

MIGRATION RESEARCH LEADERS SYNDICATE
IN SUPPORT OF THE GLOBAL COMPACT ON MIGRATION

Migrants' Integration in Host Societies, and Return to Home Countries: The Case of the Middle East and South Asia



International Organization for Migration (IOM)

The UN Migration Agency

The opinions expressed in the report are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the International Organization for Migration (IOM). The designations employed and the presentation of material throughout the report do not imply the expression of any opinion whatsoever on the part of IOM concerning the legal status of any country, territory, city or area, or of its authorities, or concerning its frontiers or boundaries.

IOM is committed to the principle that humane and orderly migration benefits migrants and society. As an intergovernmental organization, IOM acts with its partners in the international community to: assist in meeting the operational challenges of migration; advance understanding of migration issues; encourage social and economic development through migration; and uphold the human dignity and well-being of migrants.

This publication has been issued without formal editing by IOM. Any errors or oversights in this publication are the sole responsibility of the authors.

Suggested citation: Abbasi-Shavazi, Md. J, Sadeghi, R., Mohammadi, A. (2017) 'Migrants' Integration in Host Societies, and Return to Home Countries: The Case of the Middle East and South Asia', in McAuliffe, M. and M. Klein Solomon (Conveners) (2017) *Ideas to Inform International Cooperation on Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration*, IOM: Geneva.

Publisher: International Organization for Migration
17 route des Morillons
P.O. Box 17
1211 Geneva 19
Switzerland
Tel: + 41 22 717 91 11
Fax: + 41 22 798 61 50
E-mail: hq@iom.int
Internet: www.iom.int

© 2017 International Organization for Migration (IOM)

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise without the prior written permission of the publisher.



Migrants' Integration in Host Societies, and Return to Home Countries: The Case of the Middle East and South Asia

Mohammad Jalal Abbasi-Shavazi¹

Rasoul Sadeghi²

Abdullah Mohammadi³

Key issues

In recent years, voluntary and forced migrations originating from some Asian countries, particularly the Middle East and South Asia, have contributed to the global scale and complexity of international population movements. The long presence of refugees and migrants has led to the birth of a new generation of migrants in the host countries as a result of which the receiving countries have been faced with challenges to either repatriate the first and second generation of migrants back to their home countries or integrate them into the host communities.

The integration of migrants and refugees in host society and their sustainable return to home are, thus, among the major policy conundrums at regional and global levels. The two processes are interlinked, faced with challenges, and have policy implications for migrants and communities.

Insecurity and political instability influence both, the decision-making process for return among migrants and refugees who are willing to return to their country; and the decision-making process for re-migration among returnees who have already returned and are planning for their future. Lack or low investment caused by insecurity has led to high unemployment, particularly among returnees with less experiences in their home society.

The governments in host and home countries should develop long-term and sustainable migration policies. Repatriation should not be considered as a single policy, but rather it should be envisaged as a transnational process in which both integration and reintegration policies are also included.

The perception of economic development, political stability, and the rule of law in home countries is critical to migrant's decision-making about return. Without progress on the development of the home society, second-generation migrants who can be the engine development in their home country are expected to be more willing to remain in host communities.

1 Professor of Demography, University of Tehran, and Director, National Institute of Population Research (NIPR), Iran. Email: mabbasi@ut.ac.ir

2 Associate Professor of Demography, University of Tehran and NIPR, Iran.

3 MA in Demography, University of Tehran, Iran.

I. Introduction

The integration of economic migrants and refugees in host countries, and their return to origin countries, are considered as two of the major migration policy challenges in the region. In the past, urbanization and industrialization led to the movement of large groups of labor migrants between various countries, the majority of whom have neither returned nor been integrated in the host societies. In recent decades, as a result of political instability, conflicts and civil wars in such countries as Afghanistan, Syria, and Iraq continued waves of forced migrants and refugees fled to their neighboring countries. In addition to these outward movements, many of the war affected population have been displaced within their own countries, resulting in unprecedented levels of internally displaced persons (IDPs).

