



AFGHANISTAN: A Country on the Move

افغانستان: کشروری در حال پیشرفت
افغانستان: د پرمختګ په حال کې

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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.

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A family's belongings are laden on a truck at the IOM Kandahar Transit Center after crossing the Spin Boldak border with Pakistan into Afghanistan. © IOM / Andrew Quilty

FOREWORD



Mass migration is as old as mankind. Among the more notable mass migration movements are the events that occurred during the so called “Migration Period”, a period during the decline of the Roman Empire. It began around the 4th century AD with widespread migration of peoples into or within Europe, or then Roman territory. Many of those migrating were Germanic, Slavic or Hunnic, with and without accompanying invasions or war. Beginning in 382, the Roman Empire started making treaties with different

tribes to invite them to settle in their territory. Among the first tribes to settle in Roman territory were the Franks, a Germanic tribe and predecessor of modern day Germany and France, who were tasked with guarding the security on the Northeastern side of the Empire’s border. It is widely agreed that the Western Roman Empire ended with Emperor Romulus in 476. It is not so widely agreed what caused the breakdown – some scholars believe migration movements were a contributing cause, however, there is more reason to believe that these movements were simply the result of an already declining Empire with a weakened governance structure, high taxes and a failing economy being some of the main internal causes.

Afghan migration movements date back even earlier than the Roman Empire. Before the displacement caused by the war and conflict of the past four decades, Afghanistan had an extensive history of migration reaching back to the times of the Silk Road trade. The “Silk Road”, which connected Eastern to Western empires through a trade route, ran right through Afghanistan, or what was back then called the Kushan Empire.

“The Colossal Buddhas of Bamiyan must be set against the back drop of the fabulous era which created them. Rome, rich and expanding, lay to the west. China, ruled with brilliance by the Han Dynasty, lay to the east. India, source of the jewels and spices coveted by all, lay to the south. The Silk Route connected these diverse capitals of luxury, and, mid-way, the Kushan King Kanishka gained wealth and power and the Afghan area prospered.”

(Nancy Dupree: A Historic Guide to Afghanistan)

And while these migration movements happened without an institutionalized “migration management system”, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) is a result of the mass displacement that occurred in Europe after World War II. Founded by world leaders in 1951 to assist the resettlement of Europeans displaced in the aftermath of the war, IOM has provided essential support to refugee resettlement operations for over six decades. In the last decade alone, between 2007 and 2016, IOM has organized the resettlement movements of well over 1.13 million migrants from 186 locations around the world.

Nowadays, Afghan migration movements are mostly fueled by conflict, natural disasters and lack of access to basic services, such as proper education, health care and jobs. And in times where some of the world’s leaders are talking about constructing walls and using highly punitive measures to prevent irregular migration to their countries, it is important to remember: No level of border security, no wall, nothing, absolutely nothing will stop irregular migration from one country to another as long as a child is desperate enough to flee on its own, leave its family behind, to travel through all of Afghanistan and sit in a leaking boat crossing the Mediterranean Sea to escape the violence and poverty at home. We at IOM don’t see migration as a problem or a threat. For us, it is and has always been a reality that needs to be managed, and, even far more than that: it is an opportunity.

McKinsey&Company assessed the impact of recent global migration movements in December 2016. Here is what they found:

- As of 2015, approximately 247 million people lived in a country not of their birth – a number that has tripled compared to 50 years ago. More than 90 per cent of them moved voluntarily, usually for economic reasons. The remaining 10 per cent are refugees and asylum seekers who have fled to another country to escape conflict and persecution. Roughly half of these 24 million refugees and asylum seekers are in the Middle East and North Africa, reflecting the dominant pattern of flight to a neighbouring country. But the recent surge of arrivals in Europe focused the developed world’s attention on this issue.
- Immigration is a key driver of population growth. From 2000-2014, 40-80 per cent of labour force growth in top destination countries was contributed by migrants.

- In 2015, Migrants made up 3.4 per cent of the world’s population but contributed 9.4 per cent of the global GDP, or 6.7 trillion USD — 3.0 trillion USD more than they would have produced in their home countries. Migrants of all skill levels make a positive economic contribution, whether through innovation, entrepreneurship, or freeing up natives for higher-value work.
- Better integration of migrants in host societies could increase the economic contribution of migrants by up to 1 trillion USD. Annually.
- Migrants do not harm the long-run employment or wages of native workers.

