MOBILITY DYNAMICS: AFGHANISTAN ONE YEAR AFTER AUGUST 15TH

DTM
IOM DISPLACEMENT TRACKING MATRIX

INTRODUCTION

The Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM) tracks and monitors displacement and population mobility. It is designed to regularly and systematically capture, process and disseminate information to provide a better understanding of the movements and evolving needs of displaced populations, whether on site or en route.

After the political transition by the De Facto Authorities (DFA) on August 15th, 2021, Afghanistan witnessed new patterns and dynamics of internal displacement, cross-border movements, and community needs. This brief report showcases the changes in cross-border flows, internal displacement, and community needs before and after August 15th, 2021, by comparing trends identified in three of DTM Afghanistan's regular data collection exercises: Baseline Mobility Assessment (BMA), Community-Based Needs Assessment (CBNA), and Flow Monitoring (FM). Data is collected for the BMA and CBNA at the settlement level through focus group discussions with community focal points throughout the country.[1] FM data is collected through interviews with both individual travelers and those travelling in groups at four border crossing points: the Dogharoun/Islam Qala and Milak/Zaranj points with the Islamic republic of Iran and the Torkham and Spin Boldak/Chaman points with Pakistan. Finally, deportee figures come from the Beneficiary Screening and Assistance Form collected by the Cross Border Return and Reintegration unit at IOM Afghanistan.

CROSS-BORDER MOVEMENTS IN AND OUT OF AFGHANISTAN: 2021 AND 2022

OUTFLOW

In 2021, movements over land from Afghanistan to the Islamic Republic of Iran and Pakistan averaged 413,000 per month, totaling 4.9 million by the end of the year. The monthly average between January and July 2021 was 446,000 while the average between August and December 2021 was 368,000 per month.

A total of 3.5 million documented movements took place from Afghanistan to Pakistan in 2021, three-quarters of which occurred before August 2021. Between August and December, only 922,000 movements to Pakistan occurred (26% of the year's total). Due to strict border controls, only documented individuals are allowed to enter Pakistan through the two border crossing points. Meanwhile, a total of 1.4 million movements over land were recorded from Afghanistan to the Islamic Republic of Iran in 2021. After August 2021, crossings of both documented and undocumented individuals rose substantially. Sixty-three per cent of outflow to the Islamic Republic of Iran occurred after August 2021, while 37% occurred before.

In 2022, movements over land out of Afghanistan have averaged 342,000 per month, totaling 2.4 million between January to July. The monthly average in the first half of 2022 is less than that of the first half of and throughout 2021. Fewer movements out of Afghanistan could be due to tighter controls by the DFA on irregular crossings as well as temporary border closures due to tensions.[2] Four-fifths of the outflows in 2022 so far were from Afghanistan to Pakistan (1.9 out of the 2.4 million). Movements between Afghanistan and Pakistan are largely documented movements related to the circular economy between the two countries. Often individuals will cross and return on the same day.

