Migration from Afghanistan to third countries and Greece

Angeliki Dimitriadi

Deliverable 2.1.

Background Report: Migration System 3 (Afghanistan)
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1. Introduction

The Islamic Republic of Afghanistan (henceforth Afghanistan) is part of the wider region of South and Central Asia. It is a region with a long and complex history, not only politically but also in the area of migration, whereby the main characteristic is the mobility of tribes and nomadic populations between neighboring countries. For at least two decades (1980 and 1990), Afghanistan was known for its geopolitical importance, but also for being one of the leading countries in the production of refugees and migrant flows, heading primarily to Pakistan and Iran.

The present report aims at framing the discussion around immigration from Afghanistan to Greece, the reasons for migrating, the push factors for their arrival and the composition of arrivals. The report begins with an overview of the geopolitical and historical context of Afghanistan, and recent developments that have shaped and continue to shape immigration today. A discussion of the two main destination countries- Pakistan and Iran- for Afghan immigrants follows, since current Afghan migratory flows are largely a result of the political changes in these countries and particularly the change towards the Afghan refugee population hosted until recently. Therefore their importance and role cannot be ignored. The report will close with an overview of Afghan immigration in Greece, the problems encountered and the particularities of the group.

1.1. Research Methodology

The study took place over a period of six (6) months (December 2012-May 2013) and utilized both secondary and primary material. From the beginning it was evident that there is little Greek literature available regarding the migration patterns of Afghans to Greece. They are a group that has not been explored in the past. On the other hand, the English-speaking literature focuses primarily on Afghan migration and mobility until the 1990s. September 11th of 2001 significantly impacted and shifted the focus on Afghanistan from migration to security issues and terrorism. Nevertheless, the presence of foreign troops and economic aid invested in the country contributed to the development of research and evaluation reports on voluntary return programs, as well as return and settlement to Afghanistan. This, in turn, means there is a range of accessible research material that do not investigate migration from Afghanistan before 2001, but rather, the sustainability of return to the country, settlement and the new mobility patterns of Afghans.

The primary interviews that took place, using semi structured questionnaire, confirmed and expanded on the available material and literature. The original design included the development of contacts in both the country of origin as well as in Greece. In relation to the latter, interviews took place with the Presidents of the two Afghan Associations/Communities that remain active in Athens, as well as with agencies that monitor irregular entry and exit from Greece, such as the Police and Frontex. Additionally, interviews were conducted with organisations involved with protection and access to asylum such as the UN High Commissioner for Refugees office in Greece and the Greek Ombudsman.

On the other hand, the development of contacts with the country of origin proved extremely difficult, which was not entirely unexpected. The difficulty lies mainly in the distance and the lack of direct contact that enables the development of a different relationship between researcher and respondent. Additionally, there were limitations in terms of language, accessibility (for example, fixed range phone lines do not exist everywhere), but also due to the very nature of the research. As noted in one of the interviews, non- governmental organizations (NGO) and/or international organizations will confide with difficulty from a distance on the issue of irregular migration and its management, push factors or policies of neighboring countries. Relationships are fragile; the information is recycled with extreme ease raising concerns over safety, the ability to continue their work in the country, as well as privacy and personal data.

1 For example, the European Union alone by 2011 had invested approximately 2bn in Afghanistan for development and reconstruction.
Although guarantees were given for safeguarding personal data and anonymity, the response was limited. However, where information was offered it confirmed and added to the findings of the literature and the interviews conducted in Greece. Additional drawback was the absence of an Afghan diplomatic mission or of a corresponding Greek mission in Afghanistan. Contact was made with the Embassy of Afghanistan in Sofia, Bulgaria that is responsible for overseeing the Afghan population in Greece and useful information was offered. However, the absence of bilateral relations made it difficult to approach official bodies in the country. The only exception was the EU Delegation in Afghanistan that opted to respond in writing to the questions raised. When information is quoted or used in the report, in order to protect personal data we do not use names, and in some cases—where requested—we also do not refer to the organization by name, only its function. Where segments of the interviews are used, the relevant interview number is noted and a corresponding list of numbers and organizations/agencies is available in Annex I.

Given the particular nature of the researched group that is considered a mixed migrant group, but also for reasons of convenience, the survey uses the generic term 'migrant', which in this case includes refugees and persons in need of subsidiary and/or humanitarian protection. The term "asylum seeker" is used only for those cases that have lodged an asylum claim.