Host countries have pursued different policies towards migrants and refugees. Some countries consider migrants as an opportunity for economic development while others see them as a threat to national security. The common strategy in host government policies is that they consider migrants, refugees and IDPs as temporary guests who will/have to go back to their home in the foreseeable future. In the case of economic migrants, host countries try to send the workers back to their homes and prevent the entry of more workers during economic downturns or when the need for foreign workers is satisfied. Similarly, for refugees, return is considered as the preferred solution. With this strategy, it is not surprising that there have been many voluntary return or deportation programs enforced in host countries throughout the region. However, in most cases, the attempts of the host governments to either integrate or to repatriate migrants and refugees have failed; many economic migrants have not only stayed in the host countries but also brought their family members to the host country. On the other hand, repatriation programs have been launched but after a while the pace of return decreases and due to the unstable political situation of the region, new waves of refugees and IDPs are produced. The complicated situations in Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, and Yemen exemplify the situation where neighboring host countries have faced many problems regarding the return of migrants and refugees.

The conditions in home countries is not better. Almost all migrant/refugee sending countries in the Middle East region have experienced civil war, conflict, and political turmoil. Although the return of refugees is seen as a political legitimacy and sign of stability for governments, due to lack of proper social and economic structures and shortage of resources, these mass returns of returnees are usually burdensome for the governments and local communities. After ending (civil) wars, usually many migrants/refugees return to their country of origin either themselves or through voluntary repatriation programs. However, if migrants are repatriated in a context where their home country is still unsafe, or the living conditions are not improving, and if the post-conflict conditions are not favorable to meet the expected living standards, the returnees face with many challenges. *Sustainable return* refers to the conditions in which returnee is well integrated within origin community, socially and economically. In many cases, government policies regarding the reintegration of returnees and sustainable return have failed and many returnees have re-migrated or are willing to migrate. In addition to the returnees, a considerable proportion of IDPs do not return to their region of origin and some of them consider leaving the country as refugees.

Given the economic and political setting and dynamic nature of movements in the Middle East, the movements of economic/forced migrants and IDPs are among the most critical issues faced by governments and communities of both sending and receiving countries. In fact, the return of migrants, refugees and IDPs is still a preferred solution to the issue. This paper accentuates the importance of 'integration' and 'reintegration' as the key to sustainable return. In doing so, findings of two recent surveys of Afghans in Iran and Afghanistan are presented to better understand the social and demographic dimensions of integration, return and reintegration processes. The experience of Afghanistan is relevant to this context because of the mixed nature of its international migration. Afghans have been migrating due to various competing reasons: escaping from conflict and insecurity, finding a job and sending remittances back home, pilgrimage, and reunifying with family members among other reasons. The reasons for return or staying in the host country vary. Thus, integration and reintegration of Afghans in Iran and Afghanistan provides an ideal opportunity to examine the solutions for the integration and re-integration conundrums that have prevailed in the MESA region.

2. Background

Trends and levels of forced migration in the region

In recent years, voluntary and forced migrations originating from some Asian countries have contributed to the global scale and complexity of international population movements. According to a recent report by the UNHCR, there were 67.7 million persons 'of concern' in the world at the end of 2015, 46 per cent of whom (29.4 million) were from Asia. The Middle East has also experienced a dramatic flood of refugees and forced migration over the last fifteen years. The wars in Iraq and Syria have produced the greatest share of the Middle East's refugees in recent years, but many more have fled wars and failed states in Afghanistan, Libya, Somalia, Sudan, and Yemen. More than 28 per cent of the population of concern are in this region, including 2.6 million refugees, 15.1 million IDPs and returnees, and an estimated 372,500 stateless (2016 UNHCR Global Report). Neighboring states have faced severe challenges in absorbing millions of refugees, while North African states and Turkey have emerged as key transit hubs for refugee flows into Europe. At the end of 2016, there were nearly 5 million Syrian refugees in neighbouring countries, including in Turkey (2.86 million), Lebanon (1 million), Jordan (685,200), Iraq (261,900) and Egypt (213,900) reflecting the continued strong commitment and generosity of host countries (Lynch and Brand, 2017). By 2013, Afghanistan had been one of the highest refugee-sending countries for more than three decades, and Iran and Pakistan were the two highest refugee-receiving countries during this period. In addition, the United Arab Emirates and some other countries in the Persian Gulf region have been hosting labour migrants. The long presence of refugees and migrants has led to the birth of a new generation of migrants in the host countries as a result of which the receiving countries have been faced with challenges to either repatriate the first and second generation of migrants back to their home countries or integrate them into the host communities.

