



# Destination Unknown Afghans on the move in Turkey

MMC Middle East Research Report, June 2020



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Afghan refugees and migrants on the move in Erzurum, Turkey.

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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**Suggested citation:** Mixed Migration Centre (2020), Destination Unknown – Afghans on the move in Turkey. Available at [www.mixedmigration.org](http://www.mixedmigration.org)

We would like to particularly thank the respondents who were willing to share their time and insights during interviews and focus groups, without which the research would not have been possible. This publication was produced with the financial support of the United Kingdom's Department for International Development (DFID).

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# LIST OF ACRONYMS

<b>AKDEM</b>	Family, Women and Disabled Support Centre
<b>DGMM</b>	Directorate General for Migration Management
<b>DRC</b>	Danish Refugee Council
<b>DSC</b>	Data Science Consulting
<b>EASO</b>	European Asylum Support Office
<b>ECRE</b>	European Council on Refugees and Exiles
<b>EU</b>	European Union
<b>FGD</b>	Focus Group Discussion
<b>IDI</b>	In-depth Interview
<b>IDP</b>	Internally Displaced Person
<b>IOM</b>	International Organization for Migration
<b>IR</b>	Inception Report
<b>KII</b>	Key Informant Interview
<b>LFIP</b>	Law on Foreigners and International Protection
<b>MMC ME</b>	Mixed Migration Centre Middle East Region
<b>NGO</b>	Non-Governmental Organization
<b>PDMM</b>	Provincial Directorate of Migration Management
<b>RSD</b>	Refugee Status Determination
<b>SGDD-ASAM</b>	Sığınmacılar ve Göçmenlerle Dayanışma Derneği - Association for Solidarity with Asylum Seekers and Migrants
<b>SPSS</b>	Statistical Package for the Social Sciences
<b>UNHCR</b>	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
<b>UNICEF</b>	United Nations Children's Fund
<b>UNODC</b>	United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime
<b>UN DESA</b>	United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Since the late 1970s, the continuous movement of Afghans within and from Afghanistan has been shaped by a combination of security, conflict, political and economic factors. At the end of 2019, around 2.6 million Afghans were internally displaced, while around 2.7 million were registered as refugees, representing the world's most protracted displaced and dispossessed population under the mandate of the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR). Two states neighbouring Afghanistan, Pakistan and Iran, host the vast majority of Afghan refugees (88%). Nearly 7% of Afghan refugees are hosted in Europe, for the most part in Germany, Austria, and Sweden.

For decades, Turkey has been a host country and transit hub for hundreds of thousands of Afghan refugees, who constitute the second-largest group of refugees and asylum seekers registered in the country. In 2018, Turkey experienced a substantial increase of irregular arrivals (those lacking legal documentation) and Afghan nationals constituted the largest group of new irregular arrivals. In 2019, the number of Afghan arrivals doubled, and they remained the largest national group of new arrivals.

Triggered by this increase, this research report aims to improve understanding of the migration experiences of Afghans arriving in Turkey. It outlines key drivers behind Afghan migration and examines the factors influencing short- to long-term intentions, such as decisions to either stay in Turkey or continue onward movement. The report details living conditions of Afghans in Turkey, focusing on the policy framework that shapes legal and socio-economic factors, while highlighting vulnerabilities and protection challenges they encounter.

The research for this report consisted of three phases, starting with desk research: collecting and analysing relevant literature, legal and policy documents, policy briefs and reports. After preparation of data collection tools, the second phase mainly involved conducting fieldwork in six provinces (Van, Erzurum, Adana, Konya, Izmir and Istanbul). In each location, the research team simultaneously collected quantitative and qualitative data by conducting surveys, in-depth interviews (IDIs), and focus group discussions (FGDs) with Afghan refugees and migrants, as well as key informant interviews (KIIs) with officials from relevant provincial institutions and representatives of international agencies and NGOs. The third phase entailed analysing data, validating findings through expert interviews, and drafting. From November 2019 to January 2020, the research team conducted 341 surveys, 27 IDIs, nine FGDs with a total of 69 participants, and 28 KIIs.

A bespoke survey, based on those conducted by MMC's Mixed Migration Monitoring Initiative (4Mi)<sup>1</sup>, posed a wide range of questions on issues such as: drivers of migration; decision making; demographics; information on migratory routes taken; protection incidents; use of smugglers and funding of migration journeys; access to information; assistance and access to services; aspirations; and challenges faced in Turkey.

The FGDs, IDIs and KIIs served to complement the survey and reflect upon participants' general insights and perceptions on their migration reasons and experiences, their current living situation in Turkey, as well as their aspirations for the future. The respondents provided detailed accounts on housing, working conditions, access to education, healthcare and social services, and relationships with host communities.

The findings reveal that the majority of the Afghans surveyed in Turkey are young males who arrived irregularly. They were mainly driven to travel by violence and lack of economic opportunities and access to rights in Afghanistan. For some women, domestic violence, sexual abuse, verbal and physical threats, and forced marriages were reasons for embarking on migration journeys. The main reasons for coming to Turkey are expectations of family reunification, easy and fast access to asylum, economic opportunities, and better living standards. At the time they were surveyed, most respondents were still on the move to another location within Turkey or abroad. Of those who planned to travel on beyond Turkey, many expressed no particular preference for a specific country, saying this was less important than finding safety, a welcoming environment and improved living conditions.

Nearly all respondents came to Turkey via fragmented journeys through Iran and Pakistan, but prior to departure, a majority did not obtain information regarding the routes, destinations, costs, conditions, and risks that their trips would entail. Most also relied on the services of smugglers, who were mainly needed for crossing international borders. Along with problems related to harsh weather and physical conditions of the mountainous route, which had to be taken primarily on foot, Afghans reported witnessing death, physical violence and family separation along the route. Nine out of ten respondents needed very basic assistance during their journey, which was not available in most cases. Despite all the risks and challenges faced, most were determined to move and continue migration.

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1 4Mi is the Mixed Migration Centre's flagship data collection system, an innovative approach that helps fill knowledge gaps, and informs policy and response regarding the nature of mixed migratory movements and the protection risks for refugees and migrants on the move.



Upon arrival in Turkey, respondents reported a variety of challenges related to access to protection, healthcare, education, employment, and general living conditions (housing and shelter). Restricted freedom of movement, risk of deportation, limited access to formal employment, language barriers, and lack of knowledge about the scope of legal rights and obligations were among the most cited problems. Over two-third of respondents reported not being aware of their rights as an asylum seeker or migrant. On top of that, a majority reported they did not receive adequate assistance from public institutions or non-governmental organisations (NGOs).

The qualitative findings show that if Afghan refugees and migrants are provided with permanent residency and legal employment, their incentive to consider onward movement decreases. If those preconditions are not in place, and no long-term solution is in sight, Afghan migrants' and refugees' final destinations remain unknown.

# 1. INTRODUCTION

By the end of 2018, almost 70.8 million people were forcibly displaced worldwide as a result of persecution, conflict, violence, or human rights violations.<sup>2</sup> Of these, nearly 25.9 million were refugees, with the rest being internally displaced people. Following Syria, refugees from Afghanistan constitute the second-largest group by country of origin; they have also been displaced and dispossessed for longer than any other group under UNHCR's mandate worldwide.<sup>3</sup> Driven by decades of conflict, insecurity and poverty, Afghans continue to face substantial displacement challenges both within and outside their country.

The total number of registered Afghan refugees were recorded to be around 2.7 million, while another 2.6 million remained internally displaced at the end of 2019.<sup>4</sup> Almost nine out of ten Afghan refugees are hosted by two neighbouring countries: 1,420,673 in Pakistan and 951,142 in Iran.<sup>5</sup> Nearly half a million reside in the European Union (EU).<sup>6</sup> Turkey has also been hosting hundreds of thousands of Afghan refugees since the early 1980s and remains a crucial transit country for Afghans heading towards various European countries, although it has also become a de facto country of destination for many.<sup>7</sup> At present, Turkey is the largest refugee-hosting country worldwide with nearly four million registered refugees and asylum seekers, of whom 3.5 million are Syrians under temporary protection.<sup>8</sup> The second-largest group by nationality are Afghans, with a population of 170,000 under international protection.<sup>9</sup>

The Afghan movement peaked in 2015, when Europe faced the so-called "refugee crisis".<sup>10</sup> Afghans were the second-largest group of arrivals. The following years witnessed a decrease in numbers of Afghans arriving in Europe, mainly due to policy changes and implementation of the 18 March 2016 EU-Turkey Statement, which was primarily aimed at curbing irregular movements to Europe via Turkey.<sup>11</sup> However, the agreement did not prevent an increase in the number of Afghans arriving irregularly in Turkey: these more than doubled, from 45,259 in 2017, to 100,841 in 2018; and doubled again to 201,437 in 2019.<sup>12</sup>

The present study has three objectives. First, it aims to increase understanding of the key drivers behind Afghan arrivals in Turkey, and of the factors influencing Afghans' short- and long-term intentions, such as decisions to either continue their journey or stay in Turkey. Second, the study aims to shed light on Afghans' trajectories, means of travel, and exposure to rights violations along their journeys.<sup>13</sup> Third, the study unpacks the general situation of Afghans in Turkey, focusing on the policy framework that shapes legal and socio-economic conditions and access to protection and basic services. As detailed in the methodology section below, the study draws on desk research, and on primary quantitative and qualitative data collected in Turkey from November 2019 to January 2020. In setting out the recent migration experiences of Afghans in Turkey as well as their protracted displacement, the report provides insights into how international actors, policy makers and academics can develop better solutions to address the mounting protection challenges of Afghans on the move.

The report consists of nine chapters. After this introduction, Chapter 2 provides an overview of the research methodology, including information on data collection phases, data analysis, as well as research challenges and limitations. Chapter 3 presents the contextual background of the history of migration from Afghanistan, elaborating on the four main phases of large-scale displacements since the late 1970s, and Afghan migration to Turkey, alongside more recent Afghan displacement. Subsequent chapters focus on the multi-dimensional aspects of Afghans' journeys, including drivers of migration, intentions, and aspirations (Chapter 4); risks encountered throughout the journey (Chapter 5); and the dynamics and recent trends of migrant smuggling along the route from Afghanistan to Turkey (Chapter 6). Chapter 7 examines the living conditions of Afghans in Turkey, while highlighting the vulnerabilities and challenges they encounter in access to health, education, employment, and housing. Key findings are summarised in Chapter 8, while Chapter 9 provides a conclusion and offers a series of recommendations.

2 UNHCR (2019d) [Global Trends Forced Displacement in 2018](#); UNHCR Statistical Yearbooks (2019) [Figures at a Glance](#)

3 UNHCR (2019a) [UNHCR urges intensified support for displaced Afghans and refugee hosting nations](#)

4 UNHCR (2019a) Op Cit.; UNHCR (2019d) Op Cit.; UNOCHA (2020). [Afghanistan: Conflict Induced Displacements](#).

5 UNHCR (2019d) Op Cit.

6 United Nations database (2019) [International Migrant Stock 2019](#)

7 İçduygu, A. & Karadağ, S. (2018) [Afghan migration through Turkey to Europe: seeking refuge, forming diaspora, and becoming citizens](#)

8 DGMM (2020) [Migration Statistics: Temporary Protection](#); UNHCR (2019d) [Syrian regional refugee response](#)

9 DGMM (2020) Op Cit.

10 For a detailed discussion, see, Triandafyllidou, A. and M.L. McAuliffe (2018) [Migrant Smuggling Data and Research: A Global Review of the Emerging Evidence Base](#)

11 European Council, the European Union (2016) [EU-Turkey statement, 18 March 2016](#) On policy changes, see, Ruttig, T. (2017) [Pressure and Peril: Afghan refugees and Europe in 2017](#) Afghanistan Analysts Network; Bierbach, M. (2019) [Migration to Europe in 2019: Facts and Figures](#) InfoMigrants

12 DGMM (2020) [Migration Statistics: Irregular Migration](#)

13 Hagen-Zanker, J., & Mallet, R. [Journeys to Europe - The role of policy in migrant decision-making](#) ODI Insights

## 2. METHODOLOGY

### 2.1 Phases

#### Phase 1: Inception and preparation

The first phase entailed desk research: collecting and analysing 89 academic papers, legal and policy documents, policy briefs, and reports by public institutions such as Turkey's Directorate General for Migration Management (DGMM), NGOs, and international organisations such as the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) and the International Organization for Migration (IOM). During the secondary data review, tools were developed for the primary data collection. The first phase also included conducting preliminary key informant interviews (KIIs) in Ankara and meetings with the study's reference group who provided feedback on primary data collection tools, fieldwork, and draft versions of this report. Members of the reference group consisted of both internal and external experts.

#### Phase 2: Primary data collection

The second phase involved quantitative and qualitative data collection from November to December 2019. A mixed methodology was applied in order to present comprehensive and complementary empirical data on the reasons, aspirations, intentions, and protection needs of Afghans on the move. Data collection included a quantitative survey and qualitative in-depth interviews (IDIs), focus group discussions (FGDs), and KIIs with experts and stakeholders at the local and national level.

The primary data collection was done in six provinces spread across the country to cover main routes and hubs in the east, centre and west.<sup>14</sup> The two eastern provinces of Van and Erzurum were chosen as most Afghans arrive in Turkey through the Iranian border. Van is one of the main hubs of entry and registration, where UNHCR and Sığınmacılar ve Göçmenlerle Dayanışma Derneği (Association for Solidarity with Asylum Seekers and Migrants, SGDD-ASAM) have regional offices. Erzurum is significant both due to its transit and destination function. Both Van and Erzurum are satellite cities.<sup>15</sup>

In the centre of Turkey, data was collected in Konya and Adana. As suggested by the key informants and members of the reference group, Konya was selected due to its strategic location and the presence of a sizeable Afghan

population, including those with an irregular status. The fourth province, Adana, is a southern transit hub for Afghans. Adana also provides a significant number of job opportunities for refugees in the industrial and agricultural sectors. In Adana, especially, animal breeding is used to make money for onward migration. Furthermore, the city of Adana manages local migration quite effectively due to the coordination mechanism established to respond to the Syria crisis.<sup>16</sup> Both Konya and Adana are satellite cities.

In the west, Izmir was chosen as it accommodates large numbers of refugees and migrants and is often used by those who attempt to irregularly cross to Europe or other provinces. The migrant and refugee population in Izmir is highly mobile and often without documentation because Izmir is not a satellite city. It was anticipated that those who reside in Izmir will most likely be there to exit Turkey, as living there comes with the risk of apprehension and deportation.<sup>17</sup>

Lastly, Istanbul was chosen as it is the most significant hub for short- and long-term stay, but not a satellite city. It provides employment opportunities and there is a lot of diversity and mobility that allows refugees and migrants to more easily blend in. Based on feedback from experts, the reference group, and background research, Zeytinburnu and Beykoz were selected as two of the main districts where there is a well-established Afghan community. These communities reportedly provide logistical support, guidance and job opportunities for newcomers which help them to make money and sustain their livelihood.

For the quantitative data collection, 341 surveys were conducted in the six provinces. The locally recruited enumerators used their own social networks and local knowledge to find a variety of respondents. Through established connections and via snowballing, the field teams looked for respondents who were willing to participate. The target number of respondents for each of the field sites was 50, however, due to various reasons, the number of realised survey interviews varied. This was mainly due to the accessibility of the area and the respondents, as well as the logistical and practical capabilities of the field team. Contextual differences also impacted the qualitative data collection, as elaborated below.

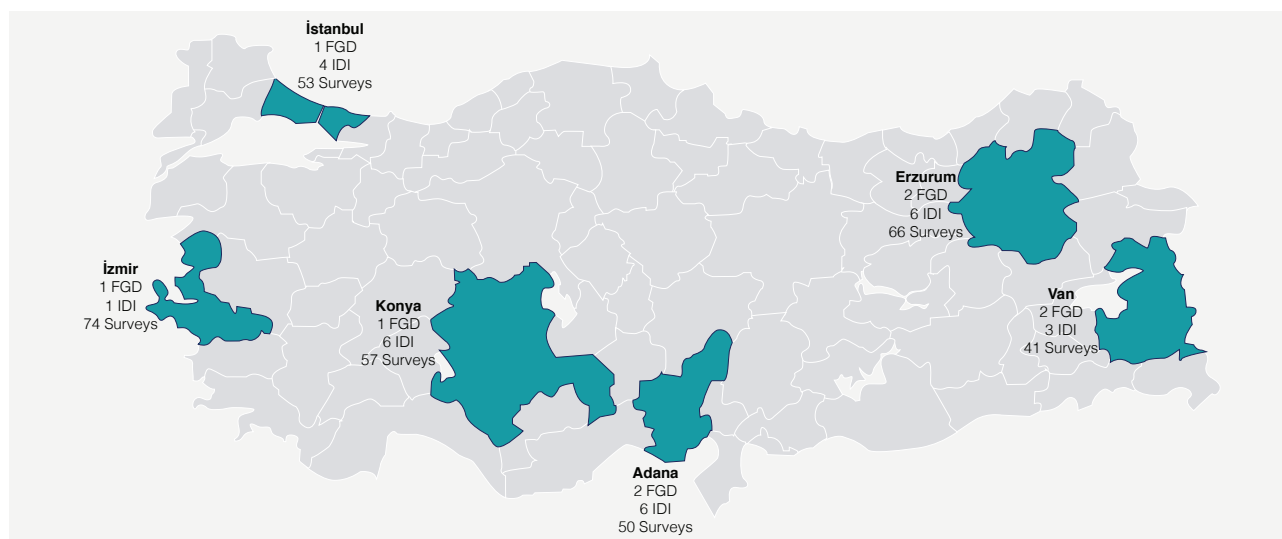
14 The words 'city' and 'province' are used interchangeably in the Turkish context as they both refer to the same administrative unit. 'Province' is preferred by the authors for this report, except for literal transcripts from interviews with participants.

15 'Satellite cities' are provinces designated by DGMM where applicants for international protection are required to reside pending the decision on their asylum application.

16 Betts, A. Ali, A. Memisoglu, F. (2017) [Local Politics of the Syrian Refugee Crisis: Exploring Responses in Turkey, Lebanon and Jordan](#) Refugee Studies Centre, University of Oxford

17 Partly because of this, the team conducted paper-based surveys in Izmir. This made respondents more comfortable to participate.

**Figure 1: Number of surveys, IDIs and FGDs conducted per province**



The qualitative data collection included in-depth interviews (IDIs) and focus group discussions with the Afghan respondents as well as key informant interviews (KIIs). Twenty-seven IDI respondents were identified during and after conducting the surveys. The research team then identified Afghans who they perceived to be the most willing to interact and open to discuss the topics and ask them to participate in an IDI. As such, the IDIs and FGDs have been conducted in parallel with the survey.

Twenty-eight KII respondents were identified and selected based on their expertise and knowledge of the situation of Afghans in Turkey. Respondents included representatives of international, national and local NGOs, DGMM and Provincial Directorates of Migration Management (PDMM) officials and academics.

### Phase 3: Analysis and reporting

For the third phase, all the data collected was analysed. For quantitative data collected from structured surveys, statistical software (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences, SPSS) was used for the analysis. For qualitative data, each FGD, IDI and KII was conducted in line with specifically designed guidelines. Most of the interviews and discussions were recorded with a voice recording device, with the consent of the respondent, and their transcriptions were transferred into MAXQDA 2020, a computer-based content analysis program for coding and analysis. Detailed note-taking replaced voice recording in interviews where the interview expressed his/her preference for this option.

### 2.2 Quantitative data collection

A survey was developed for the quantitative data collection. The survey, inspired by MMC's Mixed Migration Monitoring Initiative (4Mi), included a comprehensive set of questions including: on drivers of migration; decision making; demographics; information on migratory routes taken; protection incidents; use of smugglers and funding of migration journeys; access to information; assistance and access to services; aspirations and challenges faced in Turkey.

A total of 341 structured surveys<sup>18</sup> were conducted in the provinces of Van (41), Erzurum (66), Adana (50), Konya (57), Izmir (74) and Istanbul (53). In each of the provinces there were, teams consisting of moderators, enumerators and translators. To identify and select respondents the team applied a snowballing approach. They asked respondents to provide suggestions for new/ other respondents for the survey. This referral chain snowball method was chosen because of the difficulty of accessing a population that is on the move and trying to stay off the radar if irregular. Snowballing helped to increase trust between the researchers and respondents. Because of the chosen approach, the selected sample is not representative of the entire Afghan refugee and migrant population in Turkey. Although diversity was aimed for, it is likely that there is overlap in answers as people may for example have travelled in the same group and share similar experiences. In short, the discussed findings should be considered indicative and descriptive of those interviewed and/or surveyed.

<sup>18</sup> The survey was inspired by the Mixed Migration Monitoring Initiative (4Mi) survey. Please contact MMC if you are interested in the questionnaire.

The survey sample consisted of 66.0% male and 33.1% female respondents.<sup>19</sup>

From the sample, 44% of respondents were between 18-25 years old, 20.8% between 26-30, 20.5% between 31-40, 9.4% between 41-50, and 5.3% are 51 years old or and above. As such, the assessed population is young with 64.8% between 18-30 years old.

The majority of the surveyed **Afghan migrants and refugees were male, young and single**, with 61.3% married respondents, 34.9% single, 1.5% divorced/separated and 1.8% widowed.<sup>20</sup> A majority of 82 young men (between 18-25) reported to be single compared to 38 who were married. Among the men who are older than 30, there were only three singles. Among the young women (between 18-25), there were 15 married and 10 singles. 26 women were married in the age group of 26-30, whereas there were only three single women. There were no single female respondents aged 31-51 and above.

On average, respondents have around 3 or 4 children, with 58.4% of the respondents reporting having children.<sup>21</sup> The average household size before departure was seven, with 50% of the respondents reporting between five and eight members in their current household.

All 341 respondents are Afghan nationals. There are 93.5% of the respondents who were born in Afghanistan. A small group were born outside Afghanistan, with 5.6% respondents born in Iran and 0.9% in Pakistan.

**More than two-thirds (71.6%) of respondents started their migration journey from Afghanistan, with 24.6% from Iran, and 3.8% from Pakistan.** Among those who left Afghanistan, most originated from Kabul (51) and from Balkh (43).<sup>22</sup> Twenty-four percent of respondents indicated that they had lived in camps or informal tented settlements and 71.6% did not.<sup>23</sup>

**A majority of 83.3% of the surveyed Afghan migrants and refugees arrived irregularly in Turkey**, whereas only 5.6% used regular means.<sup>24</sup>

In the 12 months before left country of departure, 55.7% of respondents were earning money. Of those who reported earning money, 42.6% did so through a regular paid job, 22.6% were business owner/self-employed, 21.6% had casual/occasional work, 12.1% had other types work.<sup>25</sup> The professions reported among those 190 (55.7%) who were earning were diverse. A plurality of 50 was involved in small business/trade, 39 in agriculture, and public administration or teaching. The largest group of the 147 (43.1%) respondents who indicated that they did not earn money, reported being working the home (61), unemployed (39), or a student (37).

**Just over one-third of respondents, reported graduating from high school**, 25.8% only from primary school, 11.4% having a university degree, 2.6% having vocational training, and 2.1% graduating from religious primary schools, while almost one quarter, 24.0% did not graduate.

Dari was the most common first language, with 61.3% of respondents reporting speaking Dari. There are also respondents that speak other languages, such as: Uzbeki (32 respondents), Pashto (21), Persian (19), Hazaragi (17), Turkmeni (5), Kurdish (1), Azeri (1), Pashayi (1), and Tajiki (1).<sup>26</sup>

19 Three respondents (0.9%) declined to answer.

20 Two respondents declined to answer.

21 Among them, 27 have one child, 58 have two children, 25 have three, 22 have four, 35 have five, 21 have six, eight have seven, two have eight, and one has nine children.

22 The other provinces that were mentioned are: Jowzjan (28), Ghazni (26), Parwān (25), Herāt (21), Kunduz (20), Samangan (16), Takhar (15), Baghlan (15), Faryab (11), Wardak (10), Logar (10), Bamyan (7), Daykundi (7), Kapisa (6), Badakhshan (4), Sar-e pol (3), Ghōr (3), Helmand (2), Bādghīs (2), Nangarhar (2), Kunar (2), Laghman (2), Kandahar (2), Paktika (2) and Urōzgān (1). From those who participated in the IDIs and FGDs, nine started their journey from Iran and 10 from Afghanistan. Those who came from Afghanistan are from Kabul, Mazār-i-Sharīf, Kandahar and Baghlan.

23 15 people declined /did not answer.

24 38 did not answer this question.

25 Two respondents declined to answer.

26 34 respondents did not answer this question.

## 2.3 Qualitative data collection

### Focus group discussions

All nine FGDs were conducted by a team of one moderator, one note taker, and one translator. While the moderator and note taker were the same persons for all FGDs, the translators were recruited at each site. Participants were identified through referrals from survey respondents and local NGOs.

In the FGDs, the mean age of participants was 32, ranging from the youngest being 18 and the oldest 63 years old. The FGD held in Istanbul had the youngest group participants with a mean age of 20. FGDs were conducted with 50 female and 19 male participants.<sup>27</sup> In the organisation of FGDs, the research team sought assistance from municipalities and local NGOs to reach out to Afghans and establish a trusting and safe environment necessary for conducting a focus group discussion. As for the higher number of female participants, the FGDs took place during daytime hours, either before or after some language and other vocational courses offered by these local service providers. These courses were mainly attended by (unemployed) women as men were reportedly working.

Thirty-two FGD participants stated that were married, 13 single, and five were either divorced or widowed. FGD participants, as well as IDI respondents, reported an average number of three children. Among 19 FGD participants who shared their country of departure, nine started their journey from Iran and 10 started from Afghanistan. Those who came from Afghanistan were mainly from Kabul, Mazār-i-Sharīf, Kandahar and Baghlan. Of the 39 FGD participants who shared their time of arrival to Turkey, 15 reported to have arrived within the past 1-2 years, with 11 arriving less than a year ago, 10 arriving 2-5 years ago and three more than five years ago.

### In-depth interviews

In addition to the FGDs, in-depth interviews were conducted with a total of 27 Afghan respondents across all fieldwork sites. Respondents of in-depth interviews were reached through referral of survey respondents. Eighteen of the in-depth interview respondents were men. Men were much easier to identify and talk to as they were either working or loitering in the public spaces, while women were less visible as they were often staying at home and caring for children. Of the 27 in-depth interviews, 17 respondents stated that they came after 2018. The mean length of stay in Turkey for in-depth interview respondents is 19 months. In-depth interviews mainly consisted of respondents who directly came from Afghanistan (22), followed by Iran (2) and the three respondents did not want to share this information. Those who came from Afghanistan are from Kabul (6), Kunduz

(2), Baghlan (2), Mazār-i-Sharīf (2) and one respondent each from the following provinces: Parwān, Samangan, Bamiyan, Gardēz, Jowzjan, Belh, Balkh, Sheberghān, Logar and Ghazni. While the majority of respondents did not want to tell their province of entry to Turkey, seven respondents stated that they entered via Van and three via Aḡrı. In terms of legal status, 13 respondents reported to be international protection applicants and 12 were in an irregular situation, i.e. not registered with the Turkish authorities. One respondent reported to have a residence permit in Turkey.

### Key-informant interviews with key stakeholders at local and national level

A total of 28 key-informant interviews were conducted at both local and national levels. Among them were six representatives from international NGOs, 12 from national NGOs, nine from public institutions (municipalities or PDMMs) and one from a university.

## 2.4 Data analysis

Data for the survey was collected via Kobo Toolbox which was installed on tablets. After the data collection, the data entered was exported from the Kobo database and imported into SPSS which was used for the analysis.

MaxQDA2020 was used for the analysis of the qualitative data. The recorded interviews and discussions were transcribed and imported into MaxQDA to group and analyse the data. A key code book was developed to code the documents and questions. Based on the developed data collection tools, structured codes (deduction) were used but during analysis new codes (induction) emerging from the data were also created and used for qualitative analysis.

## 2.5 Research challenges and limitations

The research team faced various challenges when collecting the primary data. Firstly, access to the Afghan community was particularly challenging in Izmir and Istanbul due to heightened security measures and checks for the identification of migrants with irregular status. As both provinces are not “satellite cities” and are closed to residency of international protection applicants, it was difficult to get consent from individuals in an irregular situation to participate in the research study. Their primary concern was personal security and they feared that participation may increase their risk of apprehension and deportation. Because of these challenges, the field team stayed longer to build trust, reach the target and conducted paper-based surveys in Izmir.

Secondly, there was a higher participation rate for men in the survey and in-depth interviews. This could confirm what we found in secondary data which indicates that there is higher proportion of men in the Afghan population on the move. However, it could also be a result of the

<sup>27</sup> Because of the descriptive nature of the FGDs and interviews, and relatively small sample, no percentages are included.



snowballing approach. Although representativeness was not an objective in the first place, the fact that more men participated in the survey and in-depth interviews may limit the representativeness of the findings from a gender perspective. Nevertheless, the relatively higher participation of women in the FGDs goes some way to filling this gap, giving a stronger voice to Afghan women on the move.

Thirdly, as also widely discussed in the literature, there was the actual challenge of conducting research with highly vulnerable individuals. Aside from the overall traumatic experience of fleeing conflict, many respondents shared personal experiences of persecution and being exposed to sexual and other forms of violence as the main driving forces of being on the move. Despite expressing difficulty talking about trauma, especially when asked about personal narratives from their journeys from Afghanistan to Turkey, many of the respondents shared their stories openly with the researchers.

The ongoing lack of future prospects, poor socio-economic conditions and difficulties accessing third-country resettlement also adding to people's stress. Respondents reported challenges and desires of settling somewhere safe and living a normal life. All the stories were emotionally much heavier than anticipated. The research team tried being sensitive, patient, and respectful. To maintain confidentiality, in the following sections, the names of provinces are not provided for some quotes about sexual abuse or trauma.

The last point raised shows that there is a mounting need for increased professional psychosocial assistance and mental health support for refugees and migrants. Considering the sensitivity of the subject, the research team paid utmost attention to mitigate any potential risks and negative psychological impact to anyone participating in the research<sup>28</sup>, while also maintaining focus on better understanding and creating awareness of multiple stress factors experienced by Afghans.

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28 As described above, this was done by ensuring anonymity and establishing a trusting and safe environment to talk. For participants who were willing to seek psychological assistance, but did not know where to go, we provided them with contact details of service providers in their provinces, e.g. Kizilay and SGDD-ASAM.

# 3. CONTEXTUAL BACKGROUND

## 3.1 History of mixed migration from Afghanistan since the 1970s

Mobility plays a substantial role in Afghan history and migration is regarded as an integral part of the Afghan social and cultural history, illustrated by long-standing transnational networks of Afghans.<sup>29</sup> While population movements between Afghanistan and neighbouring countries have been taking place over decades,<sup>30</sup> since the late 1970s, the movement of Afghans within and from Afghanistan have been largely shaped by safety, security, political and economic factors as well as protracted conflict.<sup>31</sup> As described in literature, large-scale displacements in Afghanistan proceeded in four phases.<sup>32</sup>

The first phase commenced in the aftermath of the 1978 Saur Revolution and the 1979 Soviet invasion, leading to the forced displacement of millions of Afghans, particularly from rural areas.<sup>33</sup> The Soviet occupation of Afghanistan lasted from 1979-89 and by 1990 Afghans constituted the world's largest group of 6.22 million displaced persons and comprised almost half of the total people of concern under UNHCR's mandate.<sup>34</sup> Due to geographical proximity as well as similarity in language, culture and religion, Pakistan and Iran were the main destination countries for Afghan refugees at the time.<sup>35</sup> After 1992, when Kabul was captured by the Mujahideen resistance groups, many of the refugees returned to Afghanistan although middle-class and educated Afghans continued to flee the country.<sup>36</sup>

The second phase of forced displacement started after the Taliban was formed in the early 1990s by a faction of Mujahideen and conflict between different groups intensified.<sup>37</sup> Promising stability and rule of law, the Taliban attracted popular support and seized the capital in 1996. Their authoritarian rule of around 90% of the country re-initiated large population movements from

Afghanistan to Iran and Pakistan from 1996 to the present day.<sup>38</sup>

The third phase began after the US-led invasion of Afghanistan in October 2001. This followed the September 11 attacks by al-Qaeda whose leader Osama bin Laden was believed to be taking shelter from the Taliban in Afghanistan. The war resulted in an initial forced displacement of 200,000 to 300,000 people.<sup>39</sup> The fall of the Taliban regime in December 2001 and the establishment of a new political order backed by the international community led to the return of Afghan refugees.<sup>40</sup> From 2002 to 2008, the Afghanistan Voluntary Repatriation Program enabled the return of more than 4.3 million refugees mostly from Pakistan and Iran.<sup>41</sup> It was the largest return operation in UNHCR's history. However, the resurgence of Taliban and security problems slowed-down the return trend in 2005.<sup>42</sup>

The fourth phase of displacement has continued from the mid-2000s until the present day and is characterised by physical and political insecurity and instability, despite attempts from international and national actors to bring peace.<sup>43</sup> By August 2019, the Taliban is believed to control more territory than at any time since the war began.<sup>44</sup> The most recent attempts of the USA to negotiate a peace deal with the Taliban appeared to fail in September 2019 but succeeded in early 2020.<sup>45</sup> On 29 February, a peace agreement was signed which stipulates the withdrawal of all US foreign forces from Afghanistan and start of intra-Afghan negotiations for a permanent and comprehensive ceasefire.<sup>46</sup> However, whether the peace agreement will last is not clear.