2. Geography and Demography

Afghanistan is a landlocked state, part of Central, South and to some extent Western Asia. It borders Pakistan in the South and the East, Iran in the West, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan in the North and China in the far Northeast (see Map I).

![Map I- Afghanistan](source: University of Texas, 2013)

Afghanistan's geographical position largely determined the demographic profile of the country and its history. It is an amalgamation of four cultures "of Islam, Hindu, Orthodox Christianity and Confucianism, coming respectively from the Middle East, South and Central Asia" (Goodson, 2001:8). The majority of the population is divided along ethnic, racial and linguistic lines. The population is estimated at 29.1 million, of which the Pashtun (Pashtun) are the largest group (42%), followed by the Tajiks, (27%), the Hazaras (9%) , the Uzbeks (9%) and the Aimak (4%). In much smaller percentages are the tribes of Baluchi, 2% and Turkmen, 3%. (IOM, 2008:17, see map II).
Tribal divisions, which are often accompanied by geographical divisions, make up one aspect of a mosaic of different components asked to coexist in the country. Some of the elements that have contributed periodically to internal conflicts are the role of Islam in shaping the legal and political system and the division of powers at a local, regional and national level, but also geography that often constructs an inaccessible landscape that physically isolates groups and tribes.

The official languages are Dari and Pashto, the first of which is spoken by 50% of the population and the second by about 35%. Approximately 80% of the population is Sunni and 19% is Shia. Participation in a specific religious community usually corresponds to a geographical area; for example, the Shiites, especially Hazara, can be found in the mountainous Bamyan region and central Afghanistan. The division into tribes is extremely important, first because it prevents the development of a common national identity and secondly because this tribal division is maintained during the migration journey. Afghans still mostly interpret their connection with Afghanistan on the basis of race, religion and family and not in terms of a cohesive national identity. Their connection therefore with the nation-state is local and often stems from religious affiliation.

The movement of Afghans is also part of their cultural tradition, where “multi directional, cross-border movements and the ongoing, cyclical nature of migration blur the boundaries between ‘refugee’ and ‘voluntary migrant’ “(Monsutti 2006:7, Monsutti, 2007). This description represents the majority of ethnic groups in Afghanistan that have moved to Pakistan and Iran, since migration to these countries can be interpreted as a response to civil strife and insecurity, but also as an effective strategy for survival that began as early as 1979.

### 2.1. The historical framework of migration

The first wave of immigration was a result of the coup of 1978 by the Marxist Democratic Party of Afghanistan. A long period of unrest followed that largely shaped the Afghan refugee population. Inspired by the Soviet
Union, efforts were made to reform and modernize Afghanistan. They were accompanied by rapid land reform, human rights abuses and killings and the targeting of political and religious leaders, especially those in the minority of the Hazara (HRW, 2001). Reforms were treated negatively by conservative Islamists, who initially organized on a local and then regional level.

When in 1979 the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan, in support of the friendly to Moscow regime, it faced well-organized groups known as the mujahidin (literally meaning one who carries out jihad). The invasion lasted a decade (1979-1989), and significantly impacted the formulation of foreign and domestic policy in both the Soviet Union and the U.S.; the later financed much of the Islamic resistance against the Soviets (in the context of the Cold War) up until the signing of the withdrawal of Soviet troops during Gorbachev’s government. During the decade of war, the majority of the country’s infrastructure was destroyed, while a significant part of the population was forced to immigrate, especially to neighboring Pakistan and Iran. By 1992 it is estimated that “Over six million people-more than 20 percent of the population-had left the country” (Saito, 2009:3).

The second period of migration took place during the civil war that followed the withdrawal of the Soviets, in February of 1989. The Communist Party remained in power until 1992, when the rebels captured the capital Kabul. The civil war was one of the most violent in the country's history. The conflict was originally centered in the capital, but expanded to the provinces, where several groups had imposed their leadership. It is from this civil war that the Taliban emerged with a “vision” of unifying the country and restoring security. The Taliban-who ruled the country from 1996 to 2001- and originated from native Pashtun tribes of western Afghanistan-emerged from the regional religious schools in Afghanistan and Pakistan. They sought the creation of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, which was formally established in 1996 with their rise to power and dissolved with their fall in 2001. The period of the Taliban was accompanied by internal migration and new exodus of the Afghan Hazara (Shia Muslims) who mainly moved towards Iran, because of the systematic persecution they faced. It is estimated that, at the time, approximately 1 million fled the country.

