Why do children undertake the unaccompanied journey?

Motivations for departure to Europe and other industrialised countries from the perspective of children, families and residents of sending communities in Afghanistan

Chona R. Echavez
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Issues Paper

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Cover photo: 1) Interview with a minor who attempted unaccompanied migration, but failed to reach destination country (Photo by (Mia Ihsanullah Ghafoori, SRA of AREU); 2) Interview with a minor who did not attempt to make the unaccompanied journey abroad (Photo by Jennefer Lyn L. Bagaporo, SRO of AREU); 3) Interview with a minor who did not attempt to engage in unaccompanied migration abroad (Photo by Hajji Hameed Aquili); 4) Interview with a community wakil (Photo by Jennefer Lyn L. Bagaporo, SRO of AREU)

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About the Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit

The Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit (AREU) is an independent research institute based in Kabul. AREU's mission is to inform and influence policy and practice by conducting high-quality, policy-relevant research and actively disseminating the results, and by promoting a culture of research and learning. To achieve its mission AREU engages with policymakers, civil society, researchers and students to promote their use of AREU's research and its library, to strengthen their research capacity, and to create opportunities for analysis, reflection and debate.

AREU was established in 2002 by the assistance community in Afghanistan and has a Board of Directors comprised of representatives of donor organizations, the United Nations and other multilateral agencies, and non-governmental organizations. AREU currently receives core funds from the Embassy of Finland, the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA) and the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC).

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Acronyms

AREU Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit

CDCs Community Development Councils

CSO Central Statistics Organization

F Female

FGD Focus Group Discussion

FM Family Member

HS High Sending

IDI In-Depth Interview

KII Key Informant Interview

LS Low Sending

M Male

MoWA Ministry of Women's Affairs

NRVA National Risk and Vulnerability Assessment

PDES Policy Development and Evaluation Service

UACM Unaccompanied Afghan Children on the Move

UASC Unaccompanied and Separated Children

UK United Kingdom

UN United Nations

UNHCR United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

UNICEF United Nations Children's Fund

USD US Dollars

Executive Summary

The issue of children undertaking unaccompanied journeys abroad has been the focus of increasing attention, in light of the significant numbers of unaccompanied children arriving in Europe and the child protection concerns raised by this risky, and often irregular, travel. Afghanistan is one of the most notable countries of origin of children undertaking unaccompanied journeys abroad. In 2010, the UNHCR Policy Development and Evaluation Service (PDES), released *Trees Only Move in the Wind: A study of unaccompanied Afghan children in Europe,* which provided path-breaking evidence on the characteristics and journeys of Afghan children who had engaged in unaccompanied travel. The study recommended further research in Afghanistan itself, to understand the motivations and profile of unaccompanied children on the move, their families, and sending communities. This report is an outcome of a collaborative research project by UNHCR and the Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit (AREU) to examine the specific circumstances and motivations leading Afghan children to travel to Europe and other industrialised countries.

Methodology

The research methodology is based on a literature review and qualitative data collection in high- and low-sending provinces of Afghanistan, including both Pashtun- and Hazara-majority provinces to reflect the groups most strongly represented in child movements from Afghanistan. The four provinces in which data was collected were Nangahar, Kabul, Paktya and Bamiyan. Through a combination of key informant interviews and focus groups discussions, research was conducted with children, their families, community leaders, and community members.

Findings

Children engaging in unaccompanied travel were generally males between the ages of 13 and 17. Children were motivated to engage in unaccompanied journeys due to a combination of frequently inter-related factors, including poverty, insecurity, inadequate opportunities for education and employment, and family and peer expectations. In high-sending areas, the decision for children to travel unaccompanied outside Afghanistan was often shared by the heads of the family and the children, with families pooling resources, borrowing money or mortaging property to cover the cost of the journey. In low-sending areas, children themselves commonly initiated the decision and sought the support of families for the unaccompanied journey.

From both high- and low-sending areas, European countries were usually the destinations of choice, with some choosing Iran as an intermediate destination due to the presence of family members and relatives who could help them find work. The main departure points mentioned by study respondents were Herat, Islam Qala and Nimroz. It is commonly acknowledged that smuggling networks are used for these journeys.

Family members in high-sending areas usually had information about the risks of the journey when deciding to support their child's unaccompanied travel. Despite this prior knowledge, they chose to send children either because they saw the potential benefits outweighing the risks, or because they felt they had no choice but to send them. Amongst children, levels of prior knowledge about the risks were mixed, with some having little information and others knowing of the risks. Children who attempted the journey were exposed to varying levels of danger, harassment and rights violations at the hands of smugglers and in the custody of police authorities when caught at transit points or destinations. Despite this, in high-sending areas both children who returned from unaccompanied journeys and their family members strongly affirmed that they would engage in further unaccompanied travel once they could finance the trip. By contrast, in low-sending both returned children and their family members almost universally indicated that they do not wish to engage in further unaccompanied travel.

Recommendations

1. Civil society and community leaders in Afghanistan, in cooperation with relevant Afghan authorities, should consider ways of engaging children (particularly adolescent males) and parents to consider the risks of unaccompanied travel, particularly through youth networks and social media, schools and Parent-Teacher Community Associations.

2. Information campaigns on the risks involved in unaccompanied journeys by children should be enhanced, with the involvement of relevant Afghan authorities, political representatives, civil society and community leaders. Alternative methods of information dissemination should be considered through mass media, educational institutions, social media and engagement of informal youth networks.

3. Further study should be undertaken to understand the attitudes of young Afghan males towards unaccompanied travel, and to map informal youth networks - not only in Afghanistan but also Iran and Pakistan - in order to illuminate how the attitudes of young Afghan males can be influenced.

4. Vocational training and livelihoods programmes should be developed for adolescent males, particularly in high-sending areas of Afghanistan, in coordination with relevant Afghan authorities, NGOs and relevant civil society actors.

5. The best interests of the child should be a primary consideration for all actions that directly or indirectly affect the unaccompanied child, at all stages of the child's journey. Countries of destination should ensure that any solution for an unaccompanied child is based on a Best Interest Determination (BID), also taking into consideration that unaccompanied children from Afghanistan may have a rightful claim to refugee status, or be eligible for subsidiary or humanitarian protection.

6. Sensitization and capacity building on protection issues relating to unaccompanied children should be conducted with border officials and police in transit and destination countries, particularly Iran and Turkey.

7. Afghan authorities, civil society and community leaders should increase efforts to enhance protection and support for returned children, including interventions to address trauma and support integration. Programmes should take into consideration the real possibility that returned children may attempt further unaccompanied travel, particularly those from high-sending areas.

1.   Introduction

In recent years, the issue of children undertaking unaccompanied journeys abroad has been the focus of increasing concern. Amongst the drivers of this interest have been the rising numbers of unaccompanied children arriving in Europe and concerns relating to the particular protection needs of children, the risks associated with the journey and the fact that they typically travel irregularly, often with the assistance of smuggling networks. Afghanistan figures prominently amongst countries sending unaccompanied children to Europe, Australia, Pakistan, Iran and other countries. While a number of studies have been conducted on unaccompanied children in general, and a handful on children of Afghan origin, there remains a dearth of information about the profile and motivations of children taking unaccompanied journeys from Afghanistan.

In June 2010, the UNHCR Policy Development and Evaluation Service (PDES) published *Trees Only Move in the Wind: A study of unaccompanied Afghan children in Europe*. It was a comparative study based on interviews conducted with unaccompanied Afghan children in a number of European countries. The study offered path-breaking evidence on some of the characteristics of the children who engage in unaccompanied travel, and on the journey itself. Nevertheless, many gaps in the evidence remain, and the study recommended that further research be undertaken in Afghanistan itself to better understand the motivations and profile of children, their families and sending communities.

1.1   Research objectives

The overall purpose of this research is to gain further knowledge on the specific circumstances and motivations leading Afghan children to travel to Europe and other industrialised countries. Such knowledge may serve to inform future policies and strategic planning on the issue of unaccompanied child movements from Afghanistan.

1.2   Current research and evidence on unaccompanied children travelling from Afghanistan

For centuries, Afghans have migrated, both internally and across international borders, in response to crop failures, drought and violence, and in pursuit of opportunities abroad.[1] Cross-border movements have long taken place between Afghanistan and neighbouring countries, specifically Pakistan and Iran. With the invasion of the Soviets, and the protracted conflict that followed their withdrawal, many Afghans were forced to flee from their homes, greatly enlarging the movements of people from Afghanistan. Since the 1980s, Afghans have remained amongst the largest populations of refugees in the world.

It is now well recognised that the driving factors of migration in Afghanistan are highly complex. Insecurity continues to plague the country, with conflict-related civilian deaths escalating in 2013 to record-high numbers.[2] Meanwhile, after decades of conflict, the country remains the poorest in the region, ranking 175th out of 186 countries on the Human Development Index in 2013.[3] Poverty is closely linked to a lack of adequate human rights protection, including a climate of widespread impunity and discriminatory practices.[4] There is also a significant demographic and environmental aspect to Afghan migration, with "rapid population growth, the very young Afghan population, and high levels of urbanization - as well as a fragile physical environment, with significant earthquake potential and other environmental risks"[5] being amongst the elements that affect migration from Afghanistan. It is against this background that the movement of unaccompanied children from Afghanistan must be understood.

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1   Kronenfeld, 2008. "Afghan Refugees in Pakistan: Not all refugees, not always in Pakistan, not necessarily Afghan?" *Journal of Refugee Studies* 2, no. 1(2008): 43-63

2   UNAMA, *Afghanistan: Annual Report 2013, Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict*, Kabul, 2014

3   UNDP, Human Development Index and its components, 2013

4   UNDP, Human Development Report, 2013

5   Argued by Alessandro Monsutti and Adam Rodriquez, see Maastricht Graduate School of Governance, "Complexities and Challenges in Afghan Migration: Policy and Research Event", IS Academy Policy Brief No. 14, 2013 <http://mgsog.merit.unu.edu/ISacademie/docs/PB14.pdf>

Afghans comprise one of the largest groups of unaccompanied children who are travelling to Europe and are applying for asylum there.[6] In 2008, there were 13,600 asylum applications by unaccompanied and separated children (UASC) in Europe, of which 3,825 were from Afghanistan. By 2012, there were 14,010 asylum applications in Europe from UASC, of which over 5,700 were from Afghanistan.[7] In 2013, the number of UASC applicants for asylum in Europe was 14,065, of which 3,595 were from Afghanistan, a decrease from the previous year.[8] Nevertheless, Afghanistan continued to be amongst the dominant countries of origin of UASC asylum applicants, with approximately 4,500 of the more than 25,300 UASC asylum applications worldwide being from Afghan applicants in 2013.[9] It should be noted that these figures include only those children who applied for asylum; thus, the actual number of unaccompanied Afghan children in Europe is likely to be larger.[10]

The reasons for the large number of unaccompanied children on the move from Afghanistan are likely to relate to a range of factors, as noted in the 2010 report, *Trees Only Move in the Wind*. One is the introduction of restrictive immigration and asylum policies by states and the associated growth of an organised "illegal migration industry."[11] Second, the Afghan diaspora in Europe and Asia has increased, creating additional opportunities for young Afghans to seek to join family members abroad. Third, the system of *hawala,* a 'letter of credit' system that allows Afghans abroad to send remittances outside the formal banking system, facilitates the funding of unaccompanied journeys of children abroad. Finally, the ease by which Afghans can leave their country "without being detected and undeterred by border regulations" creates an enabling environment.[12] The report notes:

> [T]he transcontinental movement of young Afghan males is underpinned by a number of important historical and cultural factors, is reinforced by the difficult conditions that exist in their region of origin, and is further stimulated by the safety, security, education, livelihoods, social welfare arrangements and community support that are available in Europe.[13]

In such a context, the traditional binary distinction between forced and voluntary migration is difficult to maintain, and particular care must be taken to ensure that protection considerations are appropriately taken into account.