**In the last two decades, international aid and reconstruction programmes reportedly led to improvements in education and health sectors, but most Afghans continue to live in poverty.** Afghanistan

29 Monsutti, A. (2008) [Afghan Migratory Strategies and the Three Solutions to the Refugee Problem](#) Refugee Survey Quarterly, Also see, Monsutti, A. (2004) [Cooperation, Remittances, and Kinship among the Hazaras](#) Iranian Studies; McChesney, R.D. (2013) [On Mobility in Afghan History](#) International Journal of Middle East Studies

30 Dimitriadi, A. (2013) [Migration from Afghanistan to third countries and Greece](#) Hellenic Foundation for European and Foreign Policy; Schmeidl, S. (2016) [Deconstructing Afghan displacement data: Acknowledging the elephant in the dark](#) Migration Policy Practice

31 Bizhan, N. (2016) [The effects of Afghanistan's political evolution on migration and displacement](#) Migration Policy Practice

32 İçduygu, A. & Karadağ, S. (2018) [Afghan migration through Turkey to Europe: seeking refuge, forming diaspora and becoming citizens](#)

33 Ibid.

34 Monsutti (2006) [Migration as a Rite of Passage: Young Afghans Building Masculinity and Adulthood in Iran](#) Iranian Studies

35 Ashrafi & Moghissi (2002) [Afghans in Iran: Asylum Fatigue Overshadows Islamic Brotherhood](#) Global Dialogue

36 For in-depth analysis of the civil war in Afghanistan, see, Nojumi, N. (2002) [The Rise of the Taliban in Afghanistan](#) New York: Palgrave.

37 Laub, Z. (2014). [The Taliban in Afghanistan](#) Council on Foreign Relations

38 İçduygu, A. & Karadağ, S. Op Cit.

39 Ibid.

40 Bizhan, N. Op Cit.

41 UNHCR (2009) [Voluntary Repatriation](#)

42 Bizhan, N. Op Cit.; UNHCR (2019b) Op Cit.

43 İçduygu, A. & Karadağ, S. Op Cit.

44 The Economist (2019) [America and the Taliban inch towards a peace deal in Afghanistan](#) The Economist

45 Shalfiqi, H. (2020) [Afghanistan: the long road to peace](#) BBC World Service

46 ['Agreement for Bringing Peace to Afghanistan between the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan which is not recognised by the United States as a state and is known as the Taliban and the United States of America'](#) 29 February 2020

ranks 170 (out of 189) on the 2018 Human Development Index,<sup>47</sup> has poor education, low life expectancy and one of the highest maternal mortality rates<sup>48</sup> in the world. Nearly 75% of the Afghan population are below the age of 30<sup>49</sup> and many (42%) young Afghans (age 15-24) are reported to lack education, employment and training.<sup>50</sup> Whereas the war has almost doubled the size of Afghanistan's entire economy since 2007, it is struggling.<sup>51</sup> Return movements and the ongoing internal displacement have also negatively affected the country's already vulnerable economy. Meanwhile, as described below, million Afghans remain displaced and uprooted from their homes.<sup>52</sup>

### 3.2 Afghan displacement in numbers

Following Syria, refugees from Afghanistan constitute the second largest group by country of origin, and also represent the longest displaced and dispossessed population under UNHCR's mandate worldwide.<sup>53</sup> The total number of registered Afghan refugees was 2.7 million at the end of 2019, while another 2.6 million are internally displaced within Afghanistan.<sup>54</sup> A vast majority of 88% of Afghan refugees are hosted by the two neighbouring countries Pakistan (1,420,673) and Iran (951,142).<sup>55</sup> In Europe, based on United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA) 2019 population data, there are 488,944 Afghan migrants and refugees.<sup>56</sup> A majority are in Germany (208,732), the UK (55,227), Sweden (45,413), Netherlands (37,216), Belgium (23,386), and Austria (20,561).<sup>57</sup> As discussed below in detail, **Turkey has been hosting hundreds of thousands of Afghan refugees since the early 1980s and remains a crucial transit country for Afghans heading towards various European countries, although it also became a de facto country of destination for many.**<sup>58</sup>

### Afghan arrivals in Europe

In 2015, Afghans constituted the second largest group of irregular arrivals in the EU, arriving primarily via the Eastern Mediterranean route via Greece, Turkey and the Western Balkans.<sup>59</sup>

In parallel to the steady decline in overall arrivals in Europe after 2015, the number of Afghan arrivals also dropped considerably due to policy changes and especially after the implementation of the EU-Turkey Statement of 18 March 2016.<sup>60</sup> From January to March 2016, there were a total of 37,494 Afghan arrivals compared to only 2,778 in the following nine months.<sup>61</sup>

Of the 178,500 total arrivals in 2017, only 3,441 migrants and refugees<sup>62</sup> originated from Afghanistan and reportedly only arrived in Greece by sea (there were 29,718 sea arrivals in total in 2017).

While 2018 indicates a decline in total arrivals (from 178,500 in 2017 to 141,500 in 2018), there was a stark increase in the number of Afghan arrivals (from 3,441 in 2017 to 9,007 in 2018) in Europe. In 2018, Afghans comprised the largest group of arrivals in Greece by sea and land (9,007 out of 50,508).<sup>63</sup>

In 2019, compared to the other Mediterranean routes, the Eastern Mediterranean route once again became the most active route with 74,482 new arrivals in Greece, Bulgaria and Cyprus, comprising 63% of the total arrivals (118,466) in Europe.<sup>64</sup> Although Cyprus does not appear to be on route for Afghans, Afghans were the main nationality arriving in Greece (42% of arrivals by sea) and Bulgaria (32%).<sup>65</sup> From January to October 2019, the total number of Afghan arrivals to Greece by

47 UNDP (2019) [Human Development Report 2019](#)

48 Almukhtar, S. & Nordland, R (2019) [What Did the U.S. Get for \\$2 Trillion in Afghanistan?](#) The New York Times

49 The World Bank (2019) [The World Bank in Afghanistan: Overview](#)

50 Ibid.

51 Almukhtar, S. & Nordland, R. Op Cit.; According to the World Bank, the 2018 slow economic growth of 1.8% was disproportionate to the population growth and poses major challenges. Firstly, the poor security situation and the political instability limits job creation and investment opportunities. Secondly, periods of severe drought have had a strong negative impact on agricultural production and displaced nearly 300,000 people from poor rural areas in 2018. The World Bank (2019) Op Cit.

52 "Afghanistan is now the scene of the deadliest conflict on earth. Fighting continues to rage, exposing civilians, particularly women and children, to daily deadly risks, prompting mass displacement and choking the country's unstable economy. Years of shocks have left an acutely vulnerable population with few economic resources, an eroded capacity to cope with the unfolding crisis and little hope of recovery if the current conditions persist. (...)The humanitarian consequences of the crisis now affect every aspect of life in all corners of the country. People's survival and well-being is threatened by ongoing conflict, inflicting high levels of civilian casualties and life-altering traumatic injuries." UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (2019) [Afghanistan Humanitarian Needs Overview 2020](#) OCHA

53 UNHCR (2019a) Op Cit.

54 UNHCR (2019a) Op Cit.; UNHCR (2019c) Op Cit.

55 Ibid.

56 United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division (2019) [International Migrant Stock 2019](#)

57 UNHCR (2018), Op Cit.

58 İçduygu, A. & Karadağ, S. Op Cit

59 Kushminder & Koser (2016) [Afghans in Greece and Turkey seeking to migrate onward: Decision-making factors and destination choices](#) IOM; Stanzel, A. (2016) [Eternally Displaced: Afghanistan's Refugee Crisis and What It Means for Europe](#) European Council Foreign Relations Policy Brief

60 Bierbach, M. (2019) Op Cit. ; European Council (2016) [EU-Turkey Statement](#); Ruttig, T. (2017) "[Pressure and Peril: Afghan refugees and Europe in 2017](#)" Afghanistan Analysts Network

61 UNHCR (2019) [Europe – Refugee and Migrant arrivals and dead and missing data](#)

62 UNHCR (2017) [Refugees & Migrants Arrivals to Europe in 2017](#)

63 UNHCR (2018b) [Refugees and Migrants arrivals to Europe in 2018 \(Mediterranean\)](#)

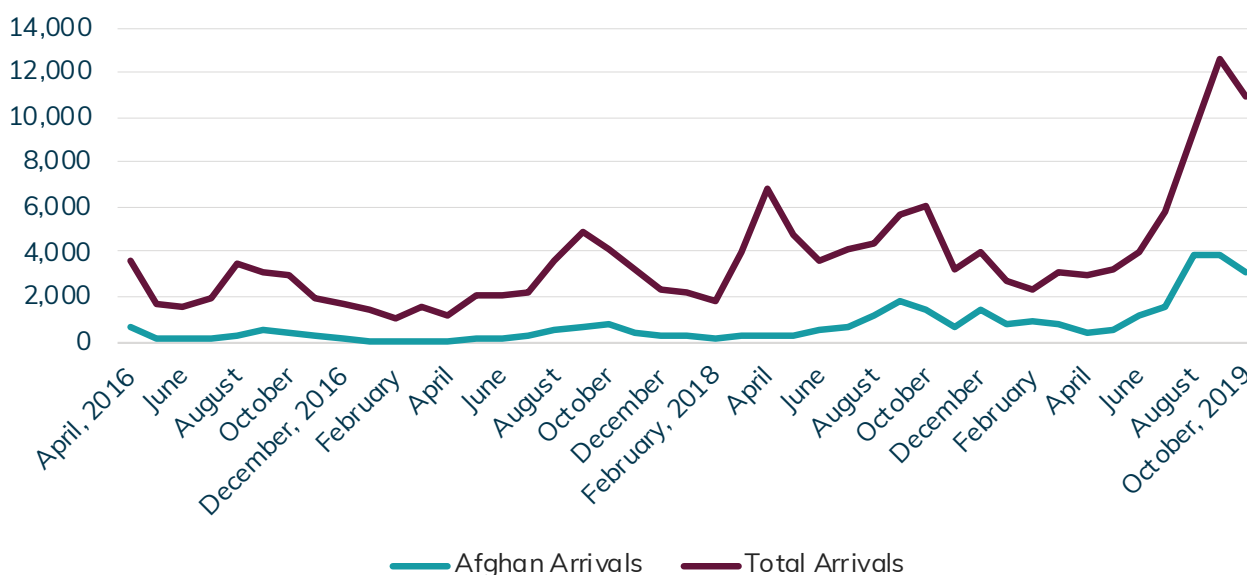
64 IOM & UNHCR (2019b) [Mixed Migration Flows in the Mediterranean](#)

65 Ibid.

sea and land more than doubled compared to the same period of the previous year (from 6,902 to 16,861).<sup>66</sup> The figure below provides an overview of the total number of

Afghan arrivals compared to the total arrivals in Greece since April 2017, following the EU-Turkey statement.

**Figure 2: Afghan and total arrivals in Greece from April 2017 – October 2019**



On 28 February 2020, frustrated by the deaths of dozens of its soldiers in northern Syria, Turkey announced the opening of its borders to allow refugees to move to Europe.<sup>67</sup> Since then, migrants and refugees have reportedly been heading to Turkey’s western borders. An estimated 13,000 refugees and migrants, including Syrians, Afghans, Somalis, Pakistanis and Iraqis gathered at Turkey’s border with Greece.<sup>68</sup>

There are possibly two reasons why a relatively low number of Syrians and a high number of Afghans have made their way to the border. Firstly, Syrians who have managed to get protection in Turkey risk losing that if they leave Turkey. Afghans, along with many others in an irregular situation from Iran and Pakistan, have less to lose.<sup>69</sup> Secondly, most of the Syrians are settled and residing with their families. On the contrary, most Afghans in Turkey are young single men for whom it is easier to move.

Following the global spread of COVID-19, as well as talks between EU leaders and the Turkish president<sup>70</sup>, Turkey closed the border on 18 March and as a result the number of migrants and refugees moving to the area reportedly decreased. There have been mixed reports on people moving back to the cities where they were initially registered.<sup>71</sup>

### Afghan asylum applications in Europe

Another indicator of the Afghan displacement is the number of asylum applications of Afghan nationals in Europe, which also provides insights into Afghans’

accessibility to third country protection. Reviewing the data from 2013 onwards, the number of Afghan asylum applicants in Europe spiked during 2015 and 2016, which is in line with the overall increase in these two years.<sup>72</sup>

66 UNHCR (2019g) [Refugee & Migrant Arrivals to Europe 2019 \(Mediterranean\)](#)

67 McKernan Bethan & Boffey Danial (2020) “[Greece and Bulgaria crack down on Turkish borders as refugees arrive](#)”, the Guardian

68 Deutsche Welle (2020) [EU calls for no-fly zone over northeastern Syria amid refugee dispute with Turkey](#)

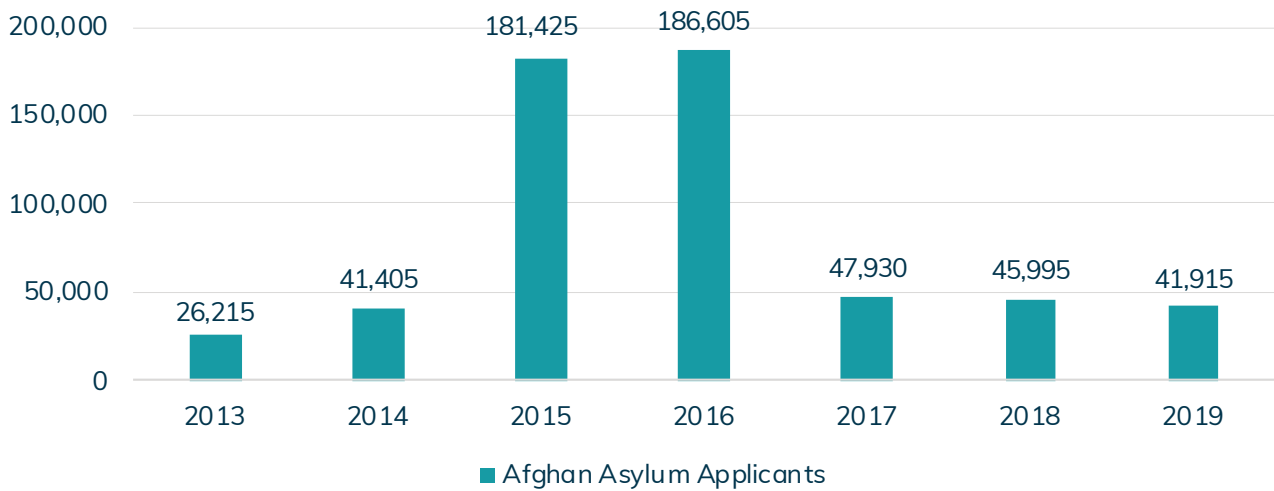
69 Hermann, R. (2020) [Afghan refugees not welcome](#), Deutsche Welle

70 Wallis, E. (2020). [Turkey closes its borders to the EU once again](#), InfoMigrants

71 Deutsche Welle Turkey (2020) [Turkey is closing the borders opened to Europe due to the coronavirus](#); Hamdi Fırat Büyük (2020) [Migrant Numbers Decrease on Turkey-Greece Border](#), BalkanInsight

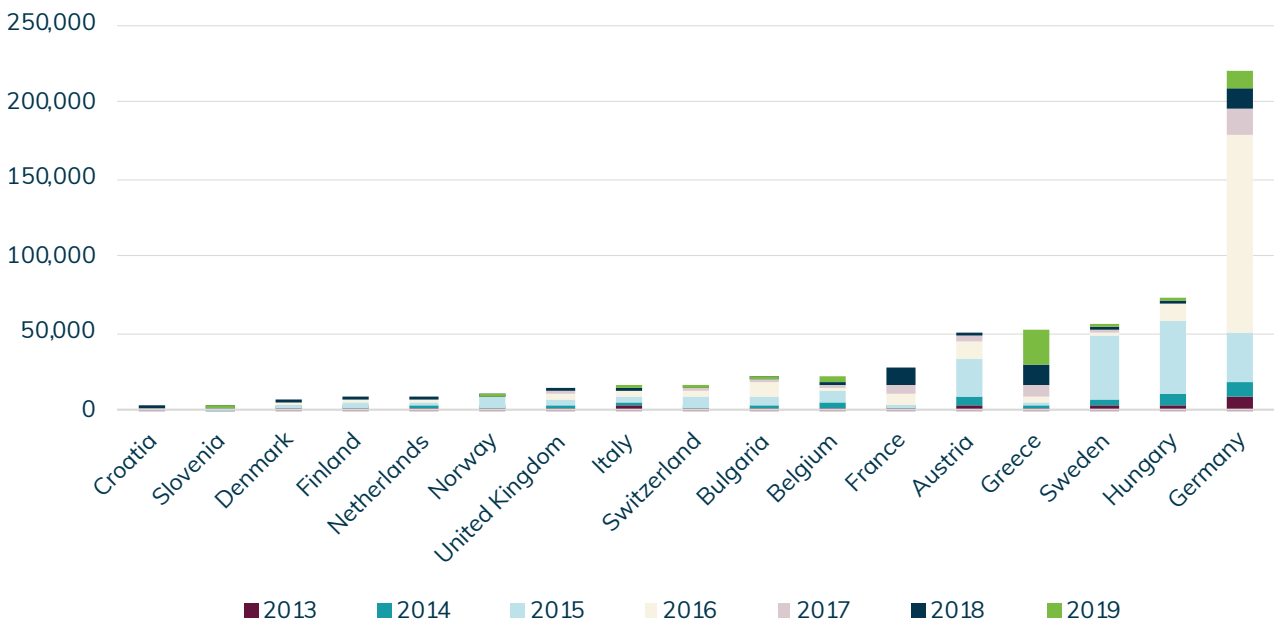
72 In 2015, 1,255,600 first time asylum seekers applied for international protection in the EU, which was more than doubling the number of the previous year and the largest number of asylum seekers since 1985. In contrast, the second largest influx was after the 1989 fall of the Berlin Wall when 697,000 people sought asylum in the EU (including Norway and Switzerland). In the late 1990s, Europe again experienced an increase in asylum applications during conflicts in Kosovo, with asylum applications peaking at 463,000 in 2002. However, the surge in 2015 not only stands out as record high number of asylum applications, but also because it had more applicants than the 1992 and 2002 peak years combined. Since 1985, Europe has accepted approximately 11.6 million applications for asylum, which means that the 1.3 million of 2015 represents nearly one-tenth of all applications in the EU over the past 30 years. See Eurostat News release (2016) [Record number of over 1.2 million first time asylum seekers registered in 2015](#) Eurostat

**Figure 3: Afghan asylum applicants and first-time applicants in the European Union (2013-2020)**



The following chart shows the geographical spread of Afghan's asylum applications in the EU since 2013. By far, Germany stands out as the number one country that received applications from Afghans, especially in 2016.

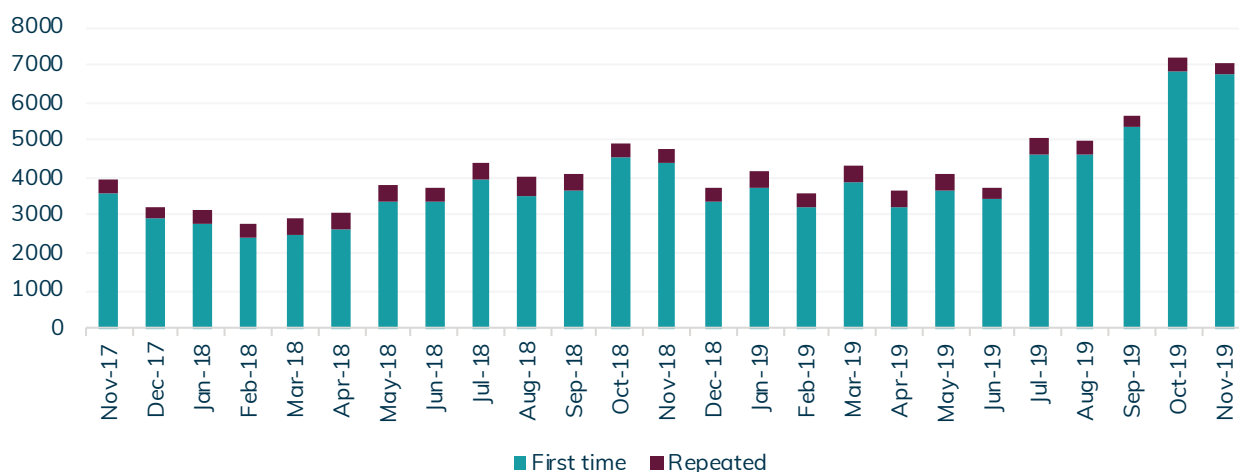
**Figure 4: Afghan asylum applicants in European Union – Top 16 countries (2013-2020)**



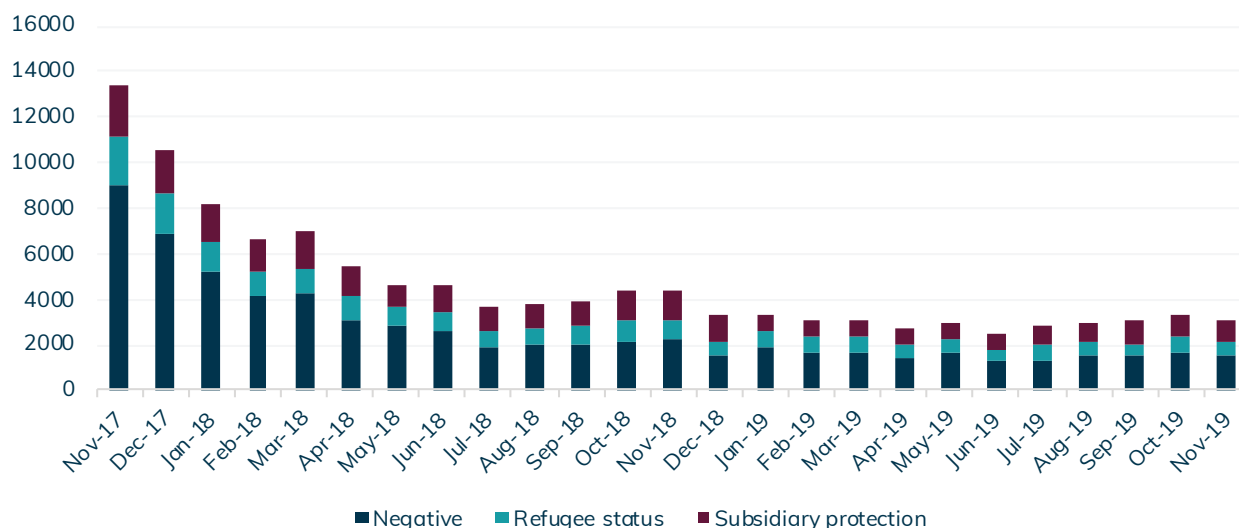
Below, the figures provided by the European Asylum Support Office (EASO) give an overview of the Afghan asylum applicants and first-time applicants in European Union in the last two years (2017-2019). Asylum applications include all persons who have lodged or have been included in an application for international protection as a family member. First-instance decisions include all persons covered by decisions issued on granting EU-regulated international protection status (refugee or subsidiary protection) following a first time or repeated application for international protection in the first instance determination process.

The numbers show that Afghans' prospects of being granted asylum are not high. In 2018, 45,995 Afghans lodged applications for asylum in Europe and the average first-instance asylum recognition rate for Afghans was 44.5%. There were reportedly large variations (between 6% and 98%) across EU+ countries with no apparent reason for the divergence to be found in the nature of the cases. The first-instance recognition rate did increase to an average of 48.5% up until November 2019. However, as the figures show, the number of applications is steadily increasing and a sizeable stock of pending cases (with a majority for more than six months) remains in place.

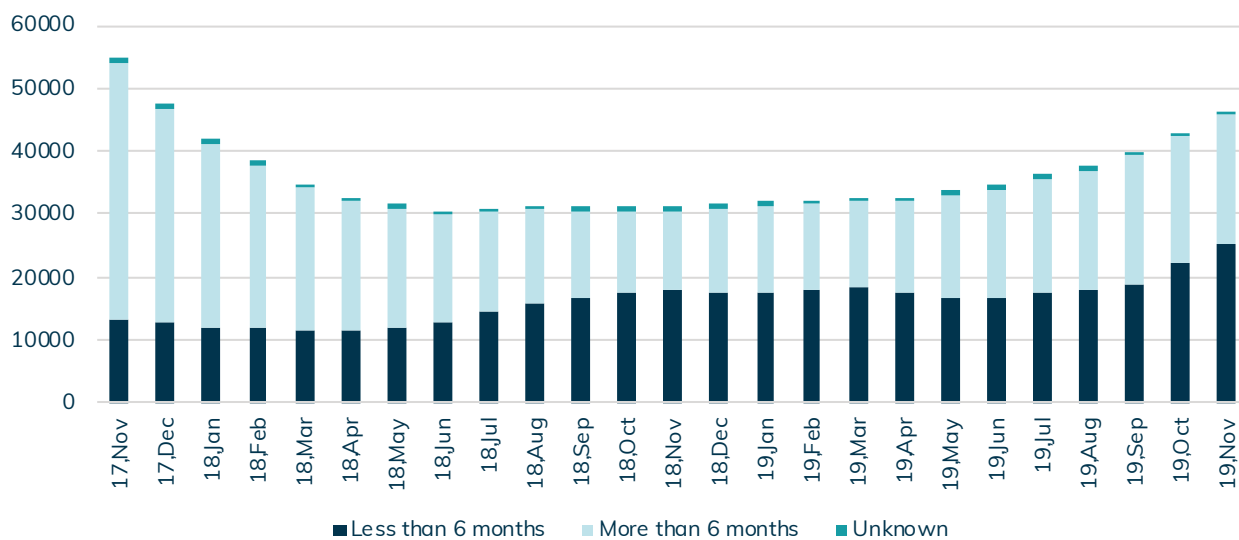
**Figure 5: Asylum applications, Afghan nationals (November 2017 – November 2019)**



**Figure 6: First-instance decisions, Afghan nationals (November 2017 – November 2019)**



**Figure 7: Stock of pending cases, Afghan nationals (November 2017 – November 2019)**





## Afghans' access to third-country resettlement

Finally, although third-country resettlement is a critical protection tool for vulnerable refugees and an essential international responsibility-sharing mechanism with major refugee hosting countries, there is a global decline in resettlement quota since 2016. This also negatively affects the likelihood of Afghans accessing third country resettlement. Globally, from 2016 to 2019, out of 401,397 total submissions, 15,433 (3.8%) Afghan cases were submitted for resettlement – ranking sixth after Syrians, Congolese, Iraqis, Somali and those coming from Myanmar.<sup>73</sup> Regarding actual departures from 2016 to 2019, out of a total number of 294,154 departures, 10,198 (3.5%) Afghans departed for resettlement – ranking eighth after the nationals from Syria, DR Congo, Myanmar, Somalia, Iraq, Eritrea and Bhutan.<sup>74</sup>

Focusing on Turkey in the period from 2016 to 2019, a total of 79,686 cases were submitted for resettlement of whom 8,421 (10.6%) were Afghans – ranking third after Syrians and Iraqis. These findings also show that globally more than half of the Afghan third country resettlement submissions are submitted in Turkey (8,421 out of 15,433, 54.7%). In the same period, a total of 49,800 people departed for resettlement from Turkey of whom 2,073 (4.2%) were Afghans – ranking fourth after Syrians, Iraqis, and Iranians. A majority of 1,843 (89.0%) out of 2,073 was resettled to the USA.

### 3.3 Drivers of Afghan migration

Conventional migration theories generally focus on macroeconomic drivers of migration, such as differences in employment conditions, wage and income levels between migrant-sending and migrant-receiving countries.<sup>75</sup> As pointed out by migration researchers, these approaches risk reducing migrants to “passive pawns lacking any agency” who are simply reacting to contextual economic determinants.<sup>76</sup> Instead, the proposed framework conceptualises migration as a social process simultaneously shaped by economic and non-economic factors, incorporating both the role of agency and structure as determinants of this process. While individual migrants have the ability to make active

choices based on their aspirations and preferences, these choices are constrained by structurally determined resources and information.<sup>77</sup> This approach also acknowledges the importance of understanding dynamic migration journeys, rather than considering migration as a straightforward and direct cross-border movement from place A to B.<sup>78</sup> As will be discussed in relation to the study's findings in the next section, the experiences during the migration journey have the potential to change migrants' understanding of their motivations, push and pull factors, decisions and destinations.<sup>79</sup>

**Based on secondary data review, the majority of Afghan refugees and migrants seem to decide to move due to similar push factors: the experience or fear of conflict, war and political repression.<sup>80</sup> Along with these security problems, economic concerns, social networks and family ties are also influential factors shaping migration decisions.<sup>81</sup> As such, traditional categories and labels about forced and voluntary migration are difficult to apply to Afghan displacement, which is better described as an example of mixed migration.** While individual expectations, aspirations and motivations may vary, the root causes of migration movements are primarily related to the “fragile” status of Afghanistan: lack of security, persisting violence and political instability, lack of basic rights and services and “state incompetence”.<sup>82</sup> As will be discussed in greater detail, the empirical findings of this study also confirm these as the main drivers of Afghan migration. The empirical findings from in-depth interviews and FGDs further reveal that while there were research participants who migrated primarily for better economic opportunities, their responses often intersected with general security concerns in Afghanistan.

In terms of pull factors, which could be defined as people's expectations when choosing their country of destination, most Afghan migrants and refugees go through “fragmented or secondary movements”.<sup>83</sup> These movements are broken into a number of stages, involving varied push and pull factors, changes in legal statuses, living and employment conditions.<sup>84</sup> The stages of journeys do not have a clear starting or ending point,

73 UNHCR (2020b) [Resettlement Data Finder](#)

74 Ibid.

75 Massey, D. S., Arango, J. Hugo, G. Kouaouci, A., Pellegrino, A and Taylor, J. E. (1993) [Theories of International Migration: A Review and Appraisal](#) Population and Development Review

76 De Haas, H. (2011) [The determinants of international migration: Conceptualising policy, origin and destination effects](#) Oxford: DEMIG Project Paper 2

77 Ibid.

78 Hagen-Zanker, J. and Mallett, R. (2016) [Journeys to Europe. The role of policy in migrant decision making](#) Overseas Development Institute (ODI) Insights

79 Hagen-Zanker, J. and Mallett, R. Op Cit.; also see, Benezet, G. and Zetter, R. (2015) [Searching for Directions: Conceptual and Methodological Challenges in Researching Refugee Journeys](#) Journal of Refugee Studies

80 For discussions on push-factors, see, Dimitriadi, Op Cit.; Bizhan Op Cit.; Kuschminder, K. & Koser, K. Op Cit.; İçduygu and Karadağ Op Cit.; Kuschminder Op Cit.

81 See, Monsutti, Op Cit., Monsutti Op Cit., Kuschminder Op Cit.

82 İçduygu, A., Karadağ, S. Op Cit. Also see, Betts, A. (2013) [Survival Migration: Failed Governance and the Crisis of Displacement](#). Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press; Betts, A. Op Cit.

