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The root causes of movement: Exploring the determinants of Irregular Migration from Afghanistan

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This paper is one of a series of occasional papers produced as part of the Department of Immigration and Border Protection's Irregular Migration Research Programme (Research Programme).

The Research Programme is intended to strengthen the evidence base on irregular migration, and is built on research framed in an open, inquiring manner that is objective and non-partisan. More information about the Research Programme can be found at:
http://www.immi.gov.au/pub-res/Pages/research/irregular-migration-research.aspx

The Occasional Paper Series aims to provide information on, and analysis of, specific irregular migration issues of relevance to Australia, within a broader migration and/or global context.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. This research was commissioned under the DIBP-ANU Collaborative Research Programme. It offers insights into the drivers, determinants, and decision-making of irregular migrants from Afghanistan. The research findings are drawn from an analysis of data collected in a survey of 2,005 households across 100 separate communities in Afghanistan between April and May of 2011. The paper provides a descriptive profile of irregular migrants and empirical modelling of the determinants of irregular migration through standard regression analysis.

2. For the purposes of this research, an irregular migrant is defined within the dataset as any individual who has migrated abroad without official documentation (e.g. tourist visa, work visa, student visa, UNHCR refugee status).

3. The research found that irregular cross-border movement from Afghanistan is not only common, but also widespread and becoming increasingly more dispersed, especially to neighbouring Pakistan and Iran. The main reason to migrate appears to have shifted over time. Movement was more related to security or political considerations prior to 2001, whereas since then, it is primarily driven by the search for employment. 87 percent of respondents migrating between 2007 and 2011 cited employment as the main reason for migration.

4. In terms of the characteristics of the survey sample, 65 percent of all those with an irregular migration experience are the household head, more than 80 percent are male and the average age at departure was 23 years old. Nearly three-quarters of the sample had no formal education prior to moving, 14 percent cited primary educational attainment, 15 percent reported secondary educational attainment and one percent had tertiary level education. A fifth of respondents were employed prior to migrating, 27 percent were unemployed and 11 percent were subsistence farmers. This indicates that those who move irregularly are predominately young males, of a lower socio-economic status, with little to no schooling and limited work experience.

5. Of those surveyed, three-quarters reported that family members were involved in the decision to migrate, with 19 percent making the decision alone and 7 percent relying on friends or others. In terms of the actual migration, 63 percent of respondents migrated with family, one quarter made the journey alone, and 12 percent with friends or others. This suggests that, in relation to more recent Afghan migration, families are playing a greater role, which may potentially be linked with an implicit household strategy to diversify the overall sources of livelihood. Importantly, the share of respondents migrating with family is far lower post-2001 compared to beforehand, suggesting that migration in a post-Taliban Afghanistan is less likely to be only about entire families fleeing for safety and more about an individual's or family's search for livelihood. Financial support of an irregular migrant was much more likely in the post-2001 period, suggesting a greater social element to the migration event when motivated by a livelihood strategy.

6. In relation to the destinations of the surveyed respondents, 55 percent cited going to Pakistan and 43 percent to Iran. The remaining two percent of respondents specified various European countries including the United Kingdom, Belgium and Greece, with a few individuals indicating travel to Saudi Arabia and Tajikistan. The preference for Pakistan was motivated predominantly by the ease of access, though better working and living conditions were also cited as drivers. Respondents' preferences for Iran were split between the ease of access and better working and living conditions, suggesting that Iran offers better job opportunities and labour market access in comparison to Pakistan. Nevertheless the number of Afghans attempting to move to Europe or elsewhere from a third nation – most commonly Pakistan and Iran – is increasing due to traditional destinations having weak economic prospects or as a result of Afghan migrants being subjected to hostile treatment in these countries. Turkey and

Australia, especially for Hazaras, have become popular destinations for those claiming asylum.

7. While 845 individuals from the sample reported having concrete plans to live in another country at some point in the future, only 8 percent of that 845 were in possession of a valid passport at that time. Of those individuals with migration intentions, 63 percent intended to move to the "West" including, by order of importance, the Netherlands, Canada, the United Kingdom, Germany, the United States and Australia.

1. THE IRREGULAR MIGRATION RESEARCH PROGRAMME

In August 2012, the Australian Department of Immigration and Border Protection (DIBP) established an Irregular Migration Research Programme (Research Programme) to identify and address the knowledge gaps in irregular migration research, with a particular focus on placing Australia's experience in a broader global and migration context. An underlying principle of the Research Programme is that the research be framed in an open, inquiring manner that is objective and non-partisan.

The Research Programme has been established as a multi-layered and integrated program including in-house research and analysis, commissioned research, a small grants programme, a multi-year research partnership arrangement with the Australian National University and a series of occasional papers.

The first occasional paper *Establishing an Evidence-Base for Future Policy Development on Irregular Migration to Australia* identified specific research gaps in the Australian context and made recommendations about how to fill these gaps, drawing on international experience.[1] In the first occasional paper, the authors highlighted the lack of research in Australia (and limited research internationally) on migrant decision making, recommending that further research be undertaken on decision making particularly as it relates to leaving origin countries and choosing a destination.

This occasional paper has been produced from research which was commissioned under the DIBP-ANU Collaborative Research Programme – one tier of the broader Research Program. The Collaborative Research Programme supports the broader Research Programme through the commissioning of research which offers insights into the drivers, determinants, and decision-making of irregular migrants.

2. INTRODUCTION

The occurrence of migration outside of any officially coordinated system is prevalent throughout the world. Although precise numbers on irregular migration are non-existent, IOM (2010: 29) estimates some 10-15 percent of the 214 million total migrants in 2010 could be categorized as irregular, while UNDP (2009: 23) puts that figure at a third within developing countries alone.[2] As a matter of concern for the individual, those embarking on such a journey expose themselves to great risk without the protection of any formal institution. From a states' perspective, on the other hand, the extent of irregular migration and its political sensitivity in countries both developed and developing post a real dilemma for policymakers trying to respond to such flows. With this in mind it is rather difficult to

[1] Koser and McAuliffe (2013).
[2] Clearly any official estimate is limited by the natural difficulties in surveying a specific population trying to avoid detection from government authorities, such as national census takers, for fear of deportation.

comprehend the apparent lack of analysis on irregular migration, and more specifically what factors might influence an individual to choose to migrate in an irregular manner.

This study explores irregular migration with a specific focus on the (post-) conflict environment of Afghanistan. Our methods to do so are two-fold: first, we sketch a descriptive profile of irregular migrants in order to gain insight into the features of the particular context in question; and second, we empirically model the determinants of irregular migration through standard regression analysis. Regarding the latter, irregular migration all too often is considered to be simply driven by the lack of capability to migrate through regular channels. While there may be some truth to such a notion, certain characteristics of the migrant may also influence the decision-making process. We therefore investigate the role pre-migration circumstances play, but also look at other relevant migration-related factors including the period in which migration occurred, destination and principal reasons for migrating, among others.

For both the descriptive and empirical analyses, we rely on a unique dataset originating from a household survey collected across Afghanistan in April and May of 2011. Overall the survey captures a wealth of information for 2,005 households across 100 separate communities. For our purposes, some 16 percent of all adults observed in the sample are identified as irregular, meaning they are either current irregular migrants or former irregular migrants who have since returned.