Migration lets millions choose participation over isolation, hope over fear and prosperity over poverty. We have the choice to answer their ambition with opportunities. The adoption of the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration on December 10th 2018 by an overwhelming majority of UN Member States takes us one step towards dignity for all, and towards a more balanced discourse and widespread cooperation on migration. The Global Compact strikes a delicate balance between the sovereignty of nations and the security, and dignity, we demand for every individual. The Compact stresses all states need well-managed migration, and that no one state can achieve this on its own. Cooperation at all levels is fundamental to addressing migration.

Migration, for the benefit of all.

Laurence Hart
Chief of Mission and Special Envoy
IOM Afghanistan
January 2019



Juma Gul (right, 6), Faisal (rear, 6), Neyshah Gul (left, 4) drink fresh cow's milk on the Afghan side of the Turkham border crossing with Pakistan, while their parents prepare for the next part of their journey, toward Afghanistan's Logar province. © IOM / Andrew Quilty

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IOM offices in Afghanistan:

Central Afghanistan

- 1 Kabul (Country Office)
- 2 Bamyan city, Bamyan

Eastern Afghanistan

- 3 Jalalabad city, Nangarhar
- 4 Turkham border, Nangarhar

Southern Afghanistan

- 5 Kandahar city, Kandahar
- 6 Spin Boldak border, Kandahar
- 7 Zaranj city, Nimroz
- 8 Milak border, Nimroz
- 9 Gardez city, Paktya

Western Afghanistan

- 10 Herat city, Herat
- 11 Islam Qala border, Herat

Northern Afghanistan

- 12 Mazar-e Sharif, Balkh
- 13 Faizabad, Badakhshan



Disclaimer: This map is for illustration purposes only. The boundaries and names shown and the designations used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the International Organization for Migration.



Omar Gul, with a small chick, and Mansour, are from one of the 155 undocumented Afghan families that returned from Pakistan on this day in April 2018.
© IOM / Andrew Quilty

INTRODUCTION

Migration is not a new phenomenon in Afghanistan. Afghans migrate for a variety of reasons to seek refuge from conflict and disasters; to go to school, receive services and look for work in an ever urbanizing society; to feed their herds, to find water and to pass the colder winter months in milder climates. Given the scope of the conflict affecting Afghanistan, in the past 40 years since 1978, approximately one fourth of the entire population of 34 million Afghans have been displaced during their lifetimes. And in spite of the remarkable resiliency demonstrated by Afghans from all walks of life, severe and entrenched challenges continue to predominate.

Every year, hundreds of thousands of Afghans return home, sometimes after generations in exile, from Pakistan and the Islamic Republic of Iran. Tens of thousands more are affected by natural and man-made disasters, with Afghanistan widely recognized as one of the most disaster prone countries in the world. Finally, thousands of Afghans who have made the dangerous outbound journey to Europe in search of a better life for themselves and their families make the decision to return voluntarily. All of these impacts combined make for a tumultuous picture of constant and fluid mobility driven by a range of drivers, push and pull factors.

With the already over-stretched absorption capacity of host communities and additional potential large scale returns looming in 2019, reintegration challenges remain outsized. Access to shelter, food, clean water and livelihoods continue to pose the biggest obstacles.

Additional concerns with land tenure and limited access to services including health, education and legal assistance pose significant developmental threats.

Guided by and in support of the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan and the Ministry of Refugees and Repatriation (MoRR), the International Organization for Migration (IOM) has been working in Afghanistan since 1992 with programming that addresses the entire migration spectrum from point of first entry to longer term development challenges. Since 2007, IOM has been actively coordinating the provision of post-arrival humanitarian assistance to hundreds of thousands of returning undocumented Afghans from the Islamic Republic of Iran and Pakistan [CBRR] and returns from Europe since 2003 [RRR]. IOM has provided emergency NFIs and shelters alongside community level disaster mitigation measures and early warning systems since 2008 [HAP] and has been carrying out in depth data collection on returnee and internally displaced persons (IDP) mobility patterns and presence since 2017 in an effort to provide humanitarian and development actors alike with evidence to support efficient and effective delivery of assistance and programming [DTM].

Finally, IOM could not carry out its programming without the continuous support of our donor partners both in-country and abroad. We offer our sincere gratitude for their generosity and determined efforts through the years to improve the lives of Afghans.