Political instability also affected the economy of the country as it moved towards centralized control, a move that eventually failed. The civil war had destroyed the urban centers, while rural agriculture had languished or was no longer possible in some areas, after the Taliban implemented the policy of scorched earth. The drought of 1995 that lasted until 2002 further compounded the problem and led to additional internal displacement of people, but also immigration (Stigter & Monsutti, 2005). According to the report of the High Commissioner for Human Rights today “one in three Afghans lives in absolute poverty and cannot meet basic needs» (OHCHR, 2010: iii).

September 11th 2001, the intervention of Allied forces in Afghanistan and the Bonn Agreement of 2001 opened a new chapter in the history of the country. However, ethnic divisions and the memories of the Civil War remained fresh, and especially the connection of the Taliban with the Pashtun tribes. In 2001, with the fall of the Taliban regime, about 20,000 Pashtun are estimated to have been forced out from Northern and Western Afghanistan (HRW, 2002). Overall the two main migration periods of Afghanistan led almost one third of the population to seek protection in Pakistan, Iran and other countries (Kronenfeld, 2011).

Following the signing of the Bonn Agreement in 2001, both Iran and Pakistan- the main host countries until then- changed significantly their policies of reception and residence of Afghan refugees, forcing Afghans to seek new routes and destination countries, turning more than before towards Europe and Australia.

### 2.2. The Afghans in Pakistan

Pakistan has consistently hosted Afghan refugees and immigrants during the last 30 years, while it has received the financial assistance of international organizations and donations amounting to 1 billion dollars for the period of 1979-1999. However, migration to Pakistan is not a recent characteristic, as it has been taking place since the 19th century.
The two countries share an extremely porous border, also known as the Durand Line, demarcated in 1893 by agreement between British India and the then ruler of Afghanistan (Glatzer, 2001). The line, which is considered one of the most dangerous borders in the world, runs across 1,500 km and includes part of the Pashtun areas and of what is today known as Balochistan. Because it divides the Pashtun region and essentially prevents them from realizing their vision of a common nation-state (Schetter, 2005), the border was never officially recognized by the governments of Afghanistan. Rather, they put forth claims for the Pashtun areas, which are now part of Pakistan, i.e., the Federally Administered Tribal Areas. The result is that today many Pashtun families are split between the borders they continue to cross on a regular basis.

Immigration to Pakistan is characterized by different phases (Monsutti, 2006). The largest exodus took place between 1979 and 1989 during the Soviet invasion. It is estimated that in 1981 there were already 2.3 million refugees in Pakistan (Turton & Marsden, 2002) mainly of Pashtun origin. Between 1989 and 1992, many returned to Afghanistan, only to flee once more -especially those residing in Kabul- when the civil war broke out. The main characteristic of the period from 1996 to 2001 was the exodus of the middle class to Pakistan. The numbers of refugees remain unclear even today. The literature supports that Pakistan welcomed more than 3.5 million refugees (Punjani, 2002; Turton & Marsden, 2002; HRCP, 2009), which is partly confirmed by the last census. Refugees were received for various reasons; religion and *pashtunwali* code, which includes the offer of asylum between Pashtuns, has played an important role in the reception of Afghans in Pakistan (Monsutti, 2006; Bialczyk, 2008, Edwards, 1986). As Turton & Marsden note, “Pakistan, like Iran, has always regarded its hospitality to Afghans as a religious and humanitarian duty” (2002:14). It was therefore a combination of foreign policy based on geopolitical and geostrategic (because of India) interests, and religious solidarity.