83 Kuschminder, K. Op Cit.

84 Kuschminder, K. Op Cit.

and they can be transformational for the migrants and refugees themselves. As will be elaborated further, this is illustrated by recent increase in Afghan's secondary movement from Iran to Turkey.

Iran, with a shared border of over 900 kilometres with Afghanistan, has been one of the most affected countries by the Afghan displacement. As of 2019, the country hosts nearly three million Afghans – of whom 951,000 are registered refugees holding Amayesh refugee cards and an estimated 1.5 to two million remain undocumented.<sup>85</sup> Registered refugees benefit from state-funded services such as subsidized healthcare and education, as well as permission to work in a range of occupations.<sup>86</sup> Aside from being a safe haven for those seeking international protection for four decades, Iran has also been a destination country for circular/ temporary migratory movements of Afghans for employment, trade and other purposes.<sup>87</sup> Studies point at the importance of remittances sent home from Iran for the re-construction of economic and social life in Afghanistan.<sup>88</sup> Studies also highlight that since the beginning of the year 2000 Iran's policy towards Afghans has become increasingly restrictive through a number of measures believed to "encourage returns".<sup>89</sup> Some of these measures included increasing costs of keeping the Amayesh cards (e.g.

introducing fees for renewing registration and requiring (partial) payment for services, including healthcare and education) and further restrictive measures for Afghans without documentation (e.g. exclusion from social benefits and opening a bank account, insurance and property).<sup>90</sup> The restrictive protection space in Iran has arguably led to increased movements of Afghans from Iran to Turkey.

While the above-mentioned policy measures are relevant to what this study's respondents from FGDs and in-depth interviews described as "restrictive living conditions in Iran", Iran's sharp economic downturn in 2018 due to currency devaluation and sanctions<sup>91</sup> has also affected the return movements of Afghans. For example, though fluctuating, there has been a continued movement of Afghans returning to Afghanistan, and a majority from neighbouring Iran. The figures show that the majority of returns are spontaneous, forced and undocumented. The number of registered refugee returns, which serves as a proxy indicator for voluntary return movements, has significantly decreased since 2016.<sup>92</sup> Although peaking in 2018 (805,977), the number of undocumented returns decreased to its lowest number in years in 2019 (499,672). The below table provides an overview of registered and undocumented returns from 2014 to 2019.<sup>93</sup>

**Table 1: Registered and undocumented refugee returns (\* from UNHCR and \*\* from IOM data)**

Year	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Total returnees	571,116	728,670	1,064,158	583,369	821,676	507,769
Registered refugee returnees*	16,995	58,460	372,577	58,817	15,699	8,097
Undocumented returnees (spontaneous and deported)**	554,121	670,210	691,581	560,552	805,977	499,672
From Iran	n.d.	n.d.	443,527	462,361	773,125	479,902
From Pakistan	n.d.	n.d.	248,054	98,191	32,752	19,770

85 UNHCR (2020a) [Iran](#)

86 Lomax, G. (2018) [Iran needs more help to support Afghan refugees – UNHCR chief](#)

87 Dimitriadi, A. Op Cit.

88 Stigter, E. and Monsutti, A. (2005) [Transnational Networks: Recognising a Regional Reality](#) AREU Briefing Paper

89 Dimitriadi, A. Op Cit.

90 Ibid.

91 Dehghanpishes, B, Shalizi, H. (2019) [Afghanistan feels impact of Iran's economic isolation](#) Reuters

92 UNHCR (2019) [Afghanistan Voluntary Repatriation Response Snapshot](#)

93 Data aggregated from several official sources.; IOM & UNHCR (2018) [Returns to Afghanistan in 2017](#); IOM & UNHCR (2019a) [Returns to Afghanistan, Joint IOM-UNHCR Summary Report](#); IOM (2017a) [Return of Undocumented Afghans: Monthly Situation Report](#); IOM (2017b) [Return of Undocumented Afghans from Pakistan and Iran: 2016 Overview](#); IOM (2018c) [Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration](#); IOM (2019) [Return of Undocumented Afghans: Weekly Situation Report Jan-Dec 2018 / 01-05 Jan 2019](#); IOM (2020a) [Return of Undocumented Afghans, Weekly Situation Report, 5-11 January](#); IOM (2020b) [Return of Undocumented Afghans Weekly Situation Report 26 Jan-01 Feb](#); Mixed Migration Centre (2019) [Distant Dreams, Understanding the aspirations of Afghan returnees](#); UNHCR (2016) [Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees, Portfolio of Projects 2015-2016](#); UNHCR (2018e) [Refugee returnees to Afghanistan in 2018 by province: Afghanistan](#);

### 3.4 Afghan migration to Turkey

For Afghans who consider Europe as their final destination, there are three “fragmented” phases.<sup>94</sup> The first phase starts with departure from Afghanistan and moving to its neighbours, Pakistan or Iran. Migrants and refugees then move to Turkey from those countries either on foot or by a vehicle and often assisted by migrant smugglers. Land routes involve harsh physical conditions and Afghans often encounter safety concerns. Once arrived in Turkey from the eastern borders, Afghans either move towards urban areas in the eastern provinces or directly to western provinces. In case of onward movement, the second stage involves crossing into Bulgaria via land or into Greece via land or sea. The final stage involves the movement from Greece or Bulgaria to the next destination in Europe. The entire journey often involves long waiting periods in order to finance the next phase. Sometimes the next phase never takes place and then transit countries become a destination. Turkey provides an interesting case in this

regard, as it has served as both a transit and destination country (either de facto and/or de jure<sup>95</sup>).

While Turkey has been a migrant-sending country for many decades, its position as a country of transit and destination has become more prevalent since the early 2000s.<sup>96</sup> Four categories of migration movements have contributed to Turkey’s transition from a sending to a receiving country: 1) irregular arrivals of migrants, especially those coming from neighbouring countries and seeking work opportunities in Turkey’s economy; 2) transit migrants who pass through Turkey on their way to Europe, while some stay longer to work and save money for onward journeys; 3) asylum seekers and refugees, and lastly 4) regular migrants who legally reside in Turkey for studying, working and other purposes.<sup>97</sup>

The table below provides an overview of Turkish’s immigration figures, based on data coming from the DGMM.<sup>98</sup>

**Table 2: National immigration figures increase from 2011 to 2019 (DGMM Migration Statistics, 2019)**

2011		2019	
International protection applicants	17,925	International protection applicants & Temporary protection beneficiaries	56,417 (non-Syrians) & 3,576,370 (Syrians)
Irregular arrivals	44,415	Irregular arrivals	454,662
Residency permits	234,268	Residency permits	1,101,030

Especially in the last decade, Turkey’s foreign population substantially increased from 296,608 in 2011 to around five million in 2019. As shown in Table 2, the numbers of international protection applicants were relatively low in 2011. From 2011 to 2015, Turkey jumped from the 59th position to first place in the UNHCR global ranking of countries hosting the largest refugee populations (UNHCR, 2014, 2018).<sup>99</sup> The conflict in Syria has been the main driver triggering this substantial growth in Turkey’s foreign population since 2011. Over 3.5 million Syrians are currently registered under temporary protection, a group-based protection scheme offered by the Turkish state in times of mass influx of displaced persons, which is managed separately from asylum applications from

individuals with a different nationality.<sup>100</sup> Concerning individual asylum seekers (56,417), Afghan nationals (35,042) constituted largest group of international protection applicants in 2019, followed by Iraqis (15,532), Iranians (3,558) and other nationalities (2,285).<sup>101</sup> Regular migration also continues to rise, as the population of foreigners with different types of residence permits increased almost fivefold within a decade.

In 2018, Afghans were among the top five nationalities of foreigners with short-term residence permits (39,283) and student residence permits in 2018 (4,601).<sup>102</sup> Due to limited data on irregular migration movements, indicative estimates on the extent of irregular migration are usually

94 Kuschminder, K. (2017) [Taking stock of assisted voluntary return from Europe: decision making, reintegration and sustainable return—time for a paradigm shift](#) Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies ; Donini, A., Monsutti, A., & Scalettari, G. (2016) [Afghans on the move: seeking protection and refuge in Europe](#) Global Migration Center

95 I.e. the legal right to stay.

96 For detailed analyses of Turkey’s migration profile, see Kirişçi, K. (2003) [The Question of Asylum and Illegal Migration in European Union-Turkish Relations](#) Turkish Studies; Martin, P. (2012) [Turkey-EU migration: The road ahead](#). Perceptions ; De Bel Air, F. (2016) [Migration profile: Turkey](#) RSCAS Policy Briefs Migration Policy Centre

97 İçduygu, A. (2014) [Turkey’s Migration Transition and its Implications for the Euro-Turkish Transnational Space](#) Global Turkey in Europe

98 DGMM (2019) [DGMM Migration Statistics](#)

99 UNHCR (2014) [The top-20 countries to have granted protection to refugees in 21st century](#) Geneva: UN Refugee Agency; UNHCR, Government of Turkey (2020) [Operational Portal Refugee Situations](#)

100 İhlamur-Oner, S.G (2013) [Turkey refugee regime stretched to the limit? The case of Iraqi and Syrian refugee flows](#) Perceptions

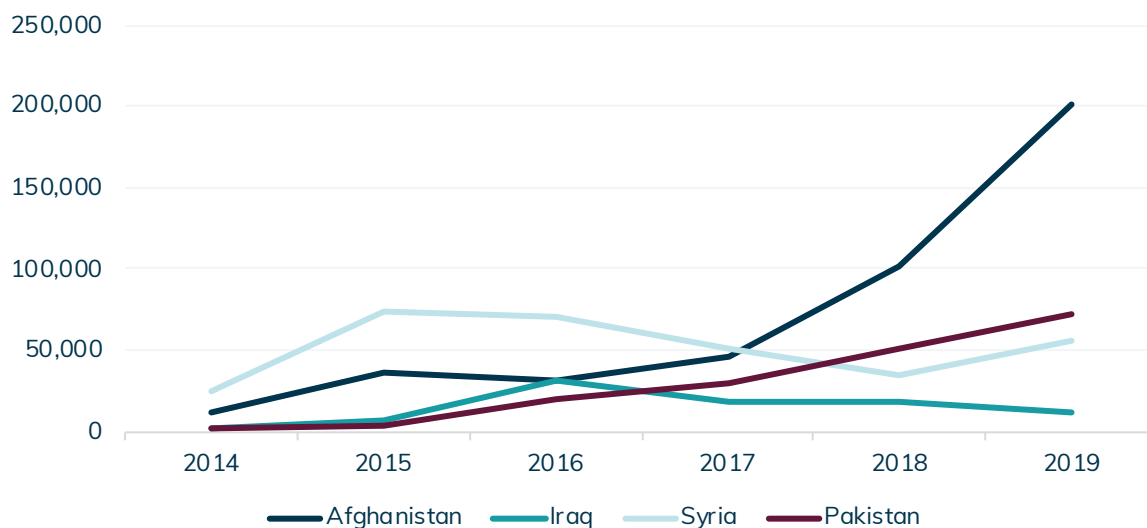
101 DGMM (2020) [International Protection](#)

102 The latest available figure is from 2018 and there is no publicly available data on Afghans with family residence permits and work permits as they are not included in the top ten ranking. See, [DGMM Migration Statistics](#)

based on apprehension figures, a commonly used method for academics and practitioners in the field.<sup>103</sup> As Table 2 illustrates, Turkey experienced a tenfold increase in the number of apprehended irregular migrants from 2011 to 2019 and Afghans have become the largest group of irregular arrivals since 2017 (see also Figure 3).<sup>104</sup> In 2018, Afghan nationals constitute the largest group

of new irregular arrivals with a share of 38% (100,841 Afghans out of a 268,003 total of new arrivals). In 2019, the number of Afghan arrivals doubled and with 44% remained the largest group of new arrivals (201,437 out of 454,662 total new arrivals).

**Figure 8: Top four nationalities of irregular arrivals in Turkey since 2014**



**Possible explanations for the increase in irregular arrivals could be linked to the externalisation of EU migration and border policies (e.g. agreements with Turkey, Jordan, and Lebanon), and the policy responses of individual EU member states aimed at restricting migration.**<sup>105</sup> These dynamics leave Afghan migrants and refugees with limited options for safe and legal migration pathways from Turkey whereby Turkey's position as a de-facto destination country becomes more prevalent.<sup>106</sup> As illustrated in the IOM 2018 Flow Monitoring Survey, migrants and refugees increasingly choose Turkey as their final destination: the majority of Syrian respondents (86%), followed by Iraqi (68%) and Afghan (64%) nationals reported Turkey as their intended destination at the time of departure.<sup>107</sup> In other words, for the majority of Afghans, Europe was not their intended destination.

Turkey's growing popularity for Afghans, especially for those who were previously residing in Iran, could also be linked to the less welcoming context of Iran. Afghan participants of this study reported more restrictive policy measures than in the past.<sup>108</sup>

While this chapter has provided background to the Afghan displacement, there is surprisingly limited data about the actual situation of Afghans on the move in and through Turkey. This is partly because these people are highly mobile and often try to remain under the radar because of their irregular status and fear of being detained and deported. Hence, this leaves us a crucial knowledge gap that this study tries to fill. The next chapter presents findings from the primary data collected as part of this study.

103 Icduygu, A. (2011) [The Irregular Migration Corridor between the EU and Turkey: Is it Possible to Block it with a Readmission Agreement?](#) Research Report Case Study EU-US Immigration Systems, European University Institute

104 Most of the interviewees working with refugees and migrants confirmed that they witnessed a growing influx of Afghans especially during 2018. Contrary to the actual number of irregular arrivals, interviewed government officials from the border provinces of Erzurum and Van indicated a decline in new arrivals after 2018, but also highlighted that smaller groups continue to arrive in intervals. A respondent's comment reflects the unpredictable nature of the situation: "We assumed that the conditions were getting better in Afghanistan with the decline in new arrivals. But we experienced a sudden increase this month [November 2019], they are arriving in groups of 100-200 people. This is unusual because arrivals normally reach these levels in summer months. There are also transiting people, we never see [this many of] them [in this time of the year]." NGO Representative, Male, Erzurum.

105 For in-depth discussions on restrictive policy measures and externalisation of EU's migration and border policies, see Toaldo, M. (2017) [Don't close borders, manage them: how to improve EU policy on migration through Libya](#) European Council on Foreign Relations (ECFR) Policy Memo; Nieman, A. and Zaun, N. (2018) [EU Refugee Policies and Politics in Times of Crisis: Theoretical and Empirical Perspectives](#) Journal of Common Market Studies; MEDAM (2019) [2019 Assessment Report on Asylum and Migration Policies in Europe](#) Mercator Dialogue on Asylum and Migration (MEDAM); for effects concerning Turkey, see Paçacı-Eltiok, S. (2019) [Three Years on: An Evaluation of the EU-Turkey Refugee Deal](#) MIREKOC Working Paper; Üstübcü, A. (2019) [The impact of externalized migration governance on Turkey: technocratic migration governance and the production of differentiated legal status](#) Comparative Migration Studies

106 Dimitradi, A., Kaya, A., Kale, B., Zurabishvili, T. (2018) [EU-Turkey Relations and Irregular Migration: Transactional Cooperation in the Making](#) FEUTURE

107 IOM (2017) [Migrants and Refugees Increasingly Choosing Turkey as Final Destination](#)

108 Kuschminder, K (2018) [Afghan Refugee Journeys: Onwards Migration Decision-Making in Greece and Turkey](#) Journal of Refugee Studies

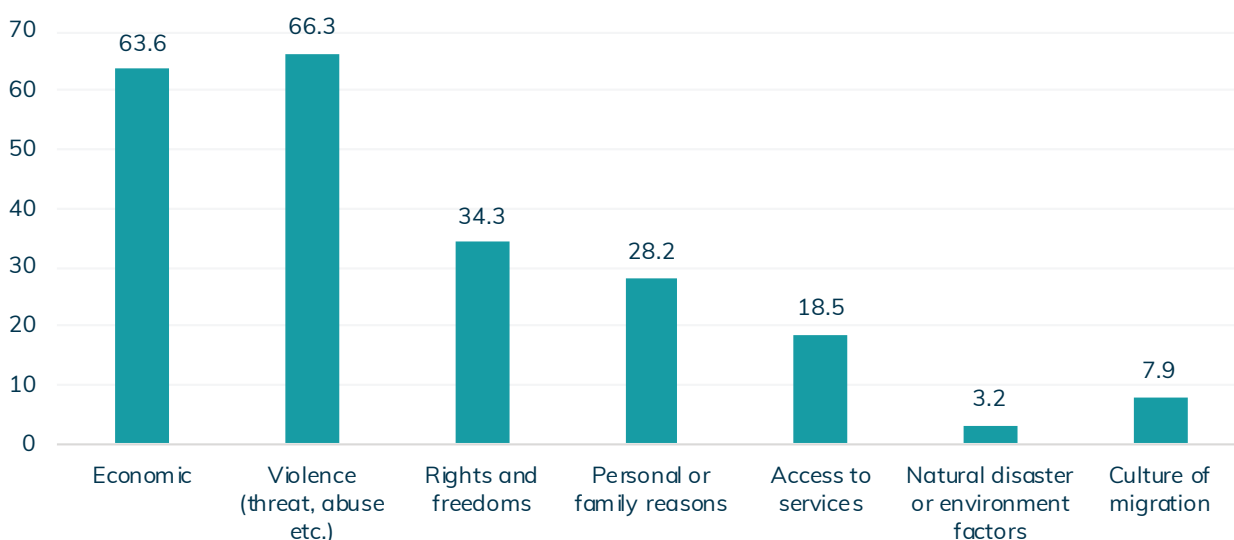
## 4. DRIVERS AND DECISIONS

### 4.1 Push factors: reasons for leaving Afghanistan

A large majority (66.3%) of survey respondents indicated violence as main reason for leaving their country of origin/residence<sup>109</sup>, closely followed by economic

reasons (63.6%)<sup>110</sup>, and then lack of rights and freedoms (34.3%)<sup>111</sup>, personal and family reasons (28.2%)<sup>112</sup>, access to services (18.5%)<sup>113</sup>, a culture of migration (7.9%), and natural disasters or environmental factors (3.2%)<sup>114</sup>.

**Figure 9: Reasons for leaving Afghanistan (Multiple choice, %, n=341)**



A majority of 138 respondents ranked economic reasons as the first reason for starting the migration journey. This was followed by 126 respondents who placed violence first place and 36 who chose rights and freedoms. 128 respondents marked violence as their second most important reasons to migrate, followed rights and freedom (n=76) and economy reasons (n=48). The third most common reason given was, “culture of migration”<sup>115</sup> (n=77), followed by rights and freedom (n=56) and access to services (n=44).

The three ranks combined, violence (80.4%) was mentioned most frequently, followed by economic reasons (60.7%) and reasons related to rights and freedom (49.3%). With some distance, these were followed by, personal or family reasons (26.7%), access to services (23.5%), and culture of migration (22.6%). Two-third (66.3%) of respondents did not think there were options for resolving their problems within their country of departure.<sup>116</sup>

109 The kinds of reasons relating to violence mentioned were: War/armed conflict/terrorism: 53.1%; Political unrest/riots: 33.1%; Crime and general insecurity: 27%; Domestic Violence: 12.3%; Sexual and gender-based violence: 7.0%.

110 The kinds of economic reasons mentioned were I was not earning enough in the job I had: 32%; I was unemployed: 27.3%; It was difficult to do business: 36.1%.

111 The kinds of reasons relating to rights and freedoms mentioned were: Lack of freedom (of expression, movement, association) / repressive government: 24.0%; Discrimination/persecution: 18.5%.

112 The kinds of reasons relating to personal and family issues mentioned were: Domestic violence / forced marriage: 37 (10.9%); Other family reasons: 18.2%; Joining family/friends abroad: 4.7%.

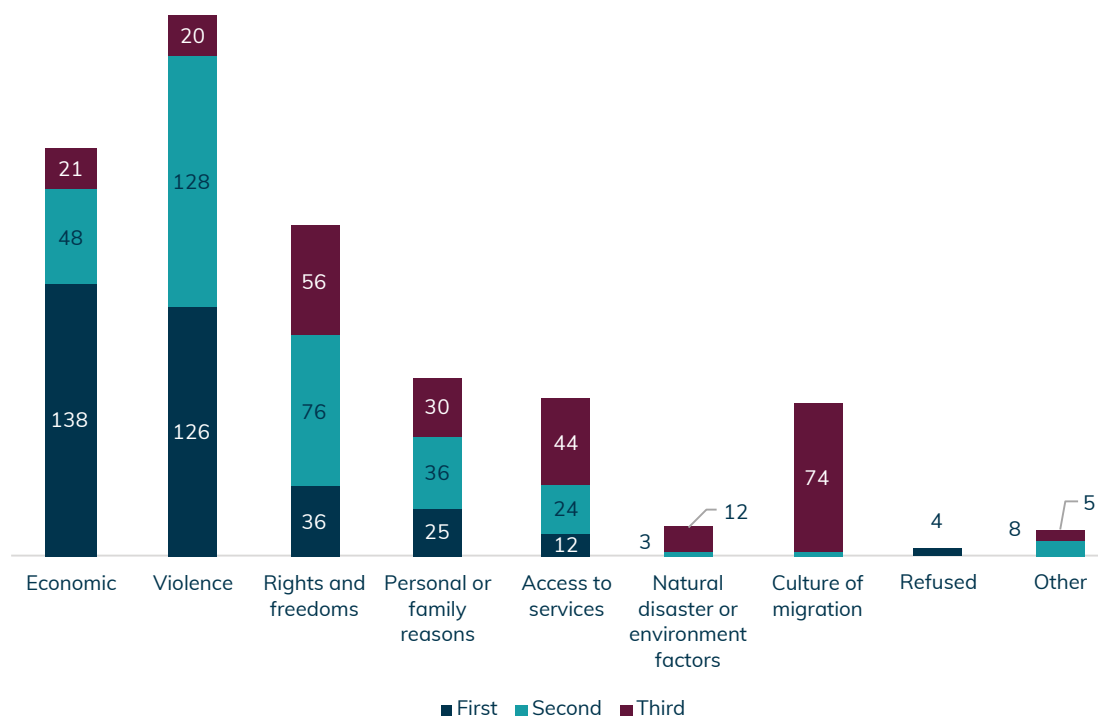
113 The kinds of reasons relating to access to services mentioned were: Lack of good educational opportunities: 12.3%; Corruption in government, politics and police: 10.3%; Lack of good health facilities: 11.1%; Insufficient access to goods and basic services (e.g. infrastructure, transport, availability of products, etc.): 5.0%.

114 The present study builds on research previously conducted by MMC. Data from MMC’s Mixed Migration Monitoring Initiative (4Mi) in 2018 demonstrates that violence and general insecurity (62.3%), personal and/or family reasons (34.5%), lack of rights in Afghanistan (20.4%) were reported to be the main drivers of migration movements from Afghanistan to Europe (based on 313 interviews with Afghans in Denmark, Germany and Greece in 2018). Whereas economic reasons (70.1%) on average are most commonly cited as drivers along the seven migration routes where MMC interviews refugees and migrants through 4Mi, it appears to be less of an important driver in the case of Afghans (14.7%) in 2018. In July 2019, MMC conducted 205 4Mi interviews with Afghans in Greece and Germany and showed that violence and general insecurity (62.7%), personal and/or family reasons (45.9%), lack of rights in Afghanistan (25.8%) and economic reasons (24.2%) were reported to be the main drivers of migration movements from Afghanistan to Europe. As the numbers show, the present research supports 4Mi findings to some extent as a small majority of respondents also pointed at the cumulative impact of protracted conflict and general insecurity on their lives as the main reason for leaving Afghanistan. More research is needed to validate these observations. The increasing importance of economic push factors may be related to the worsening economic situation in Iran. See also Mixed Migration Centre (2018) [Drivers](#).

115 Defined by Jonsson as the state in which “international movements become[s] so deeply rooted that the prospect of transnational movement becomes normative, and young people expect to live and work in a particular foreign country at some point in their lives.” See Jónsson, G. (2008). [Migration aspirations and immobility in a Malian Soninke village](#), International Migration Institute. Kandel describes it as a situation where “migration becomes the norm and staying the exception”. See Kandel, W. and D.S. Massey. (2002). [The Culture of Mexican Migration: A Theoretical and Empirical Analysis](#). Social Forces 80:981–1004, 2002.

116 84 (24.6%) said that they did think there were.

**Figure 10: Top three reasons for leaving Afghanistan (Number of people who answered per answer option and per rank, n=341)**



The qualitative data from the FGDs and in-depth interviews provide an additional layer of analysis and a look beyond the numbers. In these interviews and discussions, some of the most cited drivers for migration to Turkey were violence and oppression by the Taliban and other armed groups, personal security problems mainly involving threats from family members or personal enemies, lack of rights, and lack of access to basic services. While some referred to direct experiences of conflict-induced displacement, such as explosions in their villages, destroying their homes, others cited indirect effects, including deterioration of livelihoods and services in Afghanistan. As also noted in other studies, security concerns, unemployment and challenges in accessing education and healthcare often intersect.<sup>117</sup> The answers provided on drivers of migration and decision making already confirm the mixed nature of the Afghan migration movements as documented in secondary data. In the words of some respondents:

*“I had to flee [from Afghanistan] because of the war. But my actual desire is to study. There is no such chance in there, our economic situation did not allow this either.”*  
**21, Male, Erzurum**

*“I left [Afghanistan] for my children; they could not go to school. Taliban was threatening us every day.”*  
**Focus Group Participant, Female, Adana**

*“I came [to Turkey] because of war and unemployment. It has been four months.”*  
**Focus Group Participant, Male, Erzurum**

*“War and oppression [were the main reasons to migrate]. Taliban was threatening my son because he works with the Americans. They shot him twice, he is now disabled. We had to flee [from Afghanistan] because I did not want Taliban to kill my son or my grandchildren, to rape me or my daughter-in-law. We could no longer live there [in Afghanistan]. I was praying every single day for God to save us. We could not even sleep.”*  
**59, Female, Adana**

In terms of understanding people’s decision making before departure, one hundred forty-one respondents (141), indicated that someone influenced their decision to migrate. Among the biggest influences mentioned are parents (n=68), friends and family in country of departure (n=53), friends and family in another country (n=41) and spouses (n=34).

117 Seefar (2018) [Examining Return and Reintegration in Afghanistan: Why Psychosocial Interventions Matter](#); Mixed Migration Centre (2019) [Distant Dreams. Understanding the aspirations of Afghan returnees](#)



Family reasons play a crucial role in the decision-making process. Thirty-seven (37) survey respondents stated family or personal reasons, including the risk of forced marriage, as the major reason for leaving Afghanistan. Nearly all female respondents who either fled with other family members or on their own indicated being subject to domestic violence, sexual abuse, verbal and physical threats related to forced and early marriages (by close relatives or older men, in particular). Dispersion of families during migration movements was also reported. During FGDs and through in-depth interviews, single women reported that they decided to migrate on their own or with close family members in order to protect themselves or their children from such risks and threats. While discussing their experiences during FGDs with women in a similar situation, two women explained:

*“My older cousin started threatening me to marry him when I was 14-15. He tried to sexually abuse me a couple of times. My dad passed away when I was young, and my mother wanted to protect me. We moved to Iran [from Afghanistan]. I got married, had a child. But even after years, my cousin found us in Iran, he came and threatened [us]. We had to flee [to Turkey]; I didn’t even tell my neighbours where I was going. I am still not feeling safe here. It is a nightmare. Turkey is still too close, he can find us, I want to go somewhere very far, but we have been waiting to hear for the results of our application [for asylum].”*

**Focus Group Participant, Female**

*“After my husband passed away, my brother-in-law kept threatening to marry him. I did not want to. When my daughter turned 15, he started threatening her in the same manner. I have been through a lot. He physically abused me so many times. I lost my health because of him; I have a serious heart condition. I am illiterate, but I wanted my daughter to have a different fate, a better future. My neighbour helped me to arrange the journey to Turkey. I came with my daughter. We know no one in Turkey. I try to stay away from Afghans, because I am still afraid that he might come and find us.”*

**Focus Group Participant, Female**

As cited by some female respondents, problems related to drug addiction of partners and difficulties of surviving in Afghanistan as single females/widows also triggered migration decisions. According to secondary sources, Afghanistan provides 80% of the world’s heroin. Opium cultivation is a major source of income and jobs and one of the major economic activities of the country. This also brings a variety of other social problems to the surface. UN data shows the numbers of opium and heroin addicts rose from 0.2 to around 2.4 million people between 2005 and 2015. One female focus group participant shared:

*“My husband was a drug addict. One day he had gone missing. I tried to locate him through missing person ads, but no luck. I was feeling insecure on my own, the Taliban had also threatened me several times because my brother is a journalist [in Afghanistan]. In the end I left] on my own.”*

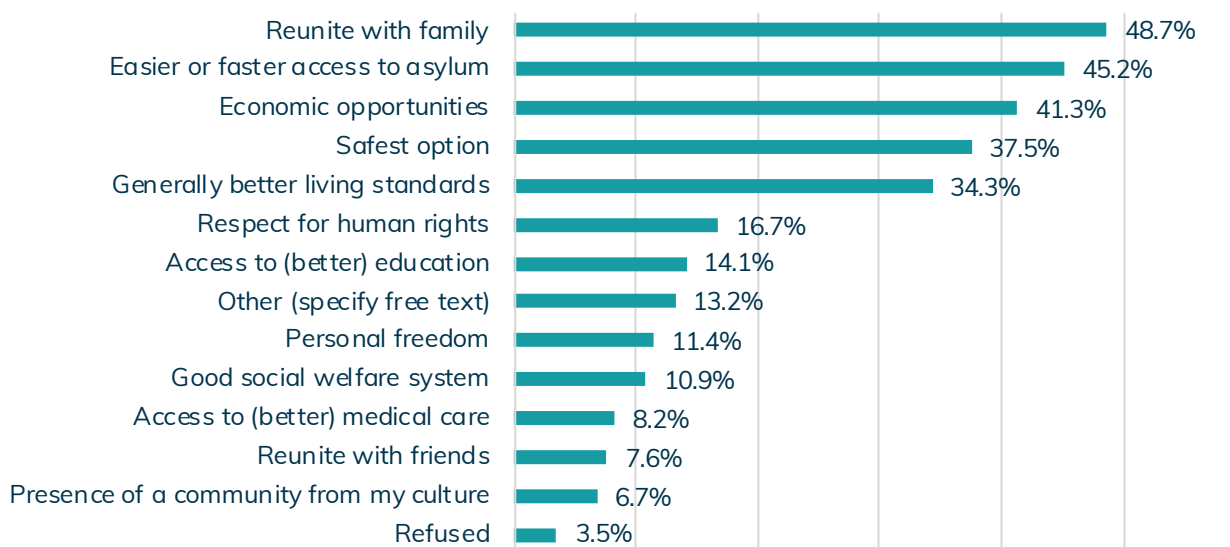
**Focus Group Participant, Female, Erzurum**

#### **4.2 Pull factors: reasons for coming to Turkey**

According to survey data, Afghan migrants and refugees have a variety of reasons for choosing Turkey. Based on a multiple-choice question on reasons for coming to Turkey, **almost half of respondents (48.7%) respondents chose Turkey to reunite with family, followed by 45.2% who chose Turkey for easier and faster access to asylum, economic reasons (41.3%), and better living standards (34.3%).**<sup>118</sup>

<sup>118</sup> Some other responses included access to better education (48 or 14.1%) and health services (28 or 8.2%), social welfare system (37 or 10.9%), respect for human rights (27 or 16.7%) and personal freedom (39 or 11.4%), reunification with friends (26 or 7.6%), and the presence of a community from their culture (23 or 6.7%). 35 respondents did not give any answer.

