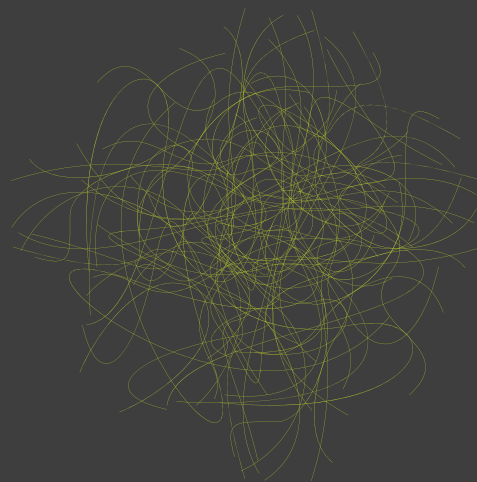


**Sources of Tension
in Afghanistan and
Pakistan: A Regional
Perspective**

**“Going, Going
... Once Again
Gone?”
The Human
Capital
Outflow from
Afghanistan Post
2014 Elections**

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“GOING, GOING ... ONCE AGAIN GONE?” THE HUMAN CAPITAL OUTFLOW FROM AFGHANISTAN POST 2014 ELECTIONS

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1. Introduction/Background

The recent buzz about the impact of the political and security transition in Afghanistan (withdrawal of international military by the end of 2014 and mid-2014 presidential elections) has overshadowed a far more important underlying demographic and development challenge that the country shares with other least developed nations: rapid population growth¹ and urbanization.²

In contrast to population growth, economic and development prospects in Afghanistan have been modest at best. Though some Afghans have become extremely rich over the last decade, many in the country are unhappy about the balance between the resources and money poured into their country since 2001 and progress on key social and economic indicators. Despite concerted international effort over the past decade, a third of the population still lives below the absolute poverty line (less than US\$1/day) and half are so close to living in poverty that any small shock could move them to the brink.³ A slowing in international assistance recently burst the externally-propped up economic bubble (85% of the Afghan budget comes from abroad), with Afghanistan’s ‘remarkable’ annual economic growth plunging from a steady 9% since 2002 to 3.1% in 2013.⁴ Exports and state revenues followed suit, and so did private investment.⁵ This provides a sobering reality for all the aid dollars spent and puts the Afghan economy in dire straits at a time when it has to accommodate for an ever-growing young labour force: those under the age of 25 make up nearly two-thirds of the Afghan population (estimated at around 30 million).⁶

Even excluding increased insecurity and high political uncertainty, factors such as demographic stress in the form of a rapidly growing cohort of potential young migrants hoping to enter higher-wage labour markets, competition over a scarce resource base and a deteriorating economy already present a *smorgasbord* of classic migration drivers.⁷ Adding to this the prevailing insecurity and a growing internal conflict in an uncertain transition environment, there should be no surprises that relocation (external or internal) will continue to function as a coping mechanism for many Afghans for years to come; especially as mobility has long served as

1. United Nations Population Fund 2013
2. Giovacchini 2011
3. Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, December 2013
4. Ruttig 2013, see also Suhrke 2012 on Afghanistan’s rentier state, and Hogg *et al.* 2013 for an analysis of other economic impacts of the transition
5. Ruttig 2013
6. *National Risk and Vulnerability Assessment 2011-12*, p.xvi [referred to as NRVA 2011-12 from here on]
7. These factors were found driving both European and African emigration; Hatton and Williamson 2001

an economic survival strategy even before the three decades of seemingly never-ending conflict.⁸

A population already struggling with considerable economic and demographic stress, dealing with a stalled peace process, rising levels of insecurity and associated toll of civilian casualties, may have problems absorbing yet another considerable shock in the form of an uncertain political future, which the 2014 electoral dispute between the two main presidential candidates foreshadows. Migration scholars demonstrated long ago that there are forces that lead to the *perpetuation* of population movements (keeping it going once begun), which are totally different from those that lead to the *inception* of migration.⁹ Already we are seeing that the increasing number of urban internally displaced persons (IDPs) function as a strong pull factor for others to follow suit. Similarly a growing number of unaccompanied minors who have made it to the West provide incentives for others to continue trying. And last but not least, a slowing refugee return from Iran and Pakistan, capital flight to Dubai and an increase in undocumented migrants working abroad, all are sending signals to the rest of the Afghan population that mobility might once more be the coping strategy with uncertain and insecure times. In 2014, UNHCR acknowledges that changed circumstances in Afghanistan have created a wait and see mentality among the remaining refugee caseload in neighbouring countries until there are “concrete signs of improved security and economic stability.”¹⁰

In light of the above, the question to ask is not ‘*why we should expect another displacement crisis in Afghanistan,*’ rather, ‘*why not*’ and ‘*what we should do to ease its impact*’? Complexities and uncertainties aside, this much is sure: Afghans have used mobility in the past to spread their risk and are unlikely to stop any time soon; though obviously within their means and possibilities. Thus, what we need to understand better in order to prepare adequate response and assistance, is what the future migration trajectory might be: who is likely to move, for what reasons and where to?

This paper discusses the historical and current displacement trends in Afghanistan and explores how they might shape and impact on future exodus.

It is divided into five sections. The first summarizes the six phases of Afghanistan’s displacement past. The second looks at current displacement trends; the third discusses existing migration routes and destinations for future migrants and refugees; the fourth highlights key migrant groups; and the last considers the impact of this renewed population on the country and region.

2. Afghanistan’s Displacement Past as Key to its Displacement Future

The experience of Afghans with internal and external migration (both voluntary and forced) is vast. In addition to a growing trend of rural to urban migration, the Afghan Diaspora from three decades of conflict is scattered around the world in as many as 75 countries. This already provides ample experience and networks to facilitate further out-migration. Additionally, seasonal migration has been part of the lives and livelihoods of many rural Afghans for centuries,¹¹ including Kuchi nomads moving between better pasture lands, mountain and rural people going to cities in the search for jobs and education, religious pilgrimage inside Afghanistan or to Mecca for *haji* etc.¹²

- 8. Monsutti 2006
- 9. Massey et al. 1999; see also Van Hear et al. 2012, p.5-6
- 10. Natta 2014
- 11. Monsutti 2006
- 12. Hanifi 2000

The onset of conflict in the late 1970s thus only added to a mobile population, a context of traditional migration flow (internal, cross-border, seasonal) and still sizable nomadic and semi-nomadic population (estimated at about 1.5 million) by creating “one of the world’s largest and most protracted refugee situations, the largest volume of returnees in recent history, [and] large-scale internal displacement.”¹³ Against this backdrop, the hope held by many policy makers - national and international alike - that that the best, most durable solution for Afghans is to return to their areas of origin and to stay put once returned, is highly unrealistic.

Estimates of how many Afghans experienced forced displacement at some point in their lifetime vary across studies, not least because the last official Population and Housing Census was carried out in 1979, just prior to ensuing conflict and mass displacement¹⁴ but also because “collecting reliable data on Afghanistan is extremely difficult, [and] the information that is available is subject to large margins of uncertainty.”¹⁵

Different studies estimate that at minimum of 24% (refugees only),¹⁶ but possibly as many as 42%¹⁷ - or even 76%¹⁸ - of the Afghan population have had internal, external or multiple displacement histories. Given that at the height of the displacement crisis (around 1989/90) 8+ million Afghans were reported displaced by the United Nations’ Refugee Agency (UNHCR) –6.3 refugees and about 2 million internally displaced persons (IDPs)– this implies implies that at least half of all Afghans might have some displacement experience. The population then was about 60% of what it is today, which suggests that many displaced families would have had children born into displacement.

The variations in estimates are best explained by the fact that internal migration is often hard to gauge and that not all displacement might be recorded. The widely-acknowledged challenge of distinguishing between various migration caseloads¹⁹ is especially exacerbated in Afghanistan, where the then-UNHCR Representative, Ewen Macleod acknowledged the impossible task of disentangling mixed migration flows: “Internal displacement patterns are becoming more complex in Afghanistan. In the cities, it is very difficult to distinguish IDPs from poor rural migrants or the urban poor.”²⁰

Regardless of which figure one ultimately arrives at, these estimates are witness to a remarkable mobile population. Moving - in contrast to staying put - is and has been the norm in Afghanistan, with many Afghans having had multiple relocation experiences in their lives (either forced, voluntary or a mix of both). Even if an individual may not have personally migrated, they would know of a relative (or friend) with a migration experience.

Ultimately such experience provides an understanding of the costs and benefits of moving, as well as providing knowledge of migration route, established networks abroad, costs of leaving and life in exile. However, the findings by the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) that Afghans fear displacement (34%) more than losing a loved one (25%) or property (22%)²¹ suggests that displacement - though a necessary coping mechanism - has not been an overwhelmingly positive experience.

13. NRVA 2011-12, p.17

14. Ibid, p.9

15. Hogg et al. 2013, p.ii

16. Kronenfeld 2011; he argues that his findings are supported by the number of returnees cited by UNHCR to date (about 6 million) proportional to the estimated population figure of Afghanistan (then 24-28 million).

17. *The Cost of War* 2009

18. International Committee of the Red Cross 2009

19. Koser 2013

20. United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees [UNHCR from here on] 2010

21. International Committee of the Red Cross 2009

2.1. The Six Displacement Waves

Forced displacement in Afghanistan (at least in this century) has been well documented and studied and is generally associated with six distinct phases, almost always witnessing mixed internal and cross-border movement and several times in both directions - leaving and returning: (see Table 1 and Figure 1 for overview).²² An understanding of these waves may shed light on future migration trajectories.

Time Period	Event	Refugee Flow	Internal Displacement	Refugee Return
Phase 1 (1978–89)	War of <i>Mujahidin</i> against Soviet-backed communist government	Steady flow into neighbouring countries and abroad; refugee figures peak in 1989	Begin in 1984 (first recorded in 1985)	
Phase 2 (1989–95)	Withdrawal of Soviet Army (1989); defeat of Communist Government (1992), ensuing Civil War	Civil war continues to displace people	Continued displacement; peak 1994	Initial optimistic return slowing by 1994; 2.5 million in 1992 and 1993 alone.
Phase 3 (1995–2000)	Taliban enters conflict, takes parts of country in 1995 and Kabul in 1996; harsh Taliban rule follows.	New refugee outflow when honeymoon with Taliban regime abates	Intense drought in 2000 leads to massive internal displacement	Hesitant return trickles though less than a million during the entire Taliban rule.
Phase 4 (2001–2)	Post 9/11 bombing and international invasion	Renewed displacement (estimated at 1.5 million) in a short period of time		Some still returning in 2000 and beginning of 2001 (though negligible)
Phase 5 (2002–6)	Peace agreement, transitional authority, new government	Asylum figures begin to drop; some 'refugee recycling' does occur (meaning people leave again after return)	Secondary displacement of returnees and new IDPs; push into big urban cities for services and security	4.2 million by end of 2005; another million by the end of 2008
Phase 6 (2007–2014)	Government increasingly loose legitimacy, insurgency resurges, violence on the rise	Afghans once more begin to leave, today among biggest refugee and asylum seeker group (latter on rising trend since 2008)	Conflict-induced IDPs steadily on the rise (660,000 by mid-2014); ongoing secondary displacement and rural-urban migration	Return slows after 2008 (a bit over 400,000 2009–13) and realization it was not sustainable total return since 2002 nearly 6 million