It is important though to note that no one was counting that 30 years later the Afghans would remain the largest refugee population of the planet, leading countries like Pakistan (and Iran) to face the so-called “asylum fatigue” (Ashrafi & Moghissi, 2002). In the first period of migration, Afghans were free to choose where to settle in Pakistan. Overall it is estimated that approximately 400 refugee camps were set up, mostly in North West Frontier Province (NWFP) and Balochistan. The camps were in close proximity to big cities like...
Peshawar, Karachi and Quetta\textsuperscript{2}. The Afghans were free to enter and leave the camps and they had the opportunity to work and mix with the local population. In the 2002 refugee count organized by UNHCR, 42% lived in camps and 58% in urban areas. 81% of the total refugee population was Pashtun. The fact that a large part of the refugees chose to stay from the outset in an urban center played an important role in the subsequent decision on whether to return to Afghanistan -especially for women\textsuperscript{3}. As Stigter (2006) notes, the second generation who grew up in Pakistan became accustomed to a standard of living with accessibility to services, food, shelter and employment, things not always available in Afghanistan nor to the same extent. At the same time, Afghans in Pakistan had access to education regardless of whether they had residence permit or refugee identity, while the Pakistani government permitted the establishment of Afghan schools to teach Dari and Pashto in the camps (Edwards, 1986) and in cities (Saito, 2009). This was confirmed during the interview with the President of United Afghans in Greece, where it was stressed that:

\begin{quote}
“In relation to Pakistan, the positive thing was that [Afghans] offered access to education and allowed the Afghans to mobilize and create their own schools” (interview nr.8)
\end{quote}

Freedom of movement and settlement was accompanied by open access to the labor market, which was later a key incentive for migration to Pakistan. The latter therefore, became an option in the quest for immediate source of income lasting for few days to few months, which would supply the family in the near and medium term with money. As 64.7% of Afghans in 2009 (Saito,2009) worked in unskilled or low-skilled jobs, earnings were limited and not stable, forcing many to frequently move across borders and without long-term settlement plans and continuously “reestablish their networks, which they have both in Afghanistan and Pakistan” (Altai Consulting, 2009:2-3).

Pakistan’s policy towards the Afghan refugees changed notably on the 1\textsuperscript{st} of January 2000, when the government announced that new arrivals from Afghanistan would no longer be considered \textit{prima facie} refugees. The fighting between the Taliban and dissidents in Taloquan however, created a new exodus to Pakistan and the latter decided in November of that year to close the border with Afghanistan in an attempt to cut off the flow\textsuperscript{4}. In 2001, for the first time, the Pakistani government issued an arrest and deportation order for newly arrived Afghans, and called on UNHCR to stop issuing identity cards in the new refugee camps on the basis that the residents were economic migrants rather than refugees. Despite the above policies, in a 2007 survey, “84.2% of registered Afghans said they did not intend to return to Afghanistan, mainly due to lack of infrastructure and security” (Saito & Hunte, 2007:3).

Under the auspices of the UNHCR in 2003\textsuperscript{5}, 1.5 million Afghans returned from Pakistan (and another 220,000 from Iran). This number, however, does not necessarily mean settlement. As Kronenfeld (2008) notes, the Afghan voluntary repatriation programs in general are characterized by the continuous movement of Afghans even after their return. Every day, thousands cross the border to get work, education, and medical care, thereby creating "a migration symptomatic for many of inadequate service in Afghanistan and other long-term experience of Afghan migration" (ibid: 2). Additionally, recycling seems to take place, especially in the case of the return from Pakistan, with refugees registering for return, going to Afghanistan to receive the subsidy and returning to Pakistan from a different direction, re-registering in a different venue and seeking again the

\textsuperscript{2} Karachi is historically a migrant city (AREU, 2005), while Quetta is a transit city for Afghans heading to Australia, Europe and United Arab Emirates (Monsutti, 2006). For the settlement of Afghans in Peshawar see AREU 2006a, for settlement in Quetta see AREU b and for settlement in Karachi see AREU 2005.

\textsuperscript{3} For the push and pull factors of women in returning or remaining in Pakistan see the research of Saito & Hunte (2007).

\textsuperscript{4} Turton & Marsden note that in practice it is impossible to close the border due to its length and geography. The announcement had a “political significance, as it passed a message to newcomers that they would not be received in the same way as before” (2002:16). As noted in the Altai report (2009), the 2,250 km border is unknown to most Afghans, with the exception of the passages of Torkham and Spin Boldak, where outposts are located. Families have become accustomed to living on one side and work on the other, crossing the border daily. This is one reason why until recently moving from Afghanistan to Pakistan took place without the assistance of traffickers and intermediaries, unlike the passage to Iran or Iran to Pakistan, which is fully controlled by traffickers (Khosravi 2007, Mogelson 2012)

\textsuperscript{5} In 2003 a tripartite agreement was signed between Pakistan-UNHCR and Afghanistan for the repatriation of Afghan refugees.
subsidy in another camp. The size and organization of returns was such that it impeded the possibility of cross-checking registrations (Turton & Marsden, 2002)

In an effort to "safeguard" the refugee status, the registration card (Proof of Registration-PoR) was adopted in 2007. The card was valid for 3-year and offered protection from deportation but also enabled identification. The card allowed refugees to stay legally in Pakistan until December of 2009. They were free to participate in one of the voluntary or assisted return programs that had already started in 2002\(^6\) or leave on their own, by December 2009; hence PoR aimed to give them sufficient time to prepare for return to Afghanistan.