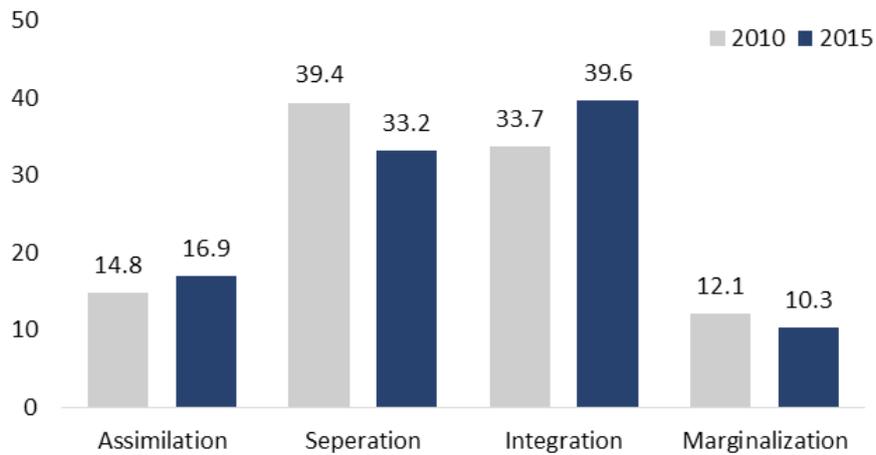
Adaptation of migrants and refugees in host countries

One of the main issues regarding migrants and refugees is the degree to which they adapt into the host society. In the MESA region, most of the migratory and refugee movements arise from countries with very poor socio-economic or even war-torn structures in which the prospect of gaining a stable and proper life for the migrant/refugee is very slim. Therefore, many migrants/refugees are not willing to return to their homeland at least in the foreseeable future. Thus, integration in host countries has become an important and durable option for migration in the region as it has implications for a sustainable settlement of migrants/refugees in the host society, their return to their homeland, and for their secondary movement to other countries.

Migrants usually experience various patterns of adaptation based on their migration history and socio-demographic and economic backgrounds. Their adaptation pattern depends upon the duration of residence in the host country as well as the degree of their attachment to the home and/or host society. *Integration* occurs when individuals maintain a positive attachment to a new society as well as to their original culture and community. *Assimilation* refers to rejecting the individual's cultural identity and accepting the host society's identity and culture. *Separation* refers to retaining the original culture while rejecting the new culture. *Marginalization* involves non-adherence to either cultures (Berry 1992, Abbasi-Shavazi and Sadeghi 2015).

The context within which refugees live has considerable implications for their adaptation patterns. For instance, the majority of Afghan migrants and refugees in Pakistan have been settled in camps while only three per cent of their counterparts in Iran reside in camps and the rest live within community. More than 70 per cent of Afghans in Iran are settled in urban areas. Most Syrian refugees are also settled in camps in such neighbouring countries as Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey, and therefore, their integration into the host societies is not easily attainable. In addition, the length of stay in the host society and generation are two determinant factors of integration.