In recent years, a number of studies have been conducted on the issue of unaccompanied children, most of which focused on documenting reception conditions and protection mechanisms, particularly in Europe.[14] The most comprehensive studies to date focusing specifically on unaccompanied Afghan children were conducted by UNICEF and UNHCR in 2010. UNICEF's publication, *Children on the Move: A Report on Children of Afghan Origin Moving to Western Countries,* principally focused on unaccompanied Afghan children in Norway and the UK who were applying for asylum, also including interviews with families and children in Afghanistan. The

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6   UNHCR, "Trees Only Move in the Wind A Study of Unaccompanied Afghan Children in Europe," Geneva, Policy Development and Evaluation Service, 2010; A. Lundberg and L. Dahlquist, "Unaccompanied children seeking asylum in Sweden: Living conditions from a child-centred perspective," *Refugee Survey Quarterly* (2012): 1-22.

7   UNHCR "Global Trends 2012", p28.

8   Eurostat, "Asylum applicants considered to be unaccompanied minors by citizenship, age and sex Annual data" http://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?dataset=migr_asyunaa&lang=en

9   UNHCR "Global Trends 2013," p 29

10   The actual number of child migrants in Europe has been estimated to be up to 100,000. (Council of Europe, Parliamentary Assembly, "Unaccompanied Children in Europe: Issues of Arrival, Stay and Return", Resolution 1810, 2011.)

11   UNHCR, "Trees Only Move in the Wind." p8

12   Ibid.

13   Ibid.

14   European Migration Network, "Unaccompanied Minors - an EU Comparative Study", 2010, <http://emm.si/files/publikaci-je/00_emn_synthesis_report_unaccompanied_minors.pdf>; European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, "Separated, Asylum-seeking Children in European Union Member States Comparative Report", 2010, <http://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra_uploads/1692-SEPAC-comparative-report_EN.pdf>; Hancilova, Blanka and Knauder, Bernadette, "Unaccompanied Minor Asylum Seekers: Overview of Protection, Assistance and Promising Practices", IOM, Budapest, 2011; France Terre D'Asile, "Right to Asylum for Unaccompanied minors in the European Union Comparative Study in the 27 EU Countries", 2012, from <http://tdh-childprotection.org/documents/right-to-asylum-for-unaccompanied-minors-in-the-european-union> ; Human Rights Watch, "Caught in a Net: Unaccompanied Migrant Children in Europe", 2012, <https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/HRW_CRD_migrant_brcohure_low.pdf> .

study provided a snapshot of the profiles of Afghan children on the move and the features of the journey from Afghanistan to Europe.

UNHCR's publication, *Trees Only Move in the Wind,* focused on unaccompanied Afghan children who were already abroad. Children were interviewed in France, Greece, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway, and the UK, as well as Turkey. The study generated information on the profile of unaccompanied children and their experiences on their way to Europe. Both studies recommended that further research be undertaken on the sending communities in Afghanistan, in order to understand better the motivations and triggers for these unaccompanied journeys.

A number of studies have since been undertaken focusing on unaccompanied children in particular countries of asylum, including the UK[15] and Sweden.[16] Further, a number of studies are emerging which document the situation of people who have returned or have been deported to Afghanistan,[17] including unaccompanied children and former unaccompanied children.[18]

Other studies have focused on gathering information about networks that facilitate travel by unaccompanied children. These include a report by UNODC from 2010 on people smuggling networks in Afghanistan and Pakistan, and a publication commissioned by the Australian Government in 2010 which examined the levels and channels of information regarding the risks of irregular travel via people smugglers, focusing on the Hazara ethnic group from four different provinces in Afghanistan.[19]

While the above literature has contributed to a growing understanding of the movement of unaccompanied children from Afghanistan, a range of gaps in evidence remain. These include a lack of information on the profile of those Afghan children who engage in unaccompanied journeys outside Afghanistan; the motivations for the decision to undertake unaccompanied travel; the conditions of those children who had been returned to Afghanistan; and the factors that influence non-engagement in this activity by other Afghan children and families.

The present study seeks to respond to some of these gaps. It examines the characteristics of unaccompanied young Afghans on the move, their motivations and process of decision-making, ways of financing the travel, and the experience of the journey.

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15 Gladwell, Catherine and Elywn, Hannah, "Broken Futures: Young Afghan Asylum Seekers in the UK and on Return to Their Country of Origin," *New Issues in Refugee Research*, Issue No. 246, UNHCR Policy Development and Evaluation Service, Oct 2012.

16 Lundberg, A and Dahlquist, L. "Unaccompanied children seeking asylum in Sweden: Living conditions from a child-centred perspective". *Refugee Survey Quarterly*, April 2012, 31(2): 54-75.

17 Schuster, Liza and Majidi, Nassim, "What happens post-deportation? The experience of deported Afghans", *Migration Studies*,1(2):221-240, 2013; Maastricht Graduate School of Governance, "Complexities and Challenges in Afghan Migration: Policy and Research Event IS Academy Policy Brief No. 14, 2013, <http://mgsog.merit.unu.edu/ISacademie/docs/PB14.pdf>.

18 Gladwell and Elwyn, "Broken Futures." Young Afghan Asylum Seekers in the UK and on Return to Their Country of Origin," New Issues in Refugee Research, Issue 246, UNHCR Policy Development and Evaluation Service, 2012.

19 Wise Strategic Communication, "Afghanistan Counter People Smuggling Scoping Study: Final Report", October 2010, <http://www.customs.gov.au/webdata/resources/files/FinalReport-WiseStrategicCommunicatoin.pdf>.

2.   Research Methodology

A qualitative approach was employed in gathering data on the circumstances of unaccompanied children on the move in Afghanistan. Before data collection proper, a thorough literature review focusing on children departing from Afghanistan/Iran/Pakistan to Europe (and Australia) was conducted. The design of the study is post observation only comparison group design.

Table 1: Post-Observation Only Comparison Group Design

Group 1 (Study Cases)	X High Sending	O_1 Pashto-majority Community
		O_2 Hazara-majority Community
Group 2 (Control Cases)	OX Low Sending	O_3 Pashto-majority Community
		O_4 Hazara-majority Community

2.1   Site Selection

Both high-sending and low-sending areas with a Pashtun-majority and a Hazara-majority were included in order to allow comparative analysis of both groups. The Hazara and Pashtun ethnic groups appeared prominently in the UNICEF and UNHCR 2010 reports as amongst the most represented groups in child migration flows. The following table shows the sending areas chosen for this study, based on the UNHCR and UNICEF 2010 reports.

Table 2: Identified sending areas

	Pashtun-majority	Hazara-majority
TOP	Nangarhar (UNHCR, UNICEF)	Ghazni, Kabul (UNHCR, UNICEF)
LOW	Paktya (UNHCR)	Bamiyan (UNHCR)

The two high-sending areas chosen were Ghazni/Kabul for the Hazara-majority and Nangarhar for the Pashtun-majority. Ghazni was the preferred choice for the high-sending Hazara community since it is the most salient high-sending area identified in the literature and by consulted experts. However, during the study period, Ghazni was not secure for the research team to enter. Hence, Kabul was chosen as the high-sending Hazara area. Kabul was also identified as a high-sending area in both the UNHCR and UNICEF studies conducted separately in 2010, and the community chosen in Kabul was an enclave of Ghazni migrants in the Kabul City area, being a place where most people from Ghazni settled when they migrated to Kabul.[20]

The two low-sending areas chosen were Paktya (Pashtun-majority) and Bamiyan (Hazara-majority). The security situation allowed the research team to enter both areas during the time the study was conducted.

2.2   Pre-fieldwork preparation

Prior to fieldwork, a roundtable discussion with relevant stakeholders was held to: 1) identify and engage policy actors in the beginning of the process, and throughout the research cycle; 2) gather the inputs from stakeholders regarding what has been done and what initiatives/structures are in place; 3) form a consultative group among stakeholders to ensure validation of the research findings, and to ensure policy relevance. Following the roundtable discussion, in-depth interviews (IDIs) were undertaken with selected stakeholders. During this phase, the research instruments were crafted, pre-tested and revised.

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20 All respondents from Kabul who were chosen for this study were of Hazara ethnicity and the majority were from Ghazni province (14 out of 21 key informants and all FGD participants).

2.3   Respondent selection

This study incorporated a number of categories of respondents in order to understand unaccompanied child travel from multiple perspectives. Information about the community context was gathered in each of the four provinces, using a set of questionnaires, which included socio-economic, demographic and historical aspects. Key informant interviews were also undertaken with key community actors, such as local authorities, teachers and religious leaders, as well as focus group discussions (FGDs) with general members of the community to gather information about community perceptions of the movement of unaccompanied children.

Table 3 shows the number of community level interviews and FGDs that were completed.

Table 3: Study participants at the community level by province

ACTIVITY	AREAS				
	KABUL (HS-H)	BAMIYAN (LS-H)	NANGAHAR (HS-P)	PAKTYA (LS-P)	TOTAL
1.Community Questionnaire	1	3	2	1	7
2. FGD -community members	1 (5 participants)	1 (10 participants)	1 (7 participants)	1 (7 participants)	4 (29)
3. KII – Community stakeholder	2	3	2	3	10
TOTAL	8	16	11	11	46

The core of the research was comprised of in-depth interviews with key informants from a range of groups. The categories of respondents were as follows:

1.   Families with a child who undertook unaccompanied travel and remains in Europe/Australia;

2.   Families with a child who attempted to go on an unaccompanied journey to Europe/ Australia, but failed to arrive there;

3.   Families with a child who travelled abroad but returned, either forcibly or voluntarily;

4.   Families with a child who did not attempt unaccompanied travel;

5.   Child who attempted to travel to Europe/Australia but failed to arrive;

6.   Child who attempted to travel to Europe/Australia but was returned; and

7.   Child who never attempted to travel.

Table 4: IDI respondents of the study by province

Category	n of cases	Province			
		Kabul	Paktya	Bamiyan	Nangarhar
Family with unaccompanied child migrants abroad	8	3	1	2	2
Family with child who attempted to go on an unaccompanied journey abroad	9	3	1	3	2
Family with child who travelled abroad but forcibly or voluntary returned	10	3	2	3	2
Family with child who did not attempt unaccompanied travel	10	2	3	3	2
Child who travelled but was returned	13	6	2	2	3
Child who attempted to travel but failed	8	2	1	2	3
Child who never attempted	10	2	3	3	2
All Categories	68	21	13	18	16

All these categories of respondents were used uniformly in all the case study areas. The child respondents had to be below 18 years old at the time of their attempt to go on an unaccompanied journey, or at the time of the interview, in the case of those who did not attempt to go on an unaccompanied journey.

2.4   The Study Sites

In order to illuminate the socio-economic context of each of the study sites, provincial socio-demographic and economic data were retrieved from a range of sources.