IOM IN AFGHANISTAN

Established in 1951, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) is the leading UN agency in the field of migration working closely with governmental, intergovernmental and non-governmental partners. With 172 Member States in 2019, a further eight States holding observer status and offices in over 150 countries, IOM is dedicated to promoting humane and orderly migration for the benefit of all. In July 2016, Member States of the United Nations (UN), through the General Assembly, unanimously adopted a resolution approving IOM's formal entry into the UN system as a related organization.

The IOM Mission in Afghanistan was established in 1992 and has maintained an uninterrupted presence ever since. Afghanistan is one of the largest IOM missions worldwide, with 430 staff in one main office, eight sub-offices and an additional eight project offices. IOM is committed to the principle that humane, well managed and orderly migration benefits migrants and society as a whole. IOM acts with its partners in the international community to:

- Assist in meeting the growing operational challenges of migration management;
- Advance understanding of migration issues;
- Encourage social and economic development through migration;
- Uphold the human dignity and well-being of migrants.

HUMANITARIAN PROGRAMMING

Cross Border Return and Reintegration (CBRR): IOM provides vulnerable, undocumented Afghans returning from the Islamic Republic of Iran and Pakistan with immediate humanitarian post-arrival assistance.

Humanitarian Assistance Programme (HAP): HAP responds to the emergency and recovery needs of natural disaster-affected communities across Afghanistan by distributing non-food items (NFIs) and emergency shelter, providing protection assistance and introducing disaster risk reduction (DRR) mitigation measures.

Protection: Undocumented Afghan returnees are at risk of exploitation and abuse during and after return, including trafficking, gender-based violence, family separation, detention and critical medical needs. IOM's protection programme aims to strengthen national and cross-border protection mechanisms and provide tailored assistance to those in need.

MIGRATION MANAGEMENT

Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration (AVRR): IOM's AVRR programme offers a dignified and safe return option for migrants who wish to return voluntarily to their countries of origin.

Counter-Trafficking In Persons (CTIP): Trafficking affects Afghanistan as a source, transit and destination country. IOM's current counter-trafficking activities include prevention, technical cooperation and victim protection.

Disaster-Risk Reduction (DRR): Disaster Risk Reduction activities help build resilience to natural disasters in vulnerable communities. IOM directly implements DRR activities and works to build the capacity of the Afghanistan Natural Disaster Management Authority (ANDMA).

Medical Health Assessment Centre (MHAC): IOM provides medical screening and assessment services for returnees as well as Afghans being resettled abroad.

Reintegration Assistance and Development in Afghanistan (RADA): IOM, with the financial contribution of the European Union, developed the Reintegration and Development Assistance in Afghanistan (RADA) project to support sustainable reintegration of returnees within their communities of return. RADA is implemented in eight provinces of high return with an integrated approach to the economic, social and psychosocial aspects of reintegration at both the individual and community levels. At the structural level, technical assistance supports national and subnational Afghan government authorities.

Immigration and Border Management (IBM): IOM works to facilitate the provision of documentation for all Afghans, thereby ensuring access to rights and social services. Current priorities include strengthening GoIRA's capacity in identity document digitalization and verification.

Migration and Development: IOM Afghanistan has facilitated the return of qualified Afghan diaspora since 2001. IOM currently facilitates the return of qualified and skilled Afghans from Iran, as well as temporary assignments by highly skilled Dutch-Afghans from the Netherlands.

MIGRATION POLICY

Migration Policy, Research and Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM): IOM conducts research designed to guide and inform migration policy and practice. Since 2017, IOM Afghanistan has the Displacement Tracking Matrix in country to ensure evidence-based programming.

Regional Consultative Processes: IOM supports the Government of Afghanistan's participation in the Almaty, Budapest, Bali and Colombo processes for informal, non-binding dialogue and information exchange on migration-related issues.