Return programs were accompanied with policies of exclusion. The government closed the four (4) main camps in an effort to encourage repatriation (in agreement with the UNHCR) and the Afghan schools. Closure and demolition of refugee camps continued throughout 2007 and 2008. Those who had failed to register with the 2007 refugee census were considered illegal residents, with no possibility of obtaining identity or other document (unless they registered for a return program). They also could no longer obtain a work permit. Since Afghans were not allowed to own property, many claimed that they lived under fear of eviction (AREU Briefing paper, 2006). Furthermore researches document a growing dissatisfaction and racism towards the Afghans previously limited, mainly from the part of the police that often manifested in physical assaults and violence (see Report of HRCP, 2009). The change in residency status and access to services (such as education) led several Afghans either to return or to secondary migration, this time to countries in Europe and/or Asia.

According to the President of the Afghan Migrant and Refugee Community in Greece:

“We had millions of refugees that returned, especially from Pakistan and Iran. They went back in 2003-2004 because of the promise of development and change [in places like] Kabul. But the situation was not handled properly and from 2009 onwards people started leaving again. There is no hope and that is why families are now leaving [...]. Pakistan is no longer a safe place for Afghans” (Interview No.8)

2.3. The Afghans of Iran

Similarly to Pakistan, the Islamic Republic of Iran (Iran) has been hosting Afghan refugees from the Soviet invasion until today. The presence, however, of Afghans in Iran was and is completely different from that in Pakistan, both in numbers but also in terms of policies enacted. Moreover, unlike Pakistan, Iran chose to take upon itself the overwhelming cost of supporting the refugees (Koepke, 2011), accepting only 150m dollars since 1979 in international assistance.

Iran’s higher levels of development-in comparison to Afghanistan-including job opportunities -but also cultural similarities, encouraged in the 1960s and the 1970s the growth of economic and circular migration between the two countries (Δημητριάδη, 2012). It was usual for the husband or brother to migrate to Iran, while the family remained in Afghanistan. The need for cheap labor meant “work for Afghans, many of whom lived in Iran illegally, but were tolerated by the authorities” (Ashrafi & Moghissi, 2002:90). According to Monsutti (2004), there were those who left the area Hazarat during the winter to work for a few months in the coal mines of Quetta, while unmarried men migrated for longer periods to Iran for work. During the 1970s, for example, before the Soviet invasion, there were thousands of Afghans who worked at refineries in Iran, where they had fled in search of work but also due to the draught at the time (Abbasi-Shavazi et al, 2008). As a result, they developed networks in both countries (Monsutti 2004:220).

\(^6\) The return of Afghans through assisted return programs were not novel phenomenon. Pakistan had conducted a large return program following the withdrawal of Soviet troops in 1989-1992. In that program, those who returned the refugee passports were given in exchange $100, and 300gr of grain. According to Turton & Marsden (2002), the program acted as a population census for Afghan refugees as well as a return program, with an estimated 900,000 people returned to their homes in 1992.
Instrumental in the development of networks was the highly porous border, which until 1978 remained open and accessible. The 900km boundary consisted mostly of desert, without border controls and signs. This facilitated and encouraged the development of “cultural and trade ties between Iran and cities such as Herat in Afghanistan” (Stigter, 2005:10). Between 1980 and 1989 it is estimated that 2,9 million Afghans went to Iran, of which 1,4 million returned following the withdrawal of Soviet troops. Mobility followed a parallel course similar to the one presented in Pakistan, with the last great exodus taking place during the Taliban government (1994-2001) (Abbasi-Shavazi et al, 2008). Similarly to Pakistan, Iran adopted an open policy towards the reception of Afghans, largely born out of religious solidarity with Shiite Muslims.