**Figure 11: Reasons for coming to Turkey (Multiple choice, n=341, 1,021 responses, %)**

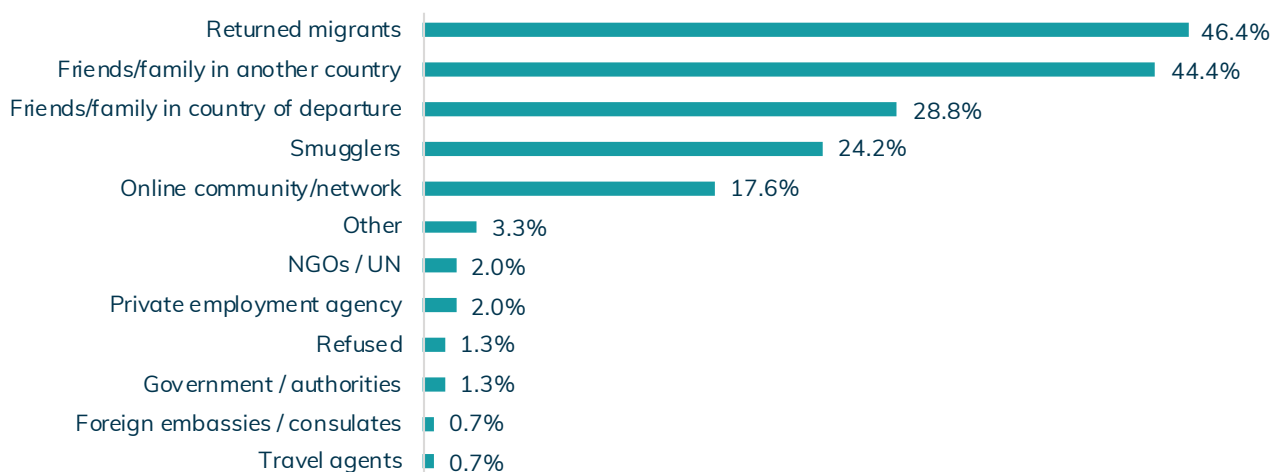


Family reunification is the main reason for people to come to Turkey and 23.2% of respondents stated that they had relatives in Turkey before starting their journeys.<sup>119</sup> A similar number of respondents indicated having relatives who came to Turkey, received refugee status and resettled to another country.<sup>120</sup> These numbers may indicate that even though family reunification was a pull factor to come to Turkey, respondents may actually want to reunite with family members in Europe (or other destinations) as easier access to asylum was reported as the second main pull factor for coming to Turkey. Below, future intentions will be discussed in more detail.

To better understand whether Afghans' decision to migrate to Turkey was an informed choice, respondents

were asked about their knowledge of Turkey, existing networks in Turkey and expectations prior to coming to Turkey. In terms of access to information that helped people to make their decision on routes, journey and destination, 52.5% of the survey respondents indicated to not obtain information regarding the routes, destinations, costs, conditions and risk of journey, compared to 45.2% who indicated that they did.<sup>121</sup> As shown in the figure below, among 154 respondents who had prior information about the route, the majority indicated returnees, friends and families in another country as the two main sources of information (46.4% and 44.4%, respectively). This was followed by those who received information from friends/family in the country of departure (28.8%), smugglers (24.2%) and online sources (e.g. social media) (17.6%).

**Figure 12: The main sources of information on routes, journey and destination (Multiple choice, n=153, 264 responses in total)**



119 Compared to 223 (65.4%) who did not.

120 Compared to 243 (71.3%) who did not

121 Eight respondents did not answer the question.

The overall reported lack of prior knowledge is also represented in the qualitative findings from the FGDs and IDIs. Many participants and respondents had little to no knowledge about Turkey before arrival.

*"I was told that Turkey would grant citizenship if I stayed for five years. I did not want my children to go through the same problems as I did in Iran, that is why I came [to Turkey], but I did not know I would be a refugee here."*

**Focus Group Participant, Female, Adana**

*"We did not know anything about Turkey, and we did not know anyone [before coming to Turkey]."*

**28, Male, Adana**

*"We knew some people here, but we still did not know much about Turkey [before coming to Turkey]. We only knew it was a safe country and had better living conditions than India, our second choice."*

**42, Male, Adana**

*"No one knows much about Turkey in general. We knew more or less about the difficulties of the journey to get here, but even so we would have come anyway. Anyone coming here irregularly has good reasons to migrate in the first place."*

**Focus Group Participant, Female, Adana**

During FGDs and in-depth interviews, respondents were asked about their expectations of Turkey before they started their journey. They cited living in a safer environment than Afghanistan or Iran, having better living standards, finding a decent job, and sending their children to school. While having a safe living environment and access to basic services, including education and healthcare, there were two other identified expectation reported left unmet: legal access to the job market, and a secure legal status in Turkey. Lacking access to the formal job market and lacking a secure legal status were also mentioned as barriers in permanently settling in Turkey and planning for their future (See also Chapter 7). Hence, these barriers are two major push factors for onward movements from Turkey. Respondents expressed their desire to have a normalised life. In the words of respondents:

*"We came with the hope that living conditions would be better here, but [they are] not [better] really. Only security conditions are better [than Afghanistan] here."*

**Focus Group Participant, Male, Erzurum**

*"At least our children can go to school here. That makes me very happy"*

**Focus Group Participant, Female, Adana**

*"We want to find a decent job, but this is really difficult. There are 13 people in my family, I cannot provide financial means here. I have to go to a third country."*

**Focus Group Participant, Male, Erzurum**

*"We [as a family] migrated way too many times. We just want to go somewhere and have a dignified life like other people. We witnessed war, then fled to Iran [from Afghanistan]. We were displaced multiple times in Iran in order to be treated better. Then [we migrated] to Van, followed by Kütahya, Konya and Adana. It feels as if I am carrying my house on my shoulders. Of course, finding a job is important, but we are young. We can find a job. What we want is stability and citizenship"*

**Focus Group Participant, Female, Adana**

*"Mom, what are our plans? Are we going to stay here? Are we going to get deported? Are we going to go back?" I want to be able to answer these questions. I am having nightmares every single day, asking myself what if I have to take my children back to the war zone [Afghanistan]."*

**Focus Group Participant, Female, Adana**

Various respondents stated that the main expectation of Turkey was to have the opportunity to acquire Turkish citizenship and permanently settle. As highlighted by experts, most Afghan face an uncertain future.

*"There is a growing trend of secondary migration from Iran [to Turkey]. This mainly stems from the fact that daily life got increasingly difficult for them [Afghans] and they cannot see any future prospects there. In my opinion, they want to move onwards from Turkey, too. In terms of discrimination and exclusion, daily life in Turkey offers a better context than Iran, but lack of future prospects is a continuing problem here."*

**NGO Representative, Female, Adana**

*"The highest priority expectations [of Afghans] are to settle permanently, i.e. citizenship. The most important feature of the other countries is that they can offer citizenship opportunities."*

**NGO Representative, Female, Adana**

“Because they [Afghans] are under international protection, they] cannot apply for citizenship at the same time in Turkey. Therefore, most immigrants [refugees and migrants] are applying for settlement in the third country. Expectations from Turkey are the same expectations from third countries where they hope to settle, which are citizenship [and a] work permit (..)”

**NGO Representative, Female, Adana**

### 4.3 Onward movement

Almost half (48.4%) of respondents stated they have not reached the end of their journey. Another 102 (30.0%) respondents declared that they have reached the end of their journey, which means that for them Turkey was or has become their destination country.<sup>122</sup>

At the end of the survey, regardless of whether people indicated having reached the end of their journey in Turkey, respondents were asked about their plans for the coming 12 months. As the table shows, a majority 51.4% of respondents plans to relocate within Turkey, followed by 26.5% who do not have any plans. Respectively, 10.9% and 7.7% of respondents indicate to move to another country or be resettled. The figures confirm our assumption that most Afghan migrant and refugees are still “on the move”, although primarily within Turkey. For example, nearly half of those who indicated to have reached the end, do not know what they will do in the coming 12 months (48 out of 102) and another 44 out of 102 still have a plan to relocate within Turkey or move to another country later (7 out of 102). As shown in the table, out of the 165 respondents who indicated to have not yet reached the end of their journey, 96 plans on moving to another location within Turkey; 27 want to move another country on their own while 20 hope to be resettled to a third country.

**Table 3: End of journey and plans for the coming 12 months**

Voluntarily return to the country of origin		What do you plan to do within 12 months? (n=313)						
		Move to another location within Turkey	Be resettled to a third country	Moving to another country on my own	Don't know	Refused	Total	
Have you reached the end of your journey? (n=341)	Yes	0	44	1	7	48	2	102
	No	0	96	20	27	22	0	165
	Don't know	0	21	3	0	12	0	36
	Refused	4	0	0	0	1	5	10
		4	161	24	34	83	7	313

Comparing plans across provinces shows that the majority who want to move to another location within Turkey (58 out of 161) is currently in Erzurum and Van (35 out of 161). Not surprisingly, these are also the border areas where most new arrivals enter Turkey and plan their onward movement within Turkey. The majority who want to move to another country through resettlement (8 out of 24) or on their own (15 out of 34) are currently in Izmir. The majority of the undecided group (34 out of 83) is currently in Istanbul. The question about plans for the coming 12 months was also discussed during focus groups and while 24 respondents highlighted that they do not wish to risk their lives by attempting to go to Europe via irregular means or get assistance from migrant smugglers, although some have already made their decision to leave:

“I would consider going [to Europe] only through regular ways. I would never ever ask assistance from smugglers. They are horrible. They torture people.”

**59, Female, Adana**

<sup>122</sup> 36 (10.6%) stated they did not know whether Turkey would be the end of their journey. 38 (11.1%) declined to answer the question.

“Turkey is way better than Iran. It is safe, but we have financial difficulties. It is difficult to get a job here. Therefore, we would consider going to a third country.”

**45, Male, Adana**

“I can't find a job. We're spending money we brought from Iran. I need to find a job, or we will be going to Europe with the rest of our money. I do not know.”

**28, Male, 2019**

Many (43.1%) of the respondents indicated Turkey as their intended destination country, followed by European countries (19.1%), Canada (17.9%), USA (10.9%) or Australia (1.8%). Nine (2.6%) mentioned that the preferred country does not matter.<sup>123</sup> Interestingly, there were four (1.2%) Afghans who expressed the desire to return to Afghanistan.

Almost two-third (65.7%) of respondents want to permanently settle in their intended destination country, while 15.2% of respondents stated that they are planning to stay there temporarily and 7.9% stated that they did not know how long they would want to stay. In the focus groups, participants mentioned the following:

“I want to go to the United States. My sister lives there.”

**Focus Group Participant, Female, Adana**

“I would go to any country except the US. The US harmed our country [Afghanistan]. I would actually prefer to stay in Turkey.”

**Focus Group Participant, Female, Adana**

“We would not consider going illegally [because] the journey [to Europe] is deadly. But if we could go through legal ways, I would consider. But if someone asks, I would also recommend Turkey. It is safe.”

**Focus Group Participant, Male, Erzurum**

Other focus group participants highlighted that the country of destination does not matter as long as they are accepted as Afghans and have improved living conditions:

“It could be any country as long as they accept us and offer better living standards. What we do not want is to ever go back to Afghanistan.”

**Focus Group Participant, Female, Adana**

“Every country is more or less the same in our situation. Our life is like a prison. But Europe may offer better opportunities. It does not really matter where we go as long as they accept us. All we want is freedom and a peaceful life”

**Focus Group Participant, Female, Adana**

123 Seven (2.1%) indicated to prefer countries other than Turkey, but without specifying which country. Five (1.5%) did not answer this question.

# 5. ON THE MOVE: ROUTES, MEANS AND CONDITIONS OF TRAVEL

## 5.1 Migration routes

Key factors determining routes and means of travel are geographical conditions, border control and migration policies of transit/destination countries, migrant smuggling networks, smuggler fees and operation methods.<sup>124</sup> Mainly depending on border control regulations and geographical conditions, land routes are widely used instead of sea or air routes, as the latter generally require more resources and organization. Between 2009 and 2015, for example, a large part of the recorded migrant smuggling between Turkey and the European Union (EU) shifted from land routes to Aegean Sea crossings. This was believed to occur in response to increased controls at the Turkish-Greek and Turkish-Bulgarian land borders.<sup>125</sup>

Migrant smuggling networks are widely known for their ability to quickly adjust their methods of operation to the changing circumstances.<sup>126</sup> When new border control measures are implemented, smugglers often adapt their routes accordingly to avoid detection. This typically leads to changes in the route taken rather than to changes in the overall number of people who use smuggling networks (which will be discussed in the next chapter).<sup>127</sup> Stricter border control measures often increase the risks for refugees and migrants but also provide opportunities for smugglers to make more money (e.g. charging higher fees because of riskier routes).<sup>128</sup> In the case of Turkey, border control management has become more restrictive since Turkey and the EU started collaborating on the governance of migration movements as part of Turkey's accession process to the EU. Reportedly, due to increased border controls, along with decreased resettlement quota, Afghans became more dependent on irregular means and smuggling networks to travel to Europe. This makes it especially difficult for Afghans who have the intention to move to Europe to do this safely and legally.<sup>129</sup>

For the majority (71.6%) of respondents, the migration journey started from Afghanistan (24.6% departed from Iran and 3.8% from Pakistan). Reportedly, this is where for many the journey started in an irregular manner as it is difficult to obtain official passports, visas, and other legal documents in Afghanistan. Although there are also reports that obtaining passports and travel permissions is restricted but relatively easy<sup>130</sup>, acquiring a passport to cross official border crossings was considered a time-consuming and expensive process. Reportedly, this was especially difficult for people from rural areas. While a majority of 69.2% of respondents came from an urban area, there were still 27.9% who came from a rural area.<sup>131</sup> The key obstacles in acquiring passports and visas are due to the Afghanistan centrist administration's policies and the very bureaucratic complexity of the system. It also requires people to go to cities to start and follow-up on the application procedures, which adds additional costs of travel, boarding and accommodation. Hence, there is a thriving black-market of middlemen taking advantage of potential migrants who generally lack information and capacities to navigate this legal process and make the required travels. However, these services are also expensive which results in many Afghan migrants and refugees seeing no other option but to cross borders irregularly without official documents. This aligns with the survey findings as a majority of 83.3% of the Afghans arrived in Turkey irregularly, whereas only 5.6% used regular means.<sup>132</sup>

The majority (58.9%) of the survey respondents indicated having moved first from Afghanistan to Iran, and then to Turkey. A smaller group of 19.4% of respondents indicated moving initially from Afghanistan to Pakistan before moving to Iran and Turkey.<sup>133</sup>

124 Kuschminder K., de Bresser J., & Siegel M. (2015) [Irregular Migration Routes to Europe and Factors Influencing Migrants' Destination Choices](#)

125 Aksel, D. B., Dimitriadi, A., Hendor, M., İçduygu, A., Karacay, A. B., Marouf, M., & Andersson-Pucher, J. (2015) [Study on Smuggling of Migrants: Characteristics, Responses and Cooperation with Third Countries. Case Study 3: Pakistan-Turkey-Greece](#) European Commission

126 Europol & INTERPOL (2016) [Migrant Smuggling Networks](#)

127 UNODC (2018) [Global Study on Smuggling of Migrants](#)

128 UNODC (2011) [Smuggling of Migrants](#)

129 Biriz Karaçay, A. (2017) [Shifting Human Smuggling Routes Along Turkey's Borders](#) Turkish Policy Quarterly

130 A member of the reference group provided the following example: "If a seasonal worker wants to go to Tehran from Kabul, obtaining Iranian visa is easy but the time of stay is short and cost for visa, transport, insurance, etc. will be around 800 USD at least. However, the same person can go to Zaranj with 30-35 USD and from there to Tehran with 300 USD using smuggler services."

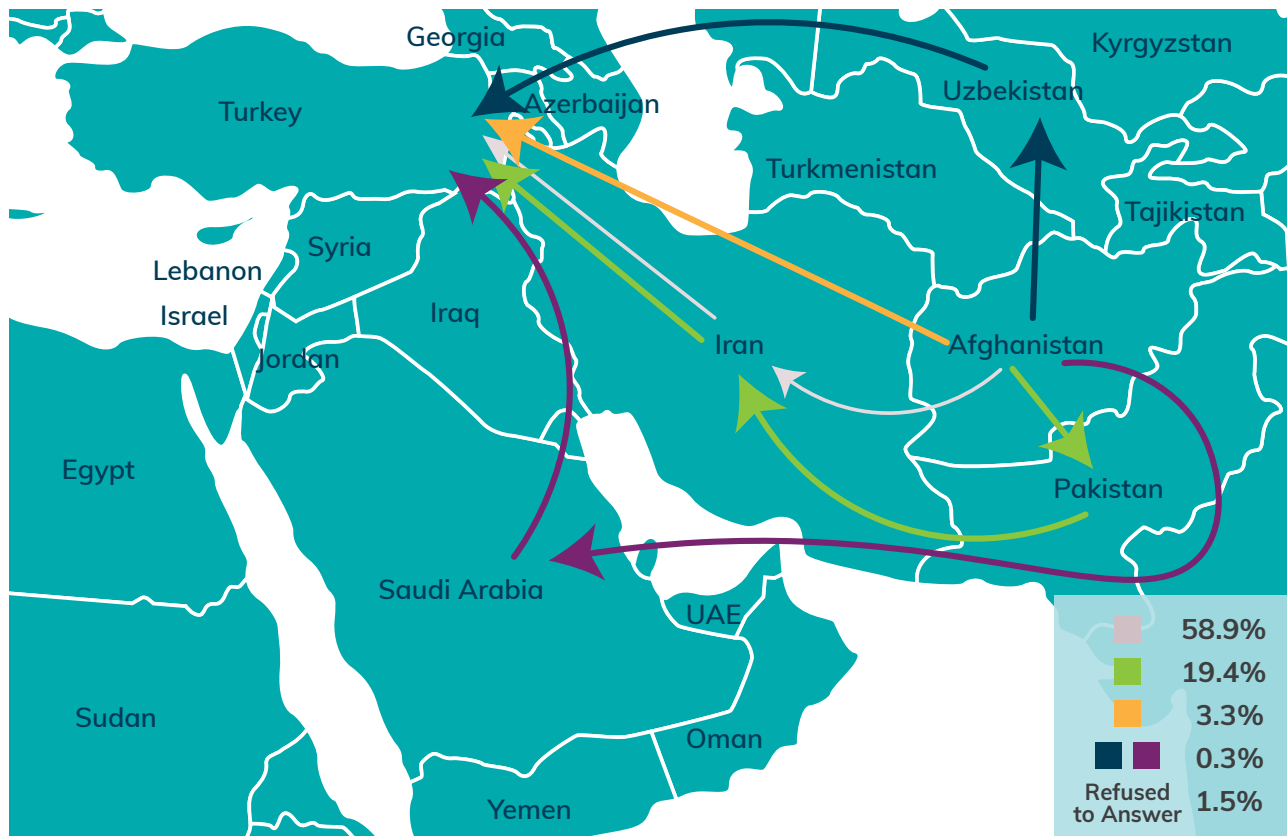
131 10 people declined to answer.

132 38 (11.1%) did not answer this question.

133 There were also 11 respondents who stated coming directly from Afghanistan or used other routes, such as crossing through Uzbekistan (1 person) and Saudi Arabia (1 person). Five respondents did not answer this question.



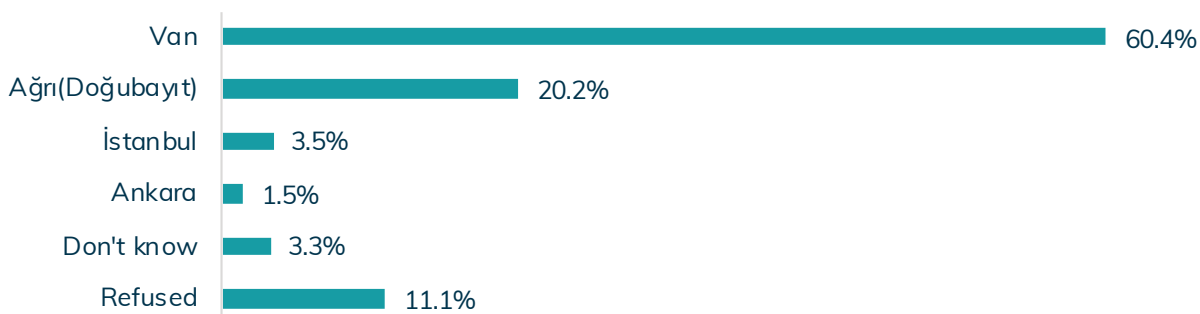
**Figure 13: Routes to Turkey (arrows are indicative only)**



Whether the journey started from Afghanistan, Iran or Pakistan, Afghans enter Turkey through Iran and cross the Iran-Turkey land border into the eastern border provinces of Turkey. 206 (60.4%) survey respondents

arrived in Van, and 69 (20.2%) in Ağrı (Doğubeyazıt). There are 17 respondents who used regular means of entry and arrived in Ankara (1.5%) and Istanbul (3.5%).<sup>134</sup>

**Figure 14: Province of entry (n=341, %)**

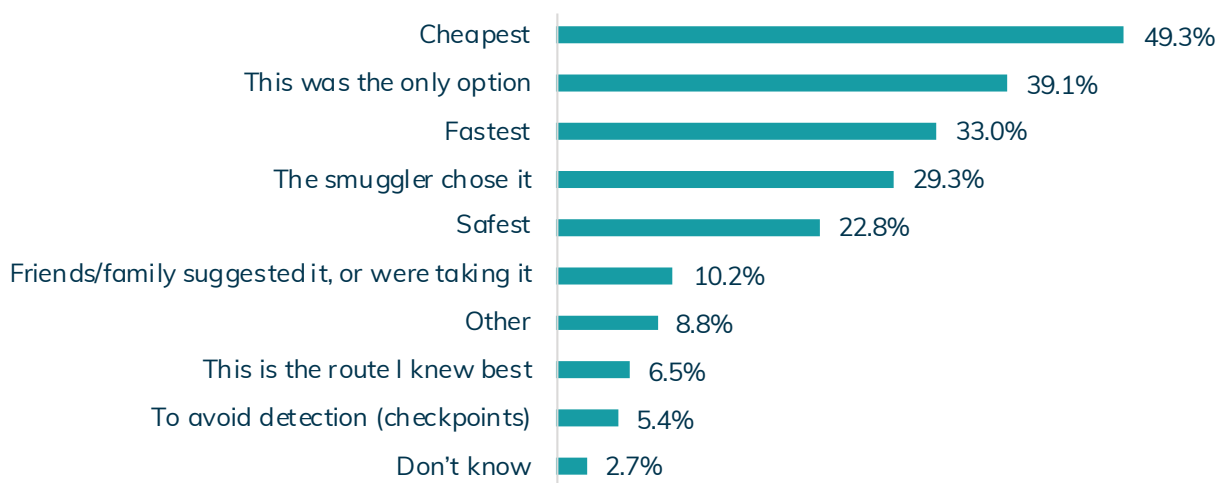


When identifying the reasons for taking a particular route, 49.3% of respondents stated that the cost of taking that route was the cheapest, while 39.1% stated that it was the only option and 33% stated that the route was the

fastest option. A further 29.3% of respondents indicated taking the route because the smuggler chose it for them and 22.8% identified it as the safest available option.

<sup>134</sup> 11 (3.3%) did not know the province they entered through and 38 respondents (11.1%) declined to answer this question.

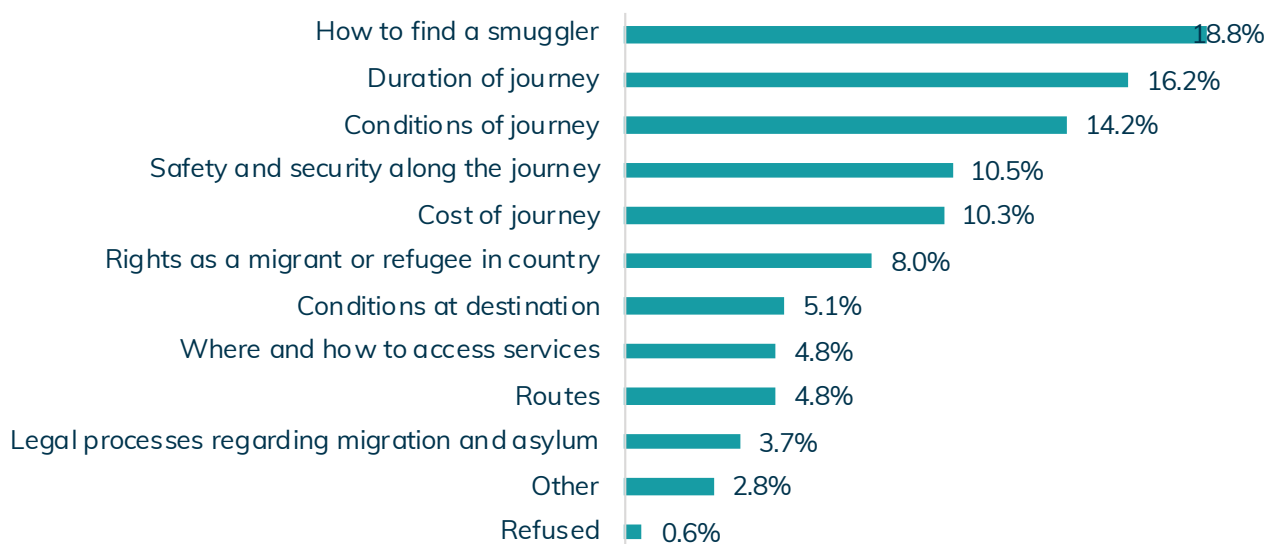
**Figure 15: Why did you take this route?**  
(Multiple choice, n=294, 609 responses in total, %)



A majority (61.3%) of respondents indicated not having access to any information on routes and destination during the journey,<sup>135</sup> compared to 35.8% who said that they did.<sup>136</sup> For the 122 (35.8%) who reported having access to information, other migrants (n=53) were the main sources of information during the journey, followed

by friends and family in the country of departure (n=49) and in other countries (n=47), and smugglers (n=33). In a multiple-choice question, finding smugglers (18.8%), duration of journey (16.2%), and conditions of the journey (14.2%) came out as the major information needs during the journey.

**Figure 16: What information would have been most useful that you did not receive?**  
(Multiple choice, n=105, 351 responses in total, %)



## 5.2 Means and conditions of travel

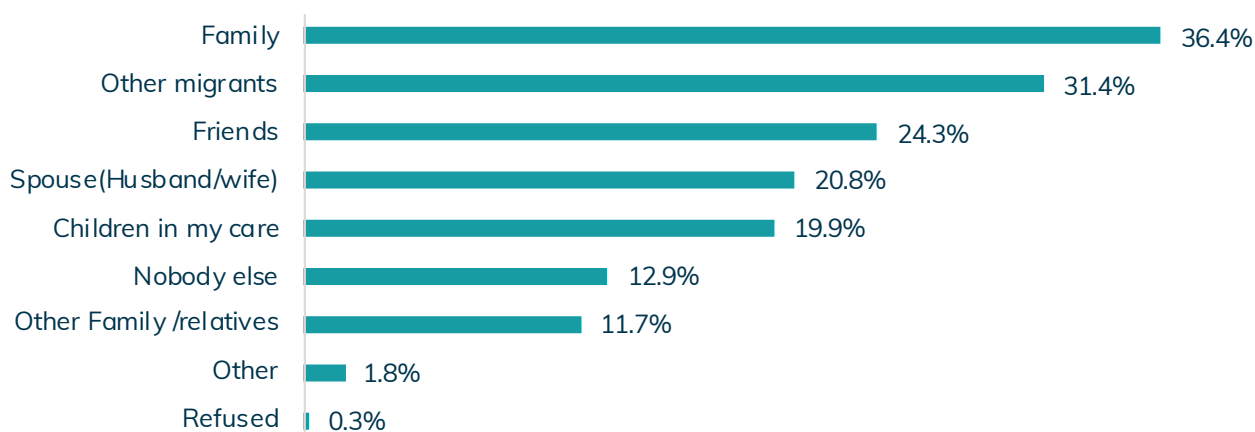
On average, migrants and refugees travelled together in groups of eight, but there were some outliers as there were two people who travelled in a group of 95 and 13 who travelled in a group of 25. Exactly half of

all respondents were traveling with a group of three to eight people. As can be seen in the figure below, 36.4% of respondents stated that they came with their families, 31.4% with other migrants, 24.3% with their friends, 20.8% with their spouses, and 19.9% with children.

<sup>135</sup> The access to information prior to departing is discussed in the section above on “Pull factors: reasons for coming to Turkey”

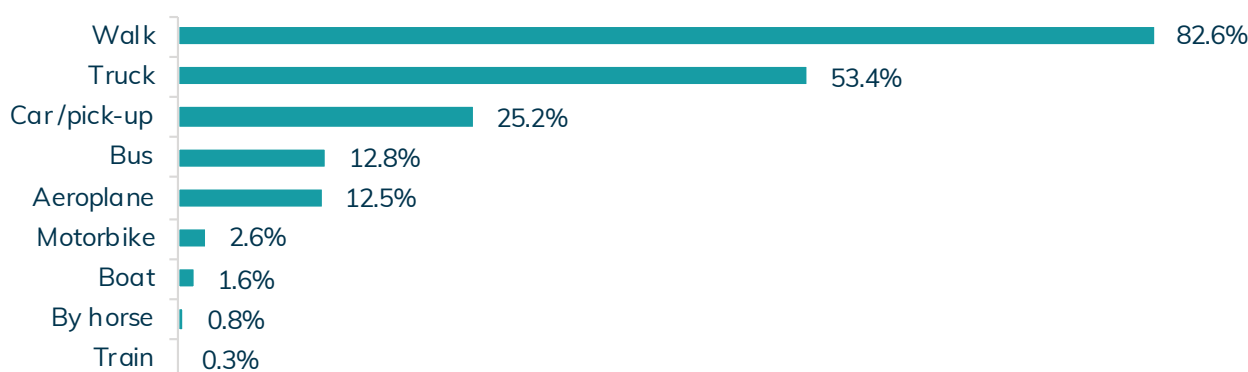
<sup>136</sup> 10 persons declined to answer the question.

**Figure 17: Who did you start your journey with? (Multiple choice, n=340, 543 responses in total, %)**



Most used means of travel reported were on foot (82.6%), by truck (53.4%), by car or pick-up (25.2%), by bus (12.8%) and aeroplane (12.5%).<sup>137</sup>

**Figure 18: Means of transportation during journey of migration (Multiple choice, n=305, 587 responses in total)**



Most of the participants used a combination of these means. For example, one interviewee mentioned crossing multiple borders and using various means of travel:

*“I came illegally from Iran [to Turkey]. I moved from Afghanistan to Pakistan, then from Pakistan to Iran. I don’t remember cities, but I walked most of the way on foot. In some parts, I was put in the back of a big truck. They’re [smugglers] filling it with 40 people. Then I continued on foot. They [smugglers] said there were security guards and told us to walk on our own for 40 kilometres and meet them after.”*  
**18, Male, Istanbul**

more dangerous because these were not suitable for the transportation of people and often overcrowded. This also applied to proper accommodation. Some smugglers offer temporary shelter during the journey, but these were reported to be in poor conditions and overcrowded.

*“They [smugglers] hid us in a barn. We were being held on scot. We used one of the corners as toilet and we slept in the same room. It was very dirty and scary. We got sick.”*  
**Focus Group Participant, Female, Van, arrived in 2019.**

However, these means of transportation were often reported to be inadequate. There were many participants who stated that they came in trucks that made the trip

### 5.3 Risks

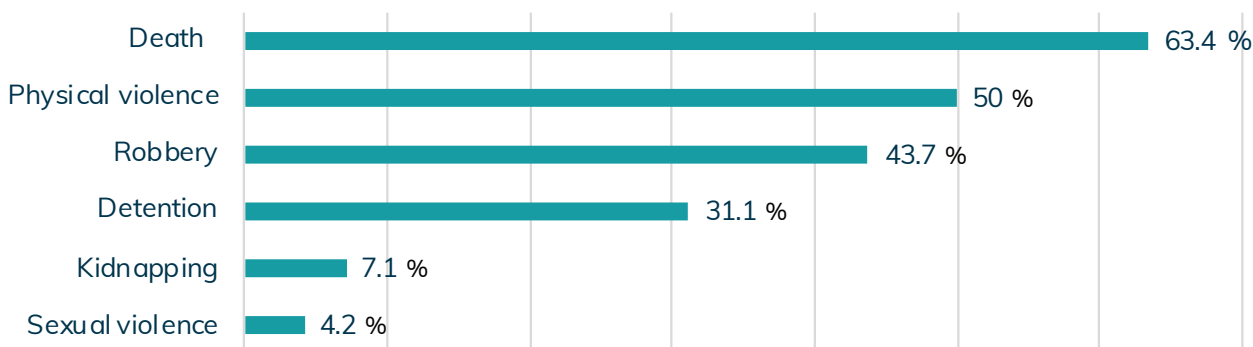
The migration route from Afghanistan and Pakistan to Iran and then to Turkey is a long and difficult to navigate and unsurprising migrants and refugees report facing a

<sup>137</sup> There were also respondents who stated that they came on a motorbike (8 or 2.6%), boat (5 or 1.6%), horse (3 or 0.8%), and by train (1 or 0.3%).

variety of challenges and risks. A majority of 237 (69.5%) respondents reported facing risks during their journey.<sup>138</sup> Among the main risks witnessed are death (63.4%),

physical violence (50%), robbery (43.7%) and detention (31.1%).