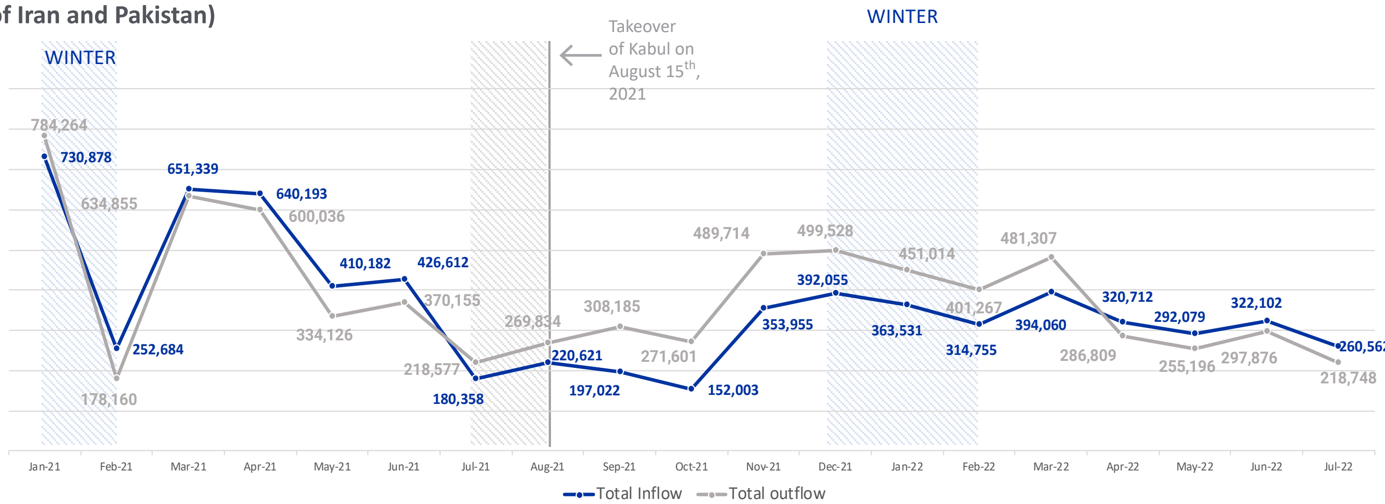
INFLOW

In 2021, movements over land into Afghanistan from the Islamic Republic of Iran and Pakistan averaged 380,000 per month, totaling 4.6 million by the end of the year. Almost three-quarters (72%) of all the inflows into Afghanistan were reported from Pakistan. The total inflow into Afghanistan from Pakistan decreased significantly after August 2021 (77% occurred between January and July while 33% occurred between August and December 2021). The proportion of returns that were facilitated by border authorities (due to lack of legal documentation to remain in Pakistan) among all recorded returns was less than one percent both before and after August 2021.

Just over half of the inflow over land from the Islamic Republic of Iran to Afghanistan was between January and July 2021 (55%), while 45% occurred between August and December 2021. On average throughout 2021, 62% of returns were involuntary. From January to July 2021, 54% of all returns were deportees. The proportion of involuntary returns/deportees increased to 72% in the August to December 2021 period.

In 2022, movements over land into Afghanistan averaged 324,000 per month, totaling 2.3 million returns from January to July. The monthly average in 2022 is less than the monthly average over the same period in 2021. So far, 78% of inflow in 2022 is from Pakistan while 22% is from the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Figure 1. Overall Movement Patterns: Cross-Border Movements to/from Afghanistan and Neighboring Countries (Islamic Republic of Iran and Pakistan)



[1] Round 13 was conducted between April and June 2021 (BMA: 12,969 settlements assessed and 76,464 CFPs interviewed; CBNA: 12,949 settlements assessed and 76,379 CFPs interviewed). Round 14 was conducted in November and December 2021 (BMA: 13,187 settlements assessed and 82,923 CFPs interviewed; CBNA: 13,173 settlements assessed and 82,860 CFPs interviewed). Round 15 was conducted in March and April 2022 (BMA: 14,107 settlements assessed and 86,210 CFPs interviewed; CBNA: 13,981 settlements assessed, 85,318 CFPs interviewed).

[2] Tolo News, "Interior Ministry Cracks Down on Human Trafficking to Iran," 18 May 2022; France 24, "Pakistan-Afghan border reopens days after deadly clash," 27 February 2020.

In general, cross-border land movements decrease during the harsh winter months (December to February) and then accelerate during spring and summer. Though this trend is visible in both 2021 and 2022, the number of people crossing over is considerably reduced in 2022 compared to 2021. The peak of inflow movement after the harsh winter in 2022 is 40% less than that of 2021. Similar trends are seen in the outflows. This can be attributed to the fact that cross-border land movements reduced substantially after the takeover of Kabul in August 2021. Although cross-border movements increased after August 2021 and into the spring and summer of 2022, they did not reach the same levels as the same period in 2021.

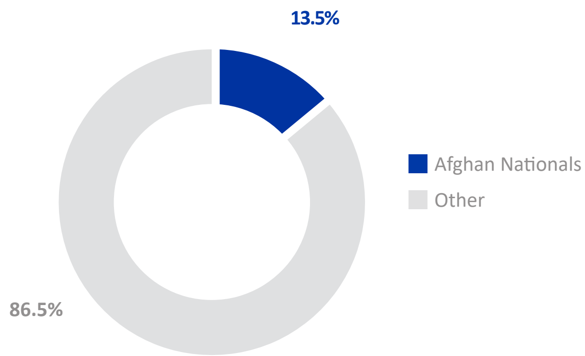
Another change seen is the inflow trends. Starting around April 2022, inflow became higher than outflow, which is reminiscent of the situation before August 2021.