KABUL PROVINCIAL PROFILE (High-sending, Hazara-majority Area)

The province of Kabul is located in the Central Region of Afghanistan. Children under the age of 15 represent close to 44% of the population of Kabul.[21] The poverty rate in the province is 23.1%, almost 13% lower than that of the entire country. The province's unemployment rate is 10.7%, which is above the national average of 7.9%.[22] Nevertheless, Kabul Province's underemployment rate of 18.9% is way below that of the entire country (48.2 %). The literacy rate in the province (46.8%) and female literacy rate of 30.2% are higher than the respective national averages of 25% and 11.4%.[23] With regard to access to land, Kabul ranks amongst the lowest of all the provinces.[24]

In relation to security, Kabul is usually considered to be safer and more stable than other provinces, although security incidents do occur.[25] The province has seen a number of suicide attacks directed at international organisations, military convoys, and civilian areas.[26] In 2011, 94% of civilian deaths in Kabul occurred as a result of suicide attacks.[27] Anti-Government Elements deliberately targeted and killed civilians not taking a direct part in hostilities and also intensified campaigns of intimidation (including road blocks, public threats and disruption of mobile telephone networks) against civilians either working for or perceived as supporting the Government or international military forces and organisations.[28]

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21 Central Statistics Organization (CSO), *NRVA 2007/2008: A profile of Afghanistan,* Kabul, Delegation of European Commission to Afghanistan, 2009, 12.

22 Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit (AREU), *2013 A-Z Guide to Afghanistan Assistance,* Kabul, AREU, 2013, 119.

23 Ibid.

24 CSO, *NRVA 2007/2008,* p41.

25 Danish Immigration Service, *Afghanistan: Country of Origin Information for Use in the Asylum Determination Process,* May 2012, p6 <https://www.nyidanmark.dk/NR/rdonlyres/3FD55632-770B-48B6-935C-827E83C18AD8/0/FFMrapportenAFGHANISTAN2012Final.pdf>.

26 UNAMA, *Afghanistan Annual Report 2010: Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict,* Kabul, UNAMA, 2011. pp. 9-10

27 UNAMA, *Afghanistan Annual Report 2011: Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict,* Kabul, UNAMA, 2012, p5.

28 Ibid, p10.

BAMIYAN PROVINCIAL PROFILE (Low-sending, Hazara-majority Area)

The Province of Bamiyan is located in Central Afghanistan. The major ethnic groups living in Bamiyan province are Hazara followed by Tajik, Tatar and Pashtun. The province is predominantly rural, and 55.7% of the population is poor. Unemployment in the province is 8%, while 48% are underemployed. The literacy rate in Bamiyan is 20.2%, which is 5% lower than the national average. Women's literacy rate is 6.1%. Bamiyan is one of the provinces with the highest percentage of households with access to land or garden plots in the country (80% or more).[29]

Bamiyan is seen as the safest province in Afghanistan.[30] However, road attacks took place in the province in 2012, raising some security concerns.[31] Illegally armed groups and warlords associated with the former Taliban regime remain in the districts of Saighan, Kahmard and Shiber. Land disputes between families are also a common cause of crime, killing, and kidnapping. While poppy cultivation has decreased substantially over the past few years, it may grow if farmers are unable to establish alternative livelihoods. There continue to be reports of drug trafficking through Bamiyan to Day Kundi, and then Helmand, Uruzgan or Herat.

NANGARHAR PROVINCIAL PROFILE (High-sending, Pashtun-majority Area)

The province of Nangarhar is located in the east of Afghanistan and shares a border with the Khyber Pukhtunkwa (KPK) Province of Pakistan. The majority of the province's population is Pashtun. Only 15% of the province is considered urban. The poverty rate in the province is 33%, close to the national average. The unemployment rate of Nangarhar province, which is at 1.6%, is far below the national average of 7.9%. The underemployment rate of the province (54.9%) is slightly higher than that of the country overall (48.2%). The literacy rate of the province is 22.8%, only 2.2% lower than the national average, however the female literacy rate is quite low, being only 6.9%, as compared to 11.4% for the entire Afghanistan. The settled population of Nangarhar is 1,409,600[32], and the province has been the destination for the second highest number of returning refugees in the country, with over 931,000 refugees assisted by UNHCR to return to Nangarhar between 2002 and March 2014.[33]

Security in the province of Nangarhar remains critical.[34] The east and south-eastern provinces, including Paktika and Nangarhar saw a combined increase in conflict-related civilian deaths of 34% in 2011.[35] The number of civilian casualties and conflict-related violence between security forces and insurgents decreased slightly in 2012. Between 2010 and 2013, detonation of improvised explosive devices and suicide attacks in civilian areas increased in the province, including the well-publicised targeting of Kabul Bank in Jalalabad in 2012.[36] Anti-Government elements are present and undertake activities including the occupation of schools, in the districts of Khogyani, PachirWaAgam, Chaparhar and to some extent in the Sherzad District. An increase in attacks on education facilities across the region has included 71 direct attacks including the burning of school buildings and facilities, and the intimidation, injury and killing of teachers and students.[37] Between 2010 and 2014, cross-border shelling from counter-insurgency operations carried out by the Pakistan authorities have caused civilian casualties and displacement and destroyed homes and livestock.[38]

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29 CSO, NRVA 2007/2008.

30 Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development: National Area Based Development Programme, *Bamyan Provincial Profile.*

31 Bowley, Graham "Taliban Hit Region Seen as 'Safest 'for Afghans, *The New York Times*, 30 October 2012, Retrieved January 2014 from <http://goo.gl/tzQVoF>.

32 Central Statistics Organization, *Afghanistan Statistical Yearbook 2011-2012*

33 UNHCR, "Volrep and Border Monitoring Monthly Update", March 2014, Retrieved 10 August 2014 from <http://www.refworld.org/docid/534d43ac4.html>

34 UNAMA, *Afghanistan Annual Report 2010: Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict*"; UNAMA, *Afghanistan Annual Report 2012 Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict*, Kabul, UNAMA, 2013.

35 UNAMA, *Afghanistan Annual Report 2011: Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict*, p10.

36 UNAMA, *Afghanistan Annual Report 2012: Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict,* p18.

37 Ibid, p38.

38 UNAMA, *Afghanistan Annual Report on Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict* 2011, 2012 and 2013.

PAKTYA PROVINCIAL PROFILE (Low-sending, Pashtun-majority Area)

The province of Paktya has a population of 525,000,[39] with only 4% of the province considered as urban. The poverty rate in the province (60.6%) is almost twice that of the entire country (35.8%).[40] The unemployment (8%) and underemployment rate (49.6%) in Paktya province are close to the respective national rates (7.9% for the former, 48.2% for the latter).[41] The literacy rate in the province is only 11.5%, which is 13.5% below the national average. Female literacy is very low at 1.2%.

Although civilian casualties decreased in 2012 in Paktya province, UNAMA and UNOCHA recorded a number of incidents in the province resulting in civilian deaths in 2013.[42] These included deliberate attacks on civilians by Anti-Government Elements, as well as casualties from escalation of force at check points, and from armed conflict between Anti-Government Elements and Pro-Government Forces. Civilian protection remains weak in Paktya province and Government presence is limited almost entirely to the district centre.[43] It has been indicated that Anti-Government Elements are assuming greater control in some districts in the province, increasing the vulnerability of civilians in these areas.[44] In some instances, power-sharing deals and peace agreements were made between the Government and Anti-Government Elements. These reduced levels of violence in the communities in the short term, but left a longer term state of insecurity without legal structures of protection.[45] The control of Anti-Government Elements in this area has also had an impact on education, with teachers instructed to change from official Government curriculum to the Taliban curriculum. Students are even searched to check whether their mobile phones play a Taliban ring-tone.[46] Limited Government control in this province has, therefore, resulted in decreased security and protection for civilians.

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39 AREU, *2013 A-Z Guide to Afghanistan Assistance,* p120.

40 Ibid, p119.

41 Ibid.

42 UNAMA, *Afghanistan Annual Report 2013: Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict,* Kabul, UNAMA, 2014.

43 UNAMA, *Afghanistan Annual Report 2012: Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict*, p64.

44 Ibid.

45 UNAMA, *Afghanistan Annual Report 2012: Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict*, Ibid, p65.

46 Ibid.

3. Findings

A. Characteristics of Unaccompanied Afghan Children on the Move (UACM)

Findings from the four study areas revealed that children who engaged in unaccompanied travel were within the age range of 13-17 years, although some children as young as 10 years had taken the journey. This is largely consistent with UNICEF's *Children on the Move* study, in which interviewees' ages ranged from 14 to 17 years, and the 2010 UNHCR report that found an age range of 9 to 18+, with the majority claiming to be between 16 and 17 years. In the interviews it was revealed that sending communities are aware that special protections exist in Europe and Australia for migrants under the age of 18 and that there are higher chances for children to remain in destination countries. These were taken into account in their decisions regarding unaccompanied children's travel.

Afghan children who made the unaccompanied journey abroad were males of secondary school age. Many, but not all, had attended secondary school. Young women seldom or never make such a journey due to cultural restrictions and ascribed roles women play in the home and society.

> *"Yes, only boys can travel alone. Here it is not common that women or girls travel alone…" (Razia, 35, F, FGD-Nangarhar)*

> *"Well, regarding those who attempt to journey, I would say that most of them are male and are at the age of 17. Females never undertake the journey unaccompanied because of cultural sensitivity…" (Alawi, 25, M, KII-Kabul).*

Most of the children who undertook the journey are neither the only male nor the eldest in the family. In general, participants in all study areas expressed that younger sons, not the eldest, undertake unaccompanied travel. They could either be the second, the third or the youngest son in the family.

> *"I think those who send their child out of [the] country are compelled to go due to poverty in our community. Maybe those children who go outside of [the] country have fathers who are jobless or the boys [themselves] cannot get jobs here. I have to say that most of the families send their second [from the eldest] boys because the eldest male should be at home and help with the father in agriculture land…" (F, 35, F, FGD-Bamiyan)*

> *"…Most of the time, the first son in the family gets married first, and the second child has to move and earn money for the rest of the family members." (Alawi, 25, M, KII-Kabul)*

> *"Children who undertake the journey are 15 or 16 years old, and are males; are Pashtuns, are in the classes of 10 to 12, and are the youngest or the last child of the family…" (Kazimi, 63, M, KII-Nangarhar)*

However, in some cases an eldest son could be sent on an unaccompanied journey if this is seen to be the best way to support the family. For instance, a male respondent from low-sending Bamiyan (Hazara majority) explained why he sent his eldest son unaccompanied to Iran:

> *"Now I am already too old and I cannot work. He should work. It is the only reason that I sent him. I decided to send him because he is the elder son of the family. He should go and work; the others are still too young."(Ali Agha, 55, M, FM, IDI-Bamiyan).*

Other individual characteristics of UACMs, as perceived by community and family members, are that they are often smart and physically strong, as these traits are seen to give them higher chances of success in reaching the country of destination.

Community members shared the perception that UACMs come from households with weak financial status, lower levels of education and many household members. The perception of the types of jobs held by the head of these households varied from unemployed to farmers, labourers, vendors, medium-sized shop owners and low-ranking government officials.

Those families who send and support children on unaccompanied journeys were seen to be of two types: 1) families who are poor, but not so poor as to be unable to borrow money to support the journey; and 2) families who can support the journey with their own resources (e.g. sell land or mortgage property). These families are not, however, amongst the most well-off, for whom the risks of the journey are seen to outweigh the benefits.