Figure 1: Adaptation patterns of Afghans in Iran (%), 2010 and 2015

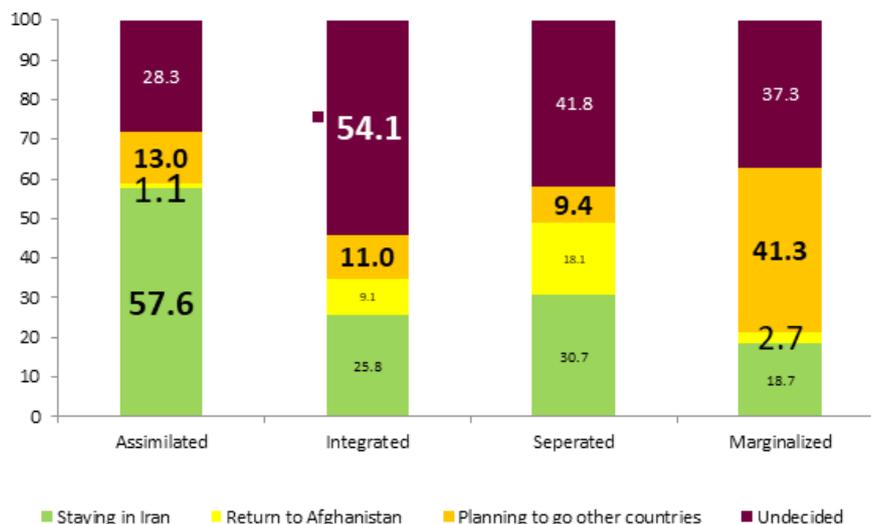


Note: The 2010 survey includes 620 Afghans aged 15–29 (Abbasi-Shavazi and Sadeghi, 2015), while the 2015 survey includes 1,202 Afghans aged 18–44 (Abbasi-Shavazi et al., 2016).

Figure 1 illustrates adaptation patterns of Afghan migrants and refugees in Iran, as a host of more than three million Afghan migrants and refugees for the last three decades. Integration and separation are the two dominant patterns of adaptation, followed by assimilation and marginalization. The level of integration and assimilation has increased over time. Access to education and employment have direct effects on these patterns. Improved access to education will lead to higher integration and assimilation of migrants while further legal, social and economic restrictions will hinder the integration process and results in separation and marginalization of migrants into the host society.

In turn, these patterns have a direct impact on the migration intention of migrant/refugee. Those who experience assimilation pattern are expected to have higher intention to stay in the host society. On the other hand, those who feel separated prefer to return to their home country. Marginalized migrants/refugees seek an opportunity to leave the host country, but not to go back home, and instead move towards a third country. Figure 2 depicts that close to two third of Afghans in Iran who were assimilated intended to stay in the host society, while 41 percent of those who were marginalized were planning to go to other countries. In recent years, European countries and Australia have been the preferred destinations for Afghans in Iran (Abbasi-Shavazi et al. 2016).

Figure 2. Migration intentions of Afghans in Iran by adaptation patterns, 2010



Note: The 2010 survey includes 620 Afghans aged 15–29 (Abbasi-Shavazi et al, 2013).