CENTRAL AFGHANISTAN



Inside the home of Shahnawaz, a widowed mother of eight, in one of Kabul's 52 informal settlements, home to Afghans internally displaced by conflict. © IOM / Andrew Quilty



Some of the 15 children who live in the home of Zabihullah in another one of Kabul's informal settlements. He and his family were displaced eight years ago when the fighting between government forces and armed militia intensified in their village in eastern Afghanistan. © IOM / Andrew Quilty

«I buy balloons for 15 Afghani (2 Cents) and sell them for 20 Afghani (3 Cents). With this income, I support myself, my wife, and my eight children» says 55-year old Wassim. They, too, live in in one of Kabul's informal settlements home to thousands of displaced Afghans.
© IOM / Andrew Quilty





Hadees (far right) and his four siblings stand in the doorway of the kitchen in their family's home in Kabul. They returned to Afghanistan with their parents in January 2018. © IOM / Eva Schwoerer



Mariam (far left) watches her children play in the courtyard of their home in Kabul in March 2018. Many returnees cannot afford heating so they cover their windows with plastic sheeting to keep out the bitter cold. Winter temperatures in Afghanistan can drop to -30°C in the central and northern parts of the country. © IOM / Eva Schwoerer

«Me and my siblings collect and sell garbage to support our family» says Zohra, 12 (left), inside their informal settlement in Kabul, home to 750 Afghan families. © IOM / Andrew Quilty





Fatima (left), Mariam (centre) and Khadija, Golsum and Fereshte (right) all live in the same neighbourhood in Kabul. IOM staff conducted a home visit to assess whether their family, recent returnees from Pakistan, needed any further support (such as heating and blankets) for the upcoming winter. © IOM / Eva Schwoerer

A herd of sheep is rumaging through a pile of garbage looking for food on the outskirts of one of Kabul's 52 informal settlements home to Afgan families displaced by conflict and natural disasters. © IOM / Eva Schwoerer





The Afghanistan offices of the World Bank Group and IOM signed a data sharing agreement in 2018, which formalizes an existing partnership between the two organizations in Afghanistan. This agreement covers data collection and analysis, knowledge management and joint programming to help better respond to the needs of Afghan returnees, IDPs, and their host communities. © IOM / Eva Schwoerer



IOM together with the Government of Afghanistan organized a regional forum bringing together NGO's from Afghanistan, Pakistan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan to discuss cross-border cooperation to combat human trafficking in Central and South Asia. © IOM / Eva Schwoerer



One of IOM's medical doctors interviews an Afghan returnee requiring medical assistance after his arrival at Hamid Karzai International Airport in Kabul. © IOM / Eva Schwoerer



On 11 July 2018, a "Welcome Home" event for Afghans who returned from the Islamic Republic of Iran with the help of IOM, financially supported by the Government of Japan was held in Kabul. The event brought together 29 participants from the current project, along with seven participants from the previous project phase (2017-2018). The Japanese Ambassador to Afghanistan, representatives from key government stakeholders, representatives from diplomatic missions, the private sector and host institutions were also in attendance. © IOM



IOM staff speak with two Afghan women whose homes were partially damaged by seasonal flooding. IOM supported them with emergency shelter, blankets and various household items. © IOM / Omar Hashimi



Fatima enjoys her lunch together with her father and six siblings. The family's home was partially destroyed after a flood, but has been reconstructed again with the help of IOM. © IOM / Eva Schwoerer



Walid (7) and his brother Naeem (12) rush to get home through the flooded streets of their neighbourhood in Kabul. IOM staff assisted them and many others who were affected by seasonal flooding. © IOM / Eva Schwoerer



An IOM staff member is on his way to assess the damage caused to a house in Kabul by spring flooding. © IOM / Eva Schwoerer

Kapisa province, one of the many areas prone to natural disasters in Afghanistan. Every year, hundreds of homes are damaged by seasonal flooding and reconstructed with the support of IOM.
© IOM / Eva Schwoerer



EASTERN AFGHANISTAN



Turkham border crossing, one of the two official border crossings between Afghanistan and Pakistan. © IOM / Nick Bishop



One of the many Pakistani 'jingle trucks' that cross the border into Afghanistan at Turkham each day, full of Afghan families who have lived as either documented or undocumented refugees in Pakistan for as long as 35 years. The trucks and busses are not only crammed with people, however. Families bring with them all their (usually modest) possessions, including roofing timber, pots and pans, pet dogs and birds, and livestock. © IOM / Andrew Quilty

«I was living in Pakistan for over 20 years before deciding to return back to Afghanistan, together with my family. I am happy to be home.»
© IOM / Nick Bishop





Two elderly Afghan women wait inside their truck for their family's return. They are registering as returnees with the Department of Refugees and Repatriation (DoRR) at the Turkham border before being referred to IOM for assistance. © IOM / Eva Schwoerer