To enable comparison, interviewees were also asked to describe children in their respective areas who have not engaged in unaccompanied travel abroad. Families who do not send their children on an unaccompanied journey were said to be either: 1) the very poor who cannot raise the money for the journey nor obtain loans and 2) the relatively well-off, who will not endanger their sons for the unaccompanied journey and would rather have their children go to school. These children come from households in which the head completed higher education and has a "good job" that is earning well, such as occupying high positions in the Government and being in business.

B. Motivations for Attempting the Journey Outside Afghanistan

"The main reason is that I wanted to go, and I emphasised a lot to my family that they should send me abroad. The next reason is that my family and I are broke. [There] is insecurity, lack of education, and lack of facilities like having [a] flat, car, money, job, and education. These are the reasons why my family agreed to send me abroad."(Amini, 17, M, Child, a formerly deported UACM, IDI-Nangarhar)

"He just wanted to be out of danger that is why he decided to go out of Afghanistan." (Abdullah, 35, M, FM, IDI-Paktya)

"I think it is the comfortable life of those who have friends/relatives in Europe from our area that has motivated other boys to go out of the country to be able to have the same comfortable life like the others. Poverty also can be the reason for the decision of to go on unaccompanied travel outside of Afghanistan. Sometimes when friends come together they make the decision to travel out of the country." (M, 38, M, FM, IDI-Paktya)

"I wanted a bright and good future for my son, for him to study and have a good job, which are not accessible here. Those are the reasons why I agreed with him to let him go to another country and make his life better." (Ewal, 80, M, FM, IDI-Kabul)

The desire for "bright and good future" and a "better life" arose from the majority of interviews as a key aspect of the motivation for children to undertake unaccompanied journeys abroad. As seen from the quotations above, this in turn relates to a mix of security, economic and social factors, which are often interlinked, as discussed in this section.

Poverty and the search for opportunity

Amongst the respondents for this research project, the most frequently mentioned factor in relation to motivation for travel was the desire for economic stability and opportunity. Whether the decision was made by children, parents, or both together, the poor socio-economic situation of their families and low employment opportunities within Afghanistan were important considerations in deciding to undertake an unaccompanied journey. Children were seen to have access to better opportunities for employment abroad, and were expected to send remittances to benefit their families. As seen below, this expectation is based upon observation of those community members who have relatives abroad, as well as information passed around the community. These findings cut across the four provinces.

It is the economic problem that caused families send their under age children out of Afghanistan. (Khairia, 23, F, KII-Nangarhar).

"My family had a lot of problems. We had economic problems, so I decided to go [to] a foreign country and earn money [so] that my family would have [a] better life in [the] future." (Mohammad Ali, 16, M, Child, a formerly deported UACM, IDI-Kabul)

"He wanted to go to foreign countries. When he made this decision, he approached me and his father. His father supported him to go so that he could help us in our economic situation... I was thinking that if we send him he would help us in our life and make his life better at the same time. He should not live like us; his economic situation should be better than ours." (Malalai, 38, F, FM, IDI-Nangarhar)

In addition to opportunities for employment, the prospect of greater access to education and the aspiration for higher standards of living in industrialised countries were also motivating factors.

"The people of my community who have children abroad and also the children who returned to Afghanistan, say that London is a secure place. It has good security, all the people obey the law, it has nice sightseeing places to visit. You can have a lot of life facilities like having car, flat, job and education and can go to night clubs. But you don't have these things here in Afghanistan that is why I decided to go there." (Delsoz, 17, M, Child, attempted to travel but failed, IDI-Nangarhar).

For the child quoted here, a desire for security and stability is mixed with a search for education and employment opportunities and a youthful aspiration to experience the excitement and comforts perceived to come with a life in the West.

Conflict and insecurity

Conflict and insecurity are featured in the decision of many unaccompanied children to travel. For some this was the dominant and immediate factor motivating their travels, whereas for others, insecurity combined with other issues to spark the decision.

The problems of lack of security were mentioned by several respondents from high-sending Nangarhar area and low-sending Paktya area (both Pashtun majority areas) as a reason for sending children abroad. A respondent from Nangarhar whose son left because of fear of the Taliban said:

"I agreed to send my son because of the Taliban and fighting. There was fighting in Afghanistan I was afraid about what will happen to him. My son got frightened, and he decided to leave Afghanistan, and I agreed with his decision. Too many problems regarding insecurity in our country made him decide to leave." (Malalai, 38, F, FM, IDI-Nangarhar)

A respondent from Paktya province spoke about specific risks faced by adolescent males as a reason for flight, seemingly referring to the practice of *bachabazi*, in which adolescent boys are used by powerful men for entertainment and sexual activities.

"There are warlords [who] use teenage boys for sexual purposes and make them entertain them by dancing. Therefore, children are abducted and abused by them. Children in different communities are in peril; thus, parents send their children abroad to keep them safe." (Dad Gull, 32, M, FGD-Paktya)

A small number of respondents in the high-sending Kabul province (Hazara majority) also mentioned problems related to insecurity as reasons for engaging in unaccompanied travel.[47] One respondent from Kabul, who was originally from Wardak province commented on his reason for leaving on an unaccompanied journey with his brother:

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47 Note that the respondents from Kabul were largely from Ghazni province, an area affected by ongoing insecurity.

> *"The only reason was insecurity and Kochis attacked our village [which is in Behsud, a district of Maidan Wardak province]. For this reason, my parents agreed to let me go on the journey." (Basit Waziri, 22, M, a formerly deported UACM, IDI-Kabul)*

When the two left their village, their parents and only sister were killed in an attack by Kochis. The two cried in grief when they recalled the incident. They were amongst a handful of respondents whose departure on an unaccompanied journey was an immediate response to a direct experience of violence.

Insecurity may be associated with rights deprivations and coupled with economic difficulties faced by the families to motivate a decision to undertake the unaccompanied journey. For instance, one respondent from Paktya described the reasons for his family member embarking on an unaccompanied journey, which included threats from the Taliban based on the child's engagement in education:

> *"Taliban gave a warning to him because he was attending school, and we also had an economic problem. Our situation was not good. The money that he earned from his work was used for his journey." (M, 38, M, FM, IDI-Paktya)*

As shared by one woman from Kabul, who was originally from Wardak province, and whose son made a failed attempt to travel:

> *"Our house was burnt down by Kochi people. We did not have the money, but we decided to send him to Iran. He needed to work and earn money to rebuild our house."(F1, 45, F, FM, IDI-Kabul).*

This account clearly illustrates the linkages between physical and economic insecurity, as a conflict led to the destruction of the family's home and to economic vulnerability, to which the response was unaccompanied travel. As noted by the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, "Insecurity is a constant in the lives of Afghans; armed conflict compounds and exacerbates poverty and inhibits or halts development programmes."[48]

The role of the community

Positive feedback provided by people in the community about families with children abroad provides inspiration to others to consider unaccompanied travel. The way in which children abroad help their families through their remittances and the good life of those who have achieved success outside the country are held in high regard by the community, as found across all four study areas. As noted below, the community is an important source of information on which the decision to engage in unaccompanied travel is based.

> *"The community has an encouraging role. Almost everyone in the community during an informal gathering like wedding parties and all other gatherings talk about the benefits of having a family member who is staying abroad and they mention also how disappointed they are about the current and future situation of the country. They are happy that the children want to go abroad, and the people persuade them, as well. When the people come together, in an area like Masjid (mosque), they persuade and encourage the families to send their children abroad to make their life better and have access to education…"(Hussaini, 26, M, FM, IDI-Kabul).*

> *"People appreciate the children who have left our place." (Nasrin, 33, F, FM, IDI-Bamiyan)*

> *"I think the community has no role in children's departures, but they always think positively about children going abroad. The community is always saying it is good that the family of the child will have a better financial standing." (Said Ghani, 25, M, a formerly deported UACM, IDI-Paktya)*

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48 UNOHCHR, *Human Rights Dimension of Poverty in Afghanistan,* March 2010, <www2.ohchr.org/SPdocs/Countries/ AF/PovertyReport_30032010.doc>.

> *"People think that when someone leaves he will be able to provide lots of money and they appreciate such children" (Mina, 49, F, FGD-Nangarhar)*

The role of peers

In cases where children themselves have taken an active part in the decision to undertake an unaccompanied journey, the influence of peers may be a significant motivating factor. Peers may play both an indirect and a direct role in the decision-making process. Indirectly, for instance, peers who are already abroad served as an important source of information, often painting a positive picture of their current situation. As noted by one family member of a child who made the unaccompanied journey:

> *"His friends who have gone abroad have better lives. While here, one day they have [a] job and the next, they do not have work at all. With this, the family took a loan, and let him engage in an unaccompanied travel." (Sadaf, 22, F, FM, IDI-Nangarhar)*

As mentioned by a forcibly returned UACM in Kabul, peers who remain in Afghanistan are also a source of information about the journey and about life abroad:

> *"My family did not have any information, but I heard from some of my friends that in European countries, life is easy. I may have access to education and have a safe life. Also, the rate of conversion of their money is higher than Afghanistan's. I heard these from my friends whose family members or friends are staying abroad." (Mohammad Reza, 25, M, a formerly deported UACM, IDI-Kabul)*

Several child respondents who had made an attempt to travel mentioned a desire to join friends who were already abroad as an important motivating factor:

> *"At first, it was just my decision. [Years back] my father took the decision about my family to go Pakistan. Now, it was my own decision to go abroad. I really wanted to go to London because I have many friends who have gone to London from my community, so I decided to go. I consulted with my family. They agreed to send me to London." (Delsoz, 17, M, Child, Attempted to Travel but Failed, IDI Nangarhar)*

> *"My family supported our decision, and they did not have [any] problem with it. They said that we should go on with our plan and aspire for a better future. Our need is to find a job, earn and complete our education. We have four friends who already reached Belgium, and that was also one reason why we wanted to go there." (Abdul Ghafar, 18, M, a formerly deported UACM, IDI-Nangarhar)*

In some cases, peers play a more direct and active role in encouraging travel abroad. A number of child respondents and family members of children who had travelled stated that the decision to undertake the unaccompanied journey had been taken by the children together with their friends.

> *"I was encouraged by my friends. They have families and relatives there [abroad]. They have good businesses and good trading markets. My decision was based on their encouragement." (Farid, 27, M, a formerly deported UACM, IDI-Paktya)*

> *"It was my family's decision to send my brother outside for work because of poverty. But for me it was my own decision to go abroad because there was no work here. My family did not allow me to go. I didn't have money, and there was no work to earn money, so I and my friends decided to escape from the house and make a life abroad." (Ahmadi, 18, M, a formerly deported UACM, IDI-Bamiyan)*

> *"Najeebullah himself decided to migrate from Afghanistan to Europe because his friends were also going to Europe. Then his father and I agreed and gave him permission to go to Europe. Najeebullah was saying that if we don't give him permission, he will escape with his friends without informing us. [So] we were compelled to give him permission." (Amir Begum, 60, F, FM, IDI-Kabul)*

The motivation to join friends who are abroad or are planning to travel could relate to a desire not to miss opportunities or experiences that their peers are pursuing. The quotation above from Delsoz, who mentions that his father previously decided that his family should travel to Pakistan, hints at the idea that he has now reached a mature enough age to make life decisions for himself, including the decision to migrate. The notion that migration can be seen as a 'rite of passage' for young Afghan males may be of relevance. This has been suggested by Alessandro Monsutti, who writes, "For young Afghans, migration offers the opportunity to broaden and to diversity their social networks beyond narrow kinship and neighbourhood ties. It may even be conceived as a necessary stage in their existence, a rite of passage to adulthood and then a step toward manhood."[49] While Monsutti's research relates primarily to young Hazara males migrating to Iran, it underlines that the social significance of the decision to migrate may be important in understanding the decision-making process.