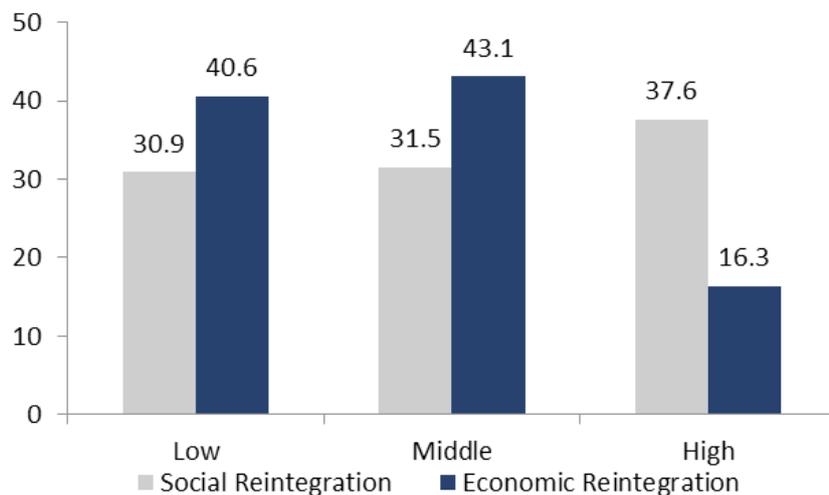
The integrated group of migrants usually have attachment to both host and home countries, and thus, they experience dilemma in choosing the opportunities that they may have in either of the societies. It is not surprising that a large proportion (54%) of the integrated Afghans were undecided about return (Figure 2). The adaptation patterns and return strategies of migrants and refugees vary by generation, as the first generation usually has different social and demographic characteristics than the second generation. The latter is more attached, assimilated and integrated into the host society and its intention for return to home is usually less pronounced. With the long period of residence in the host country, the possibility of adaptation and integration increases and there will be less intention to return to the home country. This is particularly the case for the second generation of refugees and migrants who were born and raised in the homes society many of whom have not had any contact or visit to their parent’s country of origin (Appendix Figure 1). Legal status of migrants also affects their adaptation pattern into the host society, and may lead to various return strategies.

Reintegration and sustainability of return

Contrary to the classical view of return, in which people are bound to a geographical location on their return to home country, returnees usually face an environment which has gone under social, economic, and political changes (Bakewell, 1996). In fact, return is not an end to the migration process, but a new beginning for a returnee who has to be integrated again within the socio-economic, political structure of origin country in order to have a sustainable return. If the returnee could find a proper job in labor market and gain a respectable income, they will remain and settle in the country and there will be less intention to re-migrate to the previous host or another county. Also, if the returnee could integrate socially in the society by feeling attached to home, and if the structural and contextual conditions are favorable to the reintegration process, they will be able to adapt to the values and behavioral norms of origin society without major challenges. In such circumstances, the reintegration is successful and ‘sustainable return’ has occurred. However, if the situation deteriorates and the returnee fails to achieve economic and social stability, the possibility of sustainable return is reduced and migrants may re-migrate either to the earlier host or to a new destination.

According to the 2015 Survey of Afghan Returnees, around 40 per cent of returnees had low level of economic integration and were less able to find a good job or earn sufficient income (Mohammadi et al. 2017). Around 43 per cent of respondents had a relatively satisfactory life economically; i.e. they could find a respectable job and income; and though they afford to pay their living expenses, they occasionally faced some financial problems (Figure 3). Only 16 per cent of the respondents were able to fully integrate into Afghan society economically. In terms of social reintegration, almost 38 per cent were well-integrated in Afghanistan, but a considerable proportion (62 per cent) experienced middle or low level of social integration.

Figure 3: Social and Economic reintegration of Afghan returnees from Iran in Afghanistan (%), 2015

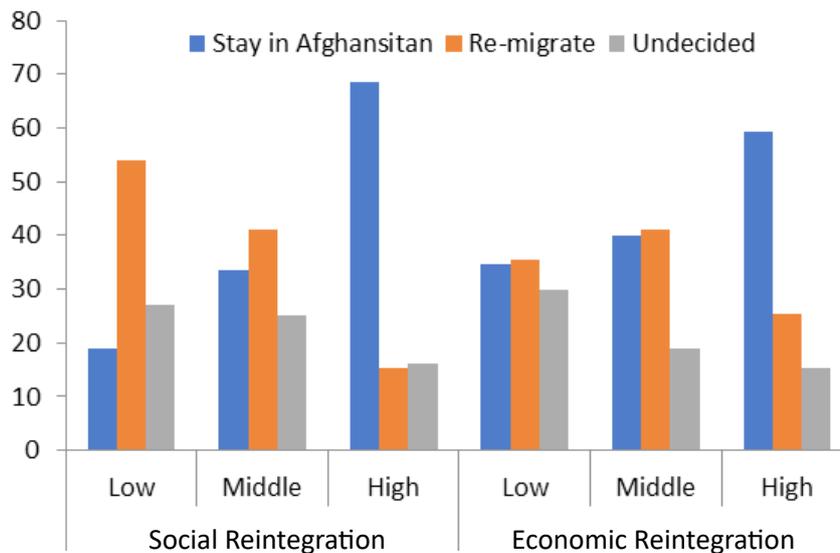


Note: The 2015 survey includes 425 Afghan returnees aged 18 to up (Mohammadi et al, 2017).