As the Soviet intervention coincided with the Islamic Revolution in Iran, Afghans were not only welcomed but considered mohajerin, i.e, "religious migrants" (Monsutti, 2006), a particular system of protection, which is considered honorary. Iran issued "blue cards" functioning as identities and indefinite-stay permits. It also signed the Geneva Convention of 1951 with reservations on Articles 17 (employment) and 26 (freedom of movement) that remain in place until today. With regard to employment, recognized refugees could apply for work permit, restricted however to 17 categories of manual labor. Afghans, however, had access to education and received subsidy for gas, food and health coverage (Koepke, 2011), but unlike Pakistan, they were restricted in their movement; government permission was required to move / travel within Iran. It is worth noting that Iran did not build many camps, resulting in most Afghans gathering in rundown suburbs of urban cities (Monsutti 2006, Strand, Suhrke & Harpviken, 2004).

Following the Soviet departure, the Iranian government gradually withdrew its support to the Afghans. New arrivals were treated as irregular (Abbasi-Shavazi, MJ, D. Glazebrook, et al., 2008) and the Afghans were classified as economic immigrants. In conjunction with the increased border controls, the result was the development of a “migration industry” between cities such as Herat and Mashad, largely operated by smugglers (Strand, Suhrke & Harpviken, 2004, Khosravi 2011).
The characteristic feature of the policy of Iran from 2000 onwards is the systematic attempt to re-register the refugee population, combined with emphasis on voluntary return programs. The process of registering those already recognized as refugees was known as Amayesh, with the last one having taken place in 2011. The Amayesh required that recognized refugees with blue cards re-register. During this process they were asked to hand over their refugee card that was replaced by a new document - a temporary residence permit, of no specific duration - at a cost of $5 per person. To this, taxes and municipal taxes were added, which refugees were asked to pay during re-registration, with costs varying by municipality. Koepke (2011) in his research indicates that in Tehran the cost was approximately $170 per family. It is worth noting that the recording and re-registering were not coincidental, since the ultimate goal remained the "voluntary" return of Afghans. The Amayesh were not only a management tool in this context, but part of a broader effort to encourage Afghans to return. A series of measures were implemented to that effect, "encouraging" return. The hand-over process of the refugee card and its exchange with a temporary residence permit automatically made the population vulnerable to future expulsion decisions. Additional, the Amayesh added a nominal tax to the Afghans and particularly children. Costs further increased, since they were asked to partially fund services hitherto subsidized, such as, health care, nutrition and education.

Education in particular is extremely important for the Afghans of Iran (Δημητριάδη, 2012). In 2002 the government repealed the licence of Afghan schools, which were deemed to "encourage the residency of Afghans in the country" (Saito, 2009:5). By 2004 the education subsidy for Afghans in Iranian schools was abolished and combined with the closure of Afghan schools. This left an entire population outside the education system

“In Iran there was a huge problem, they did not allow Afghans to attend school and this is the reason why so many of them today are illiterate” (Interview No. 7).

Access to higher education was banned completely, unless the family could cover the cost of private university. Simultaneously, irregular migrant children were excluded from schools.

The additional measures forbade irregular Afghans from having a bank account, insurance, and property. Irregular migrants thus, were excluded from the majority of social benefits and services, despite the fact that many had fallen to ‘irregularity’ because of the measures instituted by the government. Finally, from 2007 onwards “thirty (30) areas mainly near the border with Afghanistan, were nominated as non-accessible for Afghans” (Koepke 2011:4), for security reasons. These included areas bordering with Iraq, as well as the West Azerbaijan province of Sistan-Baluchistan that was inhabited at the time, by about 80,000 Afghan refugees (ILO-UNHCR, 2008). Those who were already living there were asked to move into new provinces pre-selected for relocation.

These measures were further accompanied with deportations. The exact number is unknown; for example in 2007 alone Iran deported 360,000 Afghans (Bathaie 2009:71). What is interesting is that that the effectiveness of deportation remains unclear, since immigrants continue to cross the border daily with the help mainly of Baluchi smugglers (for the smuggling networks in the region see Stigter, 2005: 20-25). While today there is the possibility of obtaining travel visa for Iran, it presupposes a passport or other identity document that many Afghans do not have, as a result of internal displacement and / or migration (Stigter & Monsutti, 2005). This in turn forces them to resort to smugglers for passage to Iran.