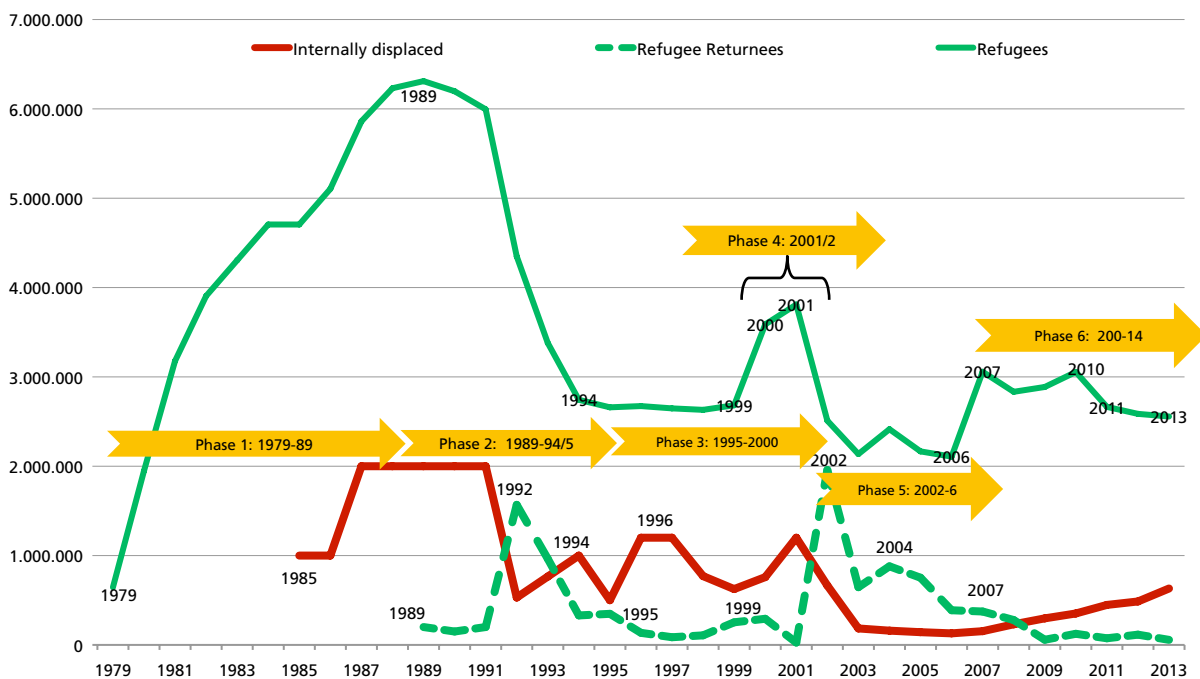
Phase 1 (1978–89) is typically associated with the Soviet-sponsored Saur (April) Revolution in 1978, which brought to power the Afghan Communist People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA). Many Afghans - especially the elites - that were against the regime change and the dominant communist ideology, left the country early on, initially fleeing to the neighbouring countries of Pakistan and Iran, but also to India (many en route to the West). By 1983, the conflict intensified after *Mujahidin* rebels received increasing international support in order to fight the Afghan government, supported by a growing number of Soviet soldiers. The war was waged largely in rural areas and a mass exodus to neighbouring countries (Iran and Pakistan) created a soaring refugee population upward of 6 million people, with an additional 2 million internally displaced (largely from rural areas into calmer urban centres). The combined figure of 8+ million

²². I am drawing here on my earlier work: Schmeidl and Maley 2008, Schmeidl et al. 2010, Schmeidl 2011

displaced people suggests that a staggering 43% (nearly half) of the entire Afghan population were displaced at the height of the war (about one-third abroad).

Phase 2 (1989–95) commenced with the withdrawal of Soviet forces from Afghanistan in 1989 and was dominated initially by voluntary refugee return. This gained momentum in 1992 following the defeat of the remnants of the Afghan Communist government: (no fewer than 1.2 million Afghans in six months left the country).²³ About 3 million refugees returned to Afghanistan between 1989 and 1993: 2.5 million in 1992/3 alone. This optimism, however, remained short-lived, with different *Mujahidin* factions unable to broker a peaceful power-sharing agreement and locking into intense fighting. This caused a slow in refugee return rates and prompted another displacement wave. While prior displacement largely came from rural areas where the Soviet army had focused their efforts, in-fighting between *Mujahidin* factions brought the war to Afghanistan’s capital, Kabul, leading to mass displacement both from and within the city,²⁴ though likely much of this in-city displacement was never counted and thus is not reflected in official IDP figures. These stayed roughly constant around 1 million for many years.

Figure 1: Overview of Afghan Displacement Phases 1979-2013 (UNHCR)



Phase 3 (1995–2000) is associated with the Taliban’s entrance into the conflict. A war-weary population tired of predatory *Mujahidin* commanders initially welcomed the Taliban’s victory in Kandahar in 1995 and Kabul 1996. Migrant return in this period, however, was rather hesitant, being only about 900,000 during the entire Taliban rule. The honeymoon with the new regime was short-lived however, as the Taliban resorted increasingly to brutal authoritarian methods to restore law and order. It continued to ward off challenges by the *Mujahidin* factions, which joined

23. Colville 1997, p.6

24. Mohmand 2011, p.3

into a loose opposition, the Northern Alliance. The brutal Taliban rule and renewed fighting prompted a new displacement wave, especially among the educated and more liberal Afghans finding it hard to submit to a very strict Shari'a-style government that prohibited girls' education and women's work. Some Afghans sought refuge in northern cities, away from the centres of Taliban rule. Others went abroad, though exit routes became increasingly controlled. Internal displacement soared further in 2000, when the worst drought in thirty years hit Afghanistan,²⁵ causing massive livestock losses among the nomadic Kuchi population, prompting many to shift to a more sedentary existence - often in Pakistan.

Phase 4 (2001/2) witnessed a short, intensive spike in refugee exodus (about 1.5 million) caused by the US-led military invasion into Afghanistan in early October 2001, in response to the 9/11 attacks in the USA. Some fled proactively, in anticipation of another conflict phase, others fled from the actual aerial bombardment and ground combat,²⁶ and yet others from anti-Pashtun violence in parts of the western and northern Afghanistan.²⁷ Much of this displacement was external (including from the IDP caseload), though some also fled inside their country.

Phase 5 (2002-6) commenced with the defeat of the Taliban, the subsequent Bonn Peace Agreement and transitional government. It witnessed the largest assisted UNHCR refugee repatriation "*in recorded history [...] equivalent to roughly one-half the current refugee population worldwide.*"²⁸ In total, about 6 million Afghan refugees (around 4.7 assisted by UNHCR)²⁹ from Pakistan, Iran, and other asylum countries returned home,³⁰ a majority (4.2 million or 74%) between 2002 and 2005. At the same time, the majority of Afghanistan's 1.2 million internally displaced persons also returned home, widely assumed to have satisfactorily reintegrated.³¹ As successful return was needed to demonstrate the political recovery and stabilization of Afghanistan,³² the creeping internal displacement crisis –among other the result of unsustainable return to areas of origin leading to considerable secondary displacement– was largely ignored.³³

Phase 6 (2007-present) began when return figures continue to steadily decline. Internal displacement was on the rise. While one million still returned between 2006 and 2008, 'only' 427,561 more did so between 2009-13. Though in absolute numbers, this is still a lot, it dwarfs in comparison to previous return - less than 10% of the total return figures.³⁴ International and national actors have begun to reluctantly wake up to a deteriorating security situation, which impacts on the willingness of refugees to return;³⁵ and to the fact that refugee return was not as successful and nor as sustainable as initially hoped.³⁶ Though refugees continue to return, the level of voluntariness is increasingly in question.³⁷

In 2008, UNHCR also started to place more attention on profiling internal displacement by drafting the first National IDP Report³⁸ prompted by a recommendation of Walter Kaelin, the Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General on the Human Rights of IDPs, who visited Afghanistan in August 2007.³⁹ By mid-2014, the IDP count had reached nearly 700,000,⁴⁰ half displaced since at least 2011, at a rate of about 100,000 per year.⁴¹ Available figures between September 2013 and June 2014 already confirm that this upward trend is likely to continue.⁴² In the north alone, "*displacement has increased more than five-fold since 2010 reflecting the spread of conflict across the country.*"⁴³

25. Roughly 12 million Afghans are estimated to be affected by the ongoing drought, of which an estimated five million lack access to food and water (Agence France-Presse 2000); The World Food Programme estimated that nearly four million of Afghans are on the brink of starvation due to the severe drought in early 2001 (World Food Programme 2001).
26. An estimated 3–3,400 civilian deaths were attributed to aerial bombardment. Herold 2002; Human Rights Watch 2001
27. The abuses and violence that accompanied the fall of the Taliban have been well documented by Human Rights Watch in the four Northern provinces of Balkh, Far-yab, Samangan, and Baghlan. Human Rights Watch 2002
28. Kronenfeld 2011; see Turton and Marsden 2002 and Schmeidl and Maley 2008
29. Natta 2014
30. It is important to note that we might never know how many Afghans exactly returned, as recycling was alleged when it was found that during the first four years of return about half a million more refugees returned to Afghanistan than previously estimated; Kronenfeld 2008). Though the differences in figures might simply be that we underestimated the number of Afghans living in Pakistan to begin with, as many had been living undetected in big urban centers; Kronenfeld 2011, Schmeidl and Maley 2008.
31. Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre [IDMC from here on] 2008
32. Turton and Marsden 2002, Schmeidl and Maley 2008
33. See Schmeidl et al. 2010, IDMC 2010
34. UNHCR 2014a, see also Natta 2014
35. Van Hear et al. 2012
36. UNHCR 2012a
37. Hammerstad 2014
38. UNHCR, August 2008
39. UNHCR, December 2008
40. UNHCR, May 2014
41. Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre [IDMC from here on], December 2013
42. IDMC, June 2014
43. Norwegian Refugee Council [NRC from here on] and IDMC 2012

Insecurity is characterized by the fact that the Taliban movement has not been defeated⁴⁴ and UNAMA already in 2009 observed that *“the conflict has widened and deepened throughout 2007 and 2008, almost a third of the country is now directly affected by armed conflict, while pockets of armed conflict have started to occur in areas which were formerly relatively tranquil.”*⁴⁵ A 2010 a poll by several new agencies reported that fewer than half of all Afghans (47%) felt secure from attacks by Taliban and other armed groups, essentially unchanged from the previous year.⁴⁶ In 2013, another opinion poll reported that a majority of all Afghans (59%) stated that they always, often, or sometimes fear for their own safety or that of their family. Furthermore, around three quarters said they feel fear when travelling within the country.⁴⁷ The choices of civilians living in areas that are either contested or under the control of anti-government elements are few: stay and acquiesce, leave to government-controlled major urban areas or be killed.

3. Afghanistan’s Displacement Present: Understanding the New (Forced) Migrants

This section needs to be read with the caveat that accurately documenting Afghan mobility, little alone into neat categories, is extremely difficult if not impossible.

Though various sources were used to arrive at the final figures, many reports differ widely or are littered with partial and unverified estimates. For example, one study puts the Afghan Diaspora at around 4.5 million⁴⁸ in 2007, while another puts it as high as 16 million (though including a vast number of migrant workers).⁴⁹

Another problem is the lack of good documentation, partially because of access problems or a slow realization of the need to do so. It was already suggested by a study in 2010 that official IDP estimates are likely only the tip of the iceberg⁵⁰ as they *“are widely recognised to under-represent the scale of displacement as they exclude IDPs in inaccessible rural locations and urban areas.”*⁵¹ In order to improve both its understanding but also its assistance to IDPs, UNHCR, the International Organization for Migration (IOM), and the Afghan Ministry of Refugees and Reintegration have recently started to improve its IDP profiling.⁵²

Some of the mystification on numbers is of course definitional, with categorization being at times political, a matter of preference, or at minimum very hard to do.