Reintegration patterns have implications for future migration intentions. It is expected that with the increasing level of social and economic reintegration, the intention for staying in home country rises. Indeed, in countries with long history of cultural, religious, and ethnic conflicts, such as countries in Middle East, the social aspects of reintegration are more important, and thus, social acceptance in the origin society plays an important role on reintegration. However, in contexts where there is not ethnic or religious divide, the economic aspects of reintegration becomes more important.

Our results from the Afghan returnees (not shown) revealed that 43 per cent of Afghan returnees indicated that they want to stay in Afghanistan, 22 per cent were still undecided and were waiting to see whether the conditions improve or not, and 36 percent had plans to re-migrate to Iran or to a third country. Overall, more than half of returnees were planning to re-migrate or were not sure about their staying in Afghanistan.

Figure 4. Migration intentions of Afghan returnees in Afghanistan by reintegration levels, 2010



Note: The 2015 survey includes 425 Afghan returnees aged 18 to up (Mohammadi *et al.* 2017).

Further analysis shows that most of those who desire to stay in Afghanistan are socially and economically in good condition and have high level of social and economic reintegration (Figure 4). On the other hand, most tendency to re-migrate to a third country is seen among those who have middle or low levels of social and economic reintegration. In fact, the better the social and economic situation of returnee, the less intention he/she has to re-migrate.

The results also reveal that those who are highly integrated socially, are most likely to stay in Afghanistan. The low-integrated group had less desire to stay in Afghanistan and they want to emigrate to a third country or Iran. A considerable proportion of those with middle level of social reintegration also have tendency to stay in Afghanistan or re-migrate. Indeed, those who are undecided about their intention for future are mostly among low levels of social and economic reintegration.

3. Conclusions

Generally speaking, insecurity and political instability have expanded to different parts of the Middle East region. The governments are unable to provide a situation in which people feel safe and secure. These factors influence both, the decision-making process for return among migrants and refugees who are willing to return to their country; and the decision-making process for re-migration among returnees who have already returned and are planning for their future. The economic and political deterioration of the home society do not provide a positive ground for the reintegration of those who have returned or repatriated to their home society. Lack or low investment caused by insecurity has led to high unemployment, particularly among

returnees with less experiences in their home society. Furthermore, for those who lived in a host country for a long time and have had access to a better education, health systems and other social services, it will be difficult to reintegrate into home society easily. Thus, security in post-war societies is a key issue that has a great role on the sustainability of returns. If security remains unstable, despite the relatively successful socio-economic reintegration, not only the returnees but the non-returnee population may also consider [re] migration as a survival strategy; a case which is clearly seen in Afghanistan and Syria today.

4. Recommendations

Successful implementation of policies and durable solutions for migrants in host societies rests on the diversity of the adaptation patterns of the second generation. Any possible return and integration policies need to take into account the distinct demographic composition of the first and second-generation migrants, their period of residence, their level of integration and adaptation as well as their attitudes toward their host country vs. home and possible future aspirations about return. Restrictions on employment opportunities will lead to downward assimilation and marginalization of some migrants in host societies. Improvement in labour laws would promote further integration of legal migrants and particularly the second generation into the host society. Peace and political stability in home countries are the key determinants of return to, and reintegration in home countries. Social and economic reintegration is a durable solution for both host and home countries. Improved service and security provisions for women would ensure their voluntary repatriation from host and their reintegration into home countries. The timing of repatriation programs should take into account the socio-economic conditions of the home countries in post-conflict situations.