The remainder of this paper is structured as follows. We first provide a brief conceptual overview of irregular migration including essential definitions and potential determinants. Next we illustrate recent migration trends in Afghanistan in order to better understand the context within which our study is embedded. Clearly Afghanistan is a particular case, however the insights gained here may also be relevant to other fragile environments in a similar condition. We then move on to our analysis beginning with a more detailed account of our sample, followed by both the descriptive profile of irregular migrants as well as the empirical analysis used to identify the determinants of irregular migration. Finally we conclude with a brief discussion of the study's main findings.

3. IRREGULAR MIGRATION: DEFINITIONS AND CAVEATS

As a first step, it is important to clarify our understanding of irregular migration underlying this analysis. Critical to defining irregular migration is the recognition of multiple routes into irregularity (Uehling, 2004). The three main routes include: individuals entering a country without proper authority either through clandestine entry or with fraudulent documents; individuals entering with authority, but overstaying their authority; and individuals deliberately utilising the asylum system. However, Koser (2009) adds an additional route: individuals moving under the control of smugglers and traffickers, although we consider this similar to individuals entering a country without proper authority either through clandestine entry or with fraudulent documents. The primary distinction of significance for most receiving states is that between irregular entry and irregular staying (de Haas, 2008). For the purposes of this study, the focus is on irregular entry in which an irregular migrant is defined as someone, "crossing borders without proper authority, or violating conditions for entering another country" (Jordan and Düvell, 2002: 15).

In the case at hand our perspective is that of the country of origin, meaning we look at individuals leaving Afghanistan without proper documentation. Therefore, in practice we define an irregular migrant within our dataset as any individual who has migrated abroad without official documentation (e.g. tourist visa, work visa, student visa, UNHCR refugee status). As such, we are not able to capture other forms of irregularity like overstaying a visa or abuse of the asylum system, nor is it possible to discuss when an initially irregular migrant becomes regular once abroad through a regularization scheme. Furthermore, we are unable to distinguish when irregular movement was assisted by

smugglers or forced by traffickers, a fundamentally important element to the overall conversation yet not feasible here.

Beyond terminology, when reflecting on what may influence an individual to migrate irregularly one must recognize that in most cases migration in general is not driven by a single motivating factor but rather an array of factors which traverse social, economic, environmental and political considerations (de Haas, 2011; Koser, 2013). For instance, an individual may seek asylum abroad from political persecution due to a long standing context of conflict in a country but the trigger to migrate at a given time may occur from another factor, such as a lack of work opportunities, resulting in a mixed migration motivation. In another example, an individual may choose to work in the informal economy of an industrialized nation without documentation, yet this decision is encouraged by a long-held desire for family reunification. Regardless of the myriad of motivations which drive migration in general but also irregular migration in particular, it seems likely that economic interests are a fundamental factor in the decision-making process (IADB, 2008).

Moreover, when looking specifically at irregular migration one must appreciate the obvious parallels with regular migration, in that we can expect both to be very much related to the interconnected social, political and economic forces operating in both host and sending countries (Van Hear et al., 2012). For example, when the demand for foreign labour is not met by the supply of labour migration through formal channels, people routinely find their own informal, and often creative, ways to meet that demand. Indeed, Portes (1978: 472) found that one of the key defining characteristics of irregular immigration to the United States was that it was: “individuals who move with the sole purpose of selling their work capacity”. This consequently leads to the conclusion that the pull of a favourable labour market causes both regular and irregular migration, making distinct identification of the determinants of irregular migration in exclusion a challenge.

Still, even though it may not be difficult to imagine many of the same factors influencing both irregular and regular migration simultaneously, with the only difference being capability to move through a regular channel, there is also indication that the drivers of irregular migration in particular may be specific to the context in question. In this regard, Orennius (2001) found that there were five primary contributing factors driving irregular migration from Mexico to the US, a context noticeably different to that of Afghanistan yet still informative: first, the history of migration between the two countries; second, the importance of established networks including those with employers; third, the wide availability of smugglers that could be used to cross the border; fourth, the large wage gap between the two countries; and fifth, the immigration policies of both countries. As such, although there are several similarities between the determinants of regular and irregular flows, irregular migration events may have certain defining characteristics which most likely include an established history of movement between countries. Furthermore, individuals choosing to migrate through irregular channels may embody particular features which influence their decision-making process.

4. MIGRATION TRENDS IN AFGHANISTAN

Often migration in the Afghan context is viewed solely in relation to the most recent period of conflict, overlooking the fact that cross-border movement in the region has a deep-rooted historical precedence. Prior to the Soviet invasion, Afghans enjoyed the nearly unrestricted ability to move back and forth between both Pakistan and Iran, much of the time for temporary or seasonal employment opportunities (Stitger, 2006). The pull from stronger neighbouring labour markets along with close social and cultural ties helped establish robust social networks across locations (Montsutti, 2006). These networks were then able to be utilized and strengthened in the subsequent years of conflict when many were forced to flee because of extreme insecurity and general hardship.

Nonetheless, the conflict characterizing Afghanistan over the last 35 years has resulted in one of the worst episodes of forced displacement, both externally and internally, in recent memory. During the Soviet presence over much of the 1980s an estimated 5.8 million individuals fled to Pakistan and Iran while another 2 million are believed to have been internally displaced (CMI, 2008; Kuschminder and Dora, 2009). Even though the Soviet withdrawal by the end of the decade offered a brief period of respite in terms of those seeking refuge abroad, the optimism for calm quickly subsided with heavy infighting between rival mujahedeen factions and the Soviet-backed Najibullah regime. In the years up until the government's eventual fall in 1992, the official number of refugees peaked above 6.3 million individuals (UNHCR, 2013a).

When the government finally did succumb, Afghanistan experienced a massive return with more than half of those abroad at the time repatriating within two years. As the Taliban came to power in 1996, however, this considerable inflow came to a halt, only to be reignited following the removal of their strict regime by international forces in 2001. The promise of change that came along with the international community's presence in the country post-2001 led to large-scale repatriation, with some 2 million Afghans estimated to have returned in 2002 alone and another 3.7 million since then (UNHCR, 2014). Nonetheless the Afghan refugee population still remains the largest in the world with more than 2.4 million located in Pakistan and Iran (UNHCR, 2013b). Moreover the heightened insecurity in recent years along with uncertainty in regards to what the future holds beyond 2014 has led to a noticeable reduction in the number of individuals voluntarily repatriating in comparison to previous years.

Besides official refugees, the number of undocumented Afghans within the immediate region is sizable. Given the porous borders as well as the either direct or indirect past migration experience of many Afghans, movement to and from both Pakistan and Iran is fairly fluid with many lured by low-wage job opportunities (Koser, 2014). In Iran alone an estimated 1.4 million Afghans live without documentation, while another one million are believed to reside in Pakistan (UNHCR, 2013b). Migration outside the region, on the other hand, is relatively small, yet still significant, and in large part is made up of the better educated and highly skilled with the resources and wherewithal to embark on such a journey (Koser, 2014). Nevertheless, the total number of asylum claims by Afghans towards mostly industrialized nations is on the rise in what seems to be anticipation of the 2014 transition. Nearly 56,000 individuals applied for asylum in 2012, up from around 50,000 the year prior and 40,000 in 2010 (UNHCR, 2014). Similarly, the number of Afghans attempting to move on to Europe or elsewhere from a third nation, again commonly Pakistan and Iran, appears to be increasing as the appeal of those countries seems to have lessened due to weak economic prospects along with the systematic hostile treatment of Afghan migrants. In this regard Turkey and Australia, especially for Hazaras, have become popular destinations for those claiming asylum. Turkey alone received more than 4,600 claims in 2012 up from around 3,100 in 2011 and 1,900 in 2010, while Australia registered just above 3,000 applications compared to 1,700 in 2011 and 1,300 in 2010 (UNHCR, 2014).

