



**DROPS**

ORGANIZATION FOR POLICY RESEARCH  
& DEVELOPMENT STUDIES

نهاد پژوهش و توسعه

## **Expert Roundtable Report**

**ON**

**Literature Review of Migration Trends in Afghanistan**

**[Part of DROPS 5-Month Training Program on 'How to Develop Policy Brief']**

**23<sup>rd</sup> May 2016**

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*Image 1: Expert Roundtable Meeting held at DROPS*

### **Introduction:**

On 23<sup>rd</sup> May, the Organization for Policy Research and Development Studies (DROPS) in facilitation of the core activity of its 5-Months Training Program on ‘How to develop a Policy Brief,’ which is the development of a Policy Brief on Afghan Migration by the training participants, a Expert Roundtable was held at DROPS to evoke discussion and critical feedback on the literature review gathered by the trainees to feed into their final policy brief on Migration.

The Purpose of this seminar was to bring together experts in the field of migration and refugees to critique and evaluate the first draft of the literature review, authored jointly by all 13 participants of the training program.

The roundtable experts offered the following critiques:

- a. Identifying any existing gaps in the draft literature review.
- b. Highlighting facts and figures that maybe missing in the literature review.
- c. Suggesting other policies and strategies that may have not been taken into consideration in the literature review.
- d. Collecting recommendations on how to address migration issues identified by literature review.

The experts invited to the roundtable included figures who have worked on issues related to refugees and migrants from a policy, advocacy and programming lens, both in the context of returnees in Afghanistan and in asylum seekers in Europe.

**1: Ms. Mio Sato, Senior Program officer International Organization for Migration | Afghanistan**

**2: Ms. Nahid Shahalimi, Initiator & Organizer at COEXIST- Stand Up For Unity**

**3: Mr. Shakib Mohsanyar, Founder of Afghanistan Needs You Campaign**



*Image 2: Roundtable Experts*

The roundtable started with an introduction to DROPS and its Training Program on ‘How to Develop a Policy Brief’ presented by Mariam Safi, Executive Director of DROPS. As an interdisciplinary and independent research-oriented non-governmental organization, DROPS’ goal is to facilitate and encourage Afghanistan’s transition to democratic governance by aiming to (1) produce policy-relevant research that provides information and makes available resources to decision-makers at the national and subnational levels, particularly the Upper and Lower Houses of the National Assembly; and (2) increase women’s involvement in policy dialogue and research on a diversity of issues that are at play in building democratic governance. In completion, Mariam explained the various activities DROPS was working towards to meet its above objectives. She spoke about DROPS annual Peer Reviewed publication titled, Women and Public Policy Journal, authored by Afghan women on various topics at play in building democratic governance in Afghanistan. She also spoke of DROPS 5-Month Training Program on ‘How to Develop a Policy Brief,’ and the subsequent Migration Policy Brief the trainees are currently developing and which is the topic of today’s Expert Roundtable.

The Policy Brief on Afghan Migration is being authored by 13 participants of DROPS training program (mentioned above). The trainees have thus far completed the first draft of their literature review by gathering secondary data on strategies, policies and academic/newsprint reports on issues related to refugees and migrants. The purpose of the Expert Roundtable was to have the trainees present the findings of their literature review to the experts who will critique the findings while identifying any gaps, facts and figures and other literature that may not have been considered and should be looked at by the trainees in finalizing their brief.



*Image 3: Session One*

**Session one:** Problem Description?

Mariam Safi commenced the presentation of key findings in the literature review by identifying the problem description(s) surrounding Afghan migration visa vie national policies/strategies, reintegration and repatriation framework, and awareness programs. Mariam stated that Afghanistan is currently experiencing mixed migration flows, with emigration of refugees and asylum seekers, seasonal and permanent outflows of economic migrants, internal movements, and the return of Afghans who had previously sought safety abroad. She underscored that the scale of these mixed flows has important consequences for the country’s development and governance. However, while the Afghan government has worked with the international community to create migration and development policies over the last decade, little has been done to implement these policies, to provide either regular emigration pathways for Afghans, such as labor migration corridors, or to support the sustainable return and reintegration of returnees and internally displaced persons. She also stated that there was significant confusion between refugees and migrants in Afghanistan and that clarification of terminology was key to addressing many of the issues surrounding migrants.

Additionally, she touched upon the lack of data on migration flows, which remain scarce and pointed to how estimates of remittances and other indicators key to understanding migration trends are unreliable. Data on transit, circular or irregular migration are either not available or, where available, are not representative of the actual situation.