People’s movement generally tend to respond to both push (forcing people to leave their homes) and pull factors (attracting migrants to a destination), making it increasingly difficult to fit migrants into the neat categories policy makers’ desire for legal purposes, e.g. refugees vs. economic migrants. For example *“economic factors linked to conflict or natural disasters can frequently trigger displacement. Thus there is often no clear distinction between ‘forced’ and ‘voluntary’ movements.”*⁵³ Sometimes *“migrants can change status or category, often overnight, and sometimes intentionally – for example, in the case of a migrant who knowingly and deliberately overstays a visa, but often because of arbitrary changes in laws or policies on visas or work permits.”*⁵⁴ According to one study, this happened with Afghans in Pakistan who changed from refugees into an irregular migration

44. Ruttig 2013

45. UNAMA 2009

46. *Afghanistan – Where Things Stand* 2010, p.7

47. The Asia Foundation 2013

48. Fitrat 2007

49. Afghans Abroad (no date given)

50. Schmeidl *et al.* 2010

51. NRC/IDMC 2012

52. Koser 2014, for an example see IOM/Samuel Hall Consulting 2014; UNHCR, May 2014

53. IDMC, March 2013

54. Koser 2013

flow, simply because times and migration channels made it more opportune.⁵⁵ UNHCR woke up to this predicament in 2006, when “500,000 more refugees returned to Afghanistan in the first four years of repatriation than we thought to exist in the first place.”⁵⁶

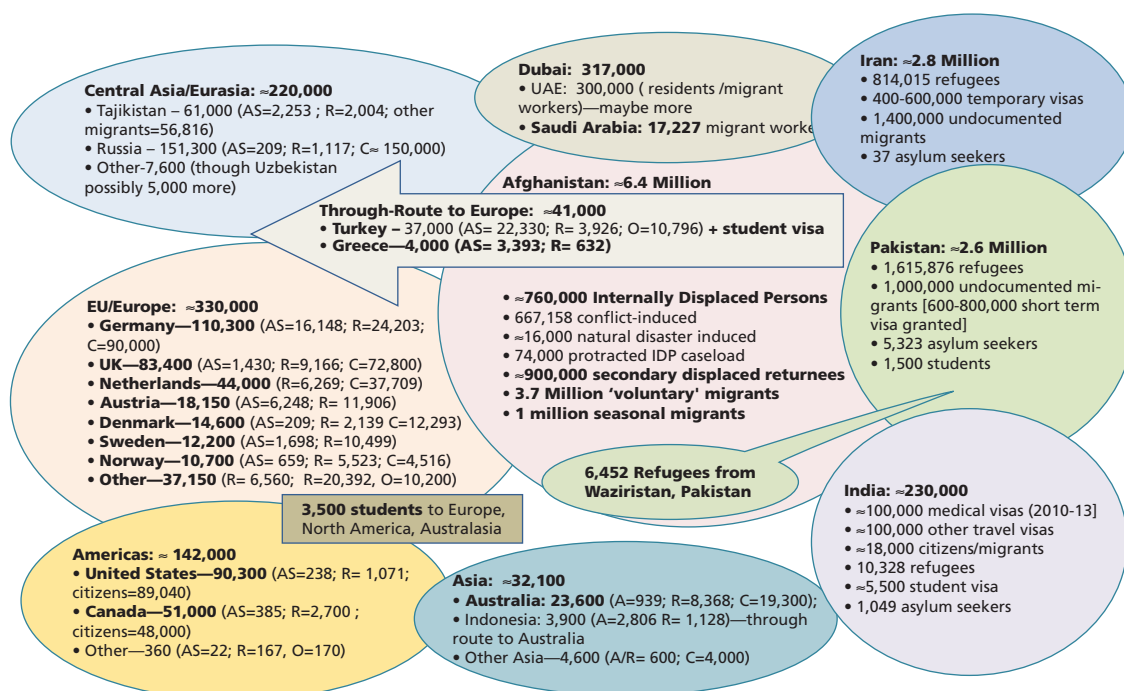
Last but not least, many Afghans now hold dual nationality (or at least have identity documents of another country) and split their time between Afghanistan and other places, complicating things further. The ultimate lesson here, however, is that people find ways to move if the need arises, simply adapting to changing circumstances and migration policies. Though not all cases of Afghan outmigration are successful as deportations from Iran, Pakistan and Europe exemplify, it often only acts as a minor deterrent if somebody really wants to leave. Anecdotal evidence suggests that being sent back might simply prompt some to try (over and over) again.⁵⁷

In light of the above, the easiest differentiation that still remains is whether or not a person has crossed an internationally recognized border and thus is either an internal or international migrant. Figure 2 (which should be read with care given the problematic nature of existing data) presents an attempt at an overview on how many Afghans can be considered as being ‘on the move’. It is important to note here that this includes both voluntary, forced and mixed migration flows, aiming primarily to show migration trajectories and only secondarily to categorize by type of migration.

The final estimates were created triangulating numerous information sources on forced displacement,⁵⁸ economic migration (internal and international),⁵⁹ and census data from countries hosting the Afghan Diaspora.⁶⁰ With the caveat that the figures are best estimates, available information suggests that about 44% of the Afghan population have been (or still are) on the move inside Afghanistan (6.4 million - 49%) or left for abroad (6.7 million - 51%).

- 55. van Hear et al. 2010, p.28
- 56. Kronenfeld 2008, p.2
- 57. Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit 2014
- 58. UNHCR 2013, 2014a
- 59. World Bank 2014, NRVA 2011/12
- 60. Various – see extra reference section at end

Figure 2: Afghans ‘on the Move’ ≈13.1 million (≈44% of the total population) Afghans Living and working abroad: ≈6.7 Million -- Afghans displaced inside country: ≈ 6.4 Million



3.1. Internal Displacement: IDPs, Secondary Displaced Returnees, Rural-Urban Migrants

Cluster	Category	Estimate
Official' IDPs (757,158)	Conflict-affected IDPs	667,158
	Protracted IDPs caseload mostly in the South	74,000
	Natural disaster-affected IDPs	10-16,000
Secondary Displaced Returnees		900,000
'Voluntary' Migration Flows (3.7 Million)	Rural-urban migrants	1,237,000
	Rural-Rural migration	1,161,000
	Urban-Urban migration	957,000
	(Development-induced) Urban-Rural migration	379,000
Seasonal Migration (1 Million)	Kuchi migration (seasonal)	496,000
	Seasonal labour migration flows	530,000
Total		»6,414,158

»6.4 million (Including about 1 million seasonal migrants).

A recent IOM report proposed seven different categories of internal displaced populations in Afghanistan acknowledging that many overlapped and providing only partial estimates.⁶¹ Both UNHCR and the Afghan government acknowledge the complexity of clearly identifying IDPs given that they blend with other forms of population movements, such as rural to urban migration and refugee return.⁶²

This section builds on these categories, with the exception of victims of human trafficking (people-smuggling), as which, at least in comparison with the other six categories, individual agency seems has no individual decision-making power ("agency") involved. Additionally, estimates were difficult to find: (one source spoke of about 500 individuals⁶³). Reducing the seven categories into four broad migration clusters, internal mobility can be seen as roughly comprised of:

- i. Officially recognized IDPs
- iii. Secondary displaced returnees (at times included in the first category and hard to differentiate from the third)
- iii. 'More' voluntary migration: rural-urban, within rural areas (rural-rural), from one city to another (urban-urban), and what IOM calls development-induced migrants (urban to rural)
- iv. Seasonal migration (either by Kuchi nomads or labour migrants)

Cluster 1 encompasses those IDPs falling into the definition of the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement: "persons or groups of persons who have been forced or obliged to flee or to leave their homes or places of habitual residence, in particular as a result of or in order to avoid the effects of armed conflict, situations of generalized violence, violations of human rights or natural or human-made disasters, and who have not crossed an internationally recognized state border."⁶⁴ This includes conflict-induced IDPs, the largest group in this cluster, 74,000 protracted case-load IDPs from previous displacement phases⁶⁵, and around 10-16,000 disaster-induced IDPs, though many do return home the nearly yearly occurrence of this type of displacement warrants counting. In 2014 the flooding in Afghanistan displaced around 14,000 alone.⁶⁶

61. Koser 2014

62. IDMC, March 2013

63. Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission 2011, IOM 2008

64. UN OCHA 2004

65. Koser 2014

66. IOM 2013

The other three clusters are a bit harder to disentangle, but in addition to UNHCR or IOM figures the National Risk and Vulnerability Assessment (NRVA) by the Central Statistics Organization (CSO) of the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan (GIROA), proves an interesting and underused source to understand mobility in Afghanistan. It reports that in 2011 some 5.1 million Afghans reported having been born outside their district of residence (of which about 900,000 were born abroad),⁶⁷ indicating they moved there over the past years. Adding this figure alone to those in Cluster One would already account for an internal mobile population of close to 6 million. But it is best to deconstruct this figure further.

Cluster 2 includes likely the most controversial category of secondary displaced refugee returnees, as not everybody fully agrees if they should be seen as part of the IDP caseload or simply as part of greater voluntary migration flows. The International Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC) observes that “IDP populations are highly mobile and are often forced into secondary or tertiary displacement due to lack of services and jobs, ongoing armed conflict or natural disasters in areas of their primary displacement. Those displaced to urban areas have often been displaced at least once previously.”⁶⁸ In the end it comes down to the difficult question of when displacement (and the associated protection need) ends. According to the *Guiding Principles* cited earlier, this is only the case if an individual was able to “return voluntarily, in safety and with dignity, to their homes or places of habitual residence, or to resettle voluntarily in another part of the country.”⁶⁹ Though the Afghan government has made strides on this challenge - most recently with the IDP Strategy – all too often it has interpreted “return to area of origin” as the only viable durable solution, leaving those in secondary displacement in limbo.⁷⁰

How many of the approximately 6 million returnees in Afghanistan are in secondary displacement, however, is hard to gauge. In its 2012 *Solutions Strategy*, UNHCR presented findings of a survey showing that “up to 60% of returnees are experiencing difficulties rebuilding their lives;” and acknowledging that “large numbers of Afghans continue to migrate to cities within Afghanistan or to neighbouring countries, seeking livelihood opportunities. Disenchanted youths returning to communities that lack basic social services and work, see few opportunities for their future.”⁷¹ Later in the document, however, they settle on a lower estimate of 15% of all returnees to live in secondary displacement mostly to urban areas, which would put them roughly at around 900,000.⁷² The figure could be higher, though we may never know for sure.

Cluster 3 encompasses the vast category of other migrants in Afghanistan. The NRVA breaks down estimates that the initial about 5.1 million-figure of Afghans living in areas different to where they were born. Of these, 900,000 were born abroad (hence children of refugees), though there is no way of knowing if they can be counted as secondary displaced or successful reintegrated returnees, so we exclude this figure here (assuming it is counted in Cluster 2), into the following neat categories. When including the first, this comes to about 3.7 so-called ‘voluntary’ migrants (though again much flow mixed indeed be mixed and caused by a complicated push-pull dynamic, including both economic and security considerations).⁷³ Of the remaining 4.2 million, another 1 million seasonal migrants is considered under Cluster 3, leaving about 3.7 million internal migrants in this category which can be broken down as follows:

- 67. Though it is not designed as a migration survey, The *National Risk and Vulnerability Assessment* (NRVA) conducted multiple survey rounds over the last decade (2003, 2005, 2007-08 and 2011-12) and thus is considered one of the most comprehensive sources of statistical information for Afghanistan. *National Risk and Vulnerability Assessment 2011-12*, p.9
- 68. IDMC, March 2013
- 69. UN OCHA 2004, Principle 28 (1)
- 70. Schmeidl et al. 2010
- 71. UNHCR, September 2012, p.11
- 72. *Ibid*, p.22 (if UNHCR means 15% of the 4.6 million assisted refugee return not the 6 million total, this figure would decrease to 690,000, already showing the perils confident estimates).
- 73. See World Bank/UNHCR 2011

- 900,000 born abroad (hence children of refugees), though there is no way of knowing if they can be counted as secondary displaced or successful reintegrated returnees, so we exclude this figure here.
- 1.24 million rural-urban migrants, which might well include some secondary-displaced returnees, though again there is no way of knowing for sure. Given the exclusion of the 900,000 individuals born abroad - which incidentally is the same estimates we arrived at for secondary displaced returnees in Cluster 2 – this figure probably holds good
- 1.16 million migrants moving within rural areas (rural-rural migration)
- 957,000 urban residents moving to another city (urban-urban migration)
- 379,000 urban-rural migrants, who could be considered to match the development-induced migration category - those no longer able to afford expensive housing in urban areas (especially Kabul) - suggested in the IOM study.⁷⁴

Cluster 4 are the roughly million individuals engaged in seasonal migration, broken down into nearly half a million Kuchi nomads (496,000) and 530,000 seasonal labour migrants. Although both types of migration are temporary, their annual occurrence establishes migration paths, which warrants inclusion. Furthermore, the moment a shock occurs these seasonal migrants may not be able to return home, which has occurred in the case of the Kuchi nomads who lost their pastures in Maidan Wardak.⁷⁵

3.2. Afghan Living and Working Abroad: Following in the Steps of Established Migration Paths

Category	Estimate
Refugees/Asylum Seekers	2,600,000
Migrants <i>writ large</i>	3,400,000
Diaspora	530,000
Health/Short-term travels	200,000
Students	10,000
Total	6,740,000

Host Nation	Estimate
Iran	2,000,000
Pakistan	1,000,000
UAE	300,000
Tajikistan	56,816
Saudi Arabia	17,227
Turkey	10,796
India	18,000
Total	3,402,839

The *roughly 6.7 million estimated Afghans living or working abroad* is slightly higher, though within the ballpark, of a recent Afghan government estimate quoted in an Afghan news outlet.⁷⁶ It also suggests that the current Afghan population abroad is actually larger than at its peak in refugee years: (6.2 million in 1989), though with only about 2.6 million counted by UNHCR as refugees or asylum seekers.⁷⁷ The rest - over half (4.1 million or 61%) - includes vast numbers

74. Koser 2014

75. The Liaison Office 2009

76. Ariana News 2014

77. UNHCR, February 2014

of migrant workers; refugees that have become citizens in their countries of asylum; and those travelling for work (documented and undocumented), education or health care. The fact that the vast category of migrant workers (both documented and undocumented) makes up for 50% of all Afghans abroad suggests that the refugee flows of the past have become an irregular migration flow,⁷⁸ simply because times and migration channels made it more opportune.