Overall, migration trends in Afghanistan need to be considered in relation to the context of the moment. Over the last 35 years mobility has been a fundamental survival strategy for many Afghan families. Migratory flows have fluctuated greatly depending on the level of insecurity and the livelihood opportunities available. With the country on the brink of another important transition, there is some indication that uncertainty about the future is driving some to look abroad once more. However, whether this modest slowdown in return and rise in requests for asylum turns into a greater trend, and whether such movement takes place outside of regular channels, depends on any number of structural factors both within and outside of Afghanistan, as well as the characteristics of the potential migrant.

5. THE SURVEY SAMPLE

In order to explore irregular migration in Afghanistan, this analysis relies on data from a household survey collected for the IS Academy: Migration and Development "A World in Motion" project.[3] The objective of the questionnaire was to explore a diverse set of themes related to the relationship between migration and development processes. As such, a range of separate modules provide in-depth information for both individuals and households including general socio-economic characteristics, migration histories, future migration plans, return migration, remittances, transnational ties and more.

The data collection took place in April and May of 2011. While a purely random sample was not possible due to the limitations of conducting fieldwork in high-risk areas of Afghanistan, particular attention was paid to capturing the diversity of the population in order to increase the representativeness of the sample. The five provinces of Kabul, Herat, Balkh, Nangarhar and Kandahar were chosen because of their highly populated urban centres, geographical dispersion and varied profiles of migration. Moreover, within each province stratification between urban, semi-rural and rural districts was applied as a way to capture different socio-economic groups.[4] Specific communities within these districts were then identified as the primary sampling unit to be eligible for enumeration at random, following official administrative records provided by the Central Statistics Organization (CSO) of Afghanistan. Additionally the surveying of households followed a random starting point and fixed interval sampling methodology to increase representativeness within the primary sampling unit.

The overall sample captures information for individuals within 2,005 households from 100 communities. Table 1 illustrates the total number of adults, age 18 and older, within our dataset categorized by their migration status.

Table 1: Overview by Migration Status

Migration Status	Frequency	Percent
Non-Migrant	6,195	82.57
Current Migrant	241	3.21
Return Migrant	1,067	14.22
Total	7,503	100.00

Unsurprisingly the overwhelming majority of our sample is a non-migrant, while return migrants make up a noticeably substantial portion given the occurrence of repatriation in recent years. Current migrants on the other hand are few and far between making careful analysis of this group challenging. As such, when describing irregular migration in our sample, current migrants and return migrants are aggregated to form a distinct group. In this regard, Table 2 provides a general overview by regularity status.

[3] For more information, see the project homepage: http://mgsog.merit.unu.edu/ISacademie/index.php.
[4] Urban refers to those communities which are the district capital; semi-rural refers to those communities which share a common border with the district capital; and rural refers to those communities with no common border with the district capital.

Table 2: Overview by Regularity Status

Regularity Status	Frequency	Percent
Non-Migrant	6,195	82.57
Regular*	86	1.15
Irregular*	1,222	16.29
Total	7,503	100.00

Note: *Current and return migrants aggregated

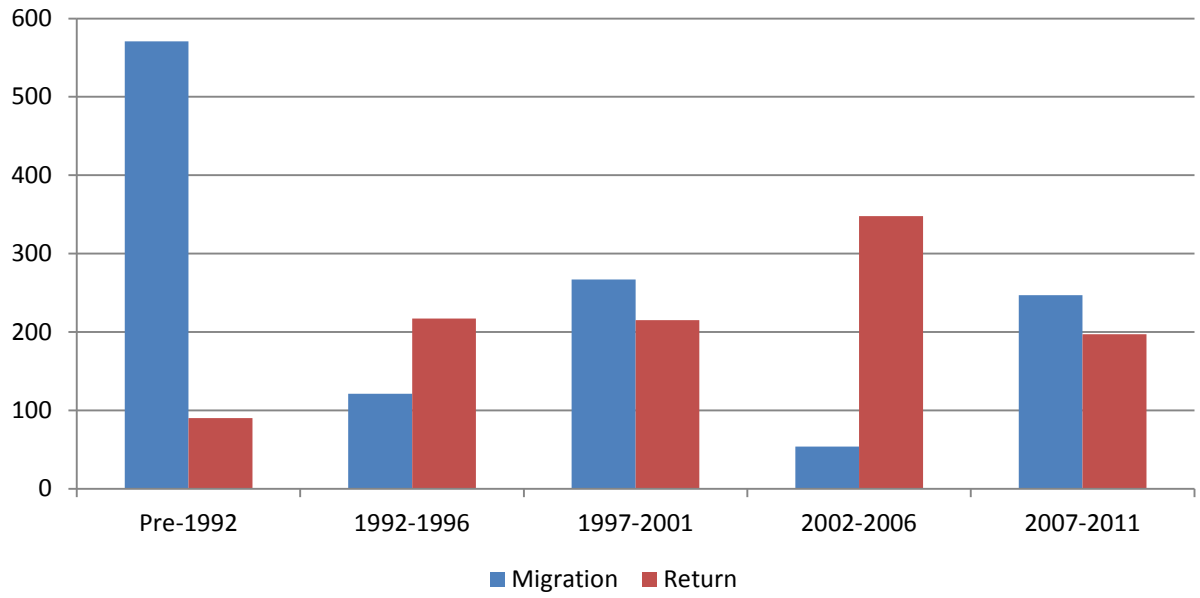
Following aggregation, we find that the vast majority of those individuals with a migration experience migrated without official documentation and therefore irregularly. Such a result largely substantiates what we already know of the migration context in Afghanistan, where movement to and from neighbouring countries outside of any regulated system is common. Whether such individuals are current irregular migrants or whether they once were irregular migrants yet have since returned is inconsequential to our analysis given the information provided from our questionnaire. Still, similar to issues just mentioned the severe imbalance between regular and irregular makes comparison between these two groups problematic. As such what follows in the descriptive profile focuses exclusively on irregular migrants.

6. DESCRIPTIVE PROFILE

In this descriptive profile, our aim is to highlight both pre-migration features of irregular migrants which help give an idea of socio-economic status prior to movement, as well as more specific migration-related factors pertaining to the irregular migration episode. We additionally look at the potential for irregular migration in the future based on migration intentions. Before that however, we provide an overview of both migration and return flows from our sample based on time of departure and return.