**Figure 19: Risk reported (Multiple choice, n=237, 475 responses in total, %)**



The following paragraphs provide more background to these risks based on data from the focus groups and interviews.

In line with the survey results, death and injury was reported as the main risk of the journey. Reportedly, this risk was mainly linked to the weather and physical conditions of the journey. Although informants and respondents stated that most migrants and refugees' cross borders during summer because of the favourable weather conditions, mountainous areas are still cold, even in the summer. Although in smaller numbers, there are also reports of people crossing the border and passing the mountains under harsh weather conditions during winter. Adverse weather conditions combined with dangerous physical conditions of the route increase the risk of death and injury. Participants reported walking through mountainous areas without having any food and water for many hours. This was reported to be especially difficult for children and individuals with poor health. As one of the key informants stated, there are dangerous mountain passes on the route from Afghanistan and Iran to Turkey. Smugglers most probably choose those routes to minimise the risk of apprehension; however, they create also life-threatening risks for refugees and migrants:

*“It was a long way from there [Afghanistan] to Turkey: it was cold, icy cold. My father almost fell from the cliff. Sometimes we thought we would die there.”*  
**Focus Group Participant, Female, Adana**

*“We came by car until the Iranian border [from Afghanistan]. Then we passed through the mountains by foot and it took 18-19 hours. We walked for six hours in Turkey, too. There was no food nor water. We were hungry for 24 hours. My grandchild was almost dying.”*  
**Female, 59, Adana, arrived in 2018**

*“There is a city near Afghanistan-Iran border. When they [Afghans] try to get there, they have to pass a difficult route. Women and men have to walk for 14 hours. It is very difficult for them to pass there alive. Only one of five people can survive. Smugglers make people pass there.”*  
**NGO Representative, Male, Konya**

*“To pass the mountains was the hardest part of the journey...I experienced risk of death many times, my foot slipped. I almost fell off.”*  
**FGD Participant, Adana**

Migrants and refugees with medical conditions reported facing greater risk of death or injuries. Mostly, the inability to move quickly created challenges while traveling. There were also reports of pregnant women traveling. Despite the risks of traveling while pregnant, some people indicated to have no time to wait:

*“I had no one to look after me [during the journey]. My foot was broken. I could not walk in winter. I experienced many problems on the road because of my foot. But I had to continue although my foot was broken.”*  
**Focus Group Participant, Male, Erzurum**

<sup>138</sup> 102 (29.9%) reported to not face risks. Two respondents declined to answer to this question.

*"I have a platinum piece in my wrist. It was difficult for me to quickly climb the rocks in the mountains. I was in great pain."*

**22, Male, Van, arrived in 2017**

*"My wife was pregnant during the journey. She fell a lot. But after 15 days we came to Turkey, she gave birth to twins. We had no other choice. We had to migrate even though she was pregnant. My mother was also too old and sick. They (the group) left us behind. We continued ourselves. It took 23 days."*

**Focus Group Participant, Male, Konya**

While the risk of death and serious injury was considered as given, even when traveling with medical conditions, the general perception of migrants and refugees on the move was that smugglers did not do much to mitigate that risk and generally did not care about the well-being of their clientele. Respondents witnessed deaths in the group they travelled with, but these dead people were not buried and ignored by the smugglers. According to a female respondent, a smuggler said that he would "only care for the ones who are alive":

*"The smuggler told us not to be afraid because the road was short, and he would take us by car. However, after a certain point we started to walk. Two Pakistani men died in front of my eyes. One of them, a young man slipped and fell from the mountain. We told the smuggler that we could go and search for him; but he told us he would only care for the ones who are alive. They only care for the money."*

**25, Female, Istanbul, 2018**

Migrants and refugees also experienced physical violence during the journey and pointed primarily at smugglers as perpetrators (almost two-third, 63.9%) of respondents mentioned smugglers as perpetrators of most of the incidents and violence). Other actors mentioned were government officials (42.9%), armed groups or militias (31.8%), criminal gangs (27.5%) and other migrants (11.6%).<sup>139</sup> In the focus groups and in-depth interviews, participants talked about how smugglers and thieves use physical violence as a threat to get more money. There were also reports of robbery or the pressure to pay bribes<sup>140</sup>. The following quotes also show how physical violence, robbery and even detention (by smugglers) interlink.

*"They put us all into a room. They beat my husband because we left the money with someone else that night [who] would make the payment once we arrived. However, there was some kind of a problem and he did not make the payment. The smuggler told us he would sell our kids to get the payment. Then he beat my husband, telling us to get the money in a day...When he [my husband] gave the money, then we continued."*

**25, Female, Istanbul, 2018**

*"We saw dead people on the road. They (smugglers) left the dead. Thieves were torturing people. We recorded them with our phones... They demanded money while we were crossing the border of Afghanistan. When we did not give [them] the money, they threatened us with guns. They tortured us. We escaped by running when they were away."*

**20, Male, Konya, 2019**

*"Different groups of people stopped us in Pakistan and Iran. I had to give them money, bribes."*

**22, Male, Erzurum, 2019**

*"Terrorists threatened us in Pakistan. They told us that they were from Taliban and asked for money."*

**21, Male, Erzurum, 2019**

Separation of families was another risk identified in the survey and in the qualitative data. Many (92.7%) of respondents stated that they started the journey with someone. Among those who travelled with someone, 100 respondents were separated from their travel companions during the journey.<sup>141</sup> Participants in FGDs and IDIs, also shared about experiences of separation from their families. One participant told about separation from her husband:

*"Smugglers separated our family. They separated men and women. We could not find water [during the journey]. We experienced a harsh condition."*

**55, Male, Erzurum, 2018**

<sup>139</sup> Two people mentioned "family members".

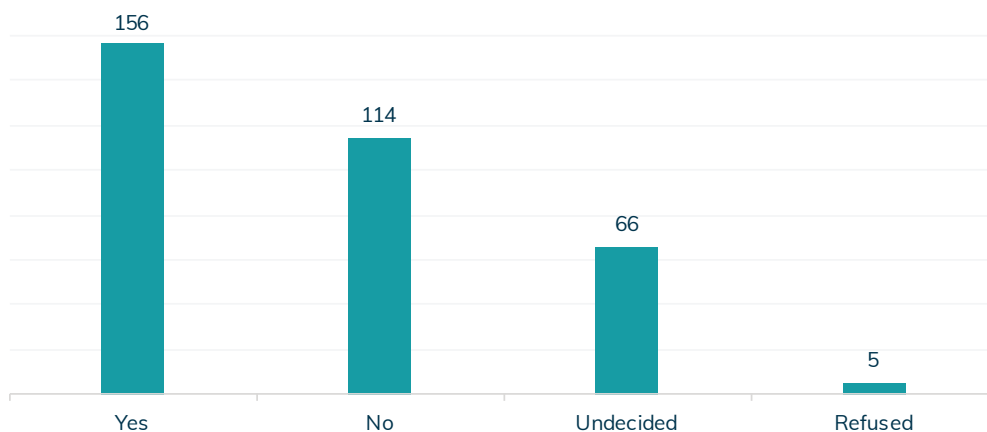
<sup>140</sup> Most (69.6%) survey respondents did not have to pay bribes to the authorities during their journey, while 5.1% reported they often paid bribes and 20.8% sometimes. However, while 20.8% reported to pay bribes at least sometimes on their journey, we cannot verify whether this happened in Turkey or elsewhere.

<sup>141</sup> Compared to 235 who were not

## 5.4 The evaluation and perception of migrants and refugees regarding the risks faced en route

Had they known in advance about the risks they would face, 45.7% said that they would still have started their journey, compared to 33.4% who would not.<sup>142</sup>

**Figure 20: Had you known the risks you would face, would you have started this journey? (n=341, #)**



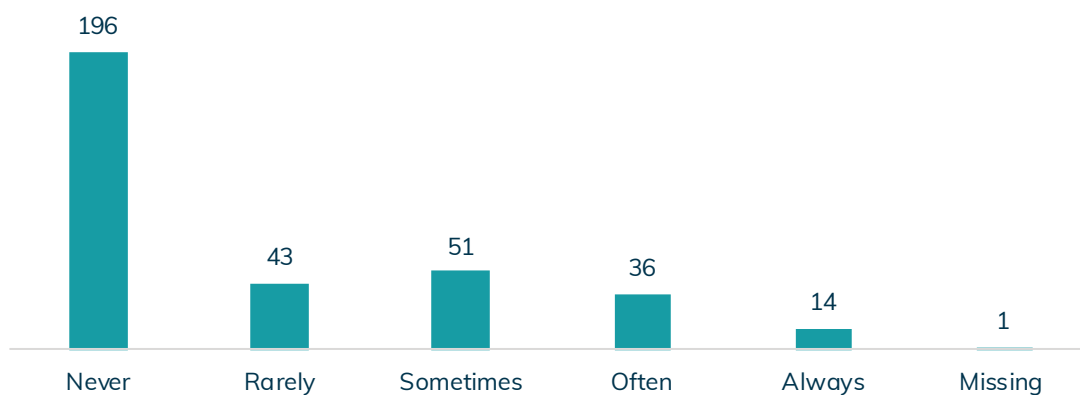
Two hundred and fifty (73.3%) respondents said that they would be unlikely to encourage others to migrate, compared to those who said somewhat likely (6.5%), likely (9.8%), and very likely (7.7%). A male focus group participant explained why he would encourage others to migrate with reference to finding safety in Turkey:

One hundred and ninety-six (57.5%) respondents stated that they never considered abandoning the journey. On the other hand, 42.5% of respondents, considered abandoning their journeys at least once.

*“We came here [to Turkey] without knowing about the extreme difficult conditions of the journey. But I would still recommend others to come to Turkey primarily for safety. Protection of human rights also seem to be more important here .”*

**Focus Group Participant, Male, Erzurum**

**Figure 21: While travelling have you considered abandoning the journey? (n=341, #)**



<sup>142</sup> 66 (19.4%) respondents are undecided, whereas five (1.5%) declined to answer.

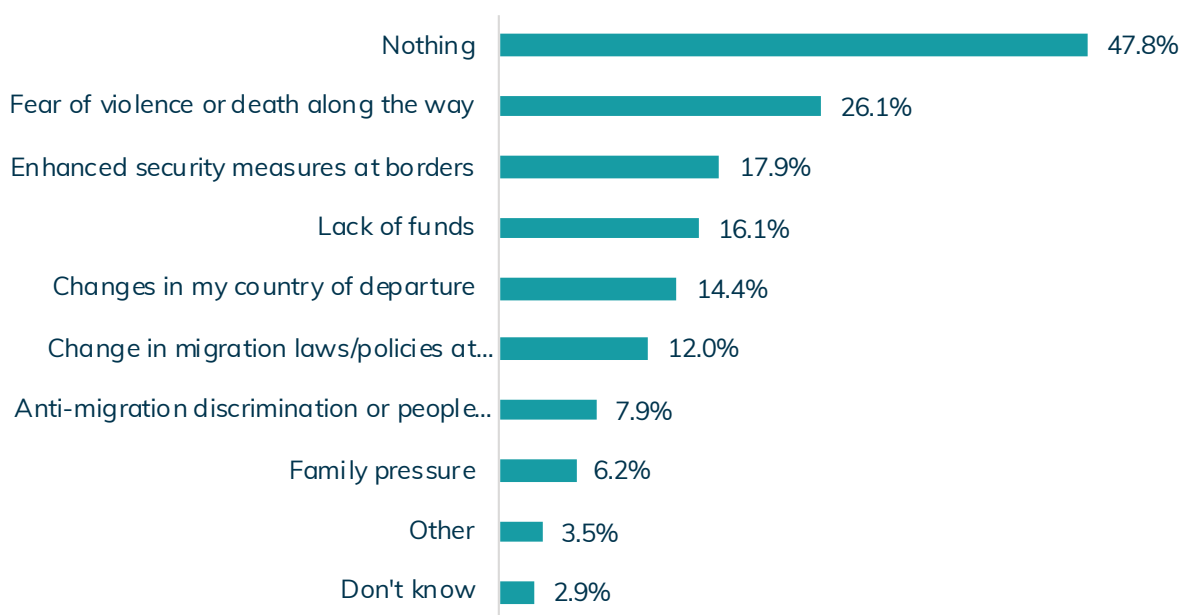


A plurality of 163 (47.8%) respondents indicated that nothing would make them even consider abandoning their journeys. For those who would consider it, fear of violence or death (26.1%) would be the main reason for abandoning the journey. A widowed Afghan woman, who came to Turkey with her three daughters and one granddaughter expressed her feelings as follows:

*“Despite all the difficulties, I came here by walking for 12 hours in snow and cold. I risked death. Even if I die, I would not return.”*

**FGD Participant, Adana**

**Figure 22: What could make you abandon the journey? (n=338, 526 responses in total, %)**



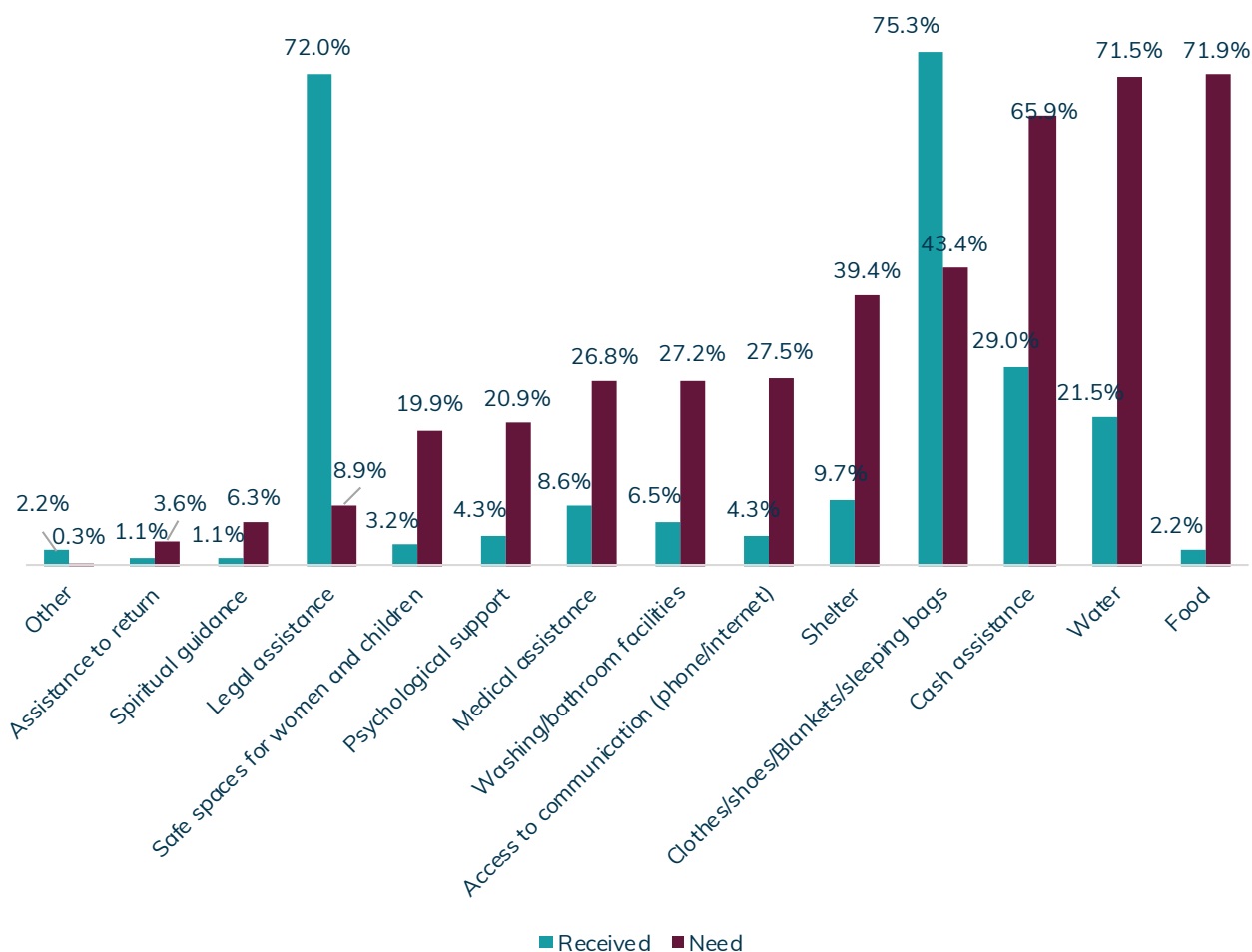
### 5.5 Assistance needed and received

A large majority of 88.6% of respondents reported that they needed assistance along the way, while 10.9% indicated not needing any assistance.<sup>143</sup> They were primarily in need of food (71.9%), water (71.5%), and cash assistance (65.9%). The lack of basic needs on the route (food and water in particular), was also highlighted by participants in the focus groups.

However, while 93 (30.8%) stated that they received assistance, 209 (69.2%) did not. The reported assistance received were clothes, shoes, blankets etc. (75.3%), and legal assistance (72.0%). Interestingly, there seems to be a relatively substantial support – but less need – in legal assistance and basic needs like clothes, shoes, blankets and sleeping bags. However, as the figure shows that there is a huge gap between the need for food and water and assistance received to address these needs. There are also large gaps between needs and assistance received on all other dimensions.

<sup>143</sup> Two respondents declined to answer.

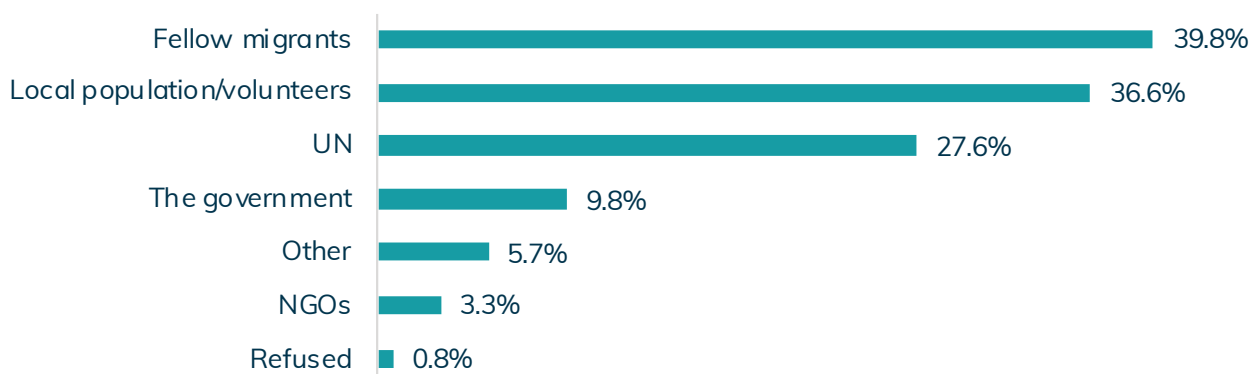
**Figure 23: Needed and received assistances (Needed: n=302, 1309 responses in total / Received: n=93, 224 responses in total)**



The majority of respondent stated that they either received assistance from fellow migrants (39.8%), from the local community and volunteers (36.6%) or the

UN (27.6%).<sup>144</sup> Only four people indicated to receive assistance from NGOs who represented the lowest proportion compared to the other service provides.

**Figure 24: Provided assistance (Multiple choice, n=123, 152 responses in total)**



<sup>144</sup> There were also those who mentioned the government (9.8%), other (5.7%) and NGOs (3.3%). Under "other", there were people who mentioned Turkish authorities, the police and smugglers. Three people misunderstood the question by stating smugglers probably because of they were in a desperate need of assistance. During an interview, a female respondent from Konya confirmed this by saying: "The smugglers helped us, [although] we gave them money."

## 6. THE ROLE OF SMUGGLERS

With limited opportunities for migration through legal channels, migrant smugglers play an increasingly central role in the mixed migration journeys of Afghans. Irregular border crossings usually require the use of smugglers, especially when refugees and migrants need to travel long distances between the country of origin and destination or need to pass through tight border control systems. Smuggling fees vary according to a range of factors, including the distance, the number of border crossings, season and geographic conditions, the length of the journey, modes of transport, and risks involved. As addressed in the literature, a migrant's decision to use smuggling services includes a cost-benefit calculation of several economic factors, including the cost of the smuggling service, the expected income after migration, and an overall understanding of risks and benefits of using the services. One study demonstrated that families from Afghanistan and Pakistan, who sent one of their family members to the United Kingdom (UK) through a smuggling network and who found employment in the UK, had doubled their household income after two years.<sup>145</sup> In such cases, the financially beneficial outcome for the migrant and for their families back home may compensate for the smuggling cost and the other risks migrants face during the journey. Next to economic considerations, there are also social factors involved in the decision-making process, including the way a migrant is introduced to the smuggling network, whether the relationship is based on fear or trust, and the social network of the smugglers.

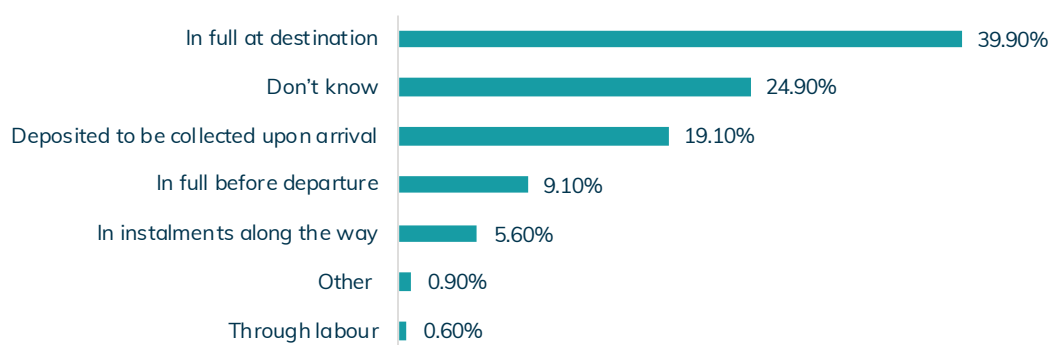
Based on data from the survey, in-depth interviews and FGDs, this section investigates the dynamics and recent trends of migrant smuggling along the route from Afghanistan to Turkey. We focus primarily on Afghans' perspectives but also incorporate findings from key informant and expert interviews.

A majority of 279 (81.8%) survey respondents stated that they resorted to the services of smugglers during their journey, compared to 60 (17.6%) who indicated not using their services.<sup>146</sup> Of the 279 respondents who indicated using smuggling services, 145 respondents used only one smuggler for the entire journey and 123 used different smugglers for different parts of the journey. A female key informant working at a local NGO in Konya also confirmed that the majority of their beneficiaries came to Turkey with the assistance of migrant smugglers, while only a few completed the entire journey on their own without seeking assistance, mainly because they were not able to afford the smuggling fees.

To fund their journey, 41.6% of respondents borrowed, 29.3% had family who paid for them, 39.9% used their own funding/savings, and 26.7% sold assets. However, 45.5% of respondents indicated that they did not have enough money to pay for their journey compared to 36.1% who stated they had enough.<sup>147</sup>

Most (39.9%) respondents stated that they paid the full amount to the smugglers upon arrival at their destination, while 19.1% paid a deposit initially and paid the rest upon arrival. Thirty-one (9.1%) respondents indicated that they paid the full amount before departure, and 5.6% paid in instalments along the way. To practically organise the payments, respondents referred to hawala, which the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) described as one of the most frequently used payment methods.<sup>148</sup> This system involves relatives, friends or trustworthy acquaintances in the country of origin who serve as a guarantor or hawaladar. The fee agreed upon is transferred by the guarantor to the account of the smugglers when the migrant or refugee arrives at the destination. In cases where multiple payments have been agreed, the migrant contacts the hawaladar at various points of the journey to request the release of money to smugglers after each leg of the travel is safely completed.

**Figure 25: Payment methods to smugglers (n=341, %)**



145 Koser, K. (2008) [Why Migrant Smuggling Pays](#) International Migration

146 Two respondents did not answer the question.

147 63 (18.5%) respondents declined to answer to this question.

148 UNODC (2018) [Global Study on Smuggling of Migrants](#)

In order to get more money during the journey, respondents indicated to borrow money from other migrants (n=56), they worked (n=53), got money from family or friends (n=46) and came to an agreement with the smuggler to pay later (n=14). Twenty-four (24) respondents indicated that they had not been able to get more money.<sup>149</sup>

Especially in cases of debt bondage, migrants may remain dependent or connected to the smugglers in ways that restrict the migrants' freedom to move or work after arrival in their country of destination. In such cases, migrant smuggling may become human trafficking, resulting in the exploitation of the smuggled migrants.<sup>150</sup> As the figures show, the majority of the surveyed migrant did not pay smugglers in advance and this reduced Afghan's dependency on smugglers and protected them to some extent from exploitation or abandonment. The preferred approach to pay in instalments and through guarantors serve a mutual interest to arrive safely at the agreed upon destination. No cases were identified where migrant smuggling transformed into forms of human trafficking. However, several respondents from in-depth interviews and FGDs referred to problems concerning arrangements that involve payment in instalments. As also noted in other studies, these problems include the risk of being locked up in a house after arrival or a relative back home taken hostage by the smugglers until the amount due is paid.<sup>151</sup> In the words of two respondents:

*"While we were still in Afghanistan, we made a deal with the smugglers to pay in instalments. We still have one instalment left, and there is no chance escaping from it. We hear about smugglers keeping people locked in a house in Van until they pay all the instalments. Some people stay in those houses for 2-3 years. Perhaps it wouldn't be a problem if we stay here, but if we go back to Afghanistan, they would certainly find us."*

**55, Male, Erzurum, 2019**

*"We paid USD 400 each [migrant]. Some people pay half the amount when they start the journey and pay the rest when they arrive to Turkey. If a migrant doesn't pay the rest, they (smugglers) take a family member hostage in Afghanistan. So, you have to pay. Smugglers also deceive people in the process of making a deal. For example, they give a guarantee that they (migrants) will not get deported if they pay the full money when they arrive at the destination. But they start threatening the migrants on the way to pay the full amount before arrival."*

**30, Male, Konya, arrived in 2018**

As respondents explained in FGDs and in-depth interviews, there are also incidents where smugglers, while being on route, ask for more money than what has been originally agreed or paid in advance. And even if the Afghans agree to pay more, smugglers may still abandon them on route:

*"We were deceived by the smugglers. They [smugglers] said the route was short and would only take 3-4 hours. When we arrived in the city of Urmia in Iran, they (smugglers) asked for more money to buy a horse if we wanted to continue the journey. In total I paid them USD 2,200 before and after leaving Afghanistan. After riding the horse for over 20 hours passing through mountainous areas with my wife on the back, they took the horse back in the middle of the night, told us to continue on foot. Because I am old, I could no longer walk. We were stranded by the smugglers in the middle of nowhere. When my son-in-law noticed we were missing, he walked back to find us and carried me on his back for the rest of the journey. We finally managed to enter through Van."*

**Focus Group Participant, Male, Erzurum**

*"The smugglers do not have a fixed rate; they indicate a fee based on your socio-economic situation. The whole amount is usually paid after arrival in person to the smuggler. Because if you pay them USD 600 in advance, they would ask for USD 200 more on the route."*

**Focus Group Participant, Male, Erzurum**

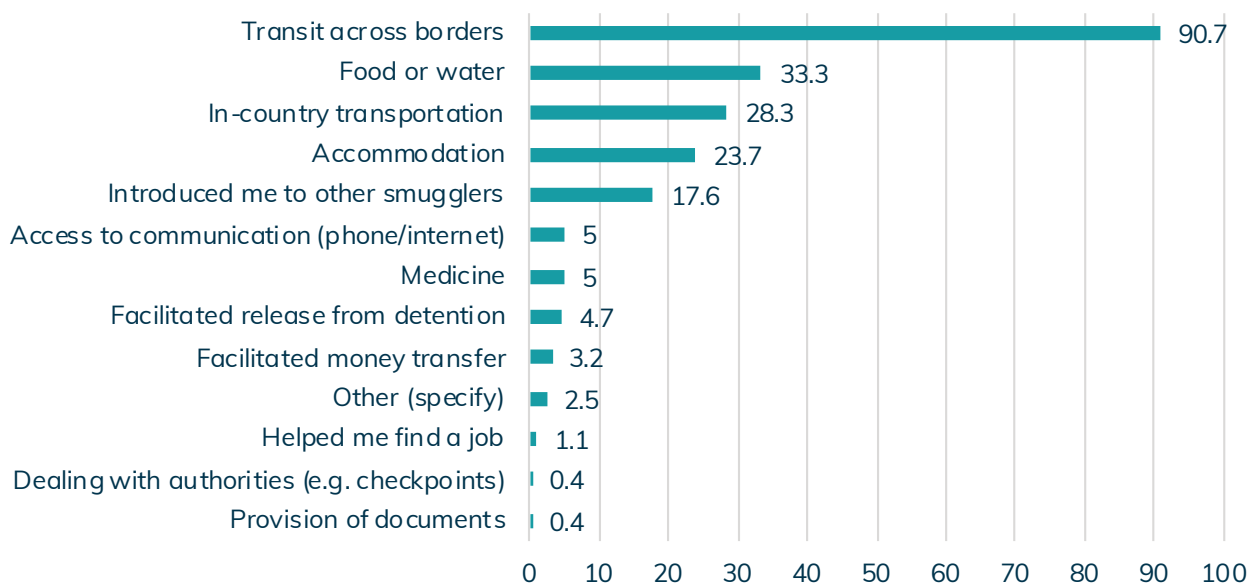
The majority of respondents indicated crossing the borders (90.7%) as the primary type of service they received from smugglers, followed by access to food or water (33.3%), in-country transportation (28.3%), accommodation (23.7%) or introduction to other smugglers (17.6%).

149 Three respondents declined to answer.

150 Triandafyllidou, A. (Ed.). (2015) [Routledge handbook of immigration and refugee studies](#) Routledge.

151 Triandafyllidou, A and Maroukis, T. (2012) [Migrant Smuggling: Irregular Migration from Asia and Africa to Europe](#) Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan

**Figure 26: Services provided by migrant smugglers (n=279, 602 responses in total)**



Respondents from FGDs and in-depth interviews generally expressed negative views about migrant smugglers, based on their experiences. Only one interviewee who arrived in 2016 indicated that he did not experience any problems with the smugglers, who also provided him food and water on the route. Most cited problems were related to lack of access to basic needs on the route, false promises, abandonment, and mistreatment. Because of this, some respondents decided to resort to other smugglers more than once or to continue the journey on their own.

“They (smugglers) did not give us any food or water on the route. One of them promised to bring some food, but he [the smuggler] never came back. Each of us paid almost USD 500-600 per person. This is normally what you pay to smugglers for the whole journey from Afghanistan to Turkey. Most people had to change smugglers at least once throughout the journey.”

**Focus Group Participant, Male, Erzurum**

“We paid them, but they kept claiming that we hadn’t. We were locked up in a room for ten days. They finally let us free after we paid them the full amount again.”

**Focus Group Participant, Male, Erzurum**

The narratives of respondents from FGDs and in-depth interviews also gave insight into the operation of migrant smuggling networks and their communication lines. Reportedly, smugglers had connections with others who kept them updated about changes in security measures, location of checkpoints, and work schedules of border patrol agencies. An NGO worker pointed out the role of extensive communication networks of Afghans in

facilitating access to different smugglers, which also makes it easier to identify smuggling services that are cheaper, depending on the difficulty of the route:

“The migration route from Afghanistan to Turkey is a well-established one, both for migrants and migrant smugglers. Besides, Afghans have an extensive communication network not only in Turkey, but across the world. As far as we understand from the narratives of our beneficiaries, accessing a migrant smuggler is not difficult at all through these networks. But the smuggling fees vary a lot, mainly depending on the difficulty of the journey they plan to take.”