Family factors

For some young people, journeying abroad provides an opportunity to escape family strife, which may be related to socio-economic or to other personal factors.

> *"The reason for sending Nasir out of [the] country was our poverty. We had no food to eat and no money to buy food. He and his brother were always fighting with each other because we had no money in our family. At times, one of them would tell the other to find work and a living, but the other would not obey, and that would make them start fighting. All of his brothers were jobless. Because of the bad situation, we were obliged to send him out of the country." (Ahmed, 55, M, FM, IDI-Paktya)*

> *"He decided for himself. He no longer has [a] father, and he was suffering from that. He was under pressure here. It was very difficult for him to take goats out of the house as my [second] husband didn't have a good behavior towards him. These difficulties made him leave me." (Sabira, 47, F, FM, IDI-Kabul)*

For these young people, difficult situations at home were amongst the push factors to venture into unaccompanied journeys outside the country.

An Interplay of Motivating Factors

The UNICEF *Children on the Move* study suggested that children who engage in unaccompanied travel "leave with a vague hope of finding a better life, without warfare and poverty, where they will be able to live in safety, study, work, and earn money to support themselves and their families."[50] This study confirms that the search for a "better life" relates to a complex mix of factors which are frequently interlinked. Poverty, inadequate opportunities for education and employment, conflict, and family roles and expectations play a part, as do the attitudes of community members and peers, and the desire to pursue possibilities to fulfil one's potential.

C. Decision-making and Financing of the Irregular Journey Outside of Afghanistan

The study identified notable differences between how the decision regarding unaccompanied travel was made in high-sending and low-sending areas.

In the high-sending areas of Nangarhar and Kabul, the decision was generally shared between the family (usually the fathers) and the children. Often the children had already thought of the idea and resolved to undertake the journey, and would then propose it to their parents

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49 Monsutti, Alessandro, "Migration as a Rite of Passage: Young Afghans Building Masculinity and Adulthood in Iran", *Iranian Studies*, Vol. 40, Iss. 2, 2007, p169.

50 UNHCR, "Trees only Move in the Wind."

or the household head. This affirms the finding of UNICEF's *Children on the Move* study that the decision to undertake an unaccompanied journey to the West is often a collaborative decision between parents and children; the children participate in the decision-making, and they depart with their parents' permission or knowledge.

> *"My mother decided on the family migration. For instance, my brother went to Iran and spent six years [there], but now he is in Kabul. The entire family did not go abroad. [As for me], I decided, but I was advised by my mother." (Nemat Mosavi, 19, M, a formerly deported UACM, IDI-Kabul)*

> *"At first my family did not agree on my unaccompanied journey outside of Afghanistan, but I forced them or made them agree to send me abroad. I told my family [that] if [they] would not send me abroad I will kill myself: I'll jump off the roof. They had no choice but to agree with me. The next reason is that I was the youngest and smallest member of my family. They sent me to get accepted for residence in European countries faster." (Edrees, 22, M, a formerly deported UACM, IDI-Nangarhar)*

In contrast, in the low-sending areas of Bamiyan and Paktya, children do not usually have the support of the family for the unaccompanied journey. Children from Bamiyan escape from their homes, raise the money themselves, or in some instances, steal money from family members to undertake the initial step of the journey. Here are some perspectives of community respondents and family members of children who travelled from Bamiyan:

> *"The children who ventured into unaccompanied journey left without asking permission from their parents. As they reach places like Kabul or Herat, they call up their parents to inform them that they have left. Some said that they had bad friends, who appreciated leaving the place." (Sakina, 28, F, KII-Bamiyan)*

> *"[For] the boys who had undertaken the journey, about 80% of them escaped from home without permission from their parents, and about 20% of them went as a result of their family's decision." (A, 60, F, KII-Bamiyan)*

> *"He made the decision to go outside of the country, and he did not inform us of his decision. He just went."(Q, 39, M, FM, IDI-Bamiyan)*

One child respondent from Paktya shared:

> *"Usually the elder or the head of the family is the one who makes decisions. But when I made the decision, I did it myself. As far as I know, most of the children in Gardez have made their own decision, without letting their families know." (Said Ghani, 25, M, a formerly deported UACM, IDI-Paktya).*

Information on which the decision was based

Sources of information

In all four provinces, the decision to engage in unaccompanied travel is influenced by information obtained from relatives, friends and community members who have travelled outside Afghanistan, and from families in their community who have children abroad. Although many of the participants in this study stated that they did not have relatives abroad, the diaspora in Europe was clearly an important source of information. A male community respondent from Paktya province said:

> *"When they see those families whose children have gone, and they have good lives, other families also decide to send their children. Most of the families are taking information from those who have gone abroad."(Amir, 50, M, KII-Paktya).*

A female family respondent from Kabul province said;

> *"We just heard from those who have some relatives in European countries. They are our neighbours and friends. They said that the one who goes abroad finds work easily, makes a better life and future, and also supports us here in Afghanistan." (Hussaini, 50, F, FM, IDI-Kabul)*

Information from peers may be a crucial source of information for children regarding unaccompanied travel, particularly in low-sending communities where it seems that children often initiate the decision, or leave without informing their family. As stated by one family member of a child who undertook an unaccompanied journey from Bamiyan:

> *"We did not have any information; he asked his friends and went. We did not know anything."(Maryam, 45, F, FM, IDI-Bamiyan)*

The information that circulates amongst sending communities about unaccompanied travel is not always accurate, including information regarding the risks of the journey:

> *"In the wedding party I met one of my cousins who said people in UK have lots of income; they have good salaries and good businesses. He said that there is no risk at all in this journey. My cousin gave all this information to me. He got that information from his friends in the community who were accompanying me in this journey. I sold the car for 800,000 Pak rupees and left without informing my family." (Said Ghani, 25, M, a formerly deported UACM, IDI -Paktya)*

Smugglers were also a source of information. A Bamiyan respondent who made an attempt to travel stated:

> *"Aside from my cousins who are living in Australia, I also got some information from [a] smuggler. He is from here, Bamiyan. He brought us until Pakistan; then introduced us to other smugglers in Pakistan." (Mustafa, 17, M, Child, attempted to travel but failed, IDI-Bamiyan)*

Family members' knowledge and attitudes toward risks of unaccompanied travel

Family members of children who undertook an unaccompanied journey usually had some knowledge of the risks involved. There appeared to be a reasonably high level of awareness of the risks about the journey in both high- and low-sending areas. Despite these risks, many still chose to support their children's travel.

Family respondents from the low-sending areas of Paktya and Bamiyan mentioned risks such as drowning, arrest, death and drug addiction on the journey, and risks of kidnapping, recruitment by armed groups and difficulties with reintegration upon return to Afghanistan. Several parents from low-sending areas were not aware of or involved in their sons' decision to undertake an unaccompanied journey. Some clearly did not approve of their children travelling alone. Other parents were involved in the decision and supported the child's travel.

> *"Yes, all the people know what are the risks and dangers in the travel."(Sakina, 28, F, FM, IDI-Paktya).*

> *"Even though I was not aware of his going [on an unaccompanied trip], I was aware of the possible risks. My friends told me about the risk of an unaccompanied journey, such as drowning, being imprisoned, being killed, becoming addicted to drugs. Upon their return, there are the risks of being kidnapped, joining opposition groups, difficulty of getting used to custom of the country and reintegrating with the family." (Fawad, 40, M, FM, IDI-Paktya)*

> *"Yes, I know about the risks, because I also travelled that way. I know if the police officers see us in the border they will kill us, or the smugglers will not help us when police see us. But I'm obliged to send him now. I'm too old; I cannot work. He should work and find money so that we can live and have something to*

eat. When my son came back, he did not face any problem because they were still near the border of Afghanistan, so they easily came back to Herat." (Ali Agha, 55, M, FM, IDI-Bamiyan).

Family members from high-sending areas also demonstrated knowledge of the risks of the unaccompanied journey. Despite this knowledge, many accepted the risks, either because the potential benefits of successfully reaching the West were seen to outweigh the dangers of the journey, or because they felt they had no choice.

"Though most of the people know about these risks, still they undertake the journey and they are happy about going. They think that they are going to paradise." (Community KI, Kabul)

"Yes, we thought about the risks and we accepted all the risks because we were obliged and some of his friends went there and they reached [their destination]. We thought that Salim will also go there; he will reach [the destination country], and he will get citizenship because he is very young. He was 17 years old and [so we thought] he will get citizenship soon [and] after one year, he will come home and will get married. But it didn't happen that way. It had too many risks like drowning in the sea, getting lost, dying because of food shortage and water shortage, and being beaten by the police. When he returned, he talked about all the things that happened. We thought that he will reach his destination, and he will pay his entire loan and we will start a new life. But it didn't happen that way, and now the loan is giving us a lot of stress." (Sadaf, 22, F, FM, IDI-Nangarhar)

"Yes, we thought about the risks, but my sons were too excited to go out of the country. They said, 'We will go to study and get a job and after finishing our studies come back to our country and serve our homeland.' They were too happy and felt good about the planned travel."(Sadaf, 45, F, FM, IDI-Nangarhar).

"Of course I thought about all of those risks. I was also thinking that if we only have the capacity to provide him and the rest of the children the best in life, he will not undergo all these dangers. But what can I do when there is no money to meet all the needs?" (Malalai,38, F, FM, IDI-Nangarhar).

For some respondents, immediate threats that they faced in Afghanistan made the risks of unaccompanied child travel worth taking. As one mother stated:

"We were aware of all possible risks. They will be arrested and will be beaten by police authorities, and there will be danger on [the] way. We were obliged to go for it and [so we just] accepted all those risks. The Kochi people burnt our house [so] we do not have anything, and we also don't have a place in which to live. Due to necessity, we sent them to Iran."(F1, 45, F, FM, IDI-Kabul)

This family's situation in Afghanistan was so grave that when the children were forcibly returned to Afghanistan after the first attempt to travel, the family still raised money for a second attempt. Even with first-hand knowledge of the risks and the dangers to the children of an unaccompanied journey, the impending threats to their security in Afghanistan made them feel that another attempt was worthwhile.

"They were with us for [a] few days, then again their father looked for a smuggler to send them [back] to Iran… Both of my sons decided to go to Iran again, and their father agreed and so they went to Iran."(F1, 45, F, FM, IDI-Kabul)

Some family members who have children abroad recognised that they had insufficient knowledge of the risks to the child at the time of decision-making:

"We were thinking about some physical risks like becoming ill, drowning in the sea, dying from hunger, but we were not thinking of other risks like mental, social and emotional. Of course, there are risks on the way (during the travel).

We were thinking that once he reaches the destination country, there will be no more risk for him. We didn't think about his forced return." (Hussaini, 26, M, FM, IDI-Kabul)

Children's knowledge and attitudes toward risks of unaccompanied travel

As for the children's knowledge and attitude towards the risks, the respondents for this study provided two different pictures. Some of the children had a degree of knowledge of the risks of the journey; while others had little information. Some of the children did not think of the risks they might encounter in the travel while others considered the risk and decided the journey was nonetheless worthwhile.