Figure 1 depicts a narrative consistent with what we know about the ebbs and flow of migration both from and back to Afghanistan. Migration in the pre-1992 period was prevalent due to conflict with the Soviet Union, slightly less so between 1992 and 1996 following the removal of the Najibullah regime despite infighting between rival mujahedeen factions, and higher once again in the Taliban years leading up to 2001. The expulsion of Taliban, however, led to a dip in departures as the number of those leaving in the sample reached its lowest point between 2002 and 2006, yet this decline reversed in the final 5-year time period ending in 2011. Return migration on the other hand neatly mirrors these outflows. Return flows in our sample were trivial in the pre-1992 period, and increased between 1992 and 1996 before cooling off in the Taliban years up until 2001. The initial post-2001 period, however, witnessed substantial return with the number repatriating reaching its peak, only to subside again in the final period between 2007 and 2011.

Figure 1: Migration and Return Flows



We next focus on the pre-migration characteristics of irregular migrants.[5] Beginning with basic characteristics we find that 65 percent of all those with an irregular migration experience were heads of households, more than 80 percent were male and the average age at departure was 23 years old. Figure 2 and Figure 3 describe the educational attainment and employment status, respectively, of irregular migrants prior to migrating. Figure 2 shows that nearly three-fourths of our sample had no formal education whatsoever prior to moving, whereas around the same amount report primary or secondary educational attainment and one percent had tertiary level education. Interestingly, this share of irregular migrants in our sample with no formal education virtually matches the official measure of the adult Afghan population not having any formal schooling (NRVA, 2013: 62).

Regarding employment, Figure 3 indicates that a fifth of respondents were employed prior to migrating, while 27 percent were unemployed and 11 percent were subsistence farmers. On the other hand just under half of the responses were not applicable to employment status meaning they were either in education, retired, permanently sick or disabled, in community or military service or doing housework. If we take these two indicators to characterize socio-economic status prior to migration, they suggest those moving irregularly are generally in a disadvantaged position in society. Indeed the vast majority of migration without documentation is done so by those with no formal education, and with little to no work experience.

[5] See Table A1 in the Appendix for comparisons of descriptive characteristics between non-migrants, regular migrants and irregular migrants.

Figure 2: Educational Attainment

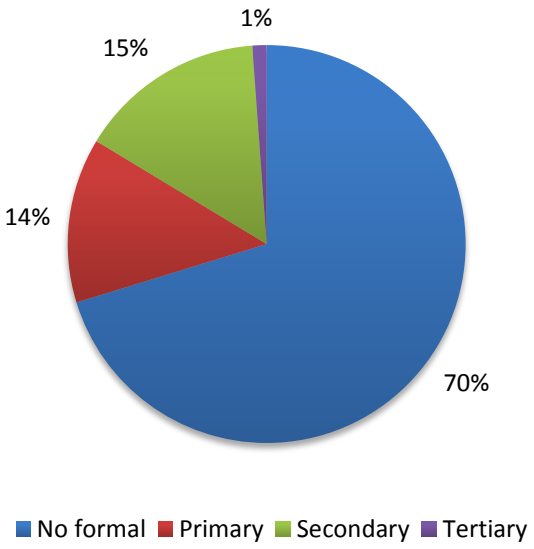
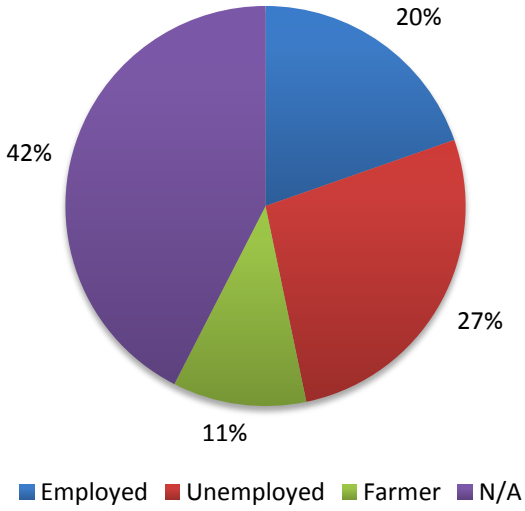


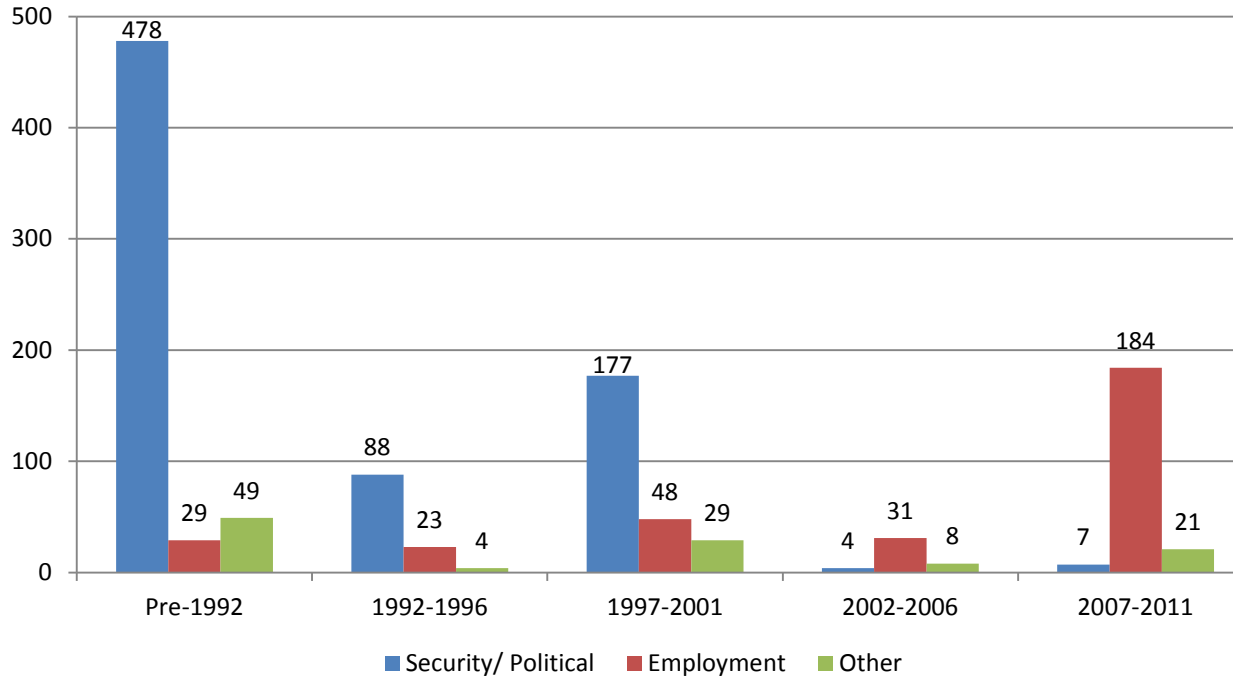
Figure 3: Employment Status



Beyond pre-migration characteristics, information relating to the irregular migration episode helps shed light on the migration decision-making process. Figure 4 illustrates the main reasons for migrating differentiated by period of migration. Unsurprisingly we see that prior to the 2001 NATO-led intervention, the vast majority of respondents moved because of security or political considerations.

This is in stark contrast to those leaving just after the international community's arrival and up until 2006, where absolute numbers were far lower and where the most predominant reason for moving relates to employment. This trend only intensifies in the last period between 2007 and 2011, with 87 percent of respondents during this time citing employment as the main reason for migration. Of those responses considered within the "other" category, reasons for migrating included family reunification or formation (marriage), education, environmental disaster, moving with family and health.