**Session two:** International Conferences on Afghanistan discussing Migration Issues

Group 1 completed the first component of the literature review- the trainees were divided into two groups with Group 1 responsible for gathering secondary data on International Conferences and Afghan Government policies and strategies and Group 2 responsible for gathering secondary data from academic papers, articles, reports and newsprint.

Group 1 literature review showed that migration and refugees have been frequently discussed topics at international conferences on Afghanistan.

The most important international conferences that migration and refugees topics were discussed in included:

- **Bonn Conference of 2001**
  - Concerning to refugee and migration, the conference didn't include a specific program on the issue; except the point on the involvement of Afghan refugees living in Pakistan, Iran and elsewhere, and Afghans from the diaspora participating in the Emergency Loya Jirga.
- **The London conference 2006**
  - Afghan government and international community agreed on the Afghanistan Compact, consistent to the goals of the Afghanistan Millennium Development Goals, identifying three critical and interdependent pillars of activities for a period of five including: Security, Governance, Rule of Law and Human Rights; and Economic and Social Development.
- **Paris Conference of 2008**
  - Similar to London Conference, included economical and fund-raising purpose which took priority above security and human rights issues. The interesting point about this conference was that that it imposed measures to tackle the problem of inefficiency of expenditure of assistance aid for the first time since 2001.
- **London Conference 2010**
  - Labour migration, return and reintegration of refugees were part of the agenda. Regarding labour migration, the Afghan government made attempts to regulate the flow of export and import of labour and regional countries were urged to be more receptive to Afghan work force.
- **Bonn Conference of 2011**
  - Reaffirmed the international communities commitments in the areas of governance, security, the peace process, economic and social development and regional cooperation. However, while the conference focused on regional primarily in the area of security and economic integration it also touched on the support of neighboring countries in particular Pakistan and Iran's assistance and support in providing temporary refuge to millions of Afghans in difficult times.
  - International Conference on the Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees to support Voluntary Repatriation, Sustainable Reintegration and Assistance to Host Countries (May 2012)

- Witnessed the International Community endorse the Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees, the main regional framework for joint interventions (Afghanistan, Iran and Pakistan) aimed at identification and implementation of solutions and providing support to host countries.
- **Tokyo Mutual Accountability Framework 2012**
  - Focused on the priorities of the Afghan Government as contained in its strategy paper towards Self-Reliance in the decade of Transformation (2014-2024). In the conference, the issues of refugees, return and reintegration of Afghan refugees and internally displaced persons were underscored as key elements to security and stability.
  - The International Community expressed their commitment to the furthering of development and reintegration potential in Afghanistan to support the return of refugees from neighboring countries.
- **The London Conference of 2014**
  - Recognized that the issue of Afghan refugees impacts on the economic development of regional countries. It commended regional countries, in particular Pakistan and Iran, for their efforts in hosting millions of Afghans.
  - In this regard, the conference called on the International Community to provide further support and assistance to enable the voluntary repatriation and resettlement of refugees in Afghanistan in a safe, timely and dignified manner.
  - Furthermore, it stressed more efforts were required to address the issue of irregular migration

**Session two:** Existing Policies and strategies in Afghanistan?

After highlighting the various international conferences on Afghanistan and how they guided the development of refugee and migration concepts and thinking in Afghanistan, Group 1 then discussed the gaps in the policies and strategies that were consequently developed as a product of these conferences.

- **The Afghanistan National Development Strategy (ANDS)**
  - Pillar 7 of ANDS for 2008-2013 focused on refugees, returnees and internally displaced persons among other issues. The aim of this pillar was to facilitate the planned and voluntary return of refugees and IDPS and their reintegration into society- this was expected to contribute to economic growth, the reduction of poverty and the strengthening of security and stability of the country and the region.

- **The National Policy on Internally Displaced Persons (IDP)**

- A significant document on internally displaced persons endorsed in 2014 recognizing special measures to protect the rights and address the needs of vulnerable IDPs to ensure that they are not discriminated against because of their displacement and that they enjoy equal protection of the law.
- Even though, the policy covers much of the causes facilitating IDPs and defines responsibilities of involved actors, its application is hindered because the Ministry of Refugees and Repatriation (MoRR) strategy does not address the IDP policy or include the realization of IDP's basic rights as citizens of Afghanistan, complicating protection of IDPs.

- **Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees (SSAR)**

- Is the only strategy that exists in dealing with the reintegration of refugee returnees in Afghanistan. It is also the only regional policy framework that touches on strengthening partnerships with regional countries and development actors to advocate for sustainable solutions for returning refugees.
- Afghanistan's refugee policy is guided by the five priority areas of the SSAR: voluntary repatriations, access to shelter and essential services, livelihoods and food security, social and environmental protection, and capacity development.