**NGO Representative, Female, Adana**

As addressed in earlier studies, Afghans usually arrange the first leg of the journey, e.g. moving from Afghanistan to Iran or Pakistan, through contacting a local smuggler. Local smugglers are often part of transnational networks through which they arrange the following legs of the journey. As further elaborated by FGD and in-depth interview participants, Afghans often interacted with more than one smuggler throughout their journey, highlighting the significance of networks in the smugglers’ methods of operation:

“We met with the smuggler. They [smugglers] change during the journey, they said. There [en route] could be even 50 changes of different smugglers. Since we could not see them all before, we start, we just made deal and paid the price.”

**Focus Group Participant, Male, Erzurum**

“No one [from smugglers] spoke our language. They were just shouting ‘Run, run!’ Since smugglers always change, languages also change. They speak Dari until Iran, but they do not in Turkey. The smugglers in Iran and Turkey are in contact [with each other].”

**Focus Group Participant, Male, Erzurum**

“I paid the smuggler in my city [in Afghanistan]. He directed me to someone else. There was also the one who took me from Iran, so 2 of them in total. In Turkey there were three smugglers.”

**Male, 28, Izmir, arrived in 2016**

In Turkey, smugglers also offer other services, such as providing transportation and accommodation in different cities and forging documents. As two FGD participants and one in-depth interview respondent indicated:

“I heard they arrange forged documents for irregular migrants.”

**Male, 22, Erzurum, 2016**

“After we crossed the Turkish border, Iranian police stopped following us. We came by foot. It was cold. There was a lot of distance till Van where the smuggler dropped us. He [smuggler] came in the late with a minibus. He picked up and put 50 people into a minibus and brought them to Van. He dropped every one of us at different places in Van. We stayed at the place of smugglers for the night.”

**Focus Group Participant, Male, Erzurum**

“I stayed in the place of smugglers for five nights. They brought me to Batman from Van and bought bus tickets [for us] to Erzurum. They have friends in terminals. They communicate with an encrypted document and buy tickets. They gave me that document as ASAM’s document, but I realized that it was a forged one after coming to here.”

**Focus Group Participant, Male, Erzurum**

As explained in detail later, PDMMs are responsible for the registration process upon arrival. Refugees who want to apply for international protection are required to register with the PDMMs in order to obtain an International Protection Applicant Identification Card (hereafter “identification cards” or “kimlik” in Turkish) and allocated to a satellite city for residence. When Afghans have relatives or acquaintances with whom they want to reunite, they may try to get to those cities without prior approval from authorities. In such cases, they need the services of smugglers, who can either provide them transportation or buy tickets with forged documents. As respondents indicated, fees of such services offered by smugglers are usually high:

“I came with a smuggler. There was another one [migrant] with me. After crossing the border, he [the smuggler] said that a man with car would take us to Istanbul. He got 3,500 TL from us to get both of us to Istanbul. During the journey, police stopped us. He [the smuggler] introduced us as his shepherds in Turkish and the police let us pass.”

**Male, 22, Erzurum, 2019**

“We went to Ankara [for UNHCR registration] and returned back with a car. We gave him [the taxi driver] 500 TL for it. Normally, if I was a Turkish man it would be cheaper, of course. He [the smuggler] got three times higher price from us. There are also taxi drivers who take refugees to Konya from Ağrı irregularly [kaçak].”

**Male, 30, Konya, 2018**

Although smugglers provide services in Turkey, the findings of this study generally indicate a low level of dependence on smugglers once they arrive in Turkey. Arguably, although not studied as part of this research, the role of smugglers becomes more important, if not critical, when migrants and refugees would attempt to cross the border into Europe via land or sea.



# 7. CHALLENGES IN TURKEY

## 7.1 Refugee response

Since the mid-2000s, the Turkish authorities have undertaken a series of institutional, legislative and policy reforms in order to respond to the challenges of managing migration movements.<sup>152</sup> As discussed below, these include the adoption of the Law on Foreigners and International Protection (LFIP) and the establishment of the Directorate General of Migration Management (DGMM) and its provincial branches (PDMM) in all 81 provinces. Given the scale of refugee influx from Syria and other countries like Afghanistan and Iraq, an increasing number of state and non-state actors, including line-ministries, municipalities, national and local NGOs, have extended their protection and social services to migrants and refugees amid growing demand.<sup>153</sup> **The Ministry of Education, Ministry of Health, Ministry of Family, Labour and Social Services, for example, have all set up specialised migration departments<sup>154</sup> to develop policies for the inclusion of migrants and refugees.**

To strengthen capacities, various partnerships have been established between local/national-level institutions and international organisations. For example, the UNHCR and Union of Turkish Bar Associations collaborate in facilitating access to legal aid for international protection applicants and refugees.<sup>155</sup> The International Labour Organisation (ILO) provides support for Syrian and non-Syrian refugees to access the formal labour market and implements vocational skills development courses in cooperation with chambers of commerce, municipalities, local vocational training and community centres.<sup>156</sup> As reported by a female municipality practitioner, the Adana Metropolitan Municipality and ILO were in the process of initiating skills development trainings with a specific focus on empowering women and youth, including Afghans, as complementary to the ongoing Turkish language courses and counselling services for international protection applicants. Jointly run with the IOM, the municipality's Migrant Coordination and Harmonisation Centre also offers counselling and referral services, social cohesion activities, and Turkish language and computer classes to all migrants and refugees living in Adana. In Istanbul, Family, Women and Disabled Support Centre (AKDEM) of Zeytinburnu district municipality offers Turkish language courses, counselling, and protection services

(in partnership with Save the Children) to Afghans irrespective of their legal status. With an estimated 35,000 registered and unregistered Afghans living in the district, a female key informant from the Zeytinburnu municipality noted that the numbers of their beneficiaries substantially increased between 2015 and 2019, jumping from 40 to 300-400.

Both governmental and non-governmental agencies also work closely with the EU. Various projects are funded within the framework of EU Refugee Facility for Turkey, such as the Emergency Social Safety Net (ESSN), Conditional Cash Transfer For Education (CCTE), and large-scale cash assistance programmes to complement existing national social assistance schemes in supporting refugees to meet their basic needs and to send children to school.<sup>157</sup> Carried out by the ministries, DGMM and the Turkish Red Crescent/Kızılay, refugee families receive 120 TL (around USD 17) per family per month from ESSN and between 35-60 TL (USD 5-9) bi-monthly from CCTE. Refugees eligible for ESSN are single female adults between ages 18-59 with no other family members, single parents with no other adults (18-59) in the family; families with one or more disabled people; families with four or more children; and families with a large number of dependents.<sup>158</sup> Of the nearly 1.7 million ESSN beneficiaries, Syrian nationals constitute the vast majority (89.2%), followed by nationals from Iraq (6.8%), Afghanistan (3.3%) and Iran (0.2%).<sup>159</sup> Afghan beneficiaries have a slightly higher share (4.6%) in the CCTE programme. In the FGDs, a female participant highlighted that ESSN is her only source of income for paying the rent, buying food, and meeting other basic needs for herself and her 14-year-old daughter (FGD Participant, Female, Konya).

The Turkish Red Crescent/ Kızılay, Turkey's oldest and largest humanitarian NGO, is a prominent actor in the refugee response. Aside from carrying out the ESSN scheme, the organisation operates 16 community centres across Turkey from which refugees and host communities alike can access protection, psychosocial and health and livelihood support services. Kızılay also implements a pilot livelihoods assistance project, supporting voluntary Afghan returnees in finding jobs or setting up their own small-scale businesses upon their

152 For a comprehensive assessment of institutional and legislative developments from 2015, see AIDA & ECRE (2019) [Country Report: Turkey](#) Asylum Information Database

153 Memisoglu, F. and Ilgit, A. (2017) [Syrian refugees in Turkey: multifaceted challenges, diverse players and ambiguous policies](#) Mediterranean Politics

154 Migration and Emergency Education Division, Department of Migration Health, Directorate General of International Labour Force, respectively.

155 UNHCR (2018d) [Turkey: Strengthening Legal Protection and Access to Justice](#), May.

156 International Labour Organization (2019) [Lessons Learned of ILO's Refugee Response Programme in Turkey: Supporting Livelihoods Opportunities for Refugees and Host Communities](#), June.

157 For more information, see European Commission (2020) [The EU Facility for Refugees in Turkey](#)

158 Turkish Red Crescent (2018) [What is the criteria to be included in the ESSN?](#)

159 Turkish Red Crescent (2019) [Syrian Crisis Humanitarian Relief Operation](#)

return to Afghanistan.<sup>160</sup> The Association for Solidarity with Asylum Seekers and Migrants (SGDD-ASAM) is another NGO with a long-standing track record in refugee advocacy and extensive nationwide network with 46 offices in 41 provinces. As an implementing NGO partner of government authorities and UNHCR Turkey, the organisation provides social, legal and psychosocial support; runs multi-service support centres; and carries out numerous courses and activities to facilitate refugee integration.<sup>161</sup> There are also a number of local NGOs, including those founded by refugees and migrants, that provide humanitarian and social assistance to refugees across different cities, while also supporting the development of social networks among migrants.<sup>162</sup>

Nonetheless, Afghan migrants and refugees continue to face various challenges in Turkey, which are mainly related to accessing healthcare, education, employment, and adequate living conditions (housing and shelter).<sup>163</sup> The language barrier is a frequently cited obstacle in accessing services, coupled with a general lack of knowledge about the scope of their legal rights and obligations. From the perspective of interviewed public officials, identifying and reaching out to Afghans with special vulnerabilities or needs is a major challenge for authorities especially if the refugees and migrants themselves refrain from registering or approaching public authorities due to various reasons, such as plans for onward movement, the general lack of information on assistance and legal rights, as well as misperceptions about their eligibility/ineligibility to access asylum procedures and public services. The following sections elaborate on these commonly raised challenges based on research findings.

## 7.2 Protection

Turkish citizenship can be acquired in several ways, the relevant legislation being the Turkish Citizenship Law (No. 5901), adopted in 2009.<sup>164</sup> Firstly, it can be acquired by place of birth or descent. Individuals with a Turkish mother or father acquire citizenship by birth regardless of where they were born. A child born in Turkey but acquiring no citizenship from his or her foreign mother or foreign father also acquires Turkish citizenship by birth. A child found in Turkey is deemed to have been born in Turkey unless proven otherwise and also acquires citizenship. A child, under the age of maturity, adopted by a Turkish

citizen, acquires Turkish citizenship from the day s/h is adopted (Articles 6-9). Secondly, Turkish citizenship can be applied for after marriage to a Turkish citizen for three years. Thirdly, individuals who have held a residency permit for five years and have not been out of Turkey for longer than six months within this period are eligible to apply for Turkish citizenship (Article 11). Fourthly, Turkish citizenship may be acquired exceptionally upon a decision of the Presidency in the following categories: (1) “those who bring industrial facilities into Turkey or have rendered or believed to render an outstanding service in the social or economic arena or in the fields of science, technology, sports, culture or arts and regarding whom a reasoned offer is made by the relevant ministries”, (2) “those whose (...) citizenship is deemed to be necessary” and (3) “those persons who are recognized as migrants” (Article 12). In addition, foreign investors are eligible to apply for Turkish citizenship under certain conditions, such as those with more than USD 2 million in investment capital, or employing at least 100 people, or who buy property worth at least USD 1 million.<sup>165</sup>

To better understand Turkey’s migration and refugee protection governance, there are two aspects that needs clarification. The first aspect is that the Turkish legal terminology differentiates between the terms of “foreigner” and “migrant”. “Foreigner” is the term used to define a person who has no bond of citizenship with Turkey. Over the years, the status of foreigners has been regulated by various legislations, such as the 1950 Passport Law and Law on Residence and Travel of Foreigners. Most matters related to foreigners are currently regulated based on the LFIP, the country’s first comprehensive immigration law that was adopted in 2013 (Law No. 6458).<sup>166</sup> The term “migrant” and granting of “migrant status” is linked to the notion of a national identity and connections to the Turkish culture. For decades, the 1934 Law on Settlement was the centrepiece of Turkish immigration policy. It stipulates that only “a person of Turkish descent and who is attached to Turkish culture” may migrate and settle in Turkey or acquire refugee status (Law No. 2510). While the more recent Law on Settlement, adopted in 2006, maintains this condition, it refers only to the admission and settlement of migrants, not refugees (Law No. 5543). With reference to this particular aspect, Turkey has a long tradition of accepting migrants and refugees, especially those of

160 Turkish Red Crescent (2019) [Ongoing Support for Afghan People Turning Back to Their Countries](#)

161 ASAM/SGDD (2020) [Who we are, what we do](#)

162 Afghan Refugees Solidarity and Aid Association is one of the main NGOs with a specific focus on Afghan refugees and migrants

163 For a comprehensive assessment of similar challenges prior to 2018, see DGMM and Hacettepe University (2017) [Türkiye’de Afghanistan Uyruklu Uluslararası Koruma Başvurusu ve Statüsü Sahipleri Üzerine Analiz: Türkiye’ye Geliş Sebepleri, Türkiye’de Kalışları, Gelecek Planları ve Amaçları](#)

164 [Turkish Citizenship Law No. 5901](#) (in Turkish)

165 See Regulation for the Amendment of the Regulation on the Enforcement of the Turkish Citizenship Law, Article.1

166 [Law on Foreigners and International Protection No. 6458](#)

Turkish origin and culture.<sup>167</sup> For example, 4,163 Turkish speaking Afghan refugees living in camps in Pakistan were brought to Turkey in accordance with a special law (Law 2641), adopted in March 1982.<sup>168</sup> This settlement marked the beginning of migration movements from Afghanistan to Turkey.<sup>169</sup> The Afghan refugees were initially settled in six provinces (Tokat, Kırşehir, Sivas, Şanlıurfa, Van, and Hatay) and later some moved to larger cities like Istanbul and Ankara. In the following decades, the Afghan migration to Turkey continued both through the social networks of the established Afghan communities in Turkey, and through mixed migratory movements. Although their exact numbers are not known, it is assumed that Afghans who initially obtained migrant status have later acquired Turkish citizenship

The second aspect that needs clarification is the geographical limitation Turkey imposed on its ratification of the 1951 Geneva Convention and its 1967 Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees. This in practice means that refugee status is granted only to “persons who have become refugees as a result of events occurring in Europe” and resulted in a two-tiered asylum policy structure. The first tier concerns European asylum seekers, while the second-tier deals with non-European asylum seekers. Those who fall under the second tier are granted temporary residence in Turkey until they are resettled to a third country, which may in practice take many years. During mid-2000s, Turkey initiated a comprehensive reform of its migration and asylum framework. Turkey’s accession process to the EU has provided further impetus for reforms in the field of migration and asylum in order to align the national legislative framework with the EU acquis.<sup>170</sup> Two key outcomes of the reform process have been the adoption of the LFIP in 2013 and the establishment of a new civil migration authority, the DGMM in 2014. Next to refugees – from Europe – the LFIP expanded the legislative framework for all other persons in need of international protection irrespective of country of origin by introducing new protection status categories: conditional refugees, subsidiary protection and temporary protection holders. The above-mentioned two-tier asylum system previously gave way to a significant role for the UNHCR – and its implementing partner SGDD-ASAM – in Turkey’s governance of refugees, as the registration process was jointly carried out by UNHCR/SGDD-ASAM

and PDMM.<sup>171</sup> Non-Syrian applicants needed to first apply at the UNHCR/SGDD-ASAM in Ankara after which they would be directed to a satellite city to lodge their applications with the PDMM.

In September 2018, in the wake of the increasing numbers of Afghan arrivals, UNHCR handed over all tasks relating to the international protection to DGMM and its provincial directorates (PDMM), resulting in substantial changes in national asylum procedures.<sup>172</sup> Currently, all asylum seekers from non-European countries are subject to a status determination procedure conducted by the DGMM (except Syrians who are offered temporary protection status, as mentioned above). Once people register with the DGMM’s provincial directorates (PDMM) as applicants for international protection upon arrival in any of the 81 provinces, they receive identification cards with a foreigner’s identification number. Identification cards provide them access to services, such as health, education, justice, and access to formal employment (six months after registration) in the assigned satellite city. Pending the decision on their asylum application, international protection applicants are required to reside and stay in the assigned city. A recently passed law in December 2019 brought amendments to the LFIP, including the removal of references to the six-months validity period for identification cards, the detention of unaccompanied children in removal centres (who will instead be taken care by the Ministry of Family, Labour and Social Services). In general, these amendments have been welcomed by rights-based NGOs.<sup>173</sup> However, there are also concerns over the potential negative effects of another amendment that limit the coverage of general health insurance of international protection applicants or beneficiaries to one year after registration (except those with special needs).<sup>174</sup>

Regardless of people’s intention about onward cross-border movement, a majority does seek international protection. However, while in Turkey, bureaucratic barriers and difficulties in filing asylum applications, long waiting periods for potential third-country resettlement, and lack of financial means to fund further movement lead them to spending more time in Turkey than anticipated. Due to capacity issues and large number of applications, refugees are reported to face delays in getting registration

167 According to official statistics, a total of 2,878 immigrants from region of “Turkistan” settled in Turkey, not providing the ethnic history of these immigrants. However, it is known that they included Kyrgyzs, Turkmens, Uzbeks and Uyghurs. The official statistics might have been not reflecting the real situation. This is also partly the consequence of the admission of some of these immigrants through third countries into Turkey and recording them under the tag of “other countries”. Through a practice that breaks away from existing practices, official statistics actually provide the ethnical breakdown of these immigrants as 1,130 Kyrgyz, 1,905 Uzbeks and 858 Turkmen and 270 Kazakhs.. See Kemal Kirişçi (1996) “[Refugees of Turkish origin: Coerced immigrants to Turkey since 1945](#)” International Migration; Kirişçi, K. (2000) “[Disaggregating Turkish citizenship and immigration practices](#)”, Middle Eastern Studies, 36:3, 1-22; M. Nazif Shahrani, N. M (2002) [The Kirghiz and Wakhi of Afghanistan: Adaptation to Closed Frontiers and War](#) Seattle and London: University of Washington Press

168 Denker, D. (1983) “[The last migration of the Kirghiz of Afghanistan?](#)” Central Asian Survey, 2:3, 89-98,

169 İçduygu, A. & Karadağ, S. Op Cit.

170 İçduygu, A. Op Cit.

171 See, AIDA & ECRE (2019) [Country Report: Turkey](#) Asylum Information Database

172 UNHCR (2018c) [Turkey: Resettlement Fact Sheet September 2018](#); UNHCR Turkey (2020) [Registration and RSD with UNHCR](#)

173 [Law published on Official Gazette No.30988 on 24/12/2019](#)

174 Multeci-Der (2019) [Ortak değerlendirme: Yabancılar ve Uluslararası Koruma Kanununda Yapılması Öngörülen Değişiklikler](#)

appointments and identification cards.<sup>175</sup> Single Afghan men<sup>176</sup> are reportedly finding it especially difficult to register as international protection applicants and obtain identity cards because, according to a key informant, many single Afghan men are considered as economic migrants and not as people who are in need of protection.<sup>177</sup> Not possessing official documentation brings the risk of arrest, detention and deportation.<sup>178</sup> Additionally, without legal documentation, asylum applicants may not be able to access essential services.<sup>179</sup> This has reportedly led to the “irregularization” of Afghans in Turkey because they may leave their satellite cities without approval from the authorities in search for access to basic needs, informal employment, family reunification or opportunities to cross the border and seek protection in Europe. According to officials, the asylum regime is open to anyone with genuine protection needs and each international protection applicant goes through the same registration and interview procedures regardless of nationality, gender or marital status. According to a key informant, the primary cause of irregularity does not stem from registration procedures but is related to either individuals’ reluctance to register or lack of information on accessing the asylum system. Reportedly, some also have the misperception that only certain groups such as Syrians benefit from protection services. Although Syrians are offered a group-based protection scheme, which minimises their chance of getting rejected or deported, this does not exclude individual applications of non-Syrians.

The survey results reveal a striking majority of 71.4% of respondents who reported not being aware of their rights as an asylum seeker or migrant. Only 27.4% of respondents indicated being aware of their rights.<sup>180</sup> Financial hardship is another major issue, as most of the research participants reported either being unemployed or not having a regular job. As will be elaborated further below, a main protection-related challenge concerning those who are not registered as international protection applicants is lack of legal status and documents, which increases their vulnerability.<sup>181</sup> For those who are registered as international protection applicants, the requirement to reside in the assigned satellite city is considered as a challenge by some of the research participants, as they wish to have more freedom of movement within Turkey and to have the right to choose the city of residence.

A small majority (55.1%) of respondents applied for international protection compared to 44.3% who did not. Out of the 188, 79 applied at the PDMM, 61 at UNHCR, 37 at the Governorship, and 11 at the foreigners’ departments of local police, which transferred foreigners’ related tasks to the PDMMs in 2015. A majority of 158 who applied for international protection have been provided with documentation, whereas 28 have not been provided with documentation. Reasons for being unregistered vary, as some of the respondents were new arrivals and were still waiting for their appointment with the PDMMs. Long waiting periods may be due to a lack of capacity at PDMMs. Since the handover from UNHCR to DGMM, PDMMs have reportedly been lacking qualified staff who can do RSD as well as supervisors who can endorse decisions.<sup>182</sup> Other respondents, who have been in Turkey for a longer period, left the assigned satellite cities and moved to metropolitan cities, such as Istanbul, Ankara and Izmir, for better employment opportunities.

In Turkey, protection problems related to Afghan’s irregular status or unauthorised in-country movement have come out as cross-cutting issues across sectors discussed further in the following sections.

## 7.4 Health

Accessing health services was reported as one of the most urgent problems for Afghan refugees and migrants. There were 30.8% respondents who reported to have health problems or disabilities, compared to 235 (68.9%) who reported to not have any health problems or disabilities.<sup>183</sup> Among those who indicated to have health problems, most reported “physical impairments” (50 respondents) – possibly caused by armed conflict in Afghanistan or dangerous conditions during their journey towards Turkey. “Chronic diseases (hearth, diabetes etc.)” was reported by 36 and “intellectual disabilities (including cognitive or learning disabilities)” by 30 respondents.

In the in-depth interviews, respondents were asked about their experiences with health services. Most problems concerning access to healthcare were reported by those who were not registered and did not possess identity cards. This led to facing difficulties in accessing free public healthcare. Focus group participants mentioned the following examples:

175 AIDA (2018) [Country Report: Turkey](#)

176 AIDA & ECRE (2019) [Registration of the asylum application](#) Asylum Information Database

177 NGO Representative, Van, Female, IKGV

178 Over 2018, Turkey’s detention capacity has [almost doubled](#) to 24 active pre-removal centres and a detention capacity of 16,116 people.

Another 11 centres with 5,350 places are currently under construction. In April 2018, with the new arrivals and due to a shortage in capacity, the DGMM resorted to other facilities for pre-removal detention and detained people in [three sports venues in Erzurum](#).

179 There was a report of an [Afghan asylum seeker](#) who lost his life after being refused access to a hospital in Izmir due to lack of an identification document. He had previously made an application at Van PDMM, which referred him to Afyon PDMM to register his claim. [His application was cancelled due](#) to non-compliance with the 15-day time limit.

180 336 respondents answered this question.

181 Demiral, S. (2015) [Afganlı Sığınmacıların Kimlik Sorunu: Erzurum Örneği](#) CIU

182 UNHCR Turkey (2019) [Promoting access to and the provision of protection](#)

183 One person declined to answer this question.

“My brothers get sick and can’t go to the hospital. We have no ID [in Turkey]. We have to go to a private hospital, which is very expensive.”

**Focus Group Participant, Male, Konya**

“My wife is three months pregnant and we can’t go to the doctor. We can’t go to the hospital without an ID. I need a report to prove my wife is pregnant, but we can’t go to the hospital, they’re not taking her [as a patient].”

**Focus Group Participant, Male, Konya**

“My child has been sick for 10 days, but the immigration management has not given any identification yet. We went to Manisa (a nearby province to Izmir) (with the referral of the immigration management) but they did not give [it] either.”

**Focus Group Participant, Female, Izmir**

Next to problems related to people’s legal status and possession of documentation, respondents reported language barriers. Many respondents and participants indicated that although there are Arabic translators in many hospitals, there are no translators speaking Persian, Dari or Pashto. Because of this barrier, Afghan refugees and migrants go to national and international NGOs, such as SGDD-ASAM and the Turkish Red Crescent, to access healthcare. The language barrier may also have an impact on how respondents perceived the quality of health services and treatment by personnel. However, some respondents reported not receiving the treatment needed even if translated. The following quotes highlight some of these challenges.

“Often we are subjected to the [negative] reaction of doctors. They do not take our illness seriously. They pass over with simple pain-relieving prescriptions, saying ‘you are fine’, and a fuller examination is not performed.”

**20, Male, Van, 2017**

“The only problem is that there are no translators, so we try to support them [migrants and refugees] in hospitals. Since immigrants cannot speak Turkish, hospital records and procedures are mostly done by us.”

**NGO Representative, Female, Van**

“They’re very good at hospitals [in Turkey]. Very good compared to Iran. They do not have an interpreter, but they bring a Syrian interpreter. They only speak Arabic. We called ASAM to help. For the interpreter to talk. They said no. We received medical help from the Red Crescent. They were very good to us.”

**45, Male, Adana, 2019**

“There is no interpreter in the public hospital, I can’t tell my problem. [So, I had to go to the ASAM.] There was an interpreter at ASAM, and the doctor there knew my problems and helped me.”

**Focus Group Participant, Female, Adana**

“Access to health is an important problem for Afghan migrants and refugees for multiple reasons: Since they do not have previous medical records of treatments or the drugs they use, the treatment here starts with insufficient information, even if they can tell their problems in hospitals. They also cannot be understood without an interpreter because the disease names are different.”

**NGO Representative, Female, Adana**

Some other respondents stated that they receive no support from NGOs and need to arrange and pay for translation themselves. Hence, the language barrier becomes interlinked with the financial barrier to access healthcare. According to Turkish legislation, those registered under international protection can access public hospitals and health centres for free. However, this does not mean that all health-related costs are covered. Afghans are still required to pay for medicines and some medical tests. This increases the financial burden, especially for those with chronic diseases that require regular access to healthcare and medicines:

“I’m diabetic. I have a lot of diseases. There’s no interpreter when we get to the hospital. We can’t communicate. Translator wants 70-80 TL; how can we pay that much money?”

**59, Female, Adana, 2018**

“It would be easier if they[hospitals] gave the translator. We have to pay money to explain our problem. We don’t have money anyway. How can we pay?”

**59, Female, Adana, 2018**



“Even though the examination is free, we have to pay for the medicine ourselves, and the drug costs are very expensive [in Turkey].”

**Female, Van, 2019**

“Examination is free but again I pay my medicine money myself.”

**22, Male, Van, 2016**

Another challenge reported are mental health services needed. In the Turkish healthcare system, psychological and mental support services are not covered by the health insurance provided to international protection applicants. However, many research participants mentioned to suffer from migration related traumas (e.g., imprisonment, physical and emotional torture, loss of family members due to displacement and death) and stressors (social-cultural adjustment difficulties and lack of social support) which can cause poor mental conditions and stress disorders.<sup>184</sup> An NGO representative from Adana stressed that Afghans have been impacted by years of conflict (in Afghanistan) and/or faced difficult living conditions in Iran which has increase their physical and psychological exhaustion.<sup>185</sup> Respondents provided examples of stress disorders and traumas in their family and many of them showed symptoms of stress disorders and traumas themselves as well. Some also expressed that local NGOs provide psychosocial support, but there seems to be a need for more:

“One of my children is sick. He doesn’t talk to anyone, only his mother. He’s not going to school.”

**Focus Group Participant, Male, Erzurum**

“When I was 11, I had to go from Afghanistan to Iran. My mother, father and sister went to Pakistan for a wedding, they did not come back. I lived in Iran for 7-8 years. One to two years ago, I came to Turkey illegally. I work in daily jobs here. Sometimes I suddenly fly into a temper, I get angry at once. (...) I have no mother or father. I do not have a house to support, I live only for myself. Sometimes I question why I live. What do we have to do?”

**19, Male, Adana, 2018**

“I was really bad when I first came to Turkey. I could not sleep. I started to go to the ASAM once a week for one year. I was receiving psychological counselling and taking medication.”

**Female, Adana**

“We find many traumatic disorders, so we also provide psycho-social support. Afghan women, in particular, come with general conflict trauma as well as domestic violence problems. Therefore, psychological support studies are very important.”

**NGO Representative, Female, Adana**

## 7.4 Education

Under Turkish law, all children up to 12 years, including foreign nationals and temporary protection or international protection beneficiaries, have the right to access basic education in public schools free of charge. According to the Ministry of Education figures from June 2019, there are 56,191 non-Syrian children enrolled in formal education in Turkey.<sup>186</sup> As of 2019, nearly half a million refugees benefited from free Turkish language, vocational and skills courses offered by the Publication Education Centres. Nonetheless, refugees continue to encounter difficulties in accessing education due to a range of factors including legal status, language barrier and financial difficulties. As shown in official figures, enrolment rate for refugee children remains high up to 6th grade and starts to rapidly decline afterwards.<sup>187</sup> The United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) estimates that 400,000 Syrian and non-Syrian refugee children are out-of-school.<sup>188</sup>

Relatively low numbers of respondents indicated better educational opportunities as one of the main reasons for starting their migration journey (12.3%) or coming to Turkey (14.1%). However, accessing better education or wanting children to have access to better education was mentioned as an important driver in the interviews and focus group discussions.

“We lived in Iran for five years. The situation got worse there. There was discrimination. They didn’t want us because we were Afghans. They don’t give us IDs there. I came because my kids can’t go to school. I didn’t want my kids to grow up illegally.”

**28, Male, Adana, 2019**

184 Keyes, EF. [Mental health status in refugees: an integrative review of current research](#) Issues Mental Health Nurs. ; Alemi, Q., James, S., Cruz, R., Zepeda, V., & Racadio, M. (2014) [Psychological distress in afghan refugees: a mixed-method systematic review](#) Journal of Immigrant and Minority Health

185 NGO Representative, Female, Adana

186 UNICEF (Mid-Year 2019), [Turkey Humanitarian Situation Report](#)

187 Hayat boyu öğrenme (2019), [Milli Eğitim Bakanlığı](#)

188 UNICEF (Mid-Year 2019). Ibid.



"I left [from Afghanistan] for my children; they couldn't go to school. The Taliban threatened [us] every day."

**Focus Group Participant, Female, Adana**

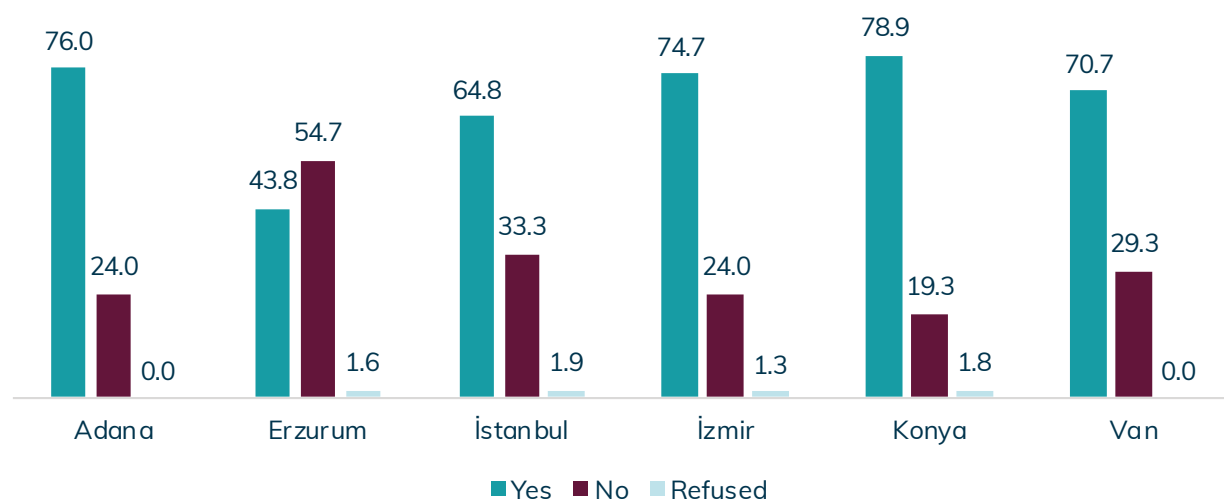
"Turkey is better in terms of education. In Afghanistan, children could not go to school. They go here."