At IOM's Turkham Screening Centre, children wait in the back of a truck while their parents complete the registration process which enables them to receive support from IOM and other NGOs. © IOM / Andrew Quilty

An IOM employee assesses the damage caused by a flash flood in Nangarhar province. Afghanistan is one of the most disaster-prone countries in the region. In 2018 alone, 113 natural disasters in 29 provinces destroyed more than 3,000 homes and left almost 7,000 homes severely damaged. IOM Afghanistan assisted close to 140,000 Afghans affected by those incidents with essential emergency assistance, 102,000 of which were Afghans displaced by drought in the western region of Afghanistan.
© IOM / Hafizullah Azimi





A young boy is pushing his bicycle on a road alongside a flood protection wall constructed by IOM in Nangarhar province. So far, IOM has implemented 74 disaster risk reduction infrastructure projects in 25 provinces with a total length of 15,673 meters protecting over 119 villages, 25,777 acres of agricultural land, 19,915 houses benefiting around 51,200 families, and temporarily employing over 140,000 skilled and unskilled workers. © IOM / Eva Schwoerer



Delivering targeted adequate humanitarian assistance requires accurate information on people's needs and whereabouts. For this reason, IOM Afghanistan conducted surveys covering villages that have seen high rates of return to assess the needs of returnee-hosting villages and inform programming for 2019. In this photo, IOM staff register newly displaced IDPs from Badghis arriving to Herat city. © IOM / Eva Schwoerer

A truck carrying the belongings of an Afghan family returning to Afghanistan crosses the Turkham border. In 2018, close to 800,000 undocumented Afghans returned or were deported from the Islamic Republic of Iran, and over 30,000 undocumented Afghans returned or were deported from Pakistan. IOM Afghanistan assisted 56,693 of the most vulnerable among them, including 4,000 unaccompanied children, 2,500 Afghans with injuries requiring medical assistance, more than 15,000 deported families and an additional 19,000 families in severely poor economic conditions. © IOM / Andrew Quilty



SOUTHERN AFGHANISTAN



Members of an unofficial border police-employed team inspect the vehicles and luggage of Afghans just returned from Pakistan at the Spin Boldak border crossing in Kandahar province. © IOM / Andrew Quilty



Children are lifted from the back of the truck that they and several families travelled on from Pakistan, across the border with Afghanistan and into IOM's Spin Boldak Reception Centre where they're registered and provided documentation which makes them eligible for assistance at the IOM Transit Centre two hours west in Kandahar City. © IOM / Andrew Quilty



Left: Inside an informal settlement for displaced Afghans known as Kareez Bazaar settlement where 30 families live in tents on a private property for which they each pay 700 Afghani (10 USD) per month. © IOM / Andrew Quilty

Right: A young boy carries a pigeon from the back of a truck that carried him and his family from Pakistan across the border into Afghanistan. © IOM / Andrew Quilty



Male heads of Afghan families just returned from Pakistan register for assistance from IOM on IOM's Spin Boldak border crossing reception centre for undocumented Afghan refugees. © IOM / Andrew Quilty



Wheat flour, carried by retro-fitted passenger vehicles, passes across the Spin Boldak border in an almost constant procession from the Pakistani side. © IOM / Andrew Quilty

People smugglers or rah balat - 'guides' - as they're known here, drive a pick-up truck full of Afghans from Zaranj in the southwestern Nimroz province, toward the border with Pakistan. The migrants are making the dangerous journey in the hope of reaching the Islamic Republic of Iran, via the Pakistani province of Baluchistan. © IOM / Andrew Quilty



STORIES OF RETURN I

NIMROZ PROVINCE

Pari moved her chair to the far edge of the screening centre, making sure she could observe the stream of migrants as closely as possible. As the hours passed, the heat at southern Afghanistan's Milak border crossing with the Islamic Republic of Iran climbed to 47 degrees, but she did not move from her chair. "I want to make sure that I don't miss any returnee from Iran", she explains firmly. "This is why I come at 8am when the returnees start pouring in, and stay all day until 6 or 7pm when the returns stop. My husband Esmatullah and I try to take turns, one day he comes to Milak, and the next day I come. But it is better if I come, because he is old and has heart problems and the heat and the stress are more difficult for him to handle", Pari says, keeping her eyes fixed on the steady stream of migrants throughout our conversation.