Child respondents from the low-sending area of Bamiyan shared the following when asked about whether they knew of the risks of the journey before leaving:

"Yes, I did. Being arrested by the police was the first risk that I thought about ... Sometimes the children have been killed by the smugglers when some problems occur, like police check. Mentally I was not comfortable. I thought if I reach the destination, will they give work for me? I thought I will face some problems with the people because I may not know their language. I was sad because I was far from my family. I didn't think of returning." (Ahmadi, 18, M, a formerly deported UACM, IDI-Bamiyan).

"Among the pressing difficulties and risks during the travel are the possibilities of being caught by Iranian police, falling from the mountain, being beaten by Iranian police and the most dangerous was being shot by Iranian police. The risks when a child reaches the destination country are the bad behaviour of Iranians, getting arrested by police and unavailability of work for smuggled children. When I was arrested by Iranian police to be deported back to Afghanistan, particularly on the Afghan side, there was no risk. The reason why I left for Iran was unavailability of work here in Afghanistan. Because of the thought of being jobless, it is better to go to Iran and work there to support my family. Therefore, I decided to take the risk." (Gul Deen, 19, M, a formerly deported UACM, IDI-Bamiyan)

Like the previous respondent, several children who travelled from Bamiyan knew of the risks but felt that they were worth taking in view of the daily risks faced in Afghanistan. Note that, as described in the provincial profiles above, Bamiyan is considered safer than many of the other provinces in the country.

"It was my own decision, yes, I knew about all the risks completely. I just decided to go because I had in mind that if I go I would face the risk once, but if I stay here in Afghanistan I will face risks every time and every day. One of my friends had gone to France, and he is now living there and has a good life. I thought about [the] risk of dying on the way, but I did not entertain thoughts of being sent back, and losing my money."(Mustafa, 17, M, Child, attempted to travel but failed, IDI-Bamiyan).

"Mostly it is the head of the family who makes the decision, but my brother made this decision to go to Europe by himself. We did not know that he wanted to go to Europe, but also, I should say that he preferred dying on the way going to Australia than living here because the way that we pass through from here [Bamiyan] to Kabul is more dangerous than the way going to Australia." (Ali Agha, 37, M, FM, IDI-Bamiyan)

From the high-sending area of Kabul, some children mentioned that they had little information about the risks before they embarked on an unaccompanied journey.

"I was very small and I was not thinking about risks. I was saying that I should reach my destination and start my life again and also bring my family members there. ...There is job opportunity, and there is peace. We could have a good life there." (Jaweed Waziri, 13, M, Child, a formerly deported UACM, IDI-Kabul)

Other child respondents had some knowledge of the risks before travelling, but either did not consider those deeply or felt that those were worth taking.

> *"Yes, I was aware of the risks that I had to face during the journey and heard from a lot of people about them. But I did not consider these risks, because I was young and was not that much clever to consider them." (Ali Ahmad, 22, M, a formerly deported UACM, IDI-Bamiyan)*

> *"I went to Iran with my father and I was not thinking about any risks during the journey. After that, I went to Turkey and again I did not care about any risk, I made myself ready for all risks. I was saying that whatever is my destiny I accept it." (F1, 18, M, a formerly deported UACM, IDI-Kabul)*

Attitudes toward a second attempt to travel

From the high-sending provinces of Kabul and Nangarhar, the vast majority of respondents who experienced unsuccessful attempts at unaccompanied travel strongly stated that they would still engage in another attempt once they have saved up and can pay for the costs of the entire journey. In contrast, in low-sending Bamiyan and Paktya, almost all children who had made an unsuccessful attempt, and their families, did not want to make a second attempt at unaccompanied travel.

In the course of this study, only one case was encountered in which children had, in fact, made a second attempt at an unaccompanied journey. One woman interviewed in Kabul province stated that after her two sons had made an unsuccessful first attempt in their unaccompanied journey to Iran, they made a subsequent attempt to go to the same destination two weeks later. These were desperate measures decided on by the parents because of a life-threatening situation in which their village was violently attacked; their house was burned down and many of their neighbours were killed. The first time that the children went, they were arrested and deported. On the second attempt, they successfully reached Iran and are now working there. The woman said,

> *"They are working secretly. They are not free to go outside [or] else the police will deport them. I am a mother and [I] feel very sad for my sons that they are not free, and they are living there with fear." (F1, 45, F, FM, IDI-Bamiyan)*

Despite this, the woman stated that she did not regret sending her sons to Iran:

> *"Yes, we would send them again and again. We would be compelled to collect money for them and send them to foreign countries." (F1, 45, F, FM, IDI-Bamiyan)*

Choice of destination

Since the decision to undertake the unaccompanied journey abroad is often a collaborative one, several factors are considered in choosing the place of destination. The primary consideration is the perceived chances of getting asylum which they heard from friends, neighbours and community members. Other factors that are taken into account are that: a) the value of the country's currency is higher than Afghanistan's; b) there are more job opportunities and higher pay, and c) there are opportunities to study.

> *"My son wanted to go to Sweden as he heard from people, our neighbours and friends that Sweden will accept the asylum application of Afghan minor migrants."(Hussaini, 50, F, FM, IDI-Kabul)*

> *"They wanted to go to Belgium because his friends told them that it will be easy to get citizenship. Also, earning money is also good in that country as they can get a job easily."(Sadaf, 45, F, FM, IDI-Nangarhar)*

> *"I wanted to go to Australia because people were saying that there are job opportunities and also anyone can avail of education." (Mohammad Ali, 16, M, Child, a formerly deported UACM, IDI-Kabul)*

European countries were generally the preferred destination. For the high-sending areas of Kabul and Nangarhar the choices of destination were European countries such as Sweden, Belgium, Austria, Switzerland and the UK. From Kabul and Bamiyan, several respondents chose to travel to Iran and Turkey. In addition, a few respondents from Bamiyan mentioned Canada, Germany and Australia. Respondents from Paktya mentioned UAE, Belgium and the UK as their preferred countries of destination.

A few minorities in the two high-sending provinces did not have any definite destination. A respondent from Kabul whose son was arrested upon reaching Turkey said:

> "We did not have a choice or did not think of any destination country. We just wanted my son to leave Afghanistan."(Ewal, NA, M, FM, IDI-Kabul)

Another family respondent in Nangarhar whose child ventured into unaccompanied travel and reached London also shared:

> "I had no country in my mind for a possible destination. My son also had no particular country in his mind. He said, "I will go anywhere." If the police will not arrest me in that country, then I will be there."(Malalai, 38, F, FM, IDI-Nangarhar)

For those who chose Iran and Turkey, the principal reasons were because their funds were limited, and they planned to work in that country temporarily until they could save and move on to European countries as their ultimate destination. A family respondent shared:

> "We did not decide where they should go. In our mind, there was just Iran. Going to other countries needs huge monetary allocation, but going to Iran or Pakistan doesn't need much money. With less amount of money, they can get there." (F1, 45, F, FM, IDI-Kabul)

This was affirmed by a child respondent of the same province who failed on his attempt to travel:

> "While I was in Iran I decided to go first to Turkey and later on if I could work there then I planned to continue my trip to Europe; I had a country in my mind, which was Sweden.... There were two reasons [why I did not make it to Europe]. First I did not have enough money, so I had to work in Turkey. Second the Turkish police arrested us and deported us back to Afghanistan." (Basit Waziri, 22, M, a formerly deported UACM, IDI-Kabul)

The choice of Iran as a destination or transit country was also influenced by the presence of relatives there.

> "After a discussion with my cousin in Iran, my father told me that they are going to send me to Iran because I had been jobless for a number of months. He talked with my cousins, and they also agreed to help me there." (Gul Deen, 19, M, a formerly deported UACM, IDI-Bamiyan)

> "I did not have any choice of destination, because I did not have enough money to go to other countries, except Iran. Besides, my sister lives there, and she promised to support me. In other countries, we do not have a relative to support us. Therefore, I did not have any other choice except to go to Iran." (Ali Ahmad, 22, M, a formerly deported UACM, IDI-Bamiyan)

Financing the journey

Children who travel with family support

When families sent their children for unaccompanied travel outside of Afghanistan, they used various means of raising funds to meet the costs of the travel. Some families utilised their pooled earnings and others resorted to borrow from money-lenders, or relatives and friends in their locality and/or abroad. There were some who mortgaged or sold their properties to finance their children's journey. Some combined a number of these schemes to send their children abroad.

A male respondent from Kabul, who failed in his attempt at unaccompanied travel said:

> *"We mortgaged our house and financed my journey. Still we haven't paid the loan."* (Mortaza Alizada, 18, M, a formerly deported UACM, IDI-Kabul)

A community respondent from Kabul commented:

> *"Most people borrow from their relatives who are in Iran or Pakistan. These loans are like contributions, and they do not expect interest on the amount borrowed. When the children reach the destination country, they work there and pay back the borrowed money."* (Alawi, 25, M, KII-Kabul)

In certain instances, families take on high financial risks, selling key assets or placing themselves at the mercy of lenders who demand exorbitant interest or cheap labour from the borrowers.

> *"They sell their land or take loans with interest from their relatives. Some of them work for very low wages for the person who lent them money, or once their son reaches the destination country, he will send money to pay the lender."* (Amir, 50, M, KII-Paktya)

> *"For the first time, we took a loan from other people. We borrowed the money from a man who was from our village. Now, he is living in Iran. When our son reached Iran, he took money again from this man. With that money, he reached Switzerland. The person from whom money was borrowed came to Afghanistan and asked for his money. Since we didn't have any money to repay him, he took all our land instead of waiting for my son's payment."* (Sabira, 47, F, FM, IDI-Kabul)

In extreme instances, respondents from Nangarhar mentioned that families resorted to trade their daughters for money.

> *"When they have nothing to sell or deposit, they give their daughter in exchange for money. With that, they send their son to a foreign country."* (Khairia, 23, F, KII- Nangarhar)

Although this was not a common answer given by the respondents in the study, two practices are known to exist in Afghanistan by which a female family member is given as payment for a loan. One is known as *baad*: "a practice in which a female family member (that is, a young girl or a woman) is given as a bride to settle blood feuds… [or] non-repayable loans."[51] The other practice is known as *pore*, by which a man pays his debt by giving a girl to his creditor in marriage.[52] In 2013, the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission documented numerous cases of *baad*, forced marriage and exchange of women.[53] These were described as being "considered ordinary or normal" and representing "common practices."[54]

Children who travel without family support

For children coming from low-sending areas who engaged in unaccompanied travel but did not let their families know, they resorted to steal resources from home or sold assets owned by the family.

> *"I had USD2000, and I stole USD7000 from home."* (Mustafa, 17, M, Child, attempted to travel but failed, IDI-Bamiyan)

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51 Ganesh et.al. *Women's Economic Empowerment in Afghanistan, 2002-2013*, Kabul, AREU, 2013.

52 Schneider, Irene «Recent Developments in Afghan Family Law : Research Aspects» ASIEN 104, July 2007, p112

53 AIHRC, *Violence against Women in Afghanistan : Factors, root causes and situation,* Kabul : AIHRC, 2013, <http://www.aihrc.org.af/media/files/Research%20Reports/Dari/Report%20on%20Violence%20against%20Women%201390%20_English-%20for%20hasa.pdf>.