**Focus Group Participant, Female, Adana**

Konya is reported to have the most problems in education. Across all provinces, most respondents from Konya reported facing problems because of language (26) and lack of access in general (24). This might be explained by the relatively high number of people who recently arrived in Turkey among the respondents in Konya. Of the 57 respondents in Konya, 42 arrived in Turkey since the beginning of 2018. Coupled with language and cultural challenges, finding access to services may be more difficult for newcomers as they need time adapting themselves to a new country. In Erzurum, on the other hand, where a majority of Afghans arrived before 2018, respondents faced the least problems with access to education as they might have overcome some key barriers with time spent in Turkey, such as developing language proficiency.

Whereas Turkey's education was appreciated, nearly half (49%) of respondents reported having problems in accessing education.<sup>189</sup> Among the provinces assessed,

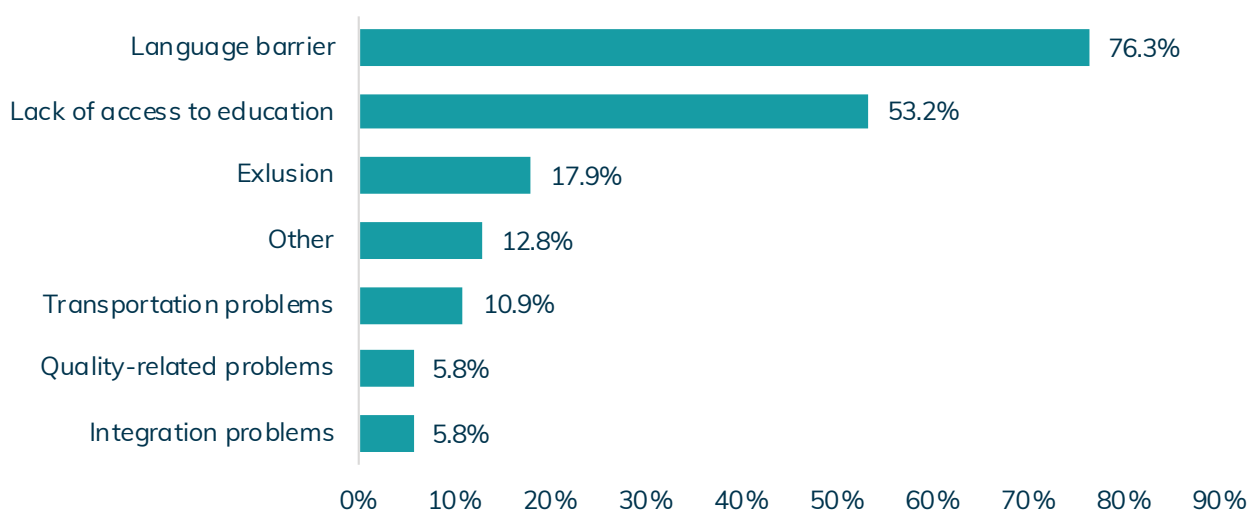
**Figure 27: Problems in access to education system by province (n=341, %)**



From the 156 people who reported problems in education, 76.3% report language problems. However,

the proportion of children who do not have any access to school is also high (53.2%).

**Figure 28: Types of problems in education system (n=156, 285 responses in total, %)**



189 42.5% reported experiencing no problems. 8.5% respondents declined to answer

These key problems were also mentioned by Afghans during the focus group meetings and in-depth interviews. Access to education is not legally possible for those who are irregularly residing in non-satellite cities (such as Istanbul and Izmir); however, a sizeable number of Afghans study at universities in these cities.<sup>190</sup> Respondents provided examples of people who had not experienced any problems in school enrolment, but in communicating with classmates and following classes. The language barrier and difficulties in paying school-related expenses were also reported as reasons behind dropouts, leading to lack of access to education.

*“They [children] had difficulty because they did not speak the [Turkish] language. They don’t get along with the other kids. There is no help for language [learning]. They learn by themselves.”*

**59, Female, Adana, 2018**

*“Many of our families have a problem with education. There are young children aged around 13. They haven’t picked up a pencil yet, but they are sent to the sixth or seventh grade. This kid even doesn’t speak Turkish.”*

**NGO Representative, Male, Konya**

*“School attendance is low [among Afghans]. They have problems of exclusion due to language problems in schools. It increases especially in older ages.”*

**NGO Representative, Male, Adana**

*“Book and stationery prices, school expenses, language problems of refugees and enrolment in school by age cause children to give up school and education.”*

**22, Male, Van, 2016**

*“I have five children. Two of them go to school. There was no problem in registering, but we couldn’t afford to buy school uniforms. For now, the teachers at school overlooks it.”*

**Focus Group Participant, Female, Konya**

## 7.5 Employment

Employment opportunities are a major reason to leave Afghanistan and come to Turkey, given its more stable economy than other countries, such as Iran and Pakistan. However, for many respondents, securing work and a stable income is a major problem; 73.6% of respondents stated they have been facing problems in employment, while 23.2% stated they have no problems.<sup>191</sup>

While finding a job is a key priority for many migrants and refugees, most participants are only able to find day jobs in construction, sheepherding, factories, and textile workshops. International protection beneficiaries work mainly in sectors that do not require work permits, such as agriculture and sheepherding.<sup>192</sup> As some of the respondents highlighted, they always need to look for new day jobs due to lack of regular income and financial stability:

*“I’m trying to get a day job every day. We can’t find regular jobs. I didn’t get my payment for the last 2 days.”*

**Focus Group Participant, Male, Izmir**

*“We’re going out on the street to find a job. I work daily. We’re going to the bazaar. If there’s a job, we talk to the boss, but we’re always concerned whether he’s going to pay us, or whether we’re going to get a job the next day.”*

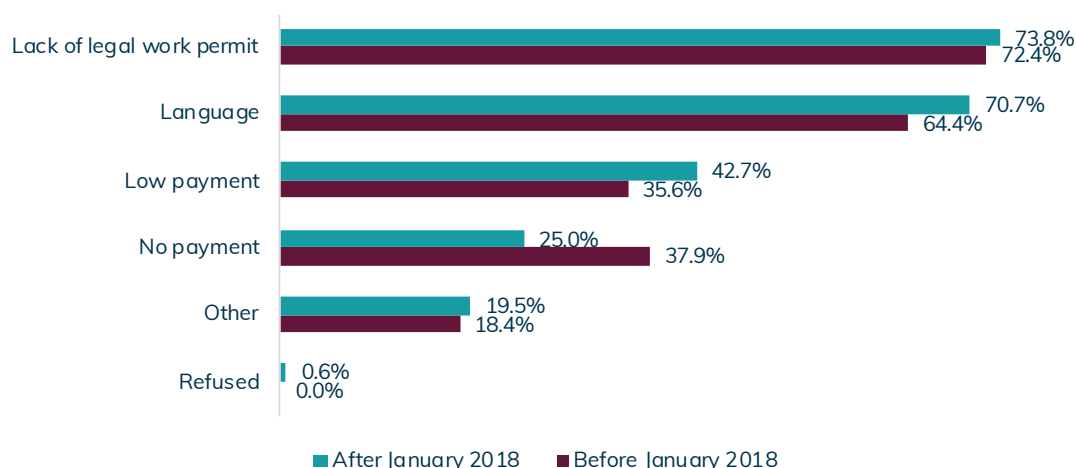
**23, Male, Konya, 2017**

190 With a total number of 4,812, Afghans were among the top-five nationalities residing in Turkey with student residence permits in 2019. DGMM (2020) Migration Statistics, <https://en.goc.gov.tr/residence-permits>

191 11 persons declined to answer the question.

192 “Applicants for conditional refugee status and those who have conditional refugee status can work in seasonal agriculture or animal husbandry without a work permit.” Official Gazette (2016) [Regulation for the Owner of the International Protection Application and the Owners of the International Protection Status](#)

**Figure 29: What kinds of problems do you face with in employment?**  
(n=251, 580 responses in total)



As shown above, lack of work permit and language barrier are the most stated problems in employment. Respondents also reported vulnerabilities due to job insecurity and workplace accidents:

Afghan refugees and migrants when they claim their payments. Living in a constant fear of being deported, the business owners reportedly misuse the worker's situation.

"When we consider short-term needs, work permit comes first. Because working illegally leads to many other problems, such as not getting paid, no social security and no protection against workplace accidents."

**NGO Representative, Adana**

"I worked in textile. We work without insurance and we have a small salary, but sometimes they don't even pay that."

**Focus Group Participant, Female, Adana**

"My brother had a work accident and injured his hand. His boss said to him "Tell them (hospital personnel) you injured it at home, not at work. Or we will both get into trouble." The boss said so because my brother was working illegally."

**Focus Group Participant, Female, Adana**

"It is not enough. They pay only 300 TL weekly. They don't make the payments on time either. They pay whenever they want to pay. We have to borrow money from others."

**26, Female, Erzurum, 2018**

"We're having trouble with the language. People who speak the [Turkish] language find jobs more easily."

**Focus Group Participant, Male, Konya**

"My husband works as a dishwasher in a Turkish restaurant. He works for a very low salary, almost 1,200 TL. But I hope he gets his payment, because they do not make the payment every month."

**Female, Istanbul, 2019**

"The problem is not knowing the language anyway. [If you can't speak Turkish] They're not hiring. You can't make the contact."

**28, Male, Adana, 2019**

"We have a friend, who was attacked because he asked for payment from his employer. He was killed. Everybody around here knew about this, but no one cared. Because he was unregistered."

**23, Male, Konya, 2017**

"Some employers don't pay for my work. They say we should report [them] to the police but we have no identity [card]."

**20, Male, Konya, 2019**

Receiving no, or very low payment is another common problem. Although there are some exceptional examples of Afghan refugees and migrants, who are business owners or contracted workers, most respondents work without a contract. As the figure above illustrates, low payment is a more common problem than not getting paid at all. Most of the participants also mentioned that they are not getting paid on time. In some cases, business owners threaten

Afghan workers, many of whom work without a work permit and thus have restricted access to judicial and official complaints, are vulnerable to discrimination and exploitation. Some respondents highlighted poor

working conditions, including long working hours, and feeling insecure and helpless:

“The owner of the business makes us work long hours because we are foreigners. I work 12 or 13 hours a day. The boss once threatened me with a gun. I went to a few villages in Erzurum to work [and] they did not give me my money. We’re very vulnerable because we’re illegal immigrants.”

**22, Male, Erzurum, 2016**

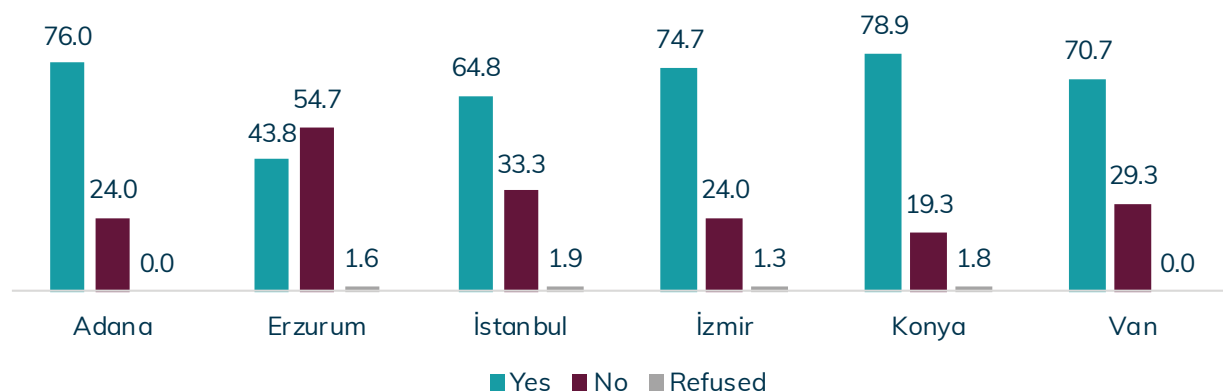
“Even if the job is very difficult, we have to do it. The working hours end at 6PM but sometimes we work until the night. Everyone loves hard-working people, as the bosses are happy with Afghan workers. But they don’t pay. A friend of mine has not received his money for 2 months. But where can we go? Who will listen to us?”

**30, Male, Konya, 2018**

## 7.6 Housing

The arrival of refugees and migrants to a specific country, city or area leads to an increased demand for housing and higher rents. For example, Turkish cities that host sizeable populations of Syrian refugees, have experienced housing shortages and rents rising three- to four-fold since 2011.<sup>193</sup> As addressed in the literature, this compels refugees and migrants with limited financial resources to live in neighbourhoods that are at the periphery of urban centres, of low quality and home to other migrants and refugees as well.<sup>194</sup> Most of the Afghans surveyed live in areas where there are also other migrants and refugees, mainly Syrians. There were some respondents who reported to live in damaged houses in areas affected by the earthquake in Van, while others lived in old buildings in urban transformation areas which are due to be demolished.

**Figure 30: Accommodation problems by province (n=341)**



In total, 67.7% of the Afghan refugees and migrants stated that they faced an accommodation-related problem. Konya had the highest proportion of new arrivals (42 out of 57) who have not been registered with PDMM (yet). Some respondents expressed facing difficulties in finding accommodation. As explained by a local informant, real estate agents and landlords are unwilling to rent a house to an immigrant/refugee who has no identity card.

Izmir also has a relatively high proportion of Afghans (56 out of 78) who report accommodation problems. This mainly stems from the fact that all Afghan migrants and refugees living in Izmir reside there irregularly because they do not have legal documentation and/or are registered in satellite cities (Izmir is not a satellite city). This makes it harder for them to find proper accommodation. Another

factor that could explain accommodation problems faced in Izmir could also be related to the fact that Afghan migrant and refugees may perceive their stay in Izmir as temporary due to their plans to move onwards to Europe. The vast majority of research respondents in Izmir (51 out of 75) indicated that they do not intend to stay in Turkey for long. Being on the move leads them to look for temporary accommodation solutions. Next to that, they are also financially more vulnerable due to a lack of a stable source of income. In the words of a participant:

193 Erdoğan, M. (2014) *Türkiye'deki Suriyeli: Toplumsal Kabul ve Uyum Araştırması* Hacettepe University Migration and Politics Research Center  
 194 Balkan, B. & Tok, E.O. & Torun, H. & Tumen, S. (2018) *Immigration, Housing Rents, and Residential Segregation: Evidence from Syrian Refugees in Turkey* Institute of Labor Economics (IZA)

“We have a house and four families live together. Someone takes my child’s milk. We’re grown-ups, eating just once a day and resist [hunger], but these kids need milk ... We have no money, no place to stay, [so it’s a] very bad situation. We were staying in the park in summer.”

**Focus Group Participant, Female, Izmir**

Although finding a proper accommodation has been a great challenge for both registered and unregistered refugees and migrants, those who are not registered as international protection applicants experience most challenges:

“It is very difficult to rent a house; they do not want to rent their houses. My sister has an ID, [so] we rented the house by using her ID. My sister didn’t come in an illegal way. She came [to Turkey] with a visa.”

**Focus Group Participant, Male, Istanbul**

“When I first arrived here, my wife’s brother was here. They have an identity [card]. We stayed with them for one and a half months, but they did not want to host us any longer. And because of that, we stay in a different house every month. We move temporarily to another house because I can’t rent a house on my own. Our economic situation is not good. They also do not rent us houses because we are here as illegal migrants.”

**Male, Istanbul, 2019**

The survey findings also confirm that new arrivals experience more challenges in finding accommodation. Respondents who came to Turkey after January 2018 had twice as many problems than those who came before then. Out of 231, 156 respondents who stated experiencing accommodation-related difficulties came to Turkey after January 2018. In the in-depth interviews and FGDs, almost all participants and interviewees stated that they had faced challenges when they first arrived in Turkey:

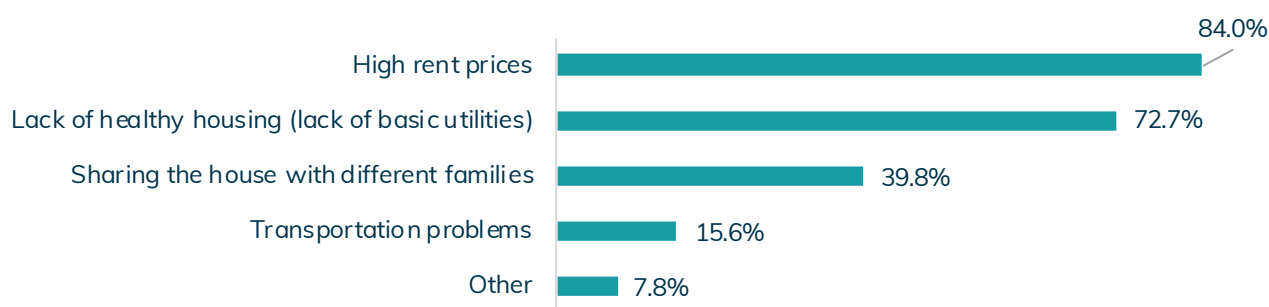
“We stayed on the street first. Then the people we met found us home. We had a lot of trouble until we found a house. We were hungry.”

**46, Male, Adana, 2018**

“When we first came to Adana, we slept in the park. Someone saw our situation in the park and rented us his house. Afghans lived here before. We have no household goods, nothing to wear, very little to eat. I don’t know how to pay the bills; I haven’t found a job yet.” (Participant who came to Turkey one and half months ago from Iran)

**28, Male, Adana, 2019**

**Figure 31: What kinds of problems do you face with in housing/sheltering? (n=231, 508 responses in total, %)**



In a multiple answer question, respondents mentioned high rents (84.0%) and lack of basic utilities (72.7%) as the most critical problems they face in housing. Most participants in interviews and FGDs also cited poor housing conditions, including inadequate household goods and lack of heating facilities:

“The house is not getting sun; the humidity is too much here. This is bad for my health; I am a cancer patient.”

**Focus Group Participant, Female, Adana**

"It is difficult to warm up because there is no sun in my house. My kids have trouble. My old house was fine, but I couldn't stay there when the rent increased."

**50, Female, Erzurum, 2017**

"We found house through a real estate agent. The estate agent asked for a higher fee than he normally asks for [from host community members]. Normally, he charges 200 TL, [but] he charged us 1000 TL."

**23, Male, Konya, 2017**

Most participants stated that they lack the financial means to afford rents. As a result, some opt for sharing houses with others, which was another frequently mentioned problem in the survey (mentioned 92 times) as it led to overcrowding. While it is mostly students and single men, who live in a shared place, there are also families who live with other families in order to split the rent:

"We rented a house with another family, who we met at the provincial immigration administration. Now we live together, it is more affordable this way."

**Focus Group Participant, Male, Konya**

Most of the Afghans found their current accommodation via informal support networks. For example, there was an Afghan who came to Turkey only eight days ago before being surveyed but was able to find an apartment through a friend who knew a place that was vacated by an Afghan family. Accommodation found through networks such as acquaintances, friends or other Afghan refugees and migrants also help overcome the troubles they face due to being unregistered (kimliksizlik).<sup>195</sup> Afghan refugees and migrants who do not have access to these solidarity networks are trying to find a home through real estate agents. However, participants stated that they frequently encounter discriminatory practices, such as overcharging and not renting a house:

"I'm going to the real estate agent. Because I know Turkish well, they do not understand where I'm from. When they learn I am from Afghanistan, they say there is no house. Especially if there are no men, if we are women alone, there is no house for us [Afghans]."

**Focus Group Participant, Female, Konya**

## 7.7 Assessment of service provision

### Public institutions and local authorities

Half (50%) of respondents do not know how to access public institutions, such as hospitals, police departments, municipalities and schools, while one-third did (31.5%). Fifty-six (16.4%) stated that they had limited knowledge about how to access services.<sup>196</sup>

Only 10.3% of respondents report that the services provided by public institutions are adequate. Two-third (66.3%) of respondents indicated that public services are inadequate. Another one out of five (20.5%) respondents stated that they have no contact or relation with public institutions.<sup>197</sup>

The highest satisfaction rate is in Konya, while the lowest is in Istanbul. One of the possible factors that determine the level of adequacy is the capacity of institutions in these locations. As a local informant in Konya highlighted, the capacity of local and provincial institutions has been increasing in tandem with the increase of arrivals. However, despite the relatively good local capacity, when compared with other provinces, there were more respondents who reported inadequate public services than those who reported adequate. This situation is more evident in large cities such as Istanbul where 87.0% reported inadequate public services.

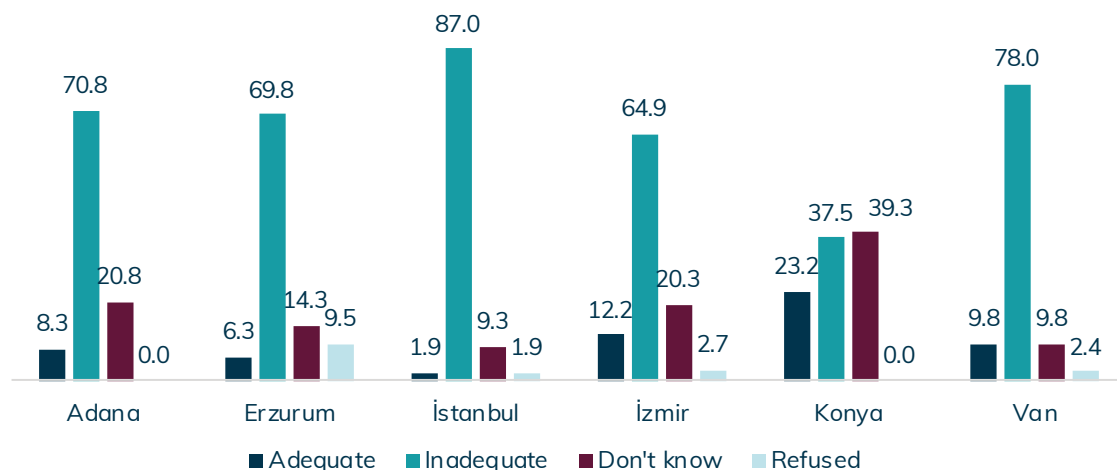
195 "My brother who stayed here previously had a friend who had an identity [card] and rented the house under his name. We found it [via an] acquaintance," said a 21-year-old male respondent who came to Turkey five months ago.

196 Eight respondents do not answer the question.

197 10 persons declined to answer the question.



**Figure 32: Assessment of public services (n=336)**



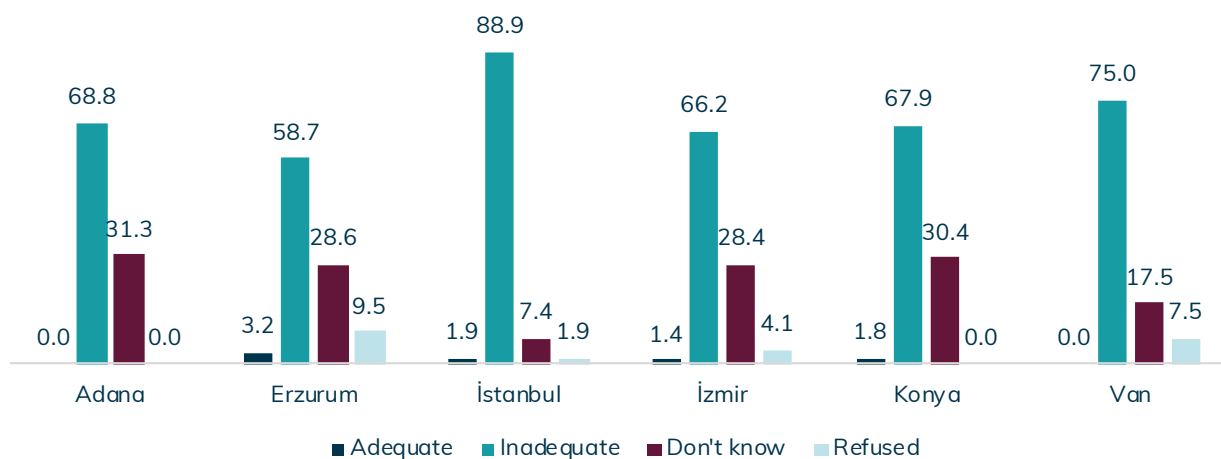
One of the possible reasons for the general low level of satisfaction is the fear of approaching the authorities. Especially those who lack documents or reside in cities other than the assigned satellite cities, refrain from going to the public institutions because of the risk of deportation. There are widespread concerns that young and single Afghan men are being deported because they are considered as “economic migrants” by the authorities and not as people in need of international protection. Migrants who do not want to resort to authorities because of fear of deportation remain in a paradoxical situation that increases their vulnerabilities. Overall, there is a general lack of

knowledge and awareness on how and where to seek assistance.

*“I don’t have ID now. I am afraid of being deported because I came [to Turkey] for a job.”*  
**Male, 22, Erzurum, 2019**

*“I didn’t go to any institution (referring PDMM) because I am unregistered. I don’t know where to obtain an ID.”*  
**Male, 21, Erzurum, 2016**

**Figure 33: Assessment of local authorities’ services (n=335)**



For local governments, such as municipalities and mukhtars, the levels of adequacy are similar to those for the public institutions. Most people who answered “I don’t know” are migrants with an irregular status. For instance, in Erzurum, 18 people who indicated not knowing how to assess the services from local authorities are also those who are not registered as international protection applicants.

It is striking that there is a substantial proportion of people who indicate not being able to assess the services from local authorities (because they are unaware). A possible reason for this is that the majority are without documentation and do not access services or do not interact with local governments and other institutions (e.g. out of fear from being deported). Another possible reason could be related to an ineffective communication between refugees and officials working in local institutions.

## National, local and international organizations

Two-thirds (68.3%) of respondents find the services provided by national and local NGOs inadequate.<sup>198</sup> Approximately one quarter (25.9%) did not know, which could mean that they had limited interaction with NGOs. Only 2 respondents find the services of NGOs both at the national and local levels adequate.<sup>199</sup>

An important point to note here is that SGDD-ASAM – which assisted registration together with UNHCR prior to 2018 – has long been regarded as an “authority” on migration. Although almost all refugees in each province have contacted ASAM at least once, they may not see ASAM branches as an NGO, especially of those who came prior to 2018. In short, there is some confusion on ASAM’s function and legal mandate.

There were also participants who expressed their dissatisfaction of NGOs that are perceived as giving priority to Syrian over non-Syrian refugees:

“They [NGOs] are helping Syrians more [than other migrants and refugees] and favouring them [Syrians] more. We [Afghans] are invisible. We do not exist at all.”

**Focus Group Participant, Female, Konya**

“(.) For example, we went to a humanitarian relief organization for assistance, but we did not get help because we are not Syrian. This happened eight months ago. Such associations (NGOs) usually receive money from Arab countries, so they do not want to give it to us. They give it to Syrians.”

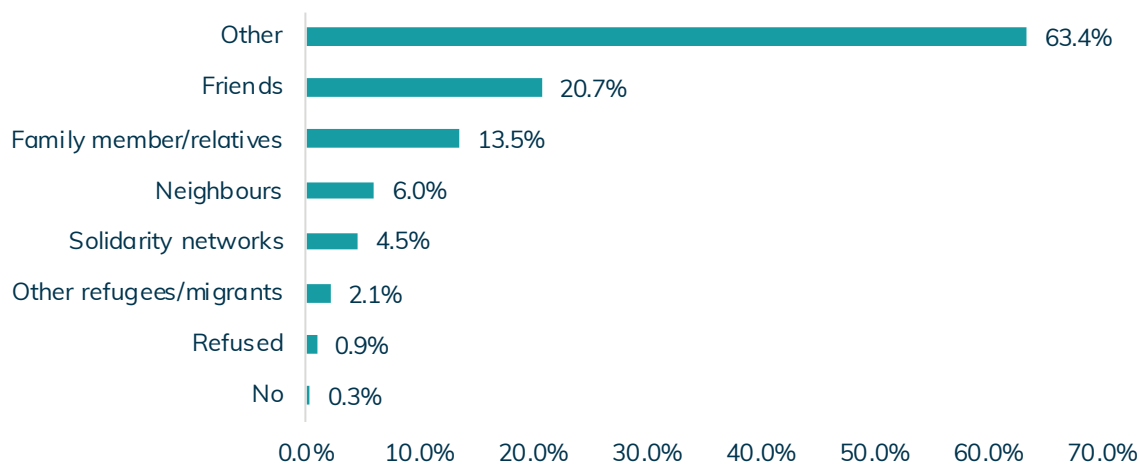
**Focus Group Participant, Male, Konya**

A majority (65.5%) of respondents stated that they found services of international NGOs inadequate and only 2.4% found it adequate.<sup>200</sup> Another 28.3% of respondents stated that they did not know or receive assistance from any international non-governmental organization.<sup>201</sup>

## Informal support

A majority (63.4%) of respondents mentioned access to “other” informal support sources but without any specifications.<sup>202</sup> Other responses indicate that respondents have a tendency to access informal support from their close social relations such as friends (20.7%) and family members/relatives (13.5%) and family members/relatives (13.5%).

**Figure 34: Informal support resources in Turkey (n=333, 371 responses in total, %)**



## 7.8 Overall assessment of conditions per city

Among the assessed areas, Istanbul and Izmir are not recognized as satellite cities and international protection applicants cannot register with DGMM/PDMM and live there regularly, while the other assessed cities, Erzurum,

Konya, Adana and Van, are all satellite cities.

On average, 131 (39%) respondents are satisfied with the city they live in now. However, 100 (29%) respondents are not fully satisfied, and 100 (29%) respondents stated that they are not satisfied.<sup>203</sup>

198 N=336

199 14 respondents declined to answer the question.

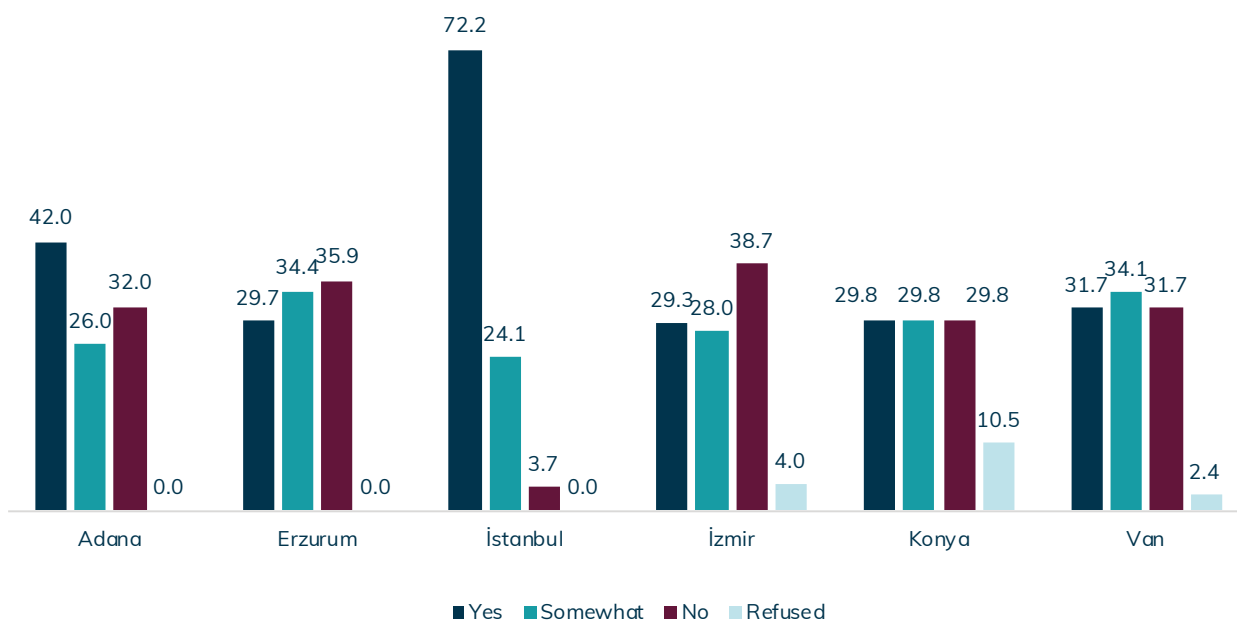
200 N=336

201 13 declined to answer

202 This question was positioned at the end of the survey. As such, survey fatigue has to be taken into consideration, as the number of responses (371 responses from 333 respondents) are lower than for other questions in the survey.