The Iranian government estimates that roughly 1.5 - 2 million irregular Afghans continue to reside in Iran, many of whom move between Afghanistan and Iran periodically. In 2011, the Iranian government announced a comprehensive legalization program for irregular Afghans that aimed at registering them to the Iranian authorities. This program involved only those who had never before held refugee status and had, as a result,

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been left out of the Amayesh program. In the first phase of the project the government issued documents of temporary validity, allowing the migrants to travel to Afghanistan to apply for a passport and return to Iran with a visa. The Bureau of Aliens and Foreign Affairs of Iran estimates that "about 1.5 million Afghans registered in the program, but it is unknown how many actually followed the return process and issuing of documents» (Norwegian Refugee Council, 2012). However, the initiative gave an opportunity to Afghans to legalize their stay, access employment and education. At the same time, it gave the Iranian government the opportunity to take stock of an irregular population and urge them to obtain Afghan citizenship (through the acquisition of identity documents) and travel documents that would facilitate in the long term any return/ deportation procedures. This is evident in the fact that between January and September 2012, Iran deported 190,000 newly registered Afghans.

The Afghans themselves admit that they continue to be victims of racism, discrimination and attacks, recorded extensively in the investigation of Human Rights Watch (2012), but also by representatives of their organizations in Athens. The large presence of Afghans, in conjunction with Iran undertaking the majority of the cost of hosting them, "was associated with an increase in unemployment, crime and drug trafficking" (HRW, 2002: 18).

Thus the situation in the first host countries and the reversal in the reception of Afghans served and continue to serves as the main push factor for their subsequent migration to Greece and Europe.

3. Migrating to Europe: motives and destinations

The migration of Afghans to Greece is part of a broader mobility pattern and quest for a host country. Today's migrants are turning to new destinations, aware of the changes taking place in the reception and hosting policies of traditionally preferred destination countries:

"When the deportations began from Iran, most people who lived for years in the country were forced to leave; they could not return to Afghanistan because of various problems. They were forced to leave Iran and this is why Greece received a great number of Afghans"(Interview No. 8).

The new migrant flows are mixed in nature, both in terms of their country of origin but also in terms of their motives. They include Afghans who migrate for the first time in search of protection, security or even financial reasons and refugees from Pakistan and Iran of second and/or third generation who can neither remain in their hosting countries nor return to Afghanistan.

According to the President of the Afghan Migrant and Refugee Community in Greece, Afghans coming from Afghanistan can be divided into three categories:

"One group is the political refugees who are at risk due to their political beliefs. The second group is those who flee for safety reasons from specific areas like Ghazni, Kandahar, and are mainly Hazara. Third group is actually those who are leaving for economic reasons; they decide to leave in search of work in Europe where they think it’s better. "(Interview No.8)

The latter group treats migration as means of improving their living conditions, access employment opportunities and social inclusion. They are usually between 12 and 30 years, unmarried men primarily of Hazara and Pashtun origin fleeing from Iran and Afghanistan respectively (Bathaie, 2009) and moving towards new destinations including Europe. Migration is not only a conscious choice but also a process of entering adulthood, a rite of passage, which begins with the crossing of borders, the successful settlement in a country (whether it is Iran, Pakistan or the West ) and the sending of remittances to family (Monsutti, 2007: 167).

The migration of Afghans from Iran and Pakistan is also closely linked with the racism and exclusion they have been experiencing:
“Iran in particular has hardened its attitude towards refugees. They’ve been ‘singled out’, they no longer have any access to social benefits [...] but Pakistan also is now a very unsafe place for Afghans, especially for Hazara” (Interview No.8).

On the other hand, those who did return to Afghanistan were faced with a particularly difficult reality, often impossible to manage, such as finding housing and employment:

"Of those who left, many lost their homes and are unable to return. The so-called Kabul informal settlements have emerged, built by former refugees who returned to Afghanistan, and are unable to return to the area they originally migrated from.” (Interview No.2).

The aforementioned settlements, however, do not meet basic requirements since the government does not allow the provision of structured and long-term assistance in the camps (e.g. to build permanent homes), in an effort to encourage returnees to resettle in their provinces (Interview No.2). In light of the conditions on the ground, many of them have or will eventually resort to new immigration.