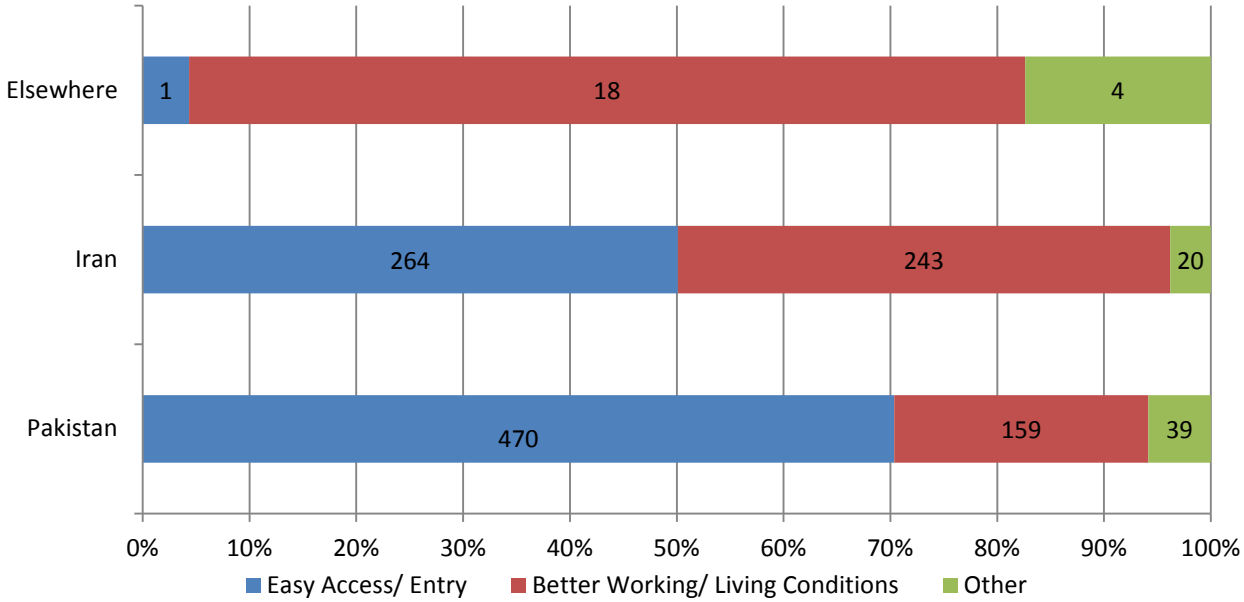
Figure 4: Main Reason for Migration



When it comes to where irregular migrants moved, as expected nearly all indicated Pakistan or Iran with 55 percent going to the former and 43 percent going to the latter. Of the only two percent who responded elsewhere, most specified various European countries including the United Kingdom, Belgium and Greece among others, and there were only a few individual cases of movement to Saudi Arabia and Tajikistan.

Additionally, Figure 5 provides the main reason for choosing destination by irregular migrants differentiated by each location. Those moving to Pakistan did so mainly because of easy access and entry into the country whereas around a quarter cited better working or living conditions. For Iran however, the main reason is nearly split between easy access or entry and better working or living conditions, suggesting greater job opportunities in comparison to the Pakistani labour market. Lastly, when considering the few of those moving to locations outside of Iran or Pakistan, better work or living conditions is the predominant reason. Of those who indicated “other” reasons, responses included family or friends already there and to study.

Figure 5: Main Reason for Choosing Destination



Besides the individual irregular migrants' motivations for migrating, we are also able to investigate other people involved in both the decision to migrate and act of migration itself. Three-quarters of irregular migrants report family members involved in the migration decision while 19 percent made the decision alone and 6 percent counted on friends or others. Furthermore, 63 percent of respondents migrated with family, while just over a quarter made the journey alone and 11 percent with friends or others. However, when disaggregating by the period of migration, the share of respondents migrating with family is far lower in the post-2001 period compared to the pre-2001 period, 21 percent compared with 77 percent respectively, suggesting again that movement since the Taliban's removal is less about the fleeing for safety by entire families and more about an individual's, or family's, search for livelihood.

Turning our attention to social networks, we look at both the contact respondents had with either family or friends living abroad prior to migration as well as the financial support they received at origin. Only 13 percent of all irregular migrants had contact with anyone abroad prior to embarking on the journey, suggesting the influence of cross-border networks in this particular case is not as crucial in the decision-making process as is often speculated. On the other hand, a third of respondents relied on either gifts or loans from friends and family to finance their journey in comparison with using savings or selling assets, indicating support at origin was rather significant. However, disaggregating by the period of migration again shows that this type of support was much more likely in the post-2001 period in comparison to the pre-2001 period, 56 percent compared with 26 percent respectively, potentially illustrating that migration motivated by a livelihood strategy necessitates a more robust social network of support.

Finally, we are also able to examine potential future flows of irregular migrants by considering migration aspirations at the time of survey. While 845 individuals in our sample reported having concrete plans to live in another country at some point in the future, only 8 percent of that 845 were in possession of a valid passport at that time. Of those individuals with migration intentions, 63 percent intended to move to the "West" including, by order of importance, the Netherlands, Canada, the United Kingdom, Germany, the United States and Australia. Conversely nearly a quarter planned on moving to a "Non-Western" country like Saudi Arabia or the United Arab Emirates, while the remaining 14

percent cited Iran or Pakistan. When differentiating by whether the respondent had a passport, no clear distinction arises in terms of destination choice. Moreover, when distinguishing by the reason for choosing that particular destination, nearly all respondents indicate better working or living conditions.

7. EMPIRICAL ANALYSIS

Here we provide a more detailed empirical analysis using standard regression techniques with the objective to identify the determinants of irregular migration from Afghanistan. Still, as was mentioned earlier, the extreme imbalance between irregular and regular migrants in our sample complicates our ability to appropriately model determinants for both groups. We therefore provide two separate comparisons: the first, more robust, looking at irregular migrants in relation to non-migrants; and the second, more tentative looking at irregular migrants in relation to regular migrants. In addition, because there is reason to believe more recent migration flows since the international community's arrival appear to be of a distinct nature as indicated in the descriptive profile, we also provide the same two comparisons but restrict our sample to those who departed post-2001.

Our empirical approach is to use two separate probit models to estimate the predicted probability of an individual being an irregular migrant in general when comparing to non-migrants, and in particular when comparing to regular migrants. The formal expression of the probit model is:

$$P(M_i = 1 \,|X_i) = \phi\beta_i X_i$$

where M_i indicates the binary dependent variable of individual i taking the value of 1 if s/he is an irregular migrant, or 0 whether s/he is a non-migrant and regular migrant respectively. X_i is a series of independent variables comprised of basic individual and migration-related characteristics included strictly in the second model. Moreover, β_i represents the regression parameter to be estimated and ϕ indicates the cumulative normal distribution function. All models are estimated using robust standard errors clustered at the household level, and we report the marginal effects along with their standard errors for easier interpretation.