Pari and Esmatullah normally live in Kabul. They came to Zaranj, Nimroz province's capital city located on the border with the Islamic Republic of Iran, to look for their son Farid. A young man in his 20s, he embarked on a journey to Europe more than nine months ago. With one of his sisters living in the Islamic Republic of Iran and another one in Austria, Farid like his siblings and so many other Afghans, wanted to seek out a better more stable future. But as European countries have increasingly scaled up their efforts to shut their borders, his journey was interrupted in Turkey. Lacking the financial means to pay a smuggler to bring him to his intended final destination in Austria, Farid decided to remain in Istanbul and find work to save money and continue his journey. However tensions in Istanbul were high, and conflict including physical violence

between migrants and Turkish citizens are a regular occurrence. During one such incident, Farid sustained a deep stab wound to his abdomen. "Look, here, this is the last photo that I received from my son", Pari said as she is pulling out her mobile phone. "I was so worried about him that I told him to come home. Alone in Turkey with nobody to take care of him, I just couldn't stand that thought."

"Farid was reluctant at first", recounts his father Esmatullah, "not wanting to let go of his big dream to make it to Europe. He was very depressed, becoming more and more frustrated with his situation. 'I don't know what to do, where should I go, I am lost father' he said on the phone. 'My son', I told him, 'please at least go back to Iran and stay with your sister and her family for a while until your health improves. You cannot make it to Europe in this weak state, please recover first.'" Farid finally agreed, and returned to Tehran to be with his sister however on his second day in country he disappeared. His sister, worried about both his mental and physical well-being, searched for her brother in hospitals and police stations. After days of uncertainty, she finally received an update from the Iranian police: her brother had been detained by the police and was facing deportation. "That was almost three weeks ago", Esmatullah says quietly. "The police didn't tell my daughter where Farid was, and when he would be returned to Afghanistan." So Pari and Esmatullah decided to leave their home in Kabul, and wait at the border for Farid until his return. On the day of the interview, they had been waiting for more than one week.



Pari, Farid's mother, waits for her son's return near IOM's screening centre on Milak border, one of the two official border crossings between the Islamic Republic of Iran and Afghanistan. © IOM / Eva Schwoerer

IOM screeners equipped with a detailed description of Farid's appearance, told the couple they would immediately notify them of his return, Pari was not convinced. "I must stay here, I will not leave until he arrives and we can return home together. If I don't grab him myself and tell him to come home, he won't come home. He is too upset, he will not come home for the shame of his failure."

Fortunately, a few days after this interview, IOM Kabul received a phone call from the Milak border. Farid had crossed the border and was welcomed by his parents. IOM arranged an arrival support package and his return transportation. Farid and his much relieved parents are now safely back in Kabul after an arduous journey.



Esmatullah, Farid's father, at the IOM Transit Centre in Zaranj city, Nimroz province. © IOM / Eva Schwoerer



An injured Afghan man crosses the bridge between the Islamic Republic of Iran and Afghanistan into Nimroz province. © IOM / Andrew Quilty



A group of Afghan deportees make their way from the Milak border crossing just outside Zaranj, the capital of Nimroz Province in Afghanistan's southwest. © IOM / Andrew Quilty



A young boy, Nabi, sells eye goggles and socks to migrants travelling the dangerous desert road between Zaranj in Afghanistan's remote southwestern province of Nimroz and the national border with Pakistan six hours south. The drive is through mostly roadless desert, and, sitting exposed on the back of pick-up trucks, protection from the elements is essential. © IOM / Andrew Quilty



Abdul Samat (left) smokes opium while Nabi (right) smokes 'shisha' a derivative of methamphetamine, in an abandoned public toilet block in a back street of the city of Zaranj, the capital of Nimroz Province in Afghanistan's southwest, where addicts congregate to buy and use drugs. In 2018, IOM assisted 194 drug addicts who had returned back to Afghanistan from neighbouring countries. © IOM / Andrew Quilty

WESTERN AFGHANISTAN

An informal settlement in Herat city. In 2018, one of the worst droughts in decades caused the displacement of more than 250,000 Afghans in the provinces of Herat, Ghor and Badghis and affected up to 3 million people across the country. © IOM / Eva Schwoerer



STORIES OF RETURN 2

HERAT PROVINCE

This is Razeqee, a 46-year old father of five. He is from Herat, a border town with the Islamic Republic of Iran and regional trade-hub. As a businessman trading carpets between the Islamic Republic of Iran and Afghanistan, he was able to provide a comfortable life for his family. However, this all changed when the kidnappings of wealthy Afghans increased. “We really led a good life, and I owned land, a house and a car. But this all didn’t matter anymore when I received increasing kidnapping threats against my family, particularly my eldest son”, explains Razeqee. Due to the economic downturn and worsening security situation, criminal activities increased in Herat. “I just grew increasingly worried for the safety of myself, my wife and my children.