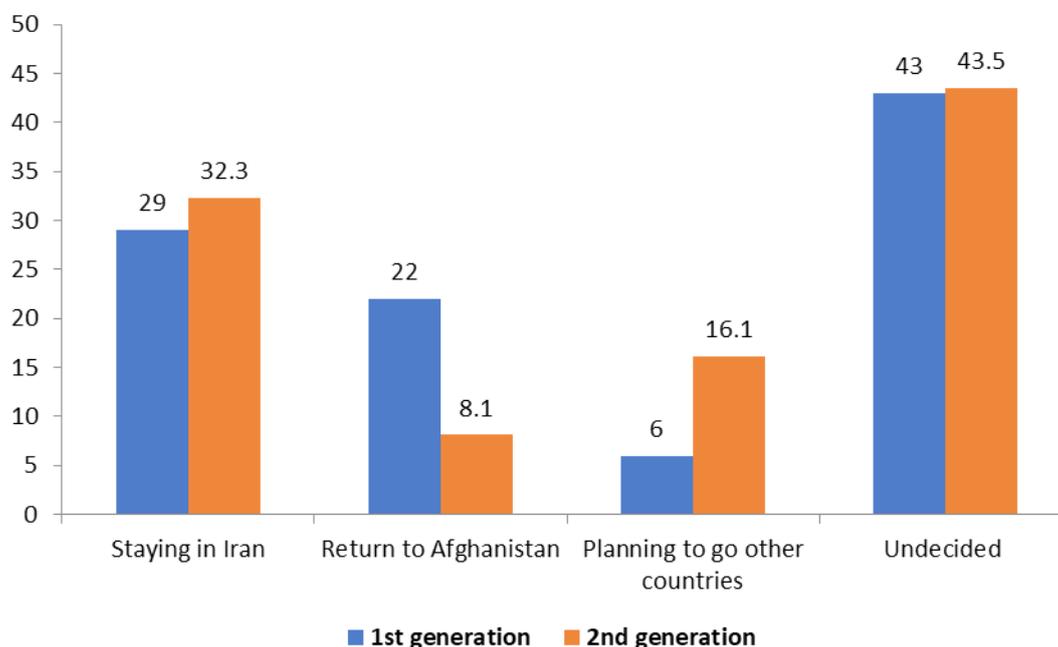
While the attention of the governments is focused on repatriation policies, both the home and host countries should collaborate to formulate integration and/or reintegration policies for those who remain in home or return to host countries. Conflicting interests for both host and origin societies on the integration, return and reintegration processes makes it difficult to reconcile the views of the two government in a joint policy approach. As there is no institutionalized mechanism for such collaboration, one way forward would be to envisage some research supported by national and international donors to investigate the mechanisms by which integration and re-integration policies can be formulated and implemented by the host and home countries. Establishing a regional center for refugee studies would facilitate such research collaborations.

The governments in host and home countries should develop long-term and sustainable migration policies. Repatriation should not be considered as a single policy, but rather it should be envisaged as a transnational process in which both integration and reintegration policies are also included. Accordingly, it is recommended that integration and re-integration programs be included in the development plans in both host and home countries. Cost sharing and other social and legal support for such programs should be envisaged by the international community and potential third country destinations.

The perception of economic development, political stability, and the rule of law in home countries is critical to migrant's decision-making about return. The decision to return may, however, depends upon the duration of residence in the host society and differs by generation. Without progress on the development of the home society, second-generation migrants who can be the engine of social and economic change and development in their home country are expected to be more willing to remain in host communities.