Documented and undocumented migration - »3.4 million: In addition to the combined 2.6 million registered Afghan refugees in Pakistan and Iran, UNHCR estimates that there are another roughly 3 million Afghans migrant workers living in these two neighbouring countries. This includes about 1 million in Pakistan, of which 600,000 to 800,000 were reported to have received short-term work permits or travel documents.⁷⁹ Another 2 million are in Iran, comprised of 1.4 million undocumented migrants⁸⁰ and another 400,000 to 600,000 which are reported to be holding temporary working visas.⁸¹ With the construction boom in the Gulf States (the United Arab Emirates having about 300,000⁸² and Saudi Arabia about 17,000 Afghan workers), migration to these countries has increased in importance over time, though Iran, together with Pakistan, remains a main destination for now.⁸³

Recently, however, the devaluation of the Iranian currency has made Iran a less attractive option for some Afghans seeking to send home remittance.⁸⁴ Smaller numbers of migrant labourers holding resident permits can be found in Tajikistan (57,000), Turkey (11,000) and India (18,000),⁸⁵ though there might be additional numbers in other Central Asian Countries.

According to the NRVA, 303,000 individuals aged 14 and older had left their household in 2010 alone,⁸⁶ and in a 2008 a UNHCR study reported 60,000 men to be crossing into Pakistan in one month alone.⁸⁷ Often migrant labourers stay abroad much longer than a year, and others join them while they are away, suggesting a rising trend as in 2005 the NRVA only reported 61,000 migrant labourers destined to the Arabian Peninsula.⁸⁸ *“Permanent migration to the Arabian Peninsula, especially Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries, is not possible for foreign workers given their strict immigration laws and regulations. Similarly, it is temporary rather than seasonal migration which is predominant in these countries.”*⁸⁹

Refugees - »2.6 million:⁹⁰ Despite the efforts over the past years in resolving the protracted displacement puzzle, and staggering return numbers, Afghans (2,556,522 spread across 65 countries) were until June 2014 still the biggest refugee population in post-World War II history, ahead of both Syria and Somalia: (all three countries accounting for more than half of all the world’s refugees).⁹¹ Syria, however, has recently been catching up in this macabre race for the top, surpassing Afghanistan in late August 2014 by reaching nearly 3 million.⁹² Thus, about one in every five refugees in the world is still from Afghanistan, highlighting the protracted nature of the displacement.

A majority of these refugees still reside in Pakistan and Iran (1.6 million and 814,015 respectively).⁹³ Some sources, however, put the number of refugees in Iran upward to 1 million registered refugees and the total

78. Van Hear *et al.* 2010, p.28

79. Koser 2014

80. UNHCR September and November 2013

81. Human Rights Watch 2013

82. Shahbandari 2012; Soufan Group 2014; Malit and Youh 2013

83. NRVA 2011-12

84. Fishstein *et al.* 2013

85. Associated Press 2013

86. NRVA 2011-12, p. 17

87. UNHCR and Altai Consulting 2009

88. Wickramasekara and Baruah 2013

89. *Ibid.*, p.6

90. UNHCR 2014a

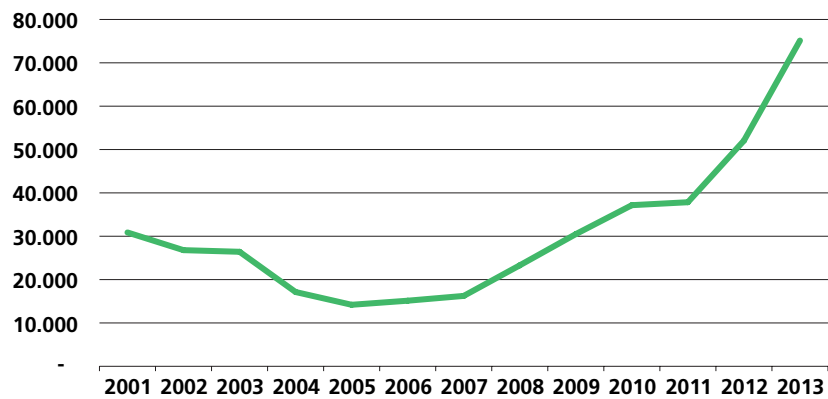
91. UNHCR, June 2014

92. UNHCR, August 2014

93. UNHCR 2014b

number of refugees in both countries at 2.6 million,⁹⁴ already showing the confusing task of counting displaced populations.⁹⁵ Of other countries hosting refugees, those in Europe still lead, ahead of all being Germany (24,203) followed by Austria (11,906), Sweden (10,499), India (10,328), the United Kingdom (9,166) and Australia (8,368).

Figure 3: Overview of Afghan Asylum Seeker (UNHCR, 2013)



Asylum Seekers - » 75,000: Since 2007, Afghanistan has shown a steady increase in **asylum seekers**, beginning to climb more rapidly post-2011, making it for several years the top asylum-seeker producing country of the world (see Figure 3).

In 2013, however, Afghanistan was ousted from first place by Syria and the Russian Federation, but still counted 75,273 asylum seekers spread across 63 countries.⁹⁷ The two top recipient countries in 2013 were Turkey (22,330) and Germany (16,148); with Turkey, and also Greece (3,393) functioning often as “through-routes” to other European destinations. Australia, with its two off-shore sites in Nauru and Papua New Guinea, trails behind with 1,062; with another 3,000 in the two through-route countries of Indonesia (2,806) and Malaysia (138).

Other migration abroad is mostly for medical reasons and education other than holidaying and visiting relatives) - »200,000:

This includes those seeking for treatment for health care, estimated at around 100,000 in India alone, though anecdotal evidence shows that many also go to Pakistan, and those who can afford it, to Europe or North America.

Currently there are about 10,000 Afghan students studying abroad⁹⁸, though this figure might be a conservative estimate with students blurring with other forms of migration. As Figure 4 illustrates, these figures have also increasingly risen over the past several years, and most rapidly since 2008.⁹⁹

Half of all students are estimated to be in India, another 1,500 in Pakistan and the rest in Europe (including Turkey), North American and Australia: (there may also be smaller numbers in Central Asia, such as students attending the American University in Kyrgyzstan).

94. UN OHCA 2012

95. Schmeidl 2000

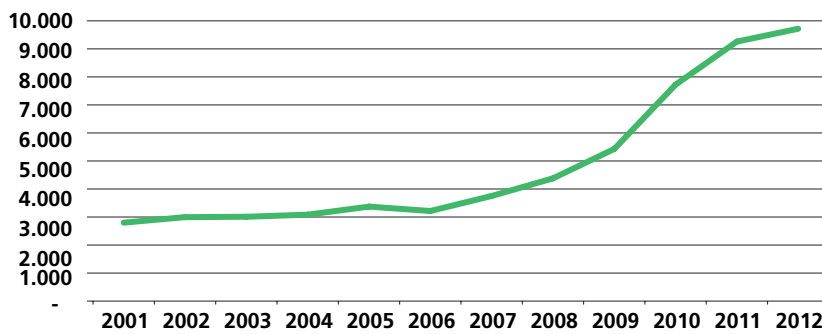
96. UNHCR 2014a

97. UNHCR 2013, March 2014

98. One source (Times of India 2014) put 10,000 Afghan students into India alone, which would raise this category possibly as high as 15,000 – again showing the problems with attaining accurate estimates.

99. UNESCO Institute for Statistic (UIS) 2014

Figure 4: Overview of Afghans studying abroad (UNESCO, 2011)



4. Afghanistan's Migration Future – *Quo Vadis?*

Afghanistan's displacement past and present provides enough evidence to outline migration trajectories without having to gaze too deep into the crystal ball.

It is unlikely that many new migration destinations (or pathways for that matter) than those already discussed will emerge. This includes a continued push into Afghan cities, flows into neighbouring countries (Iran and Pakistan), as well as the region (Central Asia, India, the Gulf States), and last but not least the West - the coveted destination for many - where the Afghan Diaspora have established themselves over the past years.

Many studies argue that, unlike past displacement phases which were predominantly concentrated outside Afghanistan, Afghanistan's displacement future lies with internal displacement.¹⁰⁰ Though the estimates discussed so far seem to suggest the opposite, or at least a dual growth of internal and international displacement, external obstacles such as border closures might change this in the future. Until then, internal push factors from Afghanistan, linked to the fragile security, political and economic situation will continue to drive both internal as well as cross-border displacement and migration.

First, insecurity, access to services (especially health care and education) and employment in rural areas, as well as challenges in reclaiming land and property, has made major cities in Afghanistan, especially Kabul, a magnet for the internal displaced, who melt into sprawling urban squatter settlements.¹⁰¹ Secondly, traditional exit options are no longer as attractive as before. In Iran, Afghan refugees face forced deportations, while in Pakistan, refugee camps are being forcibly closed, and refugees face harassment and an increasingly unstable security and political situation.

Furthermore, there is an *"ongoing return bias and the absence of genuine commitments by Iran and Pakistan to a) include alternative stay arrangements for registered refugees as part of the package of durable solution options, b) adequately address the issue of unregistered/undocumented refugee populations and c) provide protection and assistance for vulnerable unregistered Afghan refugees."*¹⁰² Official third-country resettlement, an option that only exists for Afghan refugees in Pakistan, has also slowed. Given the deteriorating security situation in Pakistan, in 2013 about 900 Afghan refugees filed for asylum abroad, though UNHCR would have to ascertain the eligibility of applicants first through their Refugees Status Determination

¹⁰⁰. Koser 2014, STATT 2013, Schmeidl 2014

¹⁰¹. UNHCR, September 2013, p.28

¹⁰². Tyler 2014, p. 20

(RDS).¹⁰³ But many Western states are no longer as welcoming to refugees and asylum seekers in general and Afghans might be slotted behind more pressing caseloads from the conflicts in the Middle East.

If destinations are less likely to change, it is more the numbers or types of migration (refugees vs. economic, labour vs. education migration, and so on) which are likely to. As some migration channels close, others may open up, in a constant dance between those wishing to migrate and those wishing to prevent it. Here, the political economy of opportunities in the form of external policies that help shape or hinder migration into a certain direction, but also a migrant's socio-economic status as to where he or she might be able to go, needs to be taken into account.¹⁰⁴ Migration, after all, whether internal or external, has to be paid for and it is often the poorest that stay behind, either in rural areas or inside a country, when out-migration proves too costly. This provides a stratification of who goes where and more importantly who remain, who are often the poorest of the poor.