Table 3 presents the results of the two separate probit models using the whole sample, estimating the predicted probability of an individual being an irregular migrant both generally and in particular.[6] Beginning with the general model comparing irregular migrants to non-migrants, a few statistically significant findings stand out. First, a household head and male respondent is on the margin 24 and two percentage points more likely to be an irregular migrant, respectively, while older individuals are slightly less likely. Compared to those with no formal education, respondents with some form of educational attainment are less likely to be irregular migrants and the scale of the marginal effect increases with each level. An individual with tertiary education for example is five percentage points less likely to be an irregular migrant. In terms of employment status, the unemployed are 11 percentage points more likely to be irregular migrants compared to their employed counterparts, whereas the same relationship albeit to a smaller scale exists for subsistence farmers and those with a non-applicable employment status.

[6] Summary statistics for all covariates used in the model can be found in Table A1 of the appendix.

Table 3: Probit Model

	General		Particular	
Dependent Variable	Irregular Migrants		Irregular Migrants	
Base	Non-Migrants		Regular Migrants	
	Marginal Effect	SE	Marginal Effect	SE
Household Head	0.2442***	(0.0098)	0.0030	(0.0138)
Male	0.0203**	(0.0084)	0.0250*	(0.0151)
Age^	-0.0078***	(0.0003)	-0.0001	(0.0004)
*Educational Attainment^*				
No formal	Reference	(.)	Reference	(.)
Primary	-0.0247***	(0.0084)	-0.0115	(0.0149)
Secondary	-0.0451***	(0.0066)	-0.0047	(0.0133)
Tertiary	-0.0547***	(0.0127)	-0.1070	(0.1060)
*Employment Status^*				
Employed	Reference	(.)	Reference	(.)
Unemployed	0.1121***	(0.0191)	0.0281*	(0.0160)
Subsistence farmer	0.0520***	(0.0155)	-0.0176	(0.0262)
Not applicable	0.0235***	(0.0075)	0.0202	(0.0133)
Household Size	0.0029***	(0.0011)	-0.0006	(0.0018)
Ethnicity				
Pashtun	Reference	(.)	Reference	(.)
Tajik	0.0105	(0.0072)	0.0067	(0.0133)
Hazara	0.0595***	(0.0195)	-0.0119	(0.0288)
Other	-0.0109	(0.0128)	0.0172	(0.0217)
District Type				
Urban	Reference	(.)	Reference	(.)
Semi-rural	-0.0037	(0.0070)	0.0096	(0.0100)
Rural	0.0099	(0.0075)	-0.0108	(0.0139)
Province				
Nangarhar	Reference	(.)	Reference	(.)
Kabul	0.0201**	(0.0096)	-0.0494***	(0.0187)
Herat	0.0086	(0.0100)	-0.0327	(0.0208)
Balkh	0.0028	(0.0118)	-0.0146	(0.0126)
Kandahar	-0.0358***	(0.0072)	-0.0168	(0.0150)
Migration: Post-2001			-0.0592***	(0.0166)
Destination				
Pakistan			Reference	(.)
Iran			-0.0163	(0.0158)
Other			-0.3619***	(0.1240)
Migration Reason				
Security/ Political			Reference	(.)
Employment			-0.0026	(0.0161)
Other			-0.0073	(0.0216)
Destination Reason				
Easy Access/ Entry			Reference	(.)
Better Conditions			-0.0156	(0.0116)
Other			-0.0007	(0.0178)
Migration Decision				
Family			Reference	(.)
Alone			0.0107	(0.0114)
Friends/ Other			-0.0037	(0.0293)

	Marginal Effect	SE	Marginal Effect	SE
Migrated With				
Family			Reference	(.)
Alone			0.0377**	(0.0164)
Friend/ Other			0.0559***	(0.0120)
Social Networks Abroad			-0.0179	(0.0124)
Method to Finance Trip				
Savings/ Sold Assets			Reference	(.)
Gifts/ Loans			0.0245**	(0.0107)
Other			0.0147	(0.0179)
R2 Adjusted	0.3625		0.2300	
N	7294		1187	

Note: ^ indicates information for regular and irregular migrants is prior to migration.

* p<0.10, ** p<0.05, *** p<0.01

Looking at some of the standard control variables, those respondents originating from a larger household are slightly more probable to be irregular migrants. Hazaras are six percentage points more likely to be irregular in comparison to the Pashtun reference group. As for location, there is no statistically significant difference regarding the type of district one originates from, yet an individual from Kabul is two percentage points more likely to be an irregular migrant while those from Kandahar are four percentage points less likely in comparison to respondents from Nangarhar.

In the next model comparing irregular migrants to regular migrants, we observe many of those statistically significant variables from the general model lose significance. Of the basic and pre-migration individual characteristics, only being male and unemployed leads to a respondent being marginally more likely to be an irregular migrant, both by three percentage points. Additionally an individual from Kabul is now less likely to be an irregular migrant in contrast to that which is seen in the general model. Focusing specifically on those migration-related characteristics, we find respondents who moved after 2001 were six percentage points less likely to be irregular migrants in comparison to those who moved before international intervention.

There is no statistically significant effect in terms of destination between Iran and Pakistan, however, unsurprisingly those migrating further abroad are much less likely, by 36 percentage points, to be irregular in comparison to the reference group. Moreover, we see no statistical significance when it comes to the reason one decides to migrate or why they choose a specific destination, nor depending on who was involved in the migration decision. On the other hand migrating alone as well as with a friend or other acquaintance is positively correlated with being an irregular migrant in comparison to those who made the journey with family, by four and six percentage points respectively. Likewise, being supported by family or friends through either a gift or loan in order to finance the migratory trip is associated with being slightly more likely to be an irregular migrant, by two percentage points, in relation to those who relied on savings or sold assets.

Despite irregular migration post-2001 being less prevalent than in the period prior, as indicated in the previous model there is reason to believe the nature of flows during this interval is fundamentally distinct in comparison to migration pre-2001. With this in mind, Table 4 presents the results of the same two models but with a restricted sample for those who departed post-2001.[7] Beginning once

[7] Summary statistics for all covariates used in the model can be found in Table A2 of the appendix.

again with the general model, we find similarly that a household head and male respondent is more likely to be an irregular migrant. Still, the marginal scale of the variable indicating head of household is much lower than before, suggesting a slight change in regards to which member migrates within the household. Age at departure still shows a negative sign despite being negligible. Concerning educational attainment, here only those respondents with secondary and tertiary qualifications are less likely to be irregular migrants, with the marginal scale again lower than that what was found earlier. With regard to employment status, now only a subsistence farmer is less likely to be an irregular migrant in comparison to an employed individual, again with marginal effects dampened.