“So I decided to leave Afghanistan to take them somewhere safe”, the father of five explained. He had spoken to relatives of his, who lived in Germany. “‘Come to Germany’, they said. ‘Here your children will be safe, and they will go to University and become doctors and engineers like our children’”, he recalls. ‘Go to Germany’, the smuggler he had contacted told him. ‘As a family, they will easily grant you asylum. You just have to fly to Turkey, and then you go overland to Germany, it will not be too hard’. And so he believed them. With the looming kidnapping threats on his family on one hand, and the desire to enable his children to study in a good university, he sold everything he owned to afford the USD 115,000 to pay a smuggler to take the family to Germany in 2015. But unfortunately, life in Germany was not as he imagined. “First of all, my relatives had lied. Their children were not doctors or engineers, but

assistant cooks and mechanics. Secondly, also the smuggler had lied. It wasn’t that easy to get asylum in Germany, and we were rejected the first time”, Razeqee remembers. And when he learned that his 16-year old son and daughter were not going to be able to enter universities but were enrolled in 2-year language classes to be followed by apprenticeships, their father didn’t even want to try to appeal. “I didn’t realize that the entry requirements to universities in Germany were that high. But I also didn’t do all of this for my children to become mechanics”, he said. So he applied for IOM’s voluntary return programme. With their help, upon return to Afghanistan, Razeqee bought a 20 per cent share in a mechanic shop where he still works. “When we left Afghanistan, we sold everything and reduced our lives to zero here. And although our lives are nothing compared to what they were before, and I just make enough income to pay for food and rent, IOM at least gave us a small chance at a new start. If I had known what it was really going to be like abroad, and which difficulties I would face upon return, I would have never left.”



Razeqee inside his shop in Herat city. He returned from Germany together with his family. © IOM / Eva Schwoerer

STORIES OF RETURN 3

HERAT PROVINCE

This is Najibullah, 25 years old. Until two years ago, he was living in Norway. “Life in Norway was good”, he recalls. As he had reached Norway as a minor, he lived with six other young asylum seekers in an apartment and earned his income by buying, repairing and re-selling used smartphones online.

“My family in Afghanistan was very poor, and I went to Iran to live and work there at 4 years old. From there, I went with a smuggler to Turkey. For some time, I worked for a group of smugglers, cooking and cleaning for them until I had made enough money that I could pay them to take me to Greece. And there, I again worked for smugglers as a cook and cleaner until I had made enough to afford the trip to Norway.”

Unfortunately, after having lived in Norway for 6.5 years, his asylum claim was rejected and he was deported back to Afghanistan. With the USD 1,500 he received from the Norwegian government through IOM, he was able to buy a small mobile phone sales and repair shop in Herat.

If IOM hadn't given him the technical and financial support to set up his own business, he would have migrated straight away, he said, perhaps back to Europe, “using the same way I did before – work for smugglers until I have made enough to pay them their fee to take me further. When I left Afghanistan to work in Iran 10 years ago, I left because I had nothing in Afghanistan. So if I had returned with nothing from Norway, I would have left right away again”, Najibullah explains.



Najibullah inside his mobile sales shop in Herat city. © IOM / Eva Schwoerer

STORIES OF RETURN 4

HERAT PROVINCE

This is Abdul Maran, 39 years old. Born in the Islamic Republic of Iran, he had lived there his entire life with his parents. When life became increasingly difficult for Afghans in the Islamic Republic of Iran, and it became harder to support his family, he decided to leave his 6 year old son with his parents since his wife had died a few years earlier, and paid a smuggler to take him to Austria. After 16 months of waiting in a reception centre without being allowed to work, his asylum case was rejected. Frustrated that he had waited for so long, but still was rejected, he decided that he did not want to appeal but preferred to return to his country of origin, not birth.