203 10 (3%) people declined to answer the question.

**Figure 35: Satisfaction by province (341 responses in total, %, n=341)**

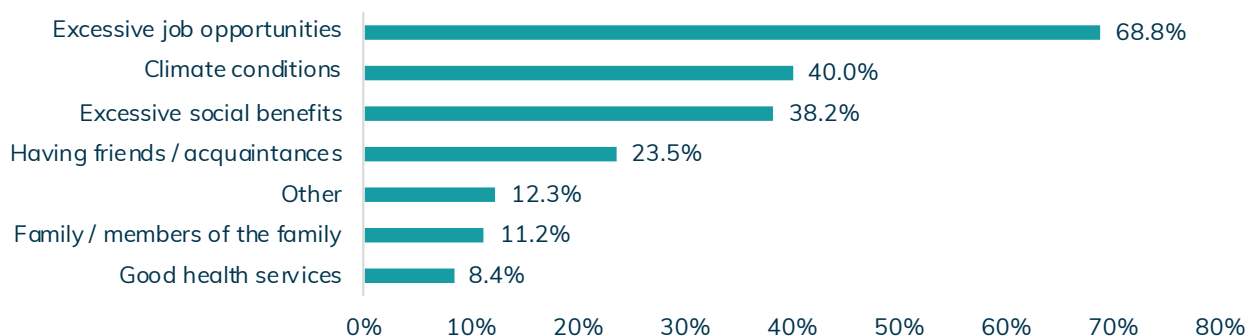


Thirty-nine (72.2%) respondents in İstanbul are satisfied with the city they live in, while 13 (24.1%) are partially satisfied. The most important reason for the high satisfaction rate in İstanbul, is having more job opportunities in comparison to other provinces in Turkey. Similarly, Adana (which followed second in terms of satisfaction) is a province which offers relatively more job

opportunities in industrial and agricultural sectors than elsewhere in the south of Turkey.

The highest proportion (39%) of those who are not satisfied are found in İzmir. This might be related to the high risk of being apprehended and detained.

**Figure 36: Main reasons to prefer a province (n=285, 577 responses in total, %)**



Job opportunities is the most important factor – by 68.8% of respondents – that determines the satisfaction rate for staying in a province and the most important reason for choosing to move to another. As stated by an informant:

*“They (migrants) come to İstanbul reluctantly because it is an expensive city. But there is also the fact there are plenty of job opportunities in İstanbul. Most of them say, “I am aware that I spend more in İstanbul, but I also make money. You make no money there [satellite cities].”*  
**NGO Representative, İstanbul**

This is also illustrated in the map below, which shows that Istanbul is the most preferred city to live among Afghan refugees and migrants. Another factor increasing satisfaction, that was especially raised about Adana, is the positive attitude of the host community towards refugees and migrants:

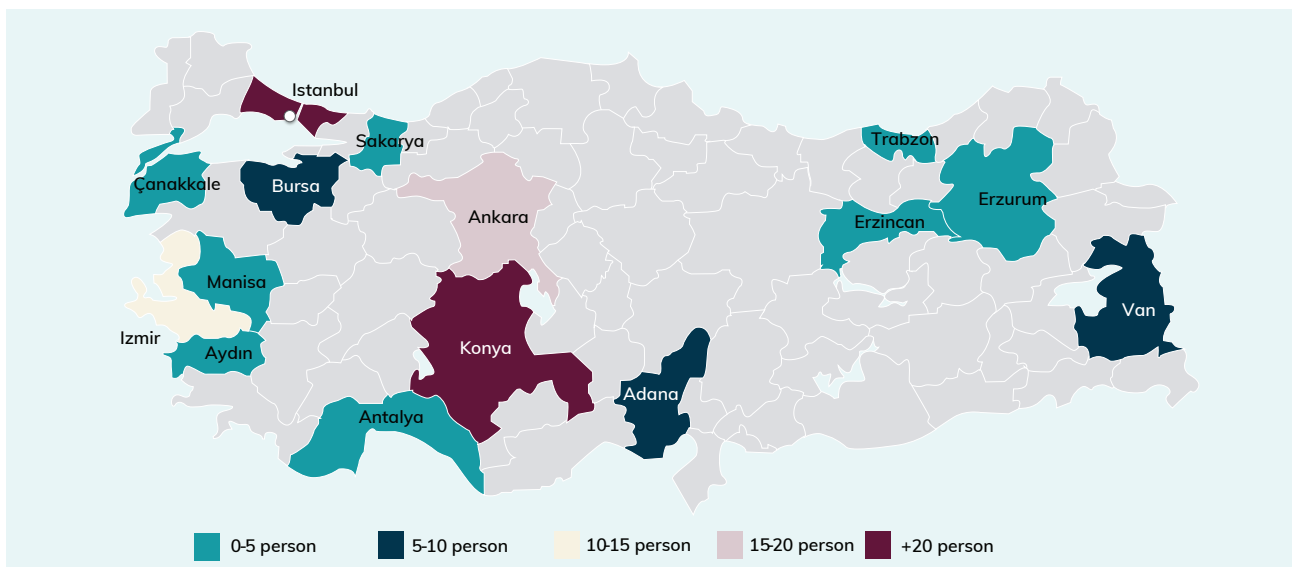
*“The behaviour of the people here is better than in Iran, we are more comfortable.”*

**Focus Group Participant, Female, Adana**

*“We are very pleased with the people of Adana, we are glad. They gave us clothes, household goods. They were very helpful when we first arrived.”*

**Focus Group Participant, Female, Adana**

**Figure 37: Provinces Afghan refugees and migrants want to reside in (n=108)**



## 8. SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS

This study has set out the key factors influencing Afghans' short- to long-term intentions, such as decisions to either stay in Turkey or continue a journey. In addition, it looked at people's profiles, trajectories, means of travel and exposure to rights violations along their journey, and the general situation of Afghans in Turkey. The study has also reviewed the legal framework and policies that shape socio-economic conditions and access to protection and basic services. This chapter summarises the key findings on the study's main themes: profiles, drivers, intentions, routes, means of travel, access to assistance, risks, smuggling, and challenges faced in Turkey.

### 8.1 On the move

#### Young, male and in an irregular situation

Overall, our findings on the Afghans' profiles align with the secondary data as the majority of the surveyed Afghans were men (66.0%) and relatively young – between 18 and 30 years old (64.8%). As anticipated, a majority of respondents started their migration journey from Afghanistan (71.6%), followed by Iran (24.6%) and Pakistan (3.8%). A majority (69.2%) departed from an urban area and most (71.6%) had not lived in camps or informal tented settlements. As expected with the purposive sampling, a majority (64.5%) arrived in Turkey after January 2018, and most arrived irregularly (83.3%).

#### Violence, economic factors, and access to rights drive mixed migration

The research findings on drivers confirm the mixed nature of Afghan migration. The majority left Afghanistan because of violence (66.3%) and/or economic factors (63.6%). A majority included violence (80.4%) and economic factors (60.7%), while almost half mentioned rights and freedom (49.3%) among their top three reasons for starting their migration journey. The empirical findings from IDIs and FGDs confirm these key factors driving Afghan mixed migration movements, and also provide context to reported oppression by Taliban and other armed groups, lack of rights, discrimination, and lack of access to basic services. While some referred to direct consequences of conflict such as explosions in villages destroying their homes, others cited indirect effects, including reduced access to livelihoods and services in Afghanistan. As also noted in other studies, security concerns, unemployment, and challenges in accessing education and healthcare often intersect and confirm the mixed nature of Afghans' movements.<sup>204</sup>

#### Women pushed by personal traumas

Family reasons were reportedly influential in the migration decision-making process, especially for women who feared forced or early marriage. Female respondents who either fled on their own or with other family members indicated having been subjected to domestic violence, sexual abuse, verbal and physical threats, and forced marriages, often perpetrated by older male family members and relatives. During FGDs and through IDIs, women reported that they decided to migrate in order to protect themselves or their children from these types of violence and threats. While this study did not compare drivers of Afghan migration to those of other population groups in Turkey, family reasons do seem to represent a much stronger push factor among Afghan migrants and refugees than among other populations, such as Syrians.<sup>205</sup>

#### Family reunification main pull to Turkey

Respondents chose to travel to Turkey to reunite with family (48.7%), for easy and fast access to asylum (45.2%), economic reasons (41.3%), and better living standards (34.3%). The strong motivation to reunite with family chimes with the findings that 23.2% had relatives in Turkey before starting their journeys and that 23.5% indicated having relatives who came to Turkey, received refugee status and then resettled to another country. These numbers suggest that even though family reunification was a reason to come to Turkey, respondents may actually want to reunite with family members in Europe (or other destinations). During FGDs and IDIs, participants also stressed moving to Turkey because of their desire to be safe, have better living standards and access to decent employment and education opportunities for their children. Afghanistan and Iran were not considered as countries where these rights could be guaranteed, and respondents from FGDs and IDIs explained their reasons for leaving Iran primarily in relation to restrictive living and worsening economic conditions. Some Afghans also struggled to secure these rights in Turkey, expressing a high degree of uncertainty about their short- and long-term future.

#### On the move, but destination unknown

Nearly half (48.4%) of respondents indicated they had not reached the end of their migration journey. Another 30.0% said they had, which implies that for them Turkey was or had become their de-facto destination country. This aligns with the findings on Afghan's intended destination, which 43.1% of respondents identified as Turkey. This was followed by European countries (19.1%), Canada (17.9%), and the United States (10.9%). These

204 Seefar (2018) [Examining Return and Reintegration in Afghanistan: Why Psychosocial Interventions Matter](#); Mixed Migration Centre (2019) [Distant Dreams. Understanding the aspirations of Afghan returnees](#)

205 This observation is based on the authors' research among mainly Syrian refugees in Turkey.

figures show that Europe is not the main destination for the surveyed Afghans that currently reside in Turkey irregularly. The majority expressed the intention to move within 12 months, but primarily within Turkey (51.4%), with a smaller percentage (17%) intending to move to another country. In the FGDs, participants highlighted that the specific country of destination did not matter as long as they would be safe, welcomed and benefitted from improved living conditions. Although mixed, the overall findings on intentions and plans confirm our assumption that Afghans are highly mobile and still on the move, although not so much with the intention to cross borders into Europe in the short term, but rather to continue movement to somewhere within Turkey.

### Eastern land route preferred

The majority of respondents came to Turkey via fragmented journeys through Iran and Pakistan. Although confronted with many challenges, as described below, most respondents considered this either the cheapest (23.4%), sole (18.6%), or fastest (15.4%) option. While the country of departure differs, for those arriving irregularly, the point of entry into Turkey remains the same: whether their journey started from Afghanistan, Iran, or Pakistan, Afghans cross the Iran-Turkey land border into eastern border provinces of Turkey (60.4% arrived in Van, and 20.2% in Ağrı, Doğubeyazıt).<sup>206</sup>

### Majority migrate while lacking information

Surprisingly, over half (52.5%) of respondents indicated not having obtained information regarding the routes, destinations, costs, conditions, and risks of their journey. A lack of prior knowledge about Turkey is also represented in the qualitative findings from the FGDs and IDIs; many had no or little such knowledge before arrival. Of the 45.2% of respondents who did obtain information, a majority (72.7%) used their friends and family – either in the country of departure or in another country – as their main sources of information. Other sources accessed before departing include returned migrants (46.4%), smugglers (24.2%), and online communities or networks (17.6%). The fact that a considerable number of respondents consult returned migrants aligns with the secondary data analysis which shows that circular migration is a common phenomenon among the Afghan population, and that forced return or deportation back to Afghanistan does not deter Afghans from trying again. With nearly two million returns from 2017 to 2019, it is not a surprise that nearly half of those who gathered information before departure did so from returned migrants.

### Death, violence and separation among the main risks during the journey

The migration route from Afghanistan and Pakistan to Iran and then to Turkey is long and difficult to navigate.

Most Afghans did not attempt this journey alone and half (50%) of all respondents were traveling with in groups of three to eight people, composed of their families (36.4%), other migrants (31.4%), friends (24.3%) and spouses (20.8%). However, among the 316 (92.7%) who travelled with someone else, 100 (46.1%) were separated from the ones they were with initially. Separation was not the only risk faced during the journey. A majority of 69.5% reported facing risks during their journey, including death (63.4%), physical violence (50%), robbery (43.7%), and detention (31.1%). Some 70% of respondents stated that smugglers were the perpetrators of incidents and violence. FGD and IDI participants also stressed other problems related to harsh weather and other physical conditions of the mountainous route, which had to be taken primarily on foot. This was especially problematic for the elderly and those with health problems.

### In need of very basic assistance while on the move

Almost nine out of ten people (88.6%) reported that they needed assistance along the way. They were primarily in need of food and water (71.9%), cash (65.9%), and clothes or blankets (43.4%). Most (69.2%) did not receive the assistance they needed. The 30.8% who reported receiving assistance mainly indicated they had received clothes or blankets (75.3%) and legal assistance (72%). The key service providers were reportedly fellow migrants (39.8%) and local communities or volunteers (36.6%), rather than authorities or NGOs. Despite the variation in assistance received, it all fell short of meeting needs. The survey findings align with what participants in FGDs and IDIs reported about a lack of basic needs (food and water in particular), poor means of transportation (e.g. over-crowded trucks), and indecent accommodation (e.g. lacking proper sanitation).

### Determined to move, despite the risks

Had they known in advance about the risks they would face, 45.7% said that they would still have started their journey, compared to 33.4% who would not.<sup>207</sup> Some 57.5% stated that they never considered abandoning their journey, while 42.5% considered doing so at least once. Nearly half (47.8%) indicated that nothing would make them even consider abandoning their journeys. Almost three quarters (73.3%) said that it was not likely that they would encourage others to migrate, compared to almost one quarter (24%) who would encourage others. In other words, while the respondents were determined to move themselves, and would have migrated even if they had known the risks in advance, the majority would not encourage other to migrate as well.

### Critical role of smugglers, primarily for crossing international borders

As opportunities for migration through legal channels

206 The remaining 19.4% arrived regularly through Ankara or Istanbul, did not know, or declined to answer.

207 Arguably, it is more difficult for people to go against their own migration decision, and regret that decision, than it is to justify the decision that was already made.



are very limited, migrant smugglers play an increasingly central role in the mixed migration journeys of Afghans. Irregular border crossings usually require the use of smugglers, especially when refugees and migrants need to travel long distances between the countries of origin and destination, or to pass through tight border control systems. The primary data collected in this research confirm that a large majority (81.8%) resorted to the services of smugglers during their journey. Almost all indicated resorting to smugglers for crossing borders (90.7%), as smugglers know how to avoid detection and where and when to move. Almost 40% paid the agreed full amount to the smugglers upon arrival at their destination and 19.1% paid a deposit initially and paid the rest upon arrival via a hawala money transfer. To fund their journey, 41.6% of respondents borrowed money, 39.9% used their own funding/savings, 29.3% had family who paid for them, and 26.7% sold assets. Being indebted to smugglers may result in debt bondage and makes migrants and refugees extremely vulnerable and dependent on smugglers.<sup>208</sup> In this study, no cases were identified where migrant smuggling transformed into forms of human trafficking. However, several FGD and IDI participants had negative experiences with migrant smugglers. The most often cited problems related to lack of access to basic needs on the route, deception, abandonment, mistreatment, and threats of physical violence and force. Because of this, some tried to resort to different smugglers or to continue their journey on their own. Reportedly, once Afghans arrived in Turkey, their use of smugglers decreased, although smugglers were sometimes needed to cross provincial borders.

## 8.2 Challenges in Turkey

Afghan migrants and refugees face various challenges in their daily lives in Turkey which are mainly related to access to protection, healthcare, education, employment, and general living conditions (housing and shelter). The language barrier is a frequently cited obstacle in access to basic services, coupled with a general lack of knowledge about the scope of legal rights and obligations.

### Protection

A majority (83.3%) of respondents arrived irregularly without legal documentation. Regardless of their irregular arrival, over half (55.1%) of respondents did apply for international protection. Most Afghans who applied did so at the PDMM (42.0%) or the UNHCR (32.4%). A majority (84.9%) of those who applied had been provided with documentation at the time of data collection. Considering that, it is striking that a majority (71.4%) do not know their rights as an asylum seeker or migrant. Additionally, this research confirmed that delays in registering and obtaining official documents cause various vulnerabilities and protection challenges for Afghans in Turkey, including an inability to access basic

rights and services such as healthcare, and the risk of deportation due to irregular status.<sup>209</sup> Single Afghan men in particular described major obstacles in several cities to registering at the PDMM as international protection applicants. For those who are registered as international protection applicants, the requirement to reside in the assigned satellite city is considered to be one of the major challenges as reported by IDI and FGD participants. There is a great desire to have more freedom of movement and the right to choose the city of residence.

### Health

A significant proportion (30.8%) of respondents reported having health problems or disabilities, such as physical impairments (47.6%) which were possibly caused by armed conflicts in Afghanistan or dangerous conditions during their journey towards Turkey; chronic diseases such as diabetes (32.3%); and intellectual disabilities such as cognitive or learning problems (28.6%). In line with the findings on protection, most problems in accessing healthcare services are faced by those who are not registered as international protection applicants. Furthermore, as is also the case in accessing other services, the language barrier is a challenge in accessing health services: IDI and FGD participants reported a lack of translators who speak Dari/Persian. Medical expenses also create a financial burden, especially for those with chronic diseases.

Another key challenge is access to mental health services. In the Turkish healthcare system, psychological and mental health support services are not covered by the health insurance provided to international protection applicants. However, many research participants mentioned suffering from migration-related traumas (e.g. imprisonment, physical and emotional torture, loss of family members due to displacement and death) and stressors (social-cultural adjustment difficulties and lack of social support) which can impair mental health and cause stress disorders. In turn, this weakens people's ability to socio-economically integrate in Turkey.

### Education

Relatively few respondents indicated better educational opportunities as one of the main reasons for starting their migration journey (12.3%) or coming to Turkey (14.1%). However, accessing better education or wanting children to have access to better education was mentioned as an important reason in the IDIs and FGDs. Nonetheless, a significant 49% of the survey respondents experienced problems accessing education in Turkey, especially because of the language barrier which was mentioned by 76.3% of those who reported issues. The proportion of children who are not enrolled in schools was also high, with 53.2% of those who reported problems indicating not having such access.

208 Triandafyllidou, A. and M.L. McAuliffe (2018) [Migrant Smuggling Data and Research: A Global Review of the Emerging Evidence Base](#)

209 Also see, Leghtas, I., & Thea, J. (2018) [You Cannot Exist in This Place: Lack of Registration Denies Afghan Refugees Protection in Turkey.](#)

## Employment

Employment opportunities are a major reason for leaving Afghanistan and coming to Turkey, as Turkey's economy is more stable than that of other countries in the region, such as Iran and Pakistan. However, for many respondents, securing work and a stable income is a major problem: 73.6% of respondents said they faced problems in employment. Most of those who reported such problems indicated lacking legal access to the job market (73.3%), followed by 68.5% who reported language barriers, which also makes them more vulnerable to discrimination and exploitation. New arrivals seem to be among those in the most disadvantaged positions in terms of language proficiency and access to a social network in Turkey, which would help them find employment. Problems with getting paid or being underpaid were some of the other problems reported. Consequently, financial hardship was reported as another major issue as most of the research participants reported either being unemployed or not having a regular job. Finally, people reported difficult conditions at work, including long working hours.

## Shelter

Two thirds (67.7%) of the Afghan refugees and migrants surveyed stated that they faced accommodation-related problems. The majority of those who reported problems indicated high rents (84.0%) and lack of basic utilities (72.7%) as the most critical issues. In the interviews and focus groups, people cited poor housing conditions, including inadequate household goods and lack of heating facilities. As a result of not being able to afford rent, some opted for sharing overcrowded houses with others, a problem noted by 39.8% of respondents. While it is mostly students and single men who share living quarters, there were also reports of families living with other families to reduce costs. The survey findings also confirm that new arrivals experience more challenges in finding accommodation. Respondents who came to Turkey after January 2018 had twice as many problems than those who came before then.<sup>210</sup>

## Access to service providers

The research for this study assessed service provision to Afghan refugees and migrants. Half (50%) of respondents indicated not knowing how to access public institutions for service provision. Only 10.3% reported that the services provided by public institutions were adequate. A possible explanation for this low level of satisfaction is a fear of approaching the authorities. Those who lack documentation or reside in cities other than the assigned satellite cities are especially reluctant to interact with public institutions because of the risk of deportation.

There is also a widespread concern that young and single Afghan men are being deported because they are considered as "economic migrants" and not as people in need of international protection.

Some 68.3% of respondents consider the services provided by national and local NGOs to be inadequate. An additional 25.9% stated they had no information on services of NGOs, which can be explained by the limited interaction between Afghan refugees and migrants and NGOs. The services of international NGOs did not score better: 65.5% of respondents found them inadequate. An additional 28.3% stated that they did not know about, or receive service assistance from, any international NGOs.

More than half (58%) of respondents stated that they were not (or not completely) satisfied with the province they lived in, compared to 39% who were satisfied. Istanbul stood out with the highest satisfaction rate (72.2%). Job opportunities and the attitude of the host community towards migrants were among the key factors affecting the satisfaction rate, as cited by IDI and FGD participants. Istanbul, and urban areas in general (such as Ankara and Konya) were among the most preferred places to reside. This aligns with the secondary data analysis that suggested that the majority of refugees and migrants intend to go to urban areas to sustain livelihoods or consider onward movement. As Istanbul is the most preferred, even though irregular arrivals cannot reside there legally and risk deportation, the city can be regarded as a critical hub for onward movement to Europe. Our qualitative findings show that if Afghan refugees and migrants are provided with permanent residency and legal employment, their incentive to consider onward movement decreases.

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210 156 persons out of 231 (67%) who stated experiencing accommodation-related difficulties came to Turkey after January 2018.

# 9. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

## 9.1 Conclusion

The findings reveal that the majority of the Afghans surveyed in Turkey are young males who arrived irregularly. They have been mainly driven by violence and lack of economic opportunities and access to rights in Afghanistan. For some women, domestic violence, sexual abuse, verbal and physical threats, and forced marriages were reasons for starting migration. The main reasons for coming to Turkey are anticipated family reunification, easy and fast access to asylum, economic opportunities, and better living standards. The findings on intentions revealed that a majority is still on the move to another location within Turkey or to a third country. Rather than identifying specific countries as preferred destinations, respondents highlighted the importance of factors such as safety, a welcoming environment, and improved living conditions.

Nearly all respondents came to Turkey via fragmented journeys through Iran and Pakistan, but prior to departure, only a minority obtained information regarding their journey's route, destination, costs, conditions, and risks. Most relied on the services of smugglers who were mainly needed for crossing international borders. Along with problems related to harsh weather and other physical conditions of the mountainous route, which had to be taken primarily on foot, Afghans reported witnessing death, physical violence, and family separation along the route. Some 70% of respondents even stated that smugglers were the perpetrators of incidents and violence. Nine out of ten people needed very basic assistance during their journey, which was not available in most cases. Despite all the risks and challenges, a majority was determined to move and continue migration. However, while the respondents were determined to move themselves, and would have migrated even if they had known the risks in advance, the majority would not encourage other to migrate as well.

Upon arrival in Turkey, respondents reported a variety of challenges related to access to protection, healthcare, education, employment, and general living conditions (housing and shelter). Restricted freedom of movement, risk of deportation, limited access to formal employment, language barriers, and lack of knowledge about the scope of legal rights and obligations were among the most cited problems. Over two thirds of respondents reported not being aware of their rights as an asylum seeker or migrant. On top of that, a majority reported not having received adequate assistance from public institutions and NGOs.

The qualitative findings show that if Afghan refugees and migrants are provided with permanent residency and legal employment, their incentive to consider onward movement decreases. If those preconditions are not in place, and no long-term solution is in sight, Afghan migrants' and refugees' final destinations remain unknown.

## 9.2 Recommendations

### For the international community:

- Implement and live up to the objectives set out in the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration and the Global Compact on Refugees with specific regard to Afghan refugees and migrants, who constitute a large but neglected and vulnerable group.
- International organisations together with the Government of Turkey should increase efforts to disseminate information and raise awareness about the asylum rights of Afghan refugees, including by guiding them through the application process and informing them of the direct risks of being unregistered in Turkey.
- Support the Government of Turkey financially and technically in its efforts to protect the rights of populations in need.
- Expand the collaboration with the Government of Turkey to increase its capacity in all provinces to properly carry out refugee status determination and provide international protection, while taking into account age-, gender- and diversity-specific vulnerabilities and protection challenges (e.g., in the case of Afghans, single women with children and young men).
- Ensure that funding for migrant and refugee support is non-discriminatory and not status based, and effectively benefits Afghan refugees and migrants and those of other nationalities.

### For international and national NGOs:

- Expand humanitarian response geographically, where government permission allows, to areas hosting high numbers of vulnerable refugee and migrant populations.
- Continue to improve the application of humanitarian principles and guidelines regardless of ethnicity, especially as to where and how assistance is provided impartially and based on needs and vulnerabilities.

- Conduct needs assessments of migrants and refugees using representative samples; inform the authorities about the assessed needs; advocate for the lifting of any restrictions on NGOs' response; and implement an evidence-based response.
- Provide refugees and migrants with improved access to protection, basic needs, health, shelter, education, and employment. Proposed interventions should prioritise:
  - Advocating for the protection of refugees and migrants, regardless of nationality;
  - Strengthening the capacity of public service providers, at all levels, as well as local NGOs and civil society organisations;
  - Overcoming language barriers in service provision by providing translation services and/or language courses, in all sectors and for all age-groups;
  - Facilitating migrants' and refugees' access to current and accurate information on national and international asylum processes and relevant legislation;
  - Expanding vocational training and economic livelihood opportunities to improve access to the labour market;
  - Bolstering specialised assistance and psychosocial support services to help migrants and refugees deal with their stress and traumas;
  - Facilitating cross-cultural dialogue and cooperation between local authorities, host communities and refugees and migrants.<sup>211</sup>
- skills to improve communication with Afghan migrants and refugees, especially at local and provincial levels, where interaction is most critical (e.g. in the realms of healthcare and education).
- Expand legal pathways for international protection applicants to work and provide for their livelihoods in all sectors (e.g. ease restrictions on work permit applications and procedures).
- Ensure that both displaced and host communities are supported and have equal access to economic opportunities to meet basic needs.
- Ensure that socioeconomic integration is promoted through targeted vocational trainings and language support programs, etc.
- Provide information to new arrivals about asylum rights and legislation in Turkey (including the risks of not being registered) through dedicated information desks that also facilitate coordination and communication with relevant public institutions and services.
- Raise awareness among host communities about the needs, rights, and vulnerabilities of Afghan refugees and migrants to mitigate discrimination and social exclusion.
- Support initiatives that address cultural misperceptions by providing spaces for host as well as migrant and refugee communities to interact (such as through implementing programs that raise awareness and increase dialogue through joint activities).

### For the Turkish authorities:

- Protect the needs and rights of all people in need and uphold the principle of non-refoulement for refugees and migrants as per international law.
- Prioritise overcoming obstacles and delays in asylum application procedures by increasing staffing capacity and supporting domestic and international NGOs to provide legal assistance to unregistered refugees and migrants.
- Support and encourage NGOs to conduct more outreach activities in Turkey which enhance their capacity to assess and identify needs and expand their operations to different geographical areas.
- Increase investment in the employment of qualified personnel with appropriate language (and other)
- Expand freedom of movement by allowing refugees and migrants to travel and work outside the province where they are registered.

211 For example, livelihoods and social cohesion activities, such as those carried out by the Family, Women and Disabled Support Centre (AKDEM) of the Zeytinburnu Municipality in Istanbul and by the Women Solidarity Centre of Adana Metropolitan Municipality. These activities exemplify the positive role local government platforms can play in enhancing communication between host communities and Afghan female migrants and refugees.

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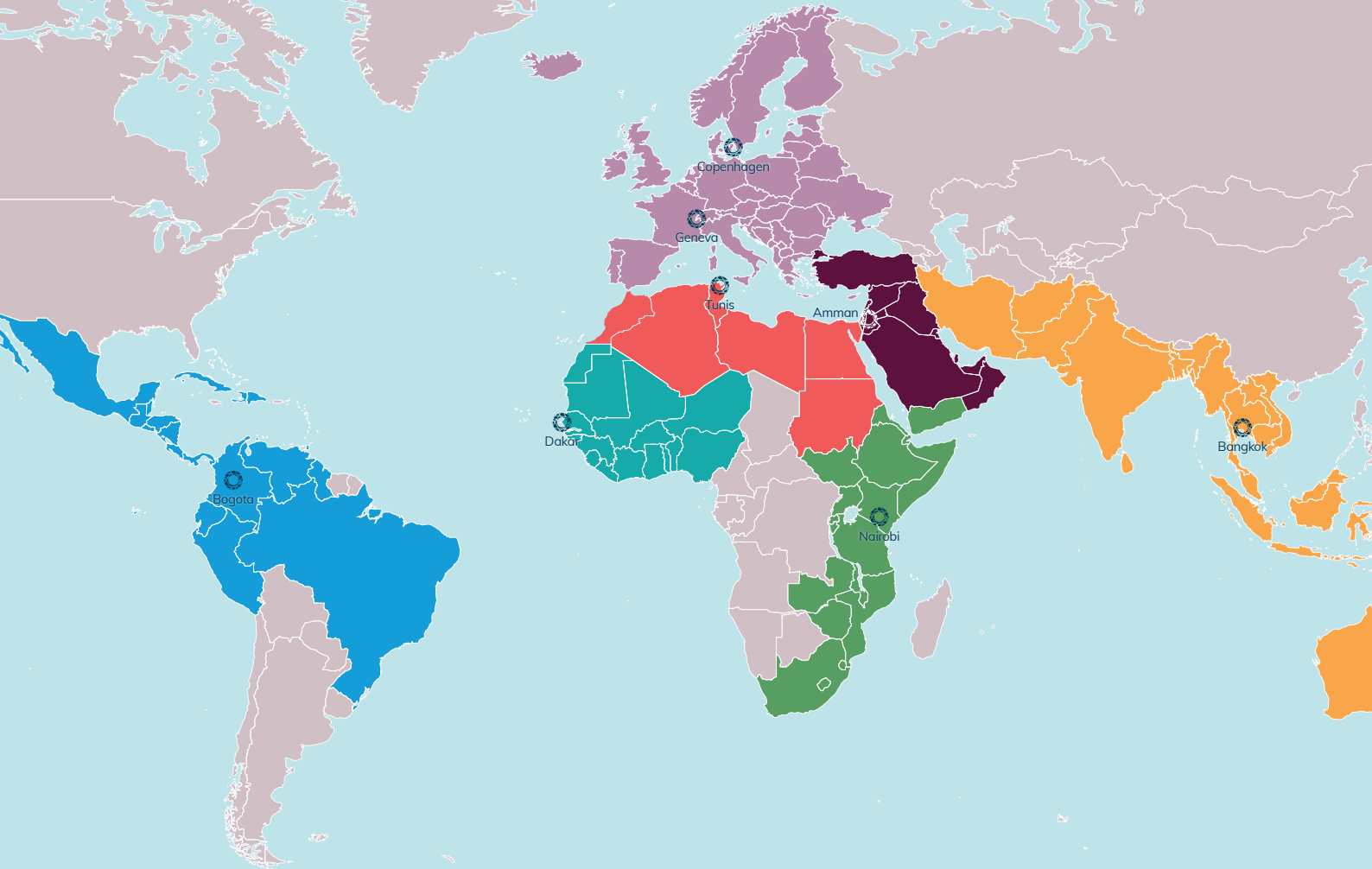
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The MMC is a global network consisting of seven regional hubs and a central unit in Geneva engaged in data collection, research, analysis and policy development on mixed migration. The MMC is a leading source for independent and high-quality data, research, analysis and expertise on mixed migration. The MMC aims to increase understanding of mixed migration, to positively impact global and regional migration policies, to inform evidence-based protection responses for people on the move and to stimulate forward thinking in public and policy debates on mixed migration. The MMC's overarching focus is on human rights and protection for all people on the move.

The MMC is part of and governed by the Danish Refugee Council (DRC). Global and regional MMC teams are based in Amman, Copenhagen, Dakar, Geneva, Nairobi, Tunis, Bogota and Bangkok.

### **More information**

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