Table 4: Probit Model, Post-2001

	General, Post-2001		Particular, Post-2001	
Dependent Variable	Irregular Migrants		Irregular Migrants	
Base	Non-Migrants		Regular Migrants	
	Marginal Effect	SE	Marginal Effect	SE
Household Head	0.0084***	(0.0026)	-0.0005	(0.0440)
Male	0.0274***	(0.0041)	0.1313**	(0.0562)
Age^	-0.0009***	(0.0001)	-0.0015	(0.0015)
*Educational Attainment^*				
No formal	Reference	(.)	Reference	(.)
Primary	-0.0034	(0.0024)	-0.0588	(0.0538)
Secondary	-0.0068***	(0.0021)	0.0122	(0.0289)
Tertiary	-0.0108***	(0.0027)	-0.0857	(0.1966)
*Employment Status^*				
Employed	Reference	(.)	Reference	(.)
Unemployed	0.0057	(0.0063)	0.0971***	(0.0364)
Subsistence farmer	-0.0104***	(0.0029)	0.0520	(0.0811)
Not applicable	-0.0040	(0.0028)	0.0583	(0.0416)
Household Size	0.0006*	(0.0004)	-0.0008	(0.0056)
Ethnicity				
Pashtun	Reference	(.)	Reference	(.)
Tajik	0.0024	(0.0025)	0.0160	(0.0387)
Hazara	0.0150*	(0.0084)	-0.1458	(0.1296)
Other	-0.0060**	(0.0025)	0.0000	(.)
District Type				
Urban	Reference	(.)	Reference	(.)
Semi-rural	0.0001	(0.0020)	0.0062	(0.0324)
Rural	0.0126***	(0.0034)	-0.0305	(0.0457)
Province				
Nangarhar	Reference	(.)	Reference	(.)
Kabul	0.0048*	(0.0028)	-0.0987	(0.0627)
Herat	0.0293***	(0.0059)	-0.0805	(0.0521)
Balkh	0.0204***	(0.0058)	-0.0351	(0.0254)
Kandahar	-0.0043**	(0.0018)	-0.0274	(0.0602)
Destination				
Pakistan			Reference	(.)
Iran			-0.0232	(0.0309)
Other			-0.6232***	(0.1813)
Migration Reason				
Security/ Political			Reference	(.)
Employment			0.0209	(0.0663)
Other			0.0767	(0.0626)

	Marginal Effect	SE	Marginal Effect	SE
Destination Reason				
Easy Access/ Entry			Reference	(.)
Better Conditions			-0.0101	(0.0278)
Other			-0.0829	(0.0862)
Migration Decision				
Family			Reference	(.)
Alone			-0.0080	(0.0329)
Friends/ Other			0.0000	(.)
Migrated With				
Family			Reference	(.)
Alone			0.1294	(0.1014)
Friend/ Other			0.2171**	(0.0884)
Social Networks Abroad			-0.0320	(0.0355)
Method to Finance Trip				
Savings/ Sold Assets			Reference	(.)
Gifts/ Loans			0.1045**	(0.0471)
Other			0.0958	(0.0603)
R2 Adjusted	0.2463		0.3847	
N	6421		272	

Note: ^ indicates information for regular and irregular migrants is prior to migration.

* p<0.10, ** p<0.05, *** p<0.01

Regarding control variables, most results are similar yet with a lower marginal effect despite a few variables gaining statistical significance. In particular to those variables specifying location, it seems an individual from a rural district as well as from Herat and Balkh provinces is now slightly more likely to be an irregular migrant. Considering that migration post-2001 is motivated more by employment opportunities abroad, it is unsurprising that rural households now are more likely to be the origin of irregular migrants than their urban counterparts. Moreover the statistical significance of provinces like Herat and Balkh post-2001 may indicate a more recent dispersion from where irregular migrants originate.

Finally, looking at the particular model again we see once more that most of those statistically significant variables in the general model lose significance. Still, being male and unemployed remain statistically significant and positive, and actually gain in scale in comparison to the situation when the whole sample is in the analysis. Additionally, considering migration flows are more likely driven by employment since 2001, the 10 percent marginal effect for the unemployed variable is telling. Beyond this result however, all other statistically significant results are similar to that which was seen before including destination other than Pakistan or Iran, migrating with a friend or other acquaintance and relying on gifts or loans in order to finance the trip. Nevertheless, the marginal effect for each is amplified compared to the model using the whole sample, with the latter two again potentially indicating a greater social element to the migration event when motivated by the search for livelihood opportunities.

8. CONCLUSION

Despite the widespread occurrence of irregular migration in both the developed and developing world, there is a gap in understanding the specific determinants of irregular migration. This study has aimed to contribute to filling this research gap by exploring the determinants of irregular migration within the (post-) conflict environment of Afghanistan, taking both a descriptive and empirical approach. Relying on a unique dataset, we first profile irregular migrants in our sample and second model the

determinants of being an irregular migrant for both the whole sample and those who migrated post-2001.

The descriptive profile paints a consistent picture in regards to what we know about the history of migration in Afghanistan. Over the last 35 years migration trends have generally ebbed and flowed in direct response to both insecurity and the lack of livelihood opportunities. Despite the rise and fall in migration flows, irregular cross-border movement has been common throughout this time period, especially to and from neighbouring Pakistan and Iran. The results highlight that the vast majority of migration from Afghanistan has been, and continues to be irregular.

The descriptive analysis indicates that those who move irregularly are predominately of a lower socio-economic status, with little to no schooling and limited work experience. Moreover the main reason for migrating has shifted over time. Unsurprisingly, migration was primarily motivated by security or political considerations prior to 2001, whereas since then it has been primarily driven by the search for employment. This emphasis on migration for livelihood is greater for those moving to Iran in comparison to Pakistan, which may indicate the greater demand for low-skilled labour in Iran due to the nature of its economy. Likewise, the fact that migrating alone is more prevalent post-2001, and that the trip is also more likely financed through gifts or loans from family and friends, gives credence to the notion of migration for livelihood potentially being based on a strategy at the household level. Finally, taking into consideration the intentions to migrate of those individuals without an official passport suggests irregular migration is likely to continue into the near future.

As for the empirical analysis focusing on the determinants of migration, we notice a number of pre-migration characteristics of statistical significance. In the general model, individuals with a lower educational background are consistently more likely to be irregular migrants compared to non-migrants. There is also evidence in both the general and particular models that those with less employment experience are more likely to migrate, yet the statistical significance varies across specification. Regarding location, it seems the origin of irregular migrants has dispersed more recently to include mostly rural areas and more provinces.

When it comes to migration-related factors, we find irregular migration to be less likely in the post-2001 period than in the previous period, even though it still dominates overall flows. Moreover, our analysis finds evidence that those individuals migrating beyond neighbouring Pakistan and Iran, which in this case was primarily to various European countries and Saudi Arabia, are less likely to have made the journey through irregular channels. It is important to note, however, that most research on irregular Afghan migration to other countries, such as Australia and those in Europe, does find that majority of these flows are irregular (Boland, 2010; McAuliffe, 2013; Vervliet et al., 2014). Even though the number of individuals in our sample that did move outside of Pakistan and Iran is limited, this finding may still indicate the difficulties in doing so given the associated costs and sheer distance. Additionally, those respondents migrating with a friend or other acquaintance are more likely to be irregular migrants in comparison to those individuals migrating with family, while the same goes for those relying on financial support from family or friends to finance the journey. This last finding again potentially indicates a greater social element to the migration event when motivated by the search for employment, possibly as part of an implicit household strategy to diversify the overall sources of livelihood.