4.1. Internal Displacement - The Rush to Afghanistan's Cities

The 6.4 million Afghans that have moved within their country are by and large (»60%) rural to urban, with IDPs and other migrants gravitating towards the bigger cities for better security, access to services and livelihoods. Refugees often return straight to Afghanistan's larger cities (Kabul, Jalalabad, Kandahar, Herat and Mazar-e-Sharif) instead of going home, or move at a later point in time when livelihoods or services become unavailable, or security deteriorates. This trend of displaced populations moving into Afghanistan's major urban centres is very likely to continue, especially considering the growing insecurity in many rural areas and an inability of the Afghan government to provide services much outside urban centres. The refusal to accept that IDPs will settle permanently in the Afghan cities, once they left, has been fittingly termed a "*de facto policy of denial*."¹⁰⁵

Afghanistan's cities, especially the capital, Kabul, have experienced rapid growth over the past decade, much above the regional average for Asia. Kabul, with an estimated 7.2 million urban dwellers in 2011 (close to 30% of the entire population), is considered to be one of the fastest growing cities in the region,¹⁰⁶ having grown three-fold over the six years from 2001 (1.5 million) to 2007 (4.5 million), with some estimates putting the figure at 7.2 million urban dwellers in 2011.¹⁰⁷

Other Afghan major cities also attract refugee returnees, IDPs and migrants.¹⁰⁸ For example, already in 2010 a vast gap existed between official and unofficial population estimates of Kandahar City, the major urban centre in Afghanistan's south - 507,400 vs. 1.5 million - with the difference largely attributed to urban poor, refugee returnees, settled Kuchi and unregistered IDPs.¹⁰⁹ Similarly, estimates for Jalalabad, Nangarhar (the major regional city in Afghanistan's east), ranged anywhere from 206,500 to 1 million, though the latter is likely closer to the truth, given the extreme urban sprawl.¹¹⁰

Many government officials have informally estimated that about 70% of the urban population in Kabul resides in so called 'informal settlements' - slum-like dwellings at the fringes of the city - with similar assumptions being made about other major cities in Afghanistan (especially Kandahar, Herat and Jalalabad).¹¹¹

103. Shah 2014

104. Van Hear et al. 2012, p.25

105. Amnesty International 2012 as cited in Roehrs 2013

106. Beall and Esser 2005, p.11

107. Giovacchini 2011, p.4

108. World Bank and UNHCR 2011

109. Schmeidl et al. 2010, p.35

110. Giovacchini 2013

111. Communication with Housing, Land & Property Task Force Coordinator, UN-HABITAT Afghanistan, 22 January 2014

A majority of the urban displaced (76%) are relatively recent arrivals (post 2002), with over 40% having been displaced for more than five years, making it a protracted displacement situation.¹¹² Some studies also estimate that a quarter of urban IDPs are returning refugees who end up in secondary displacement.¹¹³ Thus, the major difference between individuals living in urban areas is less whether they have been previously displaced or not, than the duration of displacement and time of arrival.¹¹⁴

4.2. "Oh Brother, Where Art Thou?" Migration Destinations and Enclave Building

It is important not to forget the historical circumstances of a population's migration/displacement history and the interconnectivity it brings to places they may have once travelled to. "*Histories of trans-societal interrelation remind us of how individual actions have often had long-term and distant consequences.*"¹¹⁵ In migration literature, this is often called "enclave building", which lowers the cost of migration to a specific destination due to existing networks of specific population groups.¹¹⁶ Furthermore, unless drastic barriers are put up, migration streams to certain enclaves will continue in different modes. For example, those with resources have already begun to move their families to Dubai,¹¹⁷ or are in the process of setting up doing so. Others may look into study-abroad options, marrying their children off to Afghans in the West, or paying smugglers to get abroad, with Turkey, Indonesia, and Tajikistan being some prominent "through fares".¹¹⁸

As Figure 5 illustrates, of the estimated 6.7 million Afghans working and living abroad, a vast majority (over 5.7 million or 84%) are in South Asia (81% in the two neighbouring countries of Pakistan and Iran and another 3% in India). Another 5% are working and living in the Gulf States, about 3% in Central Asia, leaving only 9% to be found in the wider Diaspora in Europe, North America and Australasia. This is significant if we consider some of the fears of Western countries regarding another great Afghan exodus coming their way. This suggests that while Afghans will continue to move, a majority of their movement will still be within the region.

112. World Bank and UNHCR 2011, p.20

113. Ibid, IDMC March and December 2013

114. Metcalfe et al. 2012

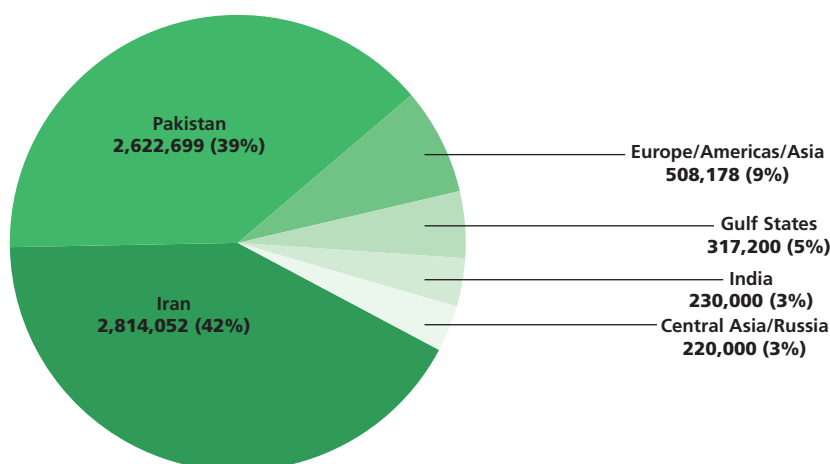
115. Kresse and Liebau 2013, p.1

116. Monsutti 2005

117. Wigglesworth 2010

118. Hasrat-Nazimi 2013

Figure 5: Overview of Location of Afghans Abroad (various sources)



4.2.1. Destination South Asia: Pakistan, Iran and India

Pakistan and Iran

Of the estimated 6.7 million Afghans working and living abroad, a majority (5.4 million or 81%) are found in the two neighbouring countries of Pakistan and Iran. The fact there are now about 200,000 more Afghans in Iran than Pakistan has reversed a historical trend where the latter bore the displacement burden in the region.

The Afghans in these two countries are divided into refugees/asylum seekers (2.6 million) and migrant workers of semi-legal status (3 million), though number of undocumented migrants is far higher in Iran than in Pakistan (1.4 vs. 1 million respectively). There are also smaller numbers of students in Pakistan - about 1,500 according to one source - with the claim that *"some 31,000 Afghan students have graduated from Pakistani universities, funded under older scholarship schemes or on a self-financing basis, and are now back in their own country."*¹¹⁹ It is, however, also likely that several of these students would come from the refugee pool. Furthermore, an unknown number of Afghans travel to Pakistan frequently to see family members or seek medical treatment.

In contrast to Iran, about half of all undocumented migrants in Pakistan have been recently provided with short-term visa, work permits or some other travel documents.¹²⁰ Furthermore, according UNHCR spokesperson Adrian Edwards, *"The Government of Pakistan, with UNHCR assistance, has begun issuing new refugee cards to more than 1.6 million registered Afghan refugees. These Proof of Registration cards are valid till the end of 2015."*¹²¹

The legal status for Afghans in Iran is far more precarious, with only a little over 800,000 being registered as refugees (asylum seekers are only 37 in number). There are another 400,000 to 600,000 holding temporary visas (many of whom get deported when they expire), while the rest, the vast majority (1.4 million), are undocumented migrant workers.¹²²

Among those moving abroad, it is unlikely that Pakistan and Iran will wither dramatically as destination countries, given the numerous facilitating factors at play, regardless of the obstacles of Iran's faltering economy and an increasing negative stance against Afghan refugees in Pakistan.¹²³ The fact that both countries have hosted Afghans for decades (and hence family ties exist), given that their economies are still greater and with more opportunities than Afghanistan's, and in the light of the inadequacy of health care in Afghanistan, there are enough incentives for migration to continue. Especially as the knowledge of how to avert possible obstacles likely outweighs disincentives the countries may continue to put in place.

Proximity should also not be underestimated as a facilitating factor, either, as both countries can be reached without having to board a plane, with the Afghan-Pakistan border being especially porous and hard to control. Considerable cultural ties (such as religion, ethnic background) between Afghanistan and the two neighbouring countries should also not be underestimated. Last but not least, the pull factor needs mention: *"Both the Iranian and Pakistani economies are also structurally dependent on cheap migrant labour."*¹²⁴

119. Khan 2012

120. Koser 2014

121. UNHR, February 2014

122. Human Rights Watch, September 2013

123. Koser 2014, STATT 2013

124. Van Hear et al. 2012, p.25

Then again, both Iran and Pakistan have become less inviting to an Afghan influx than in the early years. Both countries have strongly focused on removing Afghans from their territories over the past years, both through disincentives such as “restriction on Afghan access to labour markets, even by registered refugee populations”¹²⁵ as well as via direct push factors.

Undocumented migrants are regularly deported from both Iran and Pakistan, though much less from the latter, showing the constant volume of in-flow into these countries despite risks. In 2013, a total of 100,033 Afghans were deported from Iran (and another 9,489 from Pakistan).¹²⁶ These figures were higher for Iran in 2012 with 258,146 Afghans deported and lower in Pakistan, with 7,114 deported.¹²⁷ Pakistan is less open about admitting to deportations than Iran and may use verbal threats over physical removal.¹²⁸

Deportations, however, might only be a nuisance if migrants are still able to re-enter once expelled. One study found that Iran’s deportation practise had limited impact on curbing Afghan irregular and illegal migration, mostly because “the cost and restraints imposed on regularised migration mean that it is both cheaper and easier to risk repeated deportation rather than pay for permits.”¹²⁹ Rather than curbing in-migration, lacking legal migration channels might actually encourage longer or even permanent illegal residency stays on the margins of Iranian society in the future.¹³⁰ This means that Afghans simply circulate back into Iran, despite a devaluation of the Iranian currency, in all likelihood because conditions are still better there than in Pakistan (given the deteriorating security situation and increasingly hostile treatment of Afghan refugees).

All this might shift the hosting burden disproportionately toward Iran, as figures already suggest (42% vs. 39% of Afghans in country), reversing the trend of past decades where Pakistan shared most of the Afghan migration burden. With established smuggling channels, Iran will also remain a transit to Turkey and Europe, both directly from the western border and circling around through Pakistan’s Balochistan province.¹³¹

While Pakistan will continue to receive Afghans –especially from its Pashtun ethnic group– it is becoming less attractive as a place for medium-term or permanent residency¹³² particularly from non-Pashtuns such as the Hazara Shia and the Hindu/Sikh minorities which are all three treated badly. One should, however, not underestimate the increasing tensions between the two countries, and the deterioration of security in the Pashtun belt, making Pakistan less and less attractive even for (Afghan) Pashtuns.

Even if Pakistan is no longer as attractive as final destination¹³³, it is important as a main transit country for people to be smuggled to Europe and North America. A 2009 study by the autonomous Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP) “recorded thousands of cases of human trafficking through Quetta from 2005 to 2008, including cases involving Afghans who had set out from Kabul.”¹³⁴ Furthermore, UNHCR still manages its rapid resettlement programme for refugees at risk (e.g., women or minorities) out of Pakistan, making it still the easiest location in the region to apply for on-ward asylum. This, however, might be one of the best-kept secrets, as UNHCR is not allowed to advertise that this programme exists and promotes return as the “preferred” durable solution.¹³⁵

125. Ibid, p.27-8

126. UNHCR, November 2013

127. Ibid

128. Schmeidl and Maley 2008

129. Van Hear et al. 2012, p.27

130. Ibid

131. STATT 2013, p.15

132. Ibid, p.13, Koser 2014

133. Voice of America 2012

134. Integrated Regional Information Networks [IRIN from here on] 2012, p.14

135. Chattha 2013, p.12

India

Albeit hosting far fewer Afghans than Iran and Pakistan, India still receives around 230,000 visitors over the years. Though Afghans have migrated to India in the past, mostly elite en route to Europe, it has started to replace Pakistan and Iran as neighbouring country of choice for those seeking education and health care. For now, a majority of Afghans (87%) still seem to travel to India on a short term basis only, facilitated by accessible visa rules since 2005, especially for medical treatment. According to the Indian Embassy in Kabul, over 100,000 medical visas were issued just since the beginning of 2010 alone, about half the number of total visas for travel to India from Afghanistan in those three years. *“These medical visas are free and do not require applicants to provide financial statements or proof of medical insurance.”*¹³⁶

Smaller numbers include refugees and asylum seekers (about 11,000), residents (18,000; possibly from the Hindu/Sikh minority in Afghanistan) and student visas. According to two independent sources from the Afghan government, the Afghan student numbers in India are estimated at about 5,500, of whom only 300 are women,¹³⁷ though one Indian newspaper speaks of 10,000 students.¹³⁸ A portion of these students are supported by scholarships provided by the Indian Council for Cultural Relations (675 out of a total of 2,325 awarded in total), the largest of any nationality.¹³⁹

Future inflow into India is also prone to continue, in the framework of a Strategic Partnership Agreement signed in 2011,¹⁴⁰ though the Indian government may emphasize facilitation of short-term and educational travels as in the past, and discourage more permanent migration/refugee in-flows. For now, the Indian government is putting numerous restrictions on refugees and asylum seekers to India, such as not being allowed to work, thereby making the country less attractive for a more permanent relocation.¹⁴¹

For some migrants, India also functions as stepping-stone, a chance to study in English so they can go to Europe, the US or Canada for further studies and jobs.¹⁴² This was already practised in the past when elites fled Afghanistan via India and made their way into Europe and North America. *“Many families tell stories of a brother or son who has gone to India to find an illicit path abroad or who is trying another escape plan.”*¹⁴³