*Image 4: Session Two*

- Since 2012, there have been concerted efforts by the three Governments and UNHCR to operationalize the strategy, including the development of country specific portfolios of projects. More than 50 Government agencies, humanitarian and development actors, including UN agencies, international organizations and NGOs are engaged in the formulation of the country specific portfolios, which were designed around the interlinked sectors of education, health and livelihoods.

- However, the implementation of SSAR has been hindered by corruption and lack of capacity as found by a SIGAR assessment in 2015.
- **National Labour Migration Strategy (NLMS)** [pending Cabinet endorsement]
  - NLMS recognizes the crucial role of labour migration as a safety valve for local employment problems and its potential to promote local economic development through remittances and diaspora engagement.
  - Three core NLMS pillars are (1) protection of the rights of migrant workers and support services, (2) increasing the development benefits of labour migration, and (3) improved overseas labour administration.
  - The absence of bilateral agreements with receiving countries is not allowing for labor-migration corridors to be opened.

### **Session Three:** What are the Current Migration Trends in Afghanistan?

Group 2, gathered secondary research that focused on identifying current migration trends in Afghanistan, what the push and pull factors are that force people to leave and, or return back to Afghanistan, what is the status of re-migration and other reliable data that can help shed light on issues pertaining to the sudden rise in migration amongst Afghans.

- Unlike, other major periods of population movement and displacement in Afghanistan that were characterized as ‘refugee movements,’ the current trends in migration are best characterized as increased irregular returns, internal displacement, and asylum flows to Europe.
- While conflict-induced migration continues, many Afghan are now moving within the country or abroad in search of greater economic opportunity and better living conditions.
- Changing dynamics of Afghan migrants:
  - The fall of the communist regime in the early 1990s prompted Afghans to move to the West. Generally characterized as middle class, highly skilled, politically persecuted, or seeking family reunification visas or special immigrant visas, such individuals easily acquired refugee status and later citizenship in Europe.
  - Since the early 2000s, the profile of Afghans in the West, particularly those arriving in Europe, has turned to the less-educated or low-skilled, refugees and asylum seekers, and visa over stayers.
  - Post-2001 were primarily young men in their 20-30’s
  - Post-2006 saw an increase in unaccompanied minors
  - Post-2008 there was an increase in women migrating for marriage

- Facts and Figures

1) Afghans are the second largest group entering the European Union.
2) In 2015, 178,230 Afghans sought asylum in the 28 states of the EU.
3) Leaked draft EU report said 223,000 Afghan illegal migrants had entered the EU in 2015, illustrating that many did not seek asylum.
4) There are estimated to be 1.1 million Afghans internally displaced.
5) The Afghan Diasporas is estimated between 4 – 6 million.
6) Pakistan is host to more then 2.9 million refugees and irregular migrants.
7) Iran is host to nearly 2 million refugees and migrants.

- Push factors:

- Migration Policy Institute:  
*The spectrum of motivations varies between “voluntary” and “forced” movement due to conflict or natural disaster.*

- Maastricht Graduate School of Governance  
*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 – are all impetuses for people to migrate.*

- Friedrich Ebert Stiftung  
*Younger migrants justified their wish to go to Europe by point to the lack of economic and educational opportunities in Afghanistan.  
Families said that their brother and sons had friends or relatives already in Europe who were urging them to come.*

- Pull factors:

- According to the key findings of UNHCR, “Economic problems, Harassment, intimidation, eviction notices, movement restrictions and fear of arrest and deportation were mentioned by interviewed returnees as the leading push factors in 2015.

- Conversely, perception of an improvement in the security situation in some parts of Afghanistan, UNHCR assistance package, the perceptions of an improved employment opportunities and reduced fear of persecution were mentioned as the main pull factors encourage the return to Afghanistan.

- What is the status of remigration?

- There are no definite figures for remigration.

- However, the literature suggests that re-migration is high because the conditions that push Afghans to leave in the first place are still present, and reinforced by lack of social

and family networks, disconnect between their skills and limited economic opportunities in their communities of return, and a general lack of education and retraining opportunities, often leading to a financial obligation to seek remigration to justify investments made and debts incurred.