“I realized that it was just very difficult for single men to get their asylum cases accepted, so I thought it would be best to return to Afghanistan instead of keeping on waiting and perhaps getting rejected a second and final time”, the widower said about his return to Afghanistan in January 2018. “I have never been to Afghanistan before, but through the IOM support, I managed to build a life here”.

IOM helped him to set up a grocery store because “a grocery store contains goods that everyone needs on a daily basis, so even if there is a lot of competition around, I thought I was most likely to get an income through a grocery store”, he said. Although the assistance wasn't enough to set up his own store, he managed to find a partner through distant relatives in Herat city. When asked about his future plans, Abdul Maran is unsure. “I have spent my entire life in Iran, and my parents are there.

But since I have this store here now, I will stay for at least another year. And who knows, if I manage to find another wife in this town, I might stay here and ask my son to come to Afghanistan to live with me instead of going back to Iran. Afghanistan has its problems, but at least I don't have that mental insecurity of being an irregular migrant that I had in both Iran and Austria.”



Abdul Maran in front of his little grocery store on the outskirts of Herat city. © IOM / Eva Schwoerer

STORIES OF RETURN 5

HERAT PROVINCE

This is Abdul Manna, 27. In 2008, when the security problems in his home province of Ghazni worsened, the 17-year-old decided to migrate to Europe together with his older brother. “After working in Iran for some time, we had made enough to pay a smuggler to take us to Greece.

There, we again stayed for a few months to save up for the smuggling fee from Greece to Europe.” Life in Greece as an irregular migrant worker wasn’t bad, Abdul Manna recalls, but then one night, his brother was arrested by the police. “He was brought to a detention centre and when I tried to find out what happened to my brother, they told me that he had committed suicide while in detention.

I just don’t believe that, I am sure the authorities lied to me, something must have happened to my brother while in detention”, he stated. After that incident, he was determined to reach Europe as quickly as possible. But once in Norway, he realized life there wasn’t what he had expected. Despite what the smugglers had told him, it wasn’t easy at all to be granted asylum. After waiting for 1.5 years for the decision on his case, he was rejected twice and decided to return voluntarily to Afghanistan in 2011. “With the help of IOM, I set up a shop to sell used parts for cars and motorcycles. I literally returned with nothing, and given the bad security situation in Ghazni, I also couldn’t return home. If IOM hadn’t helped me to set up a shop in Herat (a rather secure province at that time), I wouldn’t have known what to do”, said Abdul Manna. He is married now, and a father of two young children aged three and two.

Although it isn’t always easy to make ends meet due to the worsening security situation, he wishes to never migrate again:

“If there is no specific threat on my life or the life of my family, I would never migrate irregularly again. It just is such a huge waste of time and resources.” He now hopes that IOM can support him with a small cash grant so that he can further expand his shop and improve his economic situation.



Abdul Manna inside his auto repair shop in Herat city, while talking to an IOM staff member. © IOM / Eva Schwoerer



The drought in western Afghanistan has displaced hundreds of thousands of Afghan families, and indirectly affected more than 3 million. © IOM / Amanda Nero



Laila (7), is running toward the settlement where she lives with her family after a drought destroyed the family's livelihoods in rural Badghis province. © IOM / Amanda Nero



Omar Majeedi, 13, was deported from the Islamic Republic of Iran. He receives medical support at the IOM Transit Centre in Herat city before IOM staff accompany him back to his home in Badghis province. In 2018, IOM staff have supported over 4,000 unaccompanied minors who were deported to Afghanistan. © IOM / Eva Schwoerer



Latif, 15, sits between his parents at the IOM Transit Centre in Herat. They are among the more than 760,000 Afghans who returned from the Islamic Republic of Iran to Afghanistan between 1 January and 31 December 2018. © IOM / Eva Schwoerer

A group of 13 Afghans from different backgrounds and ethnicities spent one week together exchanging experiences, directing and producing their own film featuring stories of migration. The initiative is part of IOM's Global Migration Film Festival Participatory Video project to engage migrants and host communities in participatory filmmaking to strengthen social cohesion. © IOM / Amanda Nero





Islam Qala, one of the two official border crossings between Afghanistan and the Islamic Republic of Iran on a hot summer day in August 2017. © IOM / Andrew Quilty



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