4.2.2. Destination Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC)

With an estimated 320,000 Afghans in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Saudi Arabia, the region almost ties with Europe in the hosting of Afghans. This figure however could be possibly twice as large. One source put the Afghan migrant worker figure in Dubai as high as 600,000,¹⁴⁴ but two other sources put them closer to 300,000.¹⁴⁵ Another study found that Afghan workers in the Gulf countries often hold fake Pakistani passports,¹⁴⁶ and given there are about 950,000 Pakistani estimated to work in the UAE in 2013,¹⁴⁷ the 600,000 estimate of Afghan workers sounds at least plausible. The UAE tends not to be forthcoming in sharing labour migration statistics, and much of the migration is either illegal or falls under the heavily criticized *kafala* system, which allows Gulf countries to skirt counting them under official labour migration statistics.¹⁴⁸

¹³⁶. Bearak 2013

¹³⁷. Khan 2012; Das, 3 June 2013

¹³⁸. Times of India 2014

¹³⁹. Das 2013

¹⁴⁰. Times of India 2014

¹⁴¹. Associated Press 2013

¹⁴². Deutsche Welle 2011

¹⁴³. Bowley 2013

¹⁴⁴. Afghans Abroad (no date provided)

¹⁴⁵. Shahbandari 2012; Soufan Group 2014; Malit and Youh 2013

¹⁴⁶. Overfeld and Zumot 2010

¹⁴⁷. Malit and Youh 2013

¹⁴⁸. Human Rights Watch 2013

All but 17,227 of these Afghans are said to live and work in the United Arab Emirates, and are a mix of migrant workers (likely the vast majority) and wealthy Afghans (either businessmen or middle-class Afghans with a background in working for international or non-governmental organizations) holding residency in Dubai and Abu Dhabi.¹⁴⁹ If one 'follows the money', then Afghan migration to Dubai will continue in the future. In 2011/12, reportedly "\$4.6 billion fled [Afghanistan to Dubai] via the airport, a sum equal to almost one-quarter of the country's gross domestic product. The year before, \$2.3 billion in cash left via the airport."¹⁵⁰

4.2.3. Destination West: Europe, North America and Australasia

For many Afghans, the west is often still the most coveted destination, for education, health care, but above all as a long-term destination. This is why smugglers have specialized on these routes¹⁵¹ and Afghan families often pool funds into financing the smuggling of one young man (often under the age of 18) to make it the West, with the hope for reunifications later. Part of the attraction to the West is the already extensive Afghan enclaves which exist in these countries.

Europe

There are currently about 330,000 Afghans living and working in Europe, with a majority (59%) found in Germany (34%) and the UK (25%), followed by the Netherlands, Austria, Denmark, Sweden, and Norway (30%); and with a further 11% in about 25 other countries. If one adds the through-routes of Turkey and Greece to the figures for Europe, the total jumps to 370,000. Turkey in particular has seen a rising influx of Afghan asylum seekers hoping to make it to Europe (about 26,000 in 2013).

The bulk of Afghans living in Europe now are naturalized citizens, with 37% still counted as refugees and asylum seekers: (41% if one was to include Turkey and Greece). This opens the route for entry through marriage visas and family reunification. Though figures are hard to obtain, anecdotal evidence and observations by the author suggest that the trend is at least on the rise over the past 6-7 years.¹⁵² One study found that "*family reunification is one of the most common ways to immigrate to Europe today. This means that immigration laws in host countries have transformed immigrant youth into virtual human visas ... giving families incentives to use marriage to work around the European immigration system.*"¹⁵³

Furthermore, over the past year, Europe has once more become "*the destination for a large number of Afghan asylum-seekers, some coming directly from Afghanistan, while many arrive in Europe after stays in the Islamic Republic of Iran or Pakistan;*"¹⁵⁴ many being under-age unaccompanied boys.¹⁵⁵ Often times this requires the work of smugglers and comes at quite some cost. According to one study, "*Afghans who can afford to do so will pay as much as up to \$24,000 for European travel documents and as much as \$40,000 for Canadian ones, with visas to the United States, are generally not for sale.*" Some migrants, the study continues, "*employ smugglers for arduous overland treks from Iran to Turkey to Greece, or from Russia to Belarus to Poland.*"¹⁵⁶

¹⁴⁹.Shahbandari 2012; Soufan Group 2014; Malit and Youh 2013

¹⁵⁰.Najafizada 2012

¹⁵¹.Mogelson 2013, AREU 2014

¹⁵².Though always an occurrence, I have heard of an increasing number of colleagues or their friends and family members marrying Afghans from abroad, most with the clear intention to immigrate once the marriage visa was obtained. Not all come from the middle class, and I have also seen some occurrences of refugees returning from Europe to marry locally.

¹⁵³.Ben-David 2009

¹⁵⁴.UNHCR 2014c; Mougne 2010

¹⁵⁵.Mougne 2010, IRIN 2010 and 2013

¹⁵⁶.Mogelson 2013

Although, exact numbers are difficult to provide,¹⁵⁷ the European Commission has observed a rising trend in unaccompanied minors arriving in the European Union (12,225 in 2011; 10,845 in 2010; 12,245 in 2009 and 11,715 in 2008), at least 40-50% being from Afghanistan.¹⁵⁸ UNHCR also observed a rising trend, with 21,300 recorded in 2012 (also including Somali youth; the highest since UNHCR started counting).¹⁵⁹

Not all make it, however. One study reported that *1,500 Afghan nationals were refused entry to the European Union between 2008 and 2011, the majority turned-back along Italy's border.*¹⁶⁰ Furthermore, the smuggling carries an added concern of bondage as outcome. Increasing numbers of men, women, and children in Afghanistan pay intermediaries to assist them in finding employment in Iran, Pakistan, India, Europe, or North America; some of these intermediaries force Afghan citizens into labor or prostitution after their arrival.¹⁶¹

Turkey

Turkey is considered another major through-route for Afghan migrants aiming to reach Europe, with Afghan smugglers established there to aide on-travel.¹⁶² Others simply try to reach Turkey (or Greece) as entrance into Europe for seeking asylum in other countries. "In recent years, Iraqi and Afghan refugees crossed several European states in order to claim asylum in Sweden and Norway, countries which have more liberal asylum laws."¹⁶³

Turkey, however, might be soon more than simply a transit point. There are already an increasing number of Afghans studying in Turkey, and in 2009, the Afghan government announced its plan to increase its student scholarship to Turkey and India to 1,000 students (allocating USD 10 million).¹⁶⁴ Furthermore, some Afghans might look to Turkey as a cheaper alternative to Dubai, as well as one that is easier to reach than Europe and North America. Sales of Turkish property to overseas buyers soared in 2013, after legal changes that make it easier for foreigners to own property and offered them the possibility of securing residency. The Turkish government did not respond to a request by a journalist for details of property purchases by Afghans, but was told by people familiar with the matter that *"there has been a significant uptick in buying – including by dozens of prominent people inside and outside government."*¹⁶⁵

North America and Australasia

These farther-off destinations are the home of nearly 200,000 Afghans; with a majority living in North America (140,000). Within North America, the United States is host to the largest diaspora some putting the US figures at par with Europe.¹⁶⁶ This 300,000 estimate of Afghans living in the US, however, seems more of a self-estimate by the Afghan community as official figures from UNHCR and census would put the number much closer to 90,000.¹⁶⁷ Another 50,000 Afghans are found in Canada, and a negligible number of refugees and asylum seekers is scattered across various Latin/South American countries.

Aside from a few thousand student visas (though breakdowns of the 3,500 students studying in Europe, North America and Australia were not found), there are relatively few refugees and asylum seekers (less

¹⁵⁷. European Commission 2012

¹⁵⁸. Ibid

¹⁵⁹. UNHCR, June 2013

¹⁶⁰. Siegel 2013

¹⁶¹. U.S. Department of State 2013

¹⁶². Conversation with researcher who had interviewed Afghan smuggler in Turkey, April 2014

¹⁶³. Ben-David 2009

¹⁶⁴. ICEF Monitor, 9 April 2012

¹⁶⁵. Peel 2014

¹⁶⁶. Koser 2014

¹⁶⁷. U.S. Census Bureau 2011, UNHCR 2014b

than 5,000), with a majority of Afghans being naturalized citizens by now. As in Europe, this opens the route of marriage immigration and educational scholarships such as the Fulbright programme to the United States. Many scholarship programmes specifically target women as well.¹⁶⁸

Asia

Last but not least, not counting the few Afghans scattered in Africa, the last geographic region hosting Afghans is Asia (32,000), two-thirds living in Australia, followed by Indonesia (also seen as through-route to Australia) and New Zealand. Again, those who managed to obtain citizenship (73%) far outnumber refugees, asylum seekers and students.

Australia is ahead of all countries in aggressively trying to curb the arrival of what they deem to be illegal migrants via boats. This includes third country processing for asylum seekers who arrive by boat (May 2013) and third country settlement (the Pacific Solution), with the promise not to settle any person who arrives to Australia via boat.¹⁶⁹ This came after more Afghan asylum seekers had arrived by boat in 2013 than 2011 (4,243 vs. 1,601 Afghans respectively).¹⁷⁰

These obstacles, however, might not mean that Afghan migration to Australia will be lower, as Afghans may simply try for more formal channels such as student scholarships, marriage visas or formal resettlement programmes, instead.

4. 2. 4. Destination Central Asia

After the Gulf States, estimates of Afghans living in the general of Central Asian/Eurasian/Caucasus were the second most difficult to find.

While one source suggested that as many as 150,000 live in Russia, another put this figure for all of Central Asia/Russia.¹⁷¹ Of the 220,000 estimated to live and work in the region, a majority (68% or 151,300)¹⁷² can be found in the Russian Federation and Tajikistan (28% or 61,000)¹⁷³, with the rest (around 7,000) living in Uzbekistan and other Central Asian states. Those in Russia are by and large naturalized former refugees, while in the other Central Asia states they include refugees, asylum seekers (likely in the waiting to move onward to Europe or North America), illegal migrants, as well as some businessmen and students.

Although Afghans have flocked to Tajikistan in the past, and it is likely the easiest Central Asian country to enter from Afghanistan, it is not clear this trend will continue. Generally, the significant number of businessmen, few thousands of refugees, and few students are treated badly by the Tajik government and population alike, despite sharing the same ethnic background, mostly because it is resented that Afghans might have a ticket out as asylum seekers, an opportunity not open to many Tajiks.¹⁷⁴ Similar attitudes prevail in other Central Asian nations, such as Uzbekistan who views Afghans as uneducated and linked to crime and drug trafficking. Notwithstanding these obstacles, some migration will certainly continue –especially as transit route from Afghanistan to Russia and Europe¹⁷⁵– though it is unlikely numbers will increase.

¹⁶⁸. <https://www.facebook.com/KabulEducationUSA/notes>

¹⁶⁹. Australian Human Rights Commission [no date provided]

¹⁷⁰. Koser 2014, p.19

¹⁷¹. Fitrat 2007

¹⁷². Ferris-Rotman 2011

¹⁷³. World Bank 2014

¹⁷⁴. Bleuer and Kazemi 2014, p.28

¹⁷⁵. STATT 2013, p.15

5. Meet the Afghan 'Migrants'

Displacement scholars have long observed roughly three basic waves of forced migration.

The first (or anticipatory migrants) tend to be elites, the second are mostly male urban dwellers and only the very last wave consists of a mix of people caught in the cross-fire of rapidly unfolding political violence, often including large numbers of women and children.¹⁷⁶ The first two migration categories are a form of preventative displacement (hence often put into the voluntary category) while the last is more clearly in direct responses to threat. Estimates are easier to find for the last category of displacement, because it seems to fall much better into existing definitions of what IDPs and/or refugees should look like. Furthermore, the latter are more often than not bigger groups of people, such as families, while the preventive form of displacement is by and large limited to individuals—in Afghanistan disproportionately men.

At present, one could argue Afghanistan is observing the first two migration flows (though only partially as refugee migration) for those seeking better lives and livelihoods abroad, with elites moving their families to Dubai, politically astute Afghans going abroad for studies with the potential to stay on. A third option is to arrange marriages between exile Afghans with nationality of the host country to those from Afghanistan. The latter is facilitated by a rather large Afghan refugee population abroad.

The second wave could be viewed as consisting of the many irregular labour migrants identified – and available estimates are clear, they are largely young men. The more mass wave is at present mostly observed inside Afghanistan, when families pick up and flee insecurity and violence and seek safe refuge in the bigger cities. This already shows that internal migration is more advanced than international one or that cross-border migration has simply become more difficult than in past decades.