54 Ibid, p21. See also Human Rights Watch, "Afghanistan: Stop Women Being Given as Compensation", 8 March 2011, <http://www.hrw.org/news/2011/03/08/afghanistan-stop-women-being-given-compensation>

> *"I sold a Toyota pick-up vehicle of my elder brother and gave the money to the smuggler who promised to take me to Iran and from there he will take me via air to Turkey, but he fooled me." (Said Ghani, 25, M, a formerly deported UACM, IDI-Paktya)*

When they ran out of financial resources, they resorted to work in different transit countries, where they could get stuck for years to pay off the smugglers.

> *"If the child makes the decision and escapes, he steals money from his home or he just goes and works in one destination and then in another, until eventually he gets to the targeted country." (Haji Ramazan, 45, M, KII-Bamiyan)*

Even if children had insufficient money to pay for the journey, smugglers may still agree to the travel and then seek payments from these children's relatives in the country of destination, like Iran.

> *"At first the smugglers would take them on unaccompanied travel without money to Iran, when they reach Iran, the smugglers would call for the child's relatives to bring money to pay them. If the relatives are able to pay them, the child will be released. If the relatives cannot pay on time, the child is forced to sell his body parts to pay the smugglers. If the boys take money from their relatives, they may pay them by the time they find jobs." (A, 60, M, KII-Bamiyan)*

In all four provinces, families who had relatives living abroad stated that they did not get financial assistance or help from those relatives, even though they have some form of contact with them through letters, electronic mails or phone. Relatives living overseas are said to share information about their life situation overseas, but not resources to finance the journey.

D. Smuggling Networks

Some information relating to smuggling networks surfaced in interviews with community respondents, but this was limited given the sensitivity of the subject.

> *"The smugglers are Hazara from this province. They make connections with those boys who want to travel to other countries but they are not known to all people. They just move silently so that no one should be aware of their activities." (Azim, 60, M, KII-Bamiyan)*

> *"In Nangarhar, the smugglers are usually Pashtun. In Kabul, they are Hazara and Tajik. The group is different in every province, but they have connections with each other." (Kazimi, 63, M, KII-Nangarhar)*

> *"Every ethnic group has smugglers among the people. I don't know which ethnicity has the most number of smugglers." (Zarghuna, 23, F, KII-Paktya)*

In Kabul, community respondents pointed to the highly organised nature of smuggling networks' operations.

> *"Smugglers and facilitators have communication and have monthly meetings." (Mohammadi, 61, M, KII-Kabul)*

> *"These facilitators are among the people. They have their own offices, like having a room that operates like an office, but mostly they operate regionally. For example, a smuggler takes a child up to Pakistan or Iran then there is another smuggler who takes them up to another country." (Alawi, 25, M, KII-Kabul)*

These claims were validated by the accounts of children who had made failed attempts at unaccompanied travel.

> *"He is from here in Bamiyan [referring to the smuggler]. He brought us till Pakistan, then he introduced us to other people in Pakistan, who are smugglers too. (Mustafa, 17, M, Child, attempted to travel but failed, IDI-Bamiyan).*

When asked as to who benefits most from people-smuggling activities, the majority of respondents perceived that the smugglers reap the greatest benefits.

> *"It is clear that smugglers benefit more than anyone else because in any way they [would] receive money… whether they (children) arrive or not, they get their money from the children who are going." (Sakina, 28, F, KII-Bamiyan)*

> *"Smugglers get the benefit because if that person has been deported, he still gets his money, and this is his benefit." (Khairia, 23, F, KII-Nangarhar)*

> *"The one who benefits more are the smugglers. If the child arrives in the destination country and [gets] accepted then; his family will benefit. Anyway, the smugglers benefit more than anyone else." (Zarmina, 23, F, KII-Paktya)*
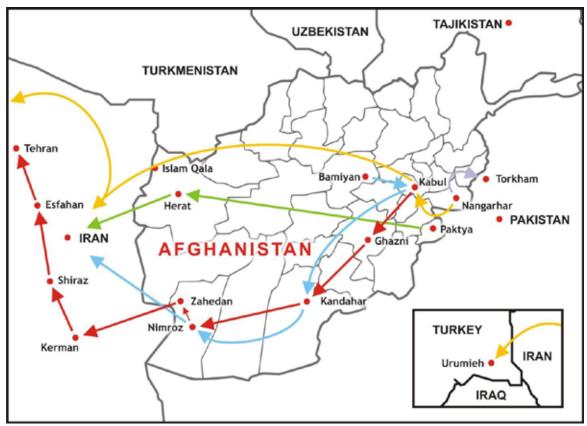
Some respondents who provided explanations as to who profited from activities mentioned the smugglers, the receiving country and the families of the UACMs.

> *"Everyone benefits… the smugglers, the host countries… because the children work cheaper there, so this is a benefit. Also, the children's families benefit because the children send money." (Alawi, 25, M, KII-Kabul).*
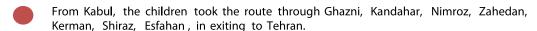
> *"First, the country of destination benefits because it makes use of the children's energy in making or building the country. Then it benefits smugglers because they get more than USD 20000 from them. In [the] end, their families do benefit [as] the children are able to work there and send their salaries to them." (Kazimi, 63, M, KII-Nangarhar).*
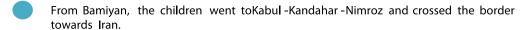
E. The Journey

Map of Departure Points

Description:

🔴 From Kabul, the children took the route through Ghazni, Kandahar, Nimroz, Zahedan, Kerman, Shiraz, Esfahan , in exiting to Tehran.

🔵 From Bamiyan, the children went toKabul –Kandahar –Nimroz and crossed the border towards Iran.

🟢 From Paktya, they departed via Herat toIran

🟠 From Nangarhar, the children proceeded to Kabul in going to Iran, they passed through Urumieh, the border between Iran and Turkey as they headed to Istanbul.

🟣 From Nangarhar to Pakistan via Torkham (the border of Pakistan)

Travel Routes

Most of the key informants from the four provinces stated that they were familiar with the routes of travel to get to the desired destination country.

The vast majority transited through Iran en route to either Australia or Europe. One respondent from Kabul took the route through Ghazni, Kandahar, Nimroz, Zahedan, Kerman, Shiraz, Esfahan, and then Tehran. He sought to travel onwards to Europe but was caught by Iranian authorities and sent back to Afghanistan.

Those from Bamiyan who sought to reach or transit through Iran on the way to Europe or Australia took the same route within Afghanistan through Kabul-Kandahar-Nimroz and crossed

the border towards Iran. One respondent shared:

> *"I knew the departure point in Afghanistan. First from Bamiyan I went to Kabul, from Kabul I went to Kandahar and from Kandahar to Nimroz and from Nimroz we went to Herat and from Islam Qala we crossed the border." (Gul Deen, 19, M, formerly deported UACM, IDI-Bamiyan)*

A respondent aiming to go to Australia who was caught in Iran stated that he travelled:

> *"From Kabul to Herat then to Nimroz and then to Iran. From Iran, we were going to Australia but I was not aware of the departure points from there." (Ahmadi, 18, M, a formerly deported UACM, IDI-Bamiyan)*

Another respondent from Bamiyan who was caught upon arrival in Indonesia took a route via Pakistan to Australia. When asked if he knew the transit points in advance, he said:

> *"Yes, I knew about it: Kabul, Pakistan, Indonesia, then finally Australia." (Mustafa, 17, M, Child, attempted to travel but failed, IDI-Bamiyan)*

Those from Paktya province who aimed to go to the UK went via Herat, then Iran, then off to Tajikistan, Turkey, Egypt or Bulgaria. From any of these departure areas, children proceeded to Greece, then to the UK. One respondent from Paktya who desired to go to the United Kingdom said that the route was as follows:

> *"From Nangarhar to Kabul then to Iran then to Urumieh, the border between Iran and Turkey, then to Istanbul then to Greece, then to France and from France to London." (Khan, 22, M, a formerly deported UACM, IDI-Paktya)*

Respondents from Nangarhar stated that in order to reach Europe they would go to Kabul and from there, they go to Iran or to Pakistan by plane. After passing through these neighbouring countries, they go by car to Turkey, then to Greece then to France and from France they go to the UK.

Another respondent who aimed to go to the United Kingdom but was caught in Turkey while on his way to his final destination shared:

> *"I knew of the departure points: Gardez-Kabul-Nimroz-Iran-Turkey." (Said Ghani, 25, M, a formerly deported UACM, IDI-Paktya).*

Experiences at transit points

The majority of children who failed on their unaccompanied journey were transiting in Iran and Turkey, where they were caught on their way to Australia or European countries. A very small number made it further but were apprehended at the borders of Germany or Indonesia.

In these transit areas, the children are constantly on the look-out for police authorities who could arrest them given their irregular status. A child who travelled via smuggling networks from Bamiyan to Pakistan en route to Australia stated:

> *"I just faced some problems in Pakistan. We were not able to get food properly and for [a] long time, we were not able to take [a] bath. We had to stay in a room all the time because we were not allowed to get out. The smugglers were saying if we go out, [the] police would arrest us... When I was returned, I did not face any problem. The Indonesian police kept us for three days in the airport, then they sent us back to Pakistan. From Pakistan, I went back directly to Afghanistan." (Mustafa, 17, M, Child, attempted to travel but failed, IDI-Bamiyan)*

In instances in which the UACMs stay longer in these departure points, they get to know of other UACMs who are still in the area, perhaps working and saving their earnings to finance their travel to the next departure point and/or destination countries. In addition to finding work, children often also need to navigate language and cultural barriers, learning to understand and communicate in unfamiliar surroundings.

The length of stay at different departure points varies. The availability of money to pay for the unaccompanied travel is the main factor determining the duration of stay in certain departure areas. Those who have no choice but to stay in Iran or other departure areas to work, save, and send money to their families remain longer than others.

> *"We stayed for one year in Iran because I had to work and earn some money for our trip and then after a year, we went to Turkey." (Basit Waziri, 22, M, a formerly deported UACM, IDI-Kabul)*

> *"We were in Turkey for 9 days and then 3 months in Greece. We had no money, and we waited there until my brother sent us money. Then we continued our journey." (Ghulam, 18, M, a formerly deported UACM, IDI-Nangarhar)*

> *"I do not know about the other places where he went but my son stayed in Greece for eight months. He needed to work in that country because he ran out of money. When he was able to save, he went to Italy." (Abdullah, NA, M, FM, IDI-Paktya)*

Those who remain and work continue to be at risk of arrest and deportation due to their irregular status. As shared by one child who was forcibly returned from Iran:

> *"I was a labourer, a mason in a house. The police saw me and asked for my passport. I was not able to produce a legal document that they asked [for], so the police arrested me, and he sent me back to Afghanistan." (Ahmadi, 18, M, a formerly deported UACM , IDI-Bamiyan).*

Dangers on the journey

Respondents mentioned a range of physical and emotional risks that were encountered by unaccompanied Afghan children during their travel. The physical risks included dangerous means of transport, deprivation of food and water, and being beaten by smugglers or even by police officers at the borders of different countries when they were caught. Some witnessed tragic events, such as the drowning of another child, and other accidents while on transit.