- As such the likelihood of further displacement or remigration remains high.
- What are the gaps in the existing policies and strategies?
  - Migration is inherently mixed in nature, with multifaceted drivers behind decision of whether and where to migrate or return and thus modern-day Afghan migrants do not fit into traditional policy categories like the Solution Strategy for Afghan Refugees. As a result this raises a number of questions crucial for policy implementation and service delivery.
  - There is confusion in Afghanistan between refugees and migrants so policies and strategies do not discuss the range of migration – from IDPs, to refugees, and returnees.
  - There is a missing link between reintegration assistance and development- reintegration assistance allows for fast track integration but not for longer-term development.
  - Need for discussion and debate in Afghanistan needs to move beyond a refugee discourse to a wider migration focus.
  - Despite some concerted efforts from the Afghan government to devise and establish a coherent reintegration policy, the existing return and reintegration framework remains ad hoc and driven largely by the wishes of donor governments.

### **Conclusion:**

The findings of the first draft of the literature review for DROPS Policy Brief on Migration was appreciated by all the experts at the roundtable who mentioned that this literature review highlighted the most problematic areas of migration and refugee in Afghanistan. They also found the literature review to include relevant data on trends, strategy and policies on migration. **The experts highlighted** that often it is difficult to find reliable and exact data about migration and refugees but that this problem not only existed in the Afghan context but also in European countries. For example, Expert Naheed Shahlani pointed out that in Europe, there are currently an estimated 100,000 and 120,000 thousand registered refugees that cannot be found in Germany. Moreover, she exclaimed that there is no data on displaced Afghans that remain in ‘the middle ground’ meaning in transit countries like Turkey, or data on how many migrants have been lost or killed on the migration path to Europe.

According to Expert Shakib Mohsenyar, who founded a campaign in Afghanistan called “Afghanistan Needs You,” most of the migrants from Afghanistan are youths who had jobs and a relatively good standard of living. This, Mohsenyar said was the saddest part of the migration crises in Afghanistan and represented a huge brain drain for the country that needs to be addressed in DROPS policy brief.

According to a survey of 830 men and women in Kabul conducted by Mohsenyar's youth group under the "Afghanistan Needs You" campaign, 39 percent of the respondents interested said they were willing to leave the country and 45 percent of those people were employed. Additionally, 61 percent of the respondents said they were uncertain of the future in Afghanistan. Yet in contrast to this finding, Mohsenyar stated that she felt there was an overall decrease in the level of migration out of Afghanistan and thought this to be an outcome of a slow rise in local optimism about the future stability of Afghanistan combined with an acknowledgement of the great potential for loss of life on the illegal migration paths that traffickers utilize. The latter has been facilitated by media channels in Afghanistan, which have given wide coverage of the migration movements and its deadly consequences.

According to Expert Mio Sato from IOM, explained that campaigns can play an important role in changing the mindset of people about migration particularly stories of realistic case studies. She urged that more campaigns targeting vulnerable groups should be developed to prevent mass migration. She exclaimed that last year (2015) IOM assisted 1400 returnees and that this year just between January to May (2016) IOM assisted 3000 returnees, a number that will continue to rise till year end.

The reintegration process and assistance by IOM is dependent on the government's bilateral agreement with IOM and this is different from one state to another. She argued that while migration crisis in Europe is of concern, addressing the refugee crisis in the region, particularly in Iran and Pakistan, continue to present the greatest crisis since they represent a much larger group and when they return to Afghanistan most do not receive any kind of repatriation support. She explained that while the international community was aware of this migration crisis it seemed that they are more keen on building the local economy in Afghanistan rather than individuals program to address the needs of returnees. Sato also asserted that it was crucial for the international community to help the Afghan government in building institutions and official's capacities on migration.

The Experts pointed out that reintegration programs need to be designed keeping in mind imperative questions such as:

- How do we plug the brain drain?
- How do we reintegrate migrants who have undergone trauma as a result of witnessing or having mental illness, suicide attempts, sexual abuse, physical abuse etc.?
- How do we reintegrate educated and qualified people?
- Should there be one reintegration program or many program each addressing different types of migrants?

At the current juncture, Experts and authors of the literature review were of the conclusion that traffickers were conducting a more successful campaign to entice the youth to leave the country than the Afghan government, local media or international actors. The Afghan government and its international partners must develop campaigns that could raise locals understandings of the threats of leaving and returning to Afghanistan. It was mentioned by the roundtable participants that perhaps migration should be viewed as a phased program rather than a permanent situation and connect migration to development. Unless, the sources for migration are not addressed in Afghanistan, with more context specific and holistic reintegration programs in place, returnees will either re-migrate or settle in urban slums which present viable breeding grounds for recruitment by armed military groups, gangs and other criminal networks.