Even though much of this irregular migration might still be circular - "*temporary movements of a repetitive character either formally or informally across borders, usually for work, involving the same migrants. [... or when] the diaspora in destination countries, engage in back and forth movements*"¹⁷⁷ - it could become more permanent if conditions in Afghanistan deteriorate. Furthermore it is worth remembering that migration to Iran and Pakistan is often seen as a stepping-stone to other destinations, such as migrants from Faryab province wishing to secure enough funds in Iran for smuggling to Turkey and onwards to Europe.¹⁷⁸

The following general categories by no means cover all Afghan migrants, but they are nevertheless the groups that are already on the move or are very prone to become so. Policymakers wishing to address outmigration would need to address the needs of these specific groups.

Young Men - The Vanguard of Afghan Migrants: One of the largest migrant categories in Afghanistan is young men from all ethnic groups, educational background and walks of life. The more educated will be the ones studying abroad, either in countries in the region or the west. The less educated join the troves of migrant workers with destinations in Pakistan, Iran and the GCCs.¹⁷⁹ Those from families who can afford

¹⁷⁶.Schmeidl and Piza-Lopez 2002, Ferris 1987

¹⁷⁷.Wickramasekara 2011, p. 1

¹⁷⁸.The Liaison Office 2014

¹⁷⁹.NRVA 2011-12

it will engage smugglers to bring them to western shores. Most of the unaccompanied child migrants pushing into Europe are also boys. Lastly, many men may leave their families in asylum countries (such as Pakistan) and return to Afghanistan to work or move them Dubai while commuting to Kabul. Even in some informal settlements, men might either arrive alone or families move into a settlement, while a male family member stays behind to tend land or to work (including fighting with armed groups).

A specific group of predominantly male out-migrants is that of Afghan interpreters who had worked with international military forces. Many NATO member states, such as the US, UK, Australia and Germany have such special visa programmes, and often it is the entire nuclear family of the Afghan interpreter that is able to migrate, though there are also complaints of visas being denied and delayed.¹⁸⁰ Numbers vary, though some speak of several hundred to possibly a few thousands (especially if family member are counted in).

A key reason why Afghan men disproportionately make up external migrants is that culturally women's movement is still far more restricted than that of men. Women often are not allowed to venture into the public sphere without being accompanied by a male chaperone (*mahram*). As honour plays a big role in Afghan culture, women are thus seen as being protected by being kept at home.¹⁸¹

Middle and Upper Classes - Those Who Can Afford to Move. Mobility needs to be first and foremost affordable. This disproportionately favours those that have the means to pick up and leave, or who as a family are able to pool funds to send at least one young man abroad. One author observes that "*the richest Afghans already have second homes abroad and can leave if security worsens.*"¹⁸²

Labour migration aside, where young (poor) men dominate, migrants often come from better-off families. This is especially true for those seeking to arrive abroad.¹⁸³ The correlation between the socio-economic status and distance travelled stratifies migration, given the ability of the wealthiest migrants to travel out of the region and towards greater opportunities.¹⁸⁴

Many Afghan elites (old and new) as well as those from a middle class that were able to benefit from the international engagement (and the employment that came with it) have begun to buy property in Dubai or Turkey.¹⁸⁵ This is once again a way to spread risk or hedge bets, given the current unfavourable political, security and economic climate in Afghanistan. For instance, "*as of early January 2014, the continued transfer of capital by Afghanistan's elites to the UAE points to persistent uncertainty among them about their country's future as US and allies prepare for draw down post-2014.*"¹⁸⁶

Educated Elite and Professionals - Those With Skills to Sell. Another migration category are those with the education and skills that can provide them with better employment. Currently in Afghanistan, professionals are extremely underpaid. For example, university professors make less than \$2 per hour in Afghanistan, and licensed physicians make about \$100 a month working in a government hospital.¹⁸⁷ Others are simply

¹⁸⁰.Zucchini 2014

¹⁸¹.Beath *et al.* 2012

¹⁸².Bowley 2013

¹⁸³.Hossaini 2013

¹⁸⁴.Van Hear *et al.* 2012, p.25

¹⁸⁵.Peel 2014, Najafizada 2012, Soufan Group 2014

¹⁸⁶.Soufan Group 2014

¹⁸⁷.Hasrat-Nazimi 2013

accustomed to obtaining a certain compensation for work rendered, and are having difficulty adjusting to lower wages that come with transition, especially in the development industry.¹⁸⁸ A final group may simply not wish to live in an Afghanistan where they feel that progressive thinkers and moderates are discriminated against. As one person put it: *“Educated people can’t live in this country, only the mafia and warlords. You pay a high price when you are in constant fear for your life and that of your husband and children.”*¹⁸⁹

The past decade has created a skilled labour force working in international and national (non-governmental) organizations, which the Afghan Ministry of Economy estimates as high as 50,000 skilled Afghans.¹⁹⁰ Many already struggle to find employment or are taking pay-cuts into account. Others have looked into education abroad, while yet others are considering more permanent relocation. The French consulate in Afghanistan, for example, stated that [in 2012] demand was up for visas from all EU countries that have missions in Afghanistan.¹⁹¹

Another group are educated Afghans who returned home either under the IOM skilled return programme or on their own volition, to take up jobs in the development industry or with Afghan government ministries. While Afghan government officials are generally paid only a few hundred US\$, the World Bank and donor schemes have supplemented salaries or paid advisors extremely well. Estimates vary widely, with some speaking of about 5,000 government staff *“whose salaries are paid by foreign money”*¹⁹² while other cite World Bank statistics [of] 106,000 Afghans working in key ministries are paid through donor funds.¹⁹³ Many are unlikely willing to remain on regular government salaries, especially if they are able to go back ‘home’ to the West to similarly well paid employment.

Women - Those With the Most to Lose. Though it was noted earlier that men disproportionately make up Afghanistan’s migrants, young women (especially if educated and coming from more liberal urban families) are also beginning to make their way abroad, for education, health care, and at times to leave altogether. There are fears that especially educated urban women, with the most to lose if rights regress, have started to look towards leaving for the West.¹⁹⁴ Although figures will likely be lower than those for men, an outmigration of outspoken women can bring setbacks for Afghanistan’s development as a society and an economy.

Women wishing to access education or jobs already are increasingly leaving rural areas to move to cities. Others are planning to do so, especially if the Taliban were to return. Many do not wish to once again have their rights severely restricted - once being more than enough.¹⁹⁵ Womens’ outmigration is facilitated by specialized targeted educational scholarship programmes as well as by UNHCR’s rapid resettlement for groups at risk (and women are more often than not put into this category).

The Young and the Restless - Those With the Greatest Aspirations. Although this category overlaps with others, it does deserve a special mention. 67% of the estimated 30 million Afghans are under the age of 25, and youth also dominate in the key internal migration destination: Afghan cities.¹⁹⁶ This suggests that young adults (15-24) tend to be drawn to urban centres regardless of their families’ residence.

¹⁸⁸. Carberry 2012

¹⁸⁹. Hasrat-Nazimi 2013

¹⁹⁰. Carberry 2012

¹⁹¹. Agence France-Presse 2012

¹⁹². Bowley 2013

¹⁹³. Carberry 2012

¹⁹⁴. McVeigh 2012, Hasrat-Nazimi 2013

¹⁹⁵. Conversation with Teacher from Paktia, 2012

¹⁹⁶. NRVA 2011-12

Young adults in Afghanistan have already grown up with a collective unease; worrying that the coming decade will mirror the last. The hope in the early years of the Karzai administration has increasingly diminished, after all for many adolescents most of their young lives, things have not improved enough and there is no promising outlook in the next few years. Especially for those from more progressive families already in urban areas, and with a certain education level, the feeling is increasingly that their future lies elsewhere - even if just temporarily - as living in Afghanistan is effectively living without a future.¹⁹⁷ Afghanistan's intelligentsia is growing fast in tandem with a 'youth bulge' in which young people are a high proportion of the overall population. It is also expanding in a tenuous and uncertain social and political environment, with limited prospects for socio-economic and political integration and mobility.¹⁹⁸

6. The Impact on Afghanistan and Its Neighbours

There are several internal outcomes that can be expected from the current displacement, two of which are already in motion: first, over-urbanization and slum-development in the Afghan cities and secondly, brain-drain of an educated and younger generation. Together they create a potential toxic mix, where young educated individuals (predominantly men) in cities are replaced by young uneducated and unemployed individuals. If this toxic mix is unaddressed, it can lead to third negative impact: rising crime. Some, however, argue that out-migration is not all negative, as migrants might return with a better education and skills to help their country and/or send remittances back home helping to keep poverty at bay.

The main external outcome to be expected is that especially countries in the region will continue to have to bear the Afghan migration burden. While the economies of some countries will benefit from cheap labour (e.g., Pakistan and Iran) and others welcome the money that comes with elite migrants (such as Dubai, but also India in terms of medical treatment), not all will view increased Afghan out-migration as positive, especially those fearing that Afghans bring with them crime and terrorist potential.

6.1. Urban Sprawl and Growing Urban Poverty

As highlighted earlier, the last decade has already witnessed rapid urban growth in Afghanistan, driven by rapid population growth, large-scale refugee return into urban areas due to lacking livelihoods and services in rural areas as well as growing insecurity pushing people into the city in search for security and access to services. Ahead of all is Afghanistan's capital Kabul, which has witnessed a population explosion from around 1.5 million in 2001¹⁹⁹ to the present estimated 7.2 million today.²⁰⁰ A 2013 article cited the Mayor of Kabul as planning for a city of 8 million.²⁰¹

The minority in this urban sprawl, however, are educated and well-off elites. There are estimates that informal settlements where IDPs, refugee returnees, and impoverished rural-urban migrants mix, account for as much as 70% of Kabul and many other large Afghan cities.²⁰²

¹⁹⁷.Latifi 2013

¹⁹⁸.Ibrahimi 2014, p.2

¹⁹⁹.Beall and Esser 2005

²⁰⁰.Giovacchini 2011, p.4

²⁰¹.Bowley 2013

²⁰².Koser 2014, Bowley 2013

Few cities, if any, could cope with such rapid growth, especially if the economic situation of incoming migrants is not contributing to urban economic growth. Rapid in-migration has been testing the absorption capacity of major Afghan cities as service delivery and government policy –as elsewhere in the developing world– has not yet caught up with the challenges of growing urban poverty, forcing urban poor populations to struggle with poor basic services (water/sanitation, electricity, health care and education), lacking access to land and housing, as well as under- or unemployment in addition to food insecurity.²⁰³

Studies show that those living in informal settlements (especially with a displacement background) have a much higher illiteracy rate and lower school enrolment levels, lower household incomes, higher unemployment rates and high food insecurity.²⁰⁴ Despite the high unemployment rate, or possibly also because of it, child labour is common, with boys as young as 6 years of age collecting trash and/or polishing shoes for money.²⁰⁵ This puts children at risk and keeps them from attending school. Furthermore, while poverty rates are higher in rural areas food security is worse inside the urban centres (34% vs. 29% in rural areas).²⁰⁶

Furthermore, a study found that young women in informal settlements are having their rights infringed more than when they were in their place of origin, although generally women in urban areas have greater mobility than elsewhere.²⁰⁷ This, however, did not account for the loss of protective networks that women have in rural areas, nor for the forms of seclusion men put onto women, when they are unsure of how to best protect them. Added to this is that poor, unemployed and frustrated men frequently resort to domestic violence and negative coping mechanisms, including saving on medical care by not treating female family members.