EUROPE: ARRIVALS VIA THE MEDITERRANEAN

The political transition in Afghanistan in August 2021 did not have major effects on mobility dynamics across the Mediterranean Sea so far. Although the number of arrivals of Afghan nationals by sea and land to Europe via the Eastern and Central Mediterranean routes (Italy, Greece, and Bulgaria) in the first half of 2022 (8,623 individuals) is 3.5 times higher than in the same period of 2021 (2,462 individuals), they are much lower than the number recorded in 2015 (205,975 individuals) and 2016 (41,806).

In 2021, a total of 10,700 Afghan nationals were recorded to have arrived. Almost one-quarter of those (23%) arrived in the first half of 2021 and more than three-quarters (77%) arrived in the second half of the year.

Figure 2. Arrivals to Europe by Land and Sea: % by Nationalty



By mid-2022, at least 8,623 Afghan nationals are reported to have arrived via the same route. Thus far in 2022, Afghan nationals constitute 13.5% of all arrivals reported to Europe via all Mediterranean and Western African Atlantic routes (see Figure 2).[3] The upward trend in 2022 is mainly observed in arrivals by sea to Italy, although an increase in departures of Afghan nationals from Türkiye as well as interceptions at land borders and within the territory of Bulgaria has also been reported. Conversely, the number of recorded arrivals in Greece is fewer so far in 2022 compared to the same period in 2021.

ASYLUM APPLICATIONS OF AFGHAN NATIONALS IN EUROPE

First-time asylum applications of Afghan nationals in the EU (consisting of 27 countries as of 2020, UK excluded) peaked in September 2021, reaching 14,400, and then fell to between 6,000 and 8,000 each month so far in 2022.

The EU countries with the highest number of first-time asylum applications of Afghan nationals remained Germany, France, Austria, and Bulgaria.[4]

INTERNAL DISPLACEMENT AND RETURN TRENDS IN 2021 AND 2022

Afghanistan witnessed unprecedented levels of displacement and return from displacement between January 2021 and April 2022. Nationwide, almost one-third of the 5.8 million individuals currently in displacement were displaced between January 2021 and April 2022 (31%). Nearly one-half of the 10.1 million individuals who were formerly displaced and later returned home have done so in the same period (46%). The large increase in return can be attributed to the lessening of conflict. According to ACLED data, the number of violent events dropped significantly in the latter half of 2021 and in 2022 compared to before August 2021. Between January and July 2021, just under 8,000 violent events occurred (including battles, violence against civilians, explosions, riots, protests, and other developments). From August to December 2021, only 1,000 events took place. Similarly, in 2022, 1,600 violent events occurred between January and mid-August.[5] Assessments are currently ongoing to understand the voluntariness and, in some cases, forced nature of these returns.

Figure 3. Recent Displacement Trends

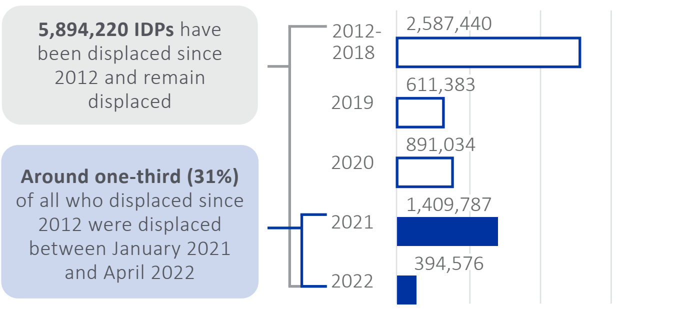
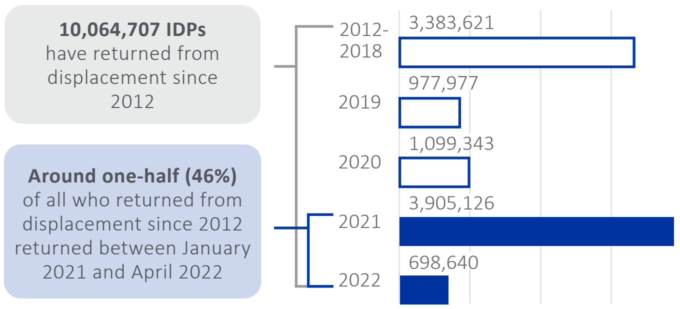