Appendix

Figure 1. Migration intentions of Afghans in Iran by generation, 2010



References

- Abbasi-Shavazi, M.J., and R. Sadeghi, 2015, Socio-cultural Adaptation of Second-generation Afghans in Iran, *International Migration*, 53(6): 89-110.
- Abbasi-Shavazi, M.J., Sadeghi, R., Hugo, G., and McDonald, P. 2013, Adaptation and Return Strategies of the Second-generation Afghan Refugee in Iran, Presented at the 27th IUSSP International Population Conference, 26-31 August, Bussan, South Korea.
- Abbasi-Shavazi, M.J., Hosseini-Chavoshi, M., Sadeghi, R., and McDonald, P., 2016, Drivers and Decision-Making Processes of Irregular Migration among Afghans in Iran, Unpublished Report, Australian Department of Immigration and Border Protection, Canberra.
- Bakewell, O., 1996, Refugee Repatriation in Africa: Towards a Theoretical Framework?, Center for Development Studies, University of Bath.
- Berry, J.W., 1992, Acculturation and adaptation in a new society, *International Migration*, Special Issue: Migration and Health in the 1990s, 30: 69–85.
- Lynch, M., and Brand, L. 2017, Refugees and Displacement in the Middle East, Project on Middle East Political Science, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. <http://carnegieendowment.org/2017/03/29/refugees-and-displacement-in-middle-east-pub-68479>
- Mohammadi, A., Abbasi-Shavazi, M.J., and Sadeghi, R., 2017, Return to Home: Reintegration and Sustainability of Return, In G., Hugo, M. J. Abbasi-Shavazi, , and E. P. Kraly, (eds.), *Demography of Refugee and Forced Migration*, Springer.
- United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), 2016, *Global Trends: Forced Displacement in 2015*. UNHCR, Geneva.



Mohammad Jalal Abbasi-Shavazi is Professor of Demography at the University of Tehran, Director of the National Institute of Population Research, Iran; and Fellow of the Crawford School of Public Policy at the Australian National University. He has published widely on Iran's population dynamics, Muslim demography as well as refugee and forced migration. He has directed and completed several projects on Afghan refugees in Iran and Australia. Abbasi-Shavazi was a member of management committee of Refugee Research Network, York University, Canada, and Chaired the Scientific Panel on Demography of Refugees of the International Union for the Study of Population (IUSSP). Jointly with Graeme Hugo (1946-2015)

and Ellen Percy Kraly, he edited a volume on *Demography of Refugee and Forced Migration* which is published by Springer soon. Abbasi-Shavazi is the Editor of *Iranian Population Studies*, and is a member of Editorial Board of *Asian Population Studies*, *International Migration Review*, *Journal of the Population Association of Iran*, and *Demographia*. He served as Vice-President (2009-2010) and President (2011-2012) of the Asian Population Association, is currently President of the Population Association of Iran, and Council member of the IUSSP (2018-2021). Abbasi-Shavazi has received four scientific prizes including the 2011 United Nations Population Award, and has been recognized as the 2016 Distinguished Researcher of the Year of IR of Iran.



Rasoul Sadeghi is Associate Professor of Demography at the University of Tehran and Research Deputy of the National Institute of Population Research (NIPR), Iran. He obtained PhD degree in Demography from the University of Tehran in 2011 and completed his PhD dissertation on Social Adaptation and Family Dynamics among Second-generation Afghans in Iran. His main research interests are Demography of ethnic and migrant groups, international migration, as well as family change. He has conducted and collaborated with Abbasi-Shavazi on several projects on Afghan refugees and migrants in Iran: Translational Networks on Afghan Refugees in Iran (2004), Second Generation Afghans in Iran (2007), State of International

Migrants and Refugees in Iran (2008), Socio-demographic Characteristics of International Migrants in Iran (2009), Integration of the Second-generation Afghans in Iran (2010), and Driving Forces of Irregular Migration among Afghans to Australia (2016).



Abdullah Mohammadi is a second generation Afghan who obtained his BA in English Language from Kharazmi University in Tehran, and completed his MA in Demography from the University of Tehran, Iran. His thesis titled "Reintegration and Sustainable Return: Survey of Socio-Economic Aspects of Reintegration of Returnees to Afghanistan". Mohammadi has collaborated with Abbasi-Shavazi on a number of projects on Afghan migrants and refugees in Iran. He is currently working with Danish Refugee Council in Kabul, Afghanistan, and involved in some research projects on Afghan international migration.