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APPENDIX

Table A1: Summary Statistics

	Non-Migrant		Regular Migrant		Irregular Migrant	
Variable	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Household Head	0.19	(0.39)	0.37	(0.49)	0.65	(0.48)
Male	0.48	(0.50)	0.72	(0.45)	0.82	(0.39)
Age^	34.16	(15.99)	25.53	(12.09)	23.37	(13.13)
*Educational Attainment^*						
No Formal	0.67	(0.47)	0.59	(0.49)	0.70	(0.46)
Primary	0.11	(0.31)	0.16	(0.37)	0.13	(0.34)
Secondary	0.19	(0.39)	0.21	(0.41)	0.15	(0.36)
Tertiary	0.03	(0.16)	0.03	(0.18)	0.01	(0.11)
*Employment Status^*						
Employed	0.23	(0.42)	0.42	(0.50)	0.27	(0.45)
Unemployed	0.04	(0.20)	0.05	(0.21)	0.12	(0.33)
Subsistence farmer	0.04	(0.19)	0.09	(0.29)	0.11	(0.31)
Not applicable	0.69	(0.46)	0.44	(0.50)	0.50	(0.50)
Household Size	8.29	(2.81)	8.20	(2.58)	7.72	(2.75)
Ethnicity						
Pashtun	0.47	(0.50)	0.37	(0.49)	0.45	(0.50)
Tajik	0.41	(0.49)	0.44	(0.50)	0.42	(0.49)
Hazara	0.05	(0.22)	0.17	(0.38)	0.08	(0.27)
Other	0.06	(0.24)	0.01	(0.11)	0.05	(0.21)
District Type						
Urban	0.51	(0.50)	0.50	(0.50)	0.49	(0.50)
Semi-rural	0.24	(0.42)	0.20	(0.40)	0.26	(0.44)
Rural	0.26	(0.44)	0.30	(0.46)	0.25	(0.44)
Province						
Nangarhar	0.22	(0.42)	0.14	(0.35)	0.24	(0.42)
Kabul	0.21	(0.40)	0.31	(0.47)	0.22	(0.41)
Herat	0.17	(0.37)	0.19	(0.39)	0.20	(0.40)
Balkh	0.20	(0.40)	0.29	(0.46)	0.19	(0.39)
Kandahar	0.21	(0.40)	0.07	(0.26)	0.15	(0.36)
Migration Post-2001			0.57	(0.50)	0.22	(0.41)
Destination						
Pakistan			0.25	(0.44)	0.55	(0.50)
Iran			0.60	(0.49)	0.43	(0.50)
Other			0.15	(0.36)	0.02	(0.14)
Migration Reason						
Security/ Political			0.40	(0.49)	0.63	(0.48)
Employment			0.47	(0.50)	0.28	(0.45)
Other			0.14	(0.35)	0.10	(0.29)
Destination Reason						
Easy Access/ Entry			0.33	(0.47)	0.60	(0.49)
Better Conditions			0.58	(0.50)	0.35	(0.48)

Variable	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Destination Reason (cont'd)						
Other			0.09	(0.29)	0.05	(0.22)
Migration Decision						
Family			0.77	(0.42)	0.75	(0.43)
Alone			0.20	(0.40)	0.19	(0.39)
Friends/ Other			0.02	(0.15)	0.07	(0.25)
Migration With						
Family			0.62	(0.49)	0.63	(0.48)
Alone			0.35	(0.48)	0.25	(0.43)
Friend/ Other			0.03	(0.18)	0.12	(0.32)
Social Networks Abroad			0.19	(0.39)	0.13	(0.34)
Method to Finance Trip						
Savings/ Sold Assets			0.58	(0.50)	0.60	(0.49)
Gifts/ Loans			0.31	(0.47)	0.33	(0.47)
Other			0.10	(0.31)	0.07	(0.25)

Note: ^ indicates information for regular and irregular migrants is prior to migration.

Table A2: Summary Statistics, Post-2001

	Non-Migrant		Regular Migrant		Irregular Migrant	
Variable	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Household Head	0.19	(0.39)	0.22	(0.42)	0.30	(0.46)
Male	0.48	(0.50)	0.70	(0.47)	0.93	(0.26)
Age^	34.17	(15.99)	27.42	(10.72)	24.85	(9.61)
*Educational Attainment^*						
No Formal	0.67	(0.47)	0.52	(0.51)	0.58	(0.50)
Primary	0.11	(0.31)	0.24	(0.43)	0.18	(0.39)
Secondary	0.19	(0.39)	0.22	(0.42)	0.23	(0.42)
Tertiary	0.03	(0.16)	0.02	(0.15)	0.01	(0.09)
*Employment Status^*						
Employed	0.23	(0.42)	0.47	(0.50)	0.42	(0.49)
Unemployed	0.04	(0.19)	0.02	(0.15)	0.04	(0.19)
Subsistence farmer	0.04	(0.20)	0.04	(0.21)	0.09	(0.29)
Not applicable	0.69	(0.46)	0.47	(0.50)	0.45	(0.50)
Household Size	8.29	(2.81)	8.17	(2.54)	8.02	(2.73)
Ethnicity						
Pashtun	0.47	(0.50)	0.28	(0.46)	0.26	(0.44)
Tajik	0.41	(0.49)	0.50	(0.51)	0.59	(0.49)
Hazara	0.05	(0.22)	0.22	(0.42)	0.10	(0.30)
Other	0.06	(0.24)	0.00	(0.00)	0.04	(0.20)
District Type						
Urban	0.51	(0.50)	0.54	(0.50)	0.40	(0.49)
Semi-rural	0.24	(0.42)	0.20	(0.40)	0.20	(0.40)
Rural	0.26	(0.44)	0.26	(0.44)	0.41	(0.49)
Province						
Nangarhar	0.22	(0.42)	0.17	(0.38)	0.11	(0.32)
Kabul	0.21	(0.40)	0.15	(0.36)	0.18	(0.38)
Herat	0.17	(0.37)	0.24	(0.43)	0.34	(0.47)
Balkh	0.20	(0.40)	0.41	(0.50)	0.33	(0.47)
Kandahar	0.21	(0.40)	0.02	(0.15)	0.04	(0.20)
Destination						
Pakistan			1.00	(0.00)	1.00	(0.00)
Iran			0.07	(0.25)	0.13	(0.34)
Other			0.66	(0.48)	0.81	(0.39)
Migration Reason						
Security/ Political			0.27	(0.45)	0.05	(0.23)
Employment			0.13	(0.34)	0.04	(0.20)
Other			0.72	(0.46)	0.84	(0.36)
Destination Reason						
Easy Access/ Entry			0.15	(0.36)	0.11	(0.32)
Better Conditions			0.24	(0.43)	0.41	(0.49)
Other			0.59	(0.50)	0.55	(0.50)
Migration Decision						
Family			0.17	(0.38)	0.04	(0.20)

Variable	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Migration Decision (cont'd)						
Alone			0.69	(0.47)	0.63	(0.48)
Friends/ Other			0.00	(0.00)	0.04	(0.19)
Migration With						
Family			0.31	(0.47)	0.33	(0.47)
Alone			0.48	(0.51)	0.16	(0.37)
Friend/ Other			0.04	(0.21)	0.29	(0.45)
Social Networks Abroad			0.22	(0.42)	0.14	(0.35)
Method to Finance Trip			0.48	(0.51)	0.55	(0.50)
Savings/ Sold Assets			0.57	(0.50)	0.25	(0.44)
Gifts/ Loans			0.35	(0.48)	0.60	(0.49)
Other			0.09	(0.28)	0.15	(0.36)

Note: ^ indicates information for regular and irregular migrants is prior to migration.