> *"The police of Turkey followed us, and they shot at us. Most of our friends were injured, and many of them were killed but some of us escaped. We were hungry and thirsty. When we arrived in Turkey, the police arrested us and sent us back to Iran. Iran's police beat us up, and they did not provide water for us to drink." (Mohammad Ali, 16, M, Child, IDI-Kabul)*

> *"We were inside a big box but at the border of Germany, we were seen by [the] police and they came to check. When they focused the light in the box and saw us then they beat us up. They took our mobiles and forcibly took us to the deportation center and sent us back to Afghanistan." (Ghulam, 18, M, a formerly deported UACM , IDI-Nangarhar)*

> *"When I decided to go abroad I thought [of] the possible risks like being killed or drowning on the sea and also human trafficking on the way. But I saw a lot of problems on the way, and these are my actual experiences. One of the smugglers hated me and broke my hand. It was painful. We crossed the long deserts and mountains. The smugglers put us in a car that carried ice, and it was full of ice so as a result, one of my friends died. I was unconscious; that is, I lost my mind for 15 days. At the border of Turkey, my friends gave me a drug and it made me feel better. These problems were encountered during the journey. When I got to Turkey, I didn't understand the language, and I was not familiar with their culture. In Turkey, the police arrested me, hated me a lot, and I was in prison for seven months. I felt very bad and I even thought that I would die. On our return, the police in Iran took money from us and put us in a room for three nights. They wanted money from us, but we had nothing to give." (Sadat, 18, M, a formerly deported UACM, IDI-Nangahar)*

F. Consequences of unsuccessful attempts

When asked to describe the consequences of an unsuccessful attempt at unaccompanied travel by children, community respondents noted significant implications on the livelihood of the family, as well as the security of the family and the child.

> *"The implications of being forcibly returned are mostly on the livelihood of family members, especially if he is the bread earner of the family, because he has already spent all the money the family has. There is also a security issue involved if [they] could not pay the borrowed money back, like maybe the lender of the money may give him a problem such as the person may injure or beat him up." (JT, 25, M, FGD-Kabul)*

> *"The big problem is that they borrowed the money to go to Europe but when they did not reach the destination, they no longer had the money to pay and the person who gave them money would come every day and tell them to give his money back. Also maybe [the] Taliban becomes aware of these people [who] went to Europe [and] they will kill them." (Masouda, 23, F, FGD-Nangarhar)*

> *"The security of the children will be at risk. People will think that they have brought lots of money; therefore, they are kidnapped or killed for [the] money. Since the returned child belongs to a family, the security of the family members will also be [a] concern [as] they will also get into trouble for their son." (Mohammad Yousef, 29, M, FGD-Paktya)*

Given that families often accrue significant debts to finance the child's journey, the failure to make it to Europe and provide the hoped-for remittances may have serious consequences for the economic situation of the household. This may also have negative consequences for the wellbeing of the child and for family cohesion:

> *"These children put [the] families' economy in danger. Their economy will go down the drain, and due to this condition, there would be fighting in their homes…" (Azim, 60, M, KII-Bamiyan)*

> *"Upon their return, they could not do anything. Some could not pay back the money that they borrowed for the travel. Another is that some of them have security problems because there may be an impression that they would have lots of money since they came from Europe, then they would be kidnapped." (Razia, 35, F, FGD-Nangarhar).*

> *"The first priority is the livelihood of the family members who sent their children and who encountered difficulties and lived in very impoverished situations. Second is the security of the family members and the third is security of the children, who were sometimes kidnapped. Due to these risks, their families placed restrictions on their returned children's movements, upon which, the affected children felt frightened and unsafe." (Sheerpoo, 31, M, FGD-Paktya).*

4.   Summary, Conclusion and Recommendations

Summary of Findings

1. Unaccompanied children are generally males between the ages of 13 and 17. They are typically the younger children of the family (and not the eldest). They are often those seen to be the smartest and most physically fit, who may have the greatest chance of reaching the destination country. Families expect that children will have higher chances of being accepted in destination countries than adults.

2. Children are motivated to engage in unaccompanied journeys due to a combination of (frequently inter-related) factors, including:

a. The desire for economic stability, livelihood opportunities and access to social services, particularly education

b. The need for security and safety from violence

c. The positive feedback and regard by peers and community members of families with children who successfully travelled to industrialised countries.

3. The decision for children to travel unaccompanied outside of Afghanistan is usually shared by the heads of the family and the children. However, in most instances it is the children who propose the idea. Based on the study's findings, family support tends to be high in the high-sending areas of Nangarhar (Pashtun majority) and Kabul (Hazara majority), and lower or absent in the low-sending areas of Bamiyan (Hazara majority) and Paktya (Pashtun majority).

4. From both high- and low-sending areas, European countries were usually the destinations of choice, with some choosing Iran as an intermediate destination due to the presence of family members and relatives who could help them find work. Earnings would then be used to proceed with their journey towards their final destinations.

5. Unaccompanied children from the high-sending areas of Kabul (Hazara majority) and Nangarhar (Pashtun majority) had the support of their families who would pool their resources to cover the cost of the journey. Moreover, families borrowed money or mortgaged their properties to pay for the travel or used a combination of these schemes. By contrast, children from low-sending Bamiyan (Hazara majority) and Paktya (Pashtun majority) who decided to travel without the permission of their families either resorted to taking money or property from family members without their consent in order to fund the travel. Very few made arrangements with smugglers for payment to be made once the child finds work in departure points or countries of destination.

6. The main departure points mentioned by study respondents were Herat, Islam Qala and Nimroz. The transit points were Iran, Pakistan, Turkey, Greece, France, Malaysia and Indonesia. These were points on the journey where in children were at high risk of arrest and being returned to Afghanistan.

7. Respondents were reluctant to talk about how smuggling operates in the region. They indicated that smuggling networks are highly organised and have a presence in sending communities as well as in Iran and Pakistan.

8. Almost all of the family respondents in the high sending areas of Kabul and Nangarhar knew of the risks that their children might undergo before sending or allowing their children to undertake the unaccompanied travel. Despite this prior knowledge, they still chose to send the children for these trips, either because they saw the potential benefits outweighing the risks, or because they felt they had no choice but to send them. Among the low-sending provinces, Bamiyan and Paktya, most of the family respondents did not know of their sons' decision to leave until after the fact, and many understood the risks involved in the journey. With respect to children's knowledge of the risks, the picture is mixed: some had little information, others knew many of the risks but did not carefully consider them, and others carefully considered the risks and decided that the journey was nonetheless worth taking.

9. Child respondents from all four provinces who attempted the journey were exposed to varying levels of danger, harassment and violations of their rights at the hands of the smugglers and in the custody of the police authorities when caught at different transit points or destinations.

10. Both family and child respondents who undertook unaccompanied travel from high-sending areas (Kabul and Nangarhar) strongly affirmed that they would engage in further unaccompanied migration once they could save enough to pay for the cost of the journey. By contrast, from the low-sending provinces of Bamiyan and Paktya, both children who attempted unaccompanied travel and their family members almost universally indicated that they do not wish to engage in further unaccompanied travel.

Recommendations:

1. Civil society and community leaders in Afghanistan, in cooperation with relevant Afghan authorities, should consider ways of engaging children (particularly adolescent males) and parents to consider the risks of unaccompanied travel, particularly through youth networks and social media, schools and Parent-Teacher Community Associations.

2. Information campaigns on the risks involved in unaccompanied journeys by children should be enhanced, with the involvement of relevant Afghan authorities, political representatives, civil society and community leaders. Alternative methods of information dissemination should be considered through mass media, educational institutions, social media and engagement of informal youth networks.

3. Further study should be undertaken to understand the attitudes of young Afghan males towards unaccompanied travel, and to map informal youth networks - not only in Afghanistan but also Iran and Pakistan - in order to illuminate how the attitudes of young Afghan males can be influenced.

4. Vocational training and livelihoods programmes should be developed for adolescent males, particularly in high-sending areas of Afghanistan, in coordination with relevant Afghan authorities, NGOs and relevant civil society actors.

5. The best interests of the child should be a primary consideration for all actions that directly or indirectly affect the unaccompanied child, at all stages of the child's journey. Countries of destination should ensure that any solution for an unaccompanied child is based on a Best Interest Determination (BID), also taking into consideration that unaccompanied children from Afghanistan may have a rightful claim to refugee status, or be eligible for subsidiary or humanitarian protection.

6. Sensitization and capacity building on protection issues relating to unaccompanied children should be conducted with border officials and police in transit and destination countries, particularly Iran and Turkey.

7. Afghan authorities, civil society and community leaders should increase efforts to enhance protection and support for returned children, including interventions to address trauma and support integration. Programmes should take into consideration the real possibility that returned children may attempt further unaccompanied travel, particularly those from high-sending areas.

Annexes

Annex Table 1a. Characteristics of Unaccompanied Afghan Children on the Move, Hazara-majority Study Areas.

Characteristics	Kabul Province- High Sending		Bamiyan Province- Low Sending	
	UACM	Did not attempt	UACM	Did not attempt
INDIVIDUAL				
Age	Underage (14-17)		Underage (13-17)	
Birth position	Not the eldest son	Not the eldest son	Not the eldest son	
Education	Educated (e.g. 7-12 grade) Uneducated	Uneducated	Educated (e.g. 7-8 grade) Uneducated	Educated
Ethnicity	Ethnicity does not matter		Hazara	
Sex	Male		Male	
Other characteristics	Unemployed Clever Physically strong		Unemployed Clever Physically strong	
Economic status	Poor	Poor	Poor	
HOUSEHOLD (HH)				
Number of HH members	Many HH members Not important	Less family members		
Highest Educational Attainment of the HH head	Uneducated	Higher education		
Job of HH Head	Jobless	Business person Head of a Government office	Farmer Construction labourer	Good job with good income

Annex Table 1b. Characteristics of Unaccompanied Afghan Children on the Move, Pashtun-majority Study Areas.

	Nangarhar Province- High Sending		Paktya Province- Low Sending	
Characteristics	**UACM**	**Did not attempt**	**UACM**	**Did not attempt**
INDIVIDUAL				
Age	Under age (15 -16)	Below 18 years old	Underage (10-17)	Below 10 years old
Birth position	Youngest son	Eldest son	Youngest son	
Education	Educated (10th - 12th grade)	Educated (12th grade)	Educated (secondary level)	Educated
Ethnicity	Pashtun	Pashtun	Pashtun	Pashtun Tajik
Sex	Male	Male	Male	
Other characteristics	Unskilled Smart Calm		Strongest Smartest	
Economic status	Poor	Financially well-off Cannot finance the trip		Financially well-off
HOUSEHOLD (HH)				
Number of HH members	Large HHs More than 2 sons	Only have one son No underage son	Large HHs (7-9 HH members; 20-30) Small HHs (e.g. 5-6 members)	5-7 HH members
Highest Educational Attainment of the HH head	Does not matter	Highly educated	Low education	12th grade
Job of HH Head	Does not matter	Good job with good income	Low-ranking Government officials Vendor (mobile carts, fruits) Medium sized shop owners (bakery, general store) Dealers (cars, houses) Driver/taxi driver	High-ranking Government official
Jobs of other HH members	Don't have jobs		Vendors Shopkeepers	Medium-sized shop owners (bakeries, butcher shops) Dealers (export goods, wood, oil)
Migration history of the family			Migrated during the war to Iran or Pakistan	Migrated during the war to Iran or Pakistan (All FGD)

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