6.2. Brain-Drain vs. Brain Gain and the Importance of Remittances

Although Afghanistan is not yet one of the countries with a greater proportion of the high-skilled labour force living abroad than at home, at 30%, it is well on its way.²⁰⁸ The fear of brain drain has been one of the main human impacts associated with the 2014 security transition in Afghanistan,²⁰⁹ though it was already raised in media as early as 2006.²¹⁰

One report argues that already two years ago, more Afghans were leaving the country than returning to it²¹¹ reversing the much applauded massive refugee return of earlier years. The loss of an educated elite - a mix of those that returned post 2001 or came to age during this time and benefitted from better education and skill-building opportunities - has been described as potentially depriving Afghanistan of *"a critical building block."*²¹² Indeed, one report argues that *"experts agree that the increasing number of educated workers, scholars and artists leaving Afghanistan poses a threat to the country's development. [...] You can compare the loss of a country's academic and cultural strength with a car that has no driver."*²¹³

Not all brain-drain, however, needs to be seen as negative and the literature has recently tried to reformulate the positive impact of out-migration on a country's development. One source goes as far as arguing that *"some Afghan emigrés actually contribute more to Afghanistan's social*

²⁰³.Majidi 2011

²⁰⁴.NRC/IDMC/Samuel Hall/JIPS 2012, World Bank and UNHCR 2011

²⁰⁵.Schmeidl et al. 2010

²⁰⁶.NRVA 2011-12

²⁰⁷.Tyler and Schmeidl 2014

²⁰⁸.United Nations Conference on Trade and Development [UNCTAD from hereon] 2012, p.94

²⁰⁹.Hasrat-Nazimi 2013

²¹⁰.Younossi 2006

²¹¹.Agence France-Presse 2012

²¹².Carberry 2012

²¹³.Hasrat-Nazimi 2013

and economic development by working abroad than they could do at home."²¹⁴ Afghans abroad might also form an effective lobby for continued attention and assistance to their country in the years to come. Another study, while acknowledging that *"the emigration of young men has caused long-term problems for the reconstruction"* of the country, still concludes that *"it is nevertheless a survival strategy that has proven effective."*²¹⁵ How effective this long-term survival strategy will be, however, remains to be seen.

First, out-migration can help bring advancements in education, given the current poor status of higher education in Afghanistan.²¹⁶ If those who study abroad return home, they come back with more knowledge than they left bring back, bringing useful skills that cannot be obtained at home.

Secondly, there is remittance flow to be considered, though here literature is somewhat divided as to whether this is positive or negative for a country's economy.²¹⁷ Some point to a wider benefit to the local economy, given there is multiplier effects of spending that comes from the household receiving remittances.²¹⁸ Others value *"businesses that trade with Afghan companies or employ Afghan workers."*²¹⁹

Some, however, warn that remittances can perpetuate existing social inequalities: like remittances from economic migrants, transfers from refugees in the wider diaspora are selective in their benefits, because such refugees tend to come from the better-off households among those displaced and to send money to those better-off households. Furthermore, the distribution is likely to have become still more skewed in recent years because of the rising costs associated with migration: long distance, intercontinental mobility is increasingly the preserve of those who can afford to pay migration agents' inflated fees.²²⁰

Generally it is difficult to obtain accurate data on remittances²²¹ and those available for Afghanistan are limited, showing no consistent trend.

Part of the problem is that (as noted earlier) some countries where Afghans reside, such as the United Arab Emirates, do not share data. However, neither does the Afghan government report incoming remittances, to either the World Bank or the International Monetary Fund.²²² The World Bank, however, does try to make estimates with information available to them,²²³ taking into account that the current state of disruption and uncertainty in financial services in Afghanistan²²⁴ makes available estimates incomplete, possibly only the tip of the iceberg.

This information that does exist tells us that in contrast to other countries in South Asia, where remittances have been of rising importance over the past years, Afghanistan on average receives lower amounts of remittances than other countries, both in total volume but also *per capita* (based on the receiving population, not the sending one) with Bangladesh, Pakistan and India far ahead of others. A World Bank estimates suggests that only about 15% of rural households in Afghanistan receive remittances from abroad, covering around 20% of the family's daily expenditure.²²⁵

- 214. Azimi 2012
- 215. Monsutti 2012
- 216. Ibrahim 2014
- 217. Monsutti 2012
- 218. Katseli et al. 2006, p.9
- 219. Azimi 2012
- 220. Van Hear 2003
- 221. Siegel et al. 2010, p.32
- 222. Siegel 2013
- 223. World Bank 2010 and 2014
- 224. Siegel et al. 2010
- 225. Siegel 2013

Although remittance are sent by people from the diasporas, as well as labour migrants, studies suggest that temporary migration tends to be more conducive to higher remittance flows than permanent settlement to the host country, especially when it involves low-skilled migrants, not accompanied by family members, who expect to return to their country of origin.²²⁶ This might simply be because of the larger number of labour migrants abroad, as it is in the case of Afghanistan. Some country policies might also restrict working, and hence remittance-generation, such as India, where Afghans don't have work permits. Many have trouble enrolling their children in school, or cannot obtain a local phone.²²⁷

Remittance data further shows that, although Iran accounts for the lion's share (66%) of the estimated 445 million remittances that arrived in Afghanistan in 2012, it is also the country that hosts most Afghan migrants, bringing the *per capita* remittance sent down to about US\$ 113. In contrast, Switzerland's Afghan Diaspora, which contributed less than 1% to overall remittances, provides the highest per capita remittance flow (US\$ 311). These calculations, however, are difficult to make, as not every Afghan abroad sends remittances home.

None the less, remittance flow to Afghanistan might not yet have reached its fullest potential. Only in more recent years did Western Union establish strategic alliances with Roshan in Afghanistan "to allow senders to remit funds directly to a recipient's mobile wallet from any of Western Union's agent locations worldwide".²²⁸ In contrast to other countries in the region, however, it is very unlikely that remittances are exceeding official development assistance in Afghanistan.²²⁹ In neighbouring Tajikistan, for example, "new statistics show migrant labor remittances are now equivalent to over half Tajikistan's GDP, crossing an important psychological threshold and emphasizing the Central Asian country's vulnerability to external shocks."²³⁰

Nevertheless, for a country with little other income-generating opportunities, remittances can still play a role. A study for the Dutch government found that as of 2005, "remittances were Afghanistan's third major source of externally-generated income behind opium production and trafficking and unregulated trade of legitimate goods; accounting for up to 3% of new investments that year."²³¹ With international assistance declining and more Afghans moving abroad, remittances may still come to play an important part in supporting the Afghan economy.

6.3. Generation "XYZ" – The Feared Youth Bulge, Migration-Security Nexus

Youth can be both a positive and negative force, as recent world history has shown with youth-instigated riots, uprisings and revolutions as part of the 'Arab Spring'. More often than not, however, youth, and also the migration of young men in particular, has been linked to crime, instability and also terrorism. One only needs to look at the discourse regarding foreign fighters with the Islamic State in Syria and Iraq. Unsurprising, there has also been a general discourse both in Iran and Pakistan that explains their increasing resistance to host more Afghan refugees, by blaming them for crime, insecurity and instability.²³² The Iranian government has even made a tenuous link between Afghan migrants and the drug trade.²³³

²²⁶. Katseli et al. 2006, p.9

²²⁷. Associated Press 2013

²²⁸. UNCTAD 2012, p.76

²²⁹. World Bank 2014

²³⁰. Trilling 2014

²³¹. Siegel et al. 2010, p.32

²³². International Crisis Group 2009

²³³. Ibid, p.15

Pakistan has recently turned up the heat on refugees with a local news outlet reporting *"that the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa police prepared a list of four thousand Afghan refugees allegedly involved in serious crimes"*; including terrorism.²³⁴ Central Asian countries fear spill-over conflict and the export of terrorism and extremism from Afghanistan.²³⁵ After all, the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) was once hosted by Afghanistan's Taliban government,²³⁶ and is again operating inside the country as ally of the Taliban insurgency.

Much of this, however, relies on scapegoating and scare tactics to justify tight immigration and asylum policies, and are used in many countries across the world. While migrants and refugees individually might seek crime and terrorism as an option, there are no studies that support that they are more prone to do so than others. What we should not forget is that migrants and displaced populations are extremely vulnerable, especially those travelling on their own, and that we should not confuse protection needs with law enforcement.

The problem, is not solely with a 'youth bulge' linked to rapid population growth, but when countries are unable to offer employment, education and future perspectives to their younger generation.²³⁷ If that sends them abroad in the search for work, they might be preyed upon by armed groups, such as some Taliban affiliates recruiting from within refugee camps in Pakistan, and recent reports that the Iranian government was recruiting Afghan Shia migrants to fight in Syria.²³⁸

Inside Afghanistan, the International Crisis Group (ICG), picked up in the Solutions Strategy, also warned about the impact of *"rapid urbanization that is contributing to rising poverty, unemployment and criminality"*²³⁹ that may drive young men into the arms of the insurgency or other armed groups. A 2010 study also highlighted the fact that internally displaced which do not receive assistance will find protection from local strongmen if needed.²⁴⁰ It furthermore warned that IDPs are easy prey for armed and insurgent groups. Anti-government groups in Afghanistan, but also pro-government militia, are getting increasingly young, with fighters often under the age of 30, including commanders. As one source put it: *"There aren't many suicide bombers over 20 years old."*²⁴¹

7. Conclusions

This paper has tried to emphasize that displacement will continue to shape the Afghan social and political landscape for years to come. With already nearly half of the Afghan population on the move (internally and cross-border), others have likely already considered an exit strategy for when the time has come to once more pick up, and seek security and livelihoods elsewhere.

Past displacement and migration has created international networks Afghans can draw upon. Furthermore, Afghans are more connected than ever (telephone, internet, social networks), with some estimating that there are as many as 18 million cell phone users in the country.²⁴² This has significantly improved the contact (and also reduced the perceived distance) between the Afghan Diaspora and migrants abroad with those in Afghanistan.²⁴³

²³⁴.The Nation 2014

²³⁵.Bleuer and Kazemi 2014

²³⁶.Ibid

²³⁷.Collier and Hoeffler 2001, Urdal 2004

²³⁸.Fassih 2014, Reuter 2014

²³⁹.International Crisis Group 2009, p.i

²⁴⁰.Schmeidl et al. 2010

²⁴¹.The National 2014

²⁴².Strøm-Erichsen 2013

²⁴³.Hossaini 2013

Many Afghans also no longer have the strong connection to their own country, let alone the land and livelihood, that would make them stay put.²⁴⁴ Having left before, they likely will do so again when the going gets tough. For those born abroad, departing may simply be returning to a place they are more familiar with.

While some argue that past displacement experience might lower the threshold for leaving,²⁴⁵ it can equally equip people with the experience of what to do and where to go, or at least how to weigh options.²⁴⁶ The personal experience of past displacement or migration and having spent considerable time abroad, often facilitates a decision to leave or thinking of other places as potential homes.²⁴⁷ Understanding how previous migration experiences impact on the future mobility of the Afghan population, as well as understanding new constraints put up by neighbouring countries,²⁴⁸ is key for policy makers to address future scenarios.

Part of the reluctance by international actors to accept a new displacement cycle in Afghanistan and abroad, as outlined here, may be linked to the United Nations being a member-state organization, with a majority of states still having international military operating in Afghanistan preparing for a draw-down by the end of 2014.²⁴⁹ For the military to acknowledge that more Afghans are currently leaving than returning, would mean to concede that their withdrawal was far from timely. Even those critical of the military intervention and presence in Afghanistan argue that its withdrawal by the end of 2014 comes at the wrong time.²⁵⁰

In an age of globalization, where people all over the world travel more than ever in the search for employment, education, safety and better livelihoods, a policy of denial is never the best one. Mobility as a survival strategy by many Afghans fits well into existing trends, though travelling abroad is far more contentious for Afghans than other nationals, as there is always the nagging fear that many may not intend to return home.²⁵¹

Thus, rather than fighting these migration trends that are clearly written on the wall, it is best to address them with policies that help establish legal migration channels and appropriate assistance,²⁵² particularly to those displaced within Afghanistan. The Afghan government, struggling on many fronts, has not yet made addressing displacement little alone brain-drain, one of its main policies, though there are hopes that the newly released *National Policy on Internally Displaced Persons* holds promise.²⁵³ This said, there is a dire need to do more, especially to add migration planning addressing growing urbanization and slum settlements due to rural-urban migration, into national development strategies and that of international donors. Addressing urban planning, finding employment opportunities and above all not marginalizing an increasingly disenfranchised young population is key.

However, not all solutions for the current migration dilemma can be dealt with inside Afghanistan. The international community would be well advised to revisit third-country resettlement programmes which are current inadequate to cope with a protracted displacement situation. In the end, if Afghans are unable to find security and livelihoods inside their own country or in the region, they will try to find a way abroad, and likely not in a form or modality that western countries will welcome.

²⁴⁴.Schmeidl and Maley 2008

²⁴⁵.Koser 2014

²⁴⁶.Schmeidl 2014

²⁴⁷.Van Hear et al. 2012, p.24

²⁴⁸.Koser 2014

²⁴⁹.Informal Comment to Author, UN Official, December 2013

²⁵⁰.Ruttig 2013

²⁵¹.Bashir 2014

²⁵².Tyler 2014

²⁵³.Roehrs 2013, Tyler and Schrepfer 2012, Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, November 2013

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