take part in future rounds of data collection. These screening criteria more easily applied to a non-random sample. To be clear, the report makes no claim of representativeness or causality. All claims of statistical significance are limited to the sample at hand.

Wave 2 of data collection followed this same approach on a larger scale. A total of 210 face-to-face and telephone surveys were conducted in January and February 2018 across Afghanistan. Two hundred of these respondents were new to the study. Each of the 200 new respondents was screened to ensure they intended to migrate to a European destination within the next 12 months. Researchers attempted to contact all 40 Wave 1 respondents, ultimately interviewing ten respondents who were a part of the preliminary report. These respondents were not screened for intention to migrate and were given an expanded survey that included specific questions targeting respondents who had abandoned their migration plans between Wave 1 and Wave 2.

The high attrition rate of Wave 1 respondents can be attributed to the passage of time between Wave 1 and Wave 2 (about 16 months between samples). Other relevant factors could include the frequency with which Afghan respondents change mobile phone numbers and the possibility that some of the Wave 1 respondents may have left Afghanistan. For Wave 3, researches attempted to contact all past respondents but were only able to contact 187. Many of the past respondents were not reachable due to their phone numbers not working.

Future waves of data collection are expected to have a substantially lower attrition rate based on more frequent contact with respondents. There will be two future research waves for this study, with data collected approximately every three months. No new respondents will be added to the study. Future waves of data collection will survey the respondents from Wave 1 and Wave 2.

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