Figure 4. Recent Trends in Returns from Displacement



[3] These figures are form official national sources and include only registered and reported Afghan nationals. The figures do not include estimates of undetected Afghan nationals that may have arrived to Europe through Mediterranean routes undetected.

[4] Source: Eurostat.

[5] ACLED Dashboard, https://acleddata.com/dashboard/#/dashboard.

PROVINCES OF ORIGIN AND DISPLACEMENT IN 2021 AND 2022

Before the takeover of Kabul in August 2021, the largest share of IDPs who displaced in 2021 originated from Helmand province (13%) (data from April and June 2021). After August 2021, however, the largest share originated from Faryab province (9%). The shift in these shares is most probably affected by the reduction of conflict in some locations and rise of tensions in other locations. As of April 2022, Faryab remained the province of origin of the largest share of IDPs (9%) who displaced in 2021 and 2022 of IDPs.

Before August 2021, Helmand province hosted the largest share of IDPs displaced in 2021 (13%) (data from April and June 2021). After August 2021, Kabul province hosted the largest share of IDPs displaced in 2021 (19%) (data from November and December 2021). Among the IDPs displaced in 2021 and 2022, Kabul hosts the largest share (19%) (data from March and April 2022). Kabul province became the host of the largest share of IDPs likely due to the presence of the airport as many people were attempting to leave the country in the latter half of 2021.

Among the individuals who displaced between January 2021 and April 2022, 61% displaced due to conflict while 39% displaced due to natural disaster.

Before August 2021, Takhar province had the largest share of returned IDPs (17%) among those who returned in 2021 (data from April and June 2021). After August 2021, the province with the largest share of returned IDPs was Kandahar province (14%) (data from November and December 2021). By April 2022, Kunduz province had the largest share of returned IDPs among those who returned in 2021 and 2022 (12%).

Kandahar province experienced particularly high occurrences of battles in early 2021.[6] The lessening of violence in the province could explain the high level of return in the latter half of 2021.

COMMUNITY AND PROTECTION NEEDS

DEBT AND INCOME

The number of Afghan households in debt increased significantly from 2.4 million in mid-2021 (April to June 2021) to 3 million in late 2021 (November and December 2021). By spring 2022 (March and April), the number of households in debt decreased slightly to under 2.9 million. On average throughout Afghanistan, over half of households in the assessed communities (55%) have no source of income. When Afghan households need to repay debt, they are most likely to sell assets, move abroad or within Afghanistan, or sell land or their houses in order to do so. Households may also engage in unpaid labor to repay debts. Extremely vulnerable households sometimes engage in child marriage or selling their children or body organs.

Figure 5. Number of Households in Debt Nationwide

FOOD INSECURITY

Food consumption dramatically decreased between mid-2021 (April to June 2021) and spring 2022 (March and April), with approximately 50% of the assessed populations having to reduce their food intake. Currently, 69% of households cannot afford basic food needs (with similar rates in urban, rural, and peri-urban settings). In order to afford food, households engage in negative coping mechanisms. Slightly more than two out of five households (42%) rely on less preferred and less expensive foods. One in ten households borrows money or relies on humanitarian assistance to afford food (11% and 10% respectively). Eight per cent of households borrow food or seek help from friends or family. Small shares of households limit portion sizes (7%), restrict consumption among adults for children to eat (6%), engage in child labour (6%), skip meals (5%), and sell land to buy food (4%). Particularly vulnerable families engage in extreme coping mechanisms such as child marriage, selling children, and selling body organs. These are practiced at the very least at rates between one half of a per cent and 1% (but they are likely underreported).

[6] ACLED Dashboard, https://acleddata.com/dashboard/#/dashboard.

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