Additionally, there is a special group that is part of the mixed migrant flows; the unaccompanied minors for whom migration is often the result of a combination of factors. One the one hand, the broader situation in Afghanistan as described above, ‘pushes’ many to migrate. For some, who had already migrated in search of work opportunities in Iran and Pakistan, or were born there, the lack of employment and education motivates them to migrate. Yet, as pointed out by Mougne’s report on Afghan unaccompanied minors in Europe, a key factor that attracts children in Europe is the image they have of a safe life with freedom and access to education, as many wish to study and work in prestigious professions (e.g. doctors) and contribute to the family budget (Mougne, 2010:14-15).

Migration to specific destinations is directly related to tribal associations:

"People move to certain places. For example the Pashtun tribe and those from Kandahar and Logar all want to go London and England. Those from the Heart and especially the Tajiks, primarily wish to migrate to Germany. The Hazaras prefer Sweden and Austria. For example, in 2009 almost everyone wanted to go to England. When England changed its policy, the Afghans turned to Sweden but mostly Norway and Finland. Once these countries reduced asylum recognition, they turned to Germany, Switzerland and Sweden. Families go to Sweden because within two months they know if their asylum claim has been accepted or rejected. Secondly, they receive benefits (Interview No.7).

In this mosaic of countries that emerges, Greece functions more as a transit country for Afghans (Δημητριάδης 2012, Bathaie 2009) rather than a destination. This was further confirmed during a written communication with the Embassy of Afghanistan in Sofia that stated that Greece is transit rather than destination for Afghan migrants (Interview No.1) The reasons for this are numerous, largely due to preexisting preferences of alternative destinations but also because of the system in place, regarding reception and settlement of asylum seekers in the country.
4. Arrival to Greece

4.1. Routes

Routes are partly determined by the points of departure and geography\(^8\). For example, those who depart from the southern and eastern parts of Afghanistan tend to enter Pakistan first. Those situated in the western areas, turn to Iran. The passage in both cases is difficult; from the Pakistani side because of the mountains of the Hindu Kush that those entering from the northeast will encounter, but also because of the desert and steppes for those heading to the south-western end, towards Iran. In Pakistan, the main cities for settlement but also transit stops are Karachi, Quetta and Peshawar (Khosravi, 2011). On the other hand, those who try to cross from the southwest edge of Afghanistan, through the town Zaranz of the province Nimruz, are faced with the newly built fence, of 147 km length. The fence was built by Iran, in an effort to cut the inflow of irregular migrants. This forced migrants to fragment their journey, which now extends a further ten hours to southern Pakistan, from where they cross to Iran (Mogelson, 2012), as the Iran-Pakistan border is not surrounded by fence.

The passage from Iran to Turkey is the second leg of the trip and is mostly regulated by organized networks of smugglers. It usually includes crossing through the rocky mountain ranges dividing Iran and Turkey. The passage is one of the most dangerous due to weather conditions, geography (the crossing takes place mostly on foot and at night) and organized mafia networks that profit by kidnapping migrants in exchange for ransoms from their families (Triandafyllidou & Maroukis, 2012). In Turkey, the first stops are usually the cities of Van and / or Tatvan, from where migrants are then transported to Istanbul, where they remain until the next stage of the journey (İçduyu, 2005, Terzioglu 2004); the transition to Greece has been extensively recorded in various researches (Pro Asyl 2007, HRW 2008, FRA 2011, Marouf 2011, FRA 2013).

The main entrance to Greece until 2009 was the sea border, namely the North Aegean islands, also evident in the apprehension data (see Table I below). Already by 2008, 75% of all arrests of irregular migrants in the EU took place via the Greek-Turkish sea borders (FRA, 2011). The presence of Frontex in the Aegean and the de-mining of Evros are believed to have contributed significantly to the reduction of sea arrivals.

The data refer to border apprehensions and sea rescue during patrol. They do not include apprehensions inlands by the police in the islands.

|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|

Source: FRA, 2013\(^9\).

They also resulted in a shift from the islands to the land borders and especially in the tri-border region of (Bulgarian-Turkish and Greek border) Evros. The map below (Map 1) illustrates schematically the various entry points into Greece from Iran via Turkey and the land, air and sea routes.

\(^8\) Routes change. For example, in the analysis of Papadopoulou on the crossing of Kurdish migrants to Greece she refers to a route used by Asian immigrants crossing from Tajikistan, Kazakhstan, to Russia and then the former Eastern European Bloc countries (Papadopoulou 2008: 130-133). These routes were adopted primarily by immigrants in the 1990s. On the other hand, researches indicate that the Afghans, who appear regularly in Greek apprehension lists since 2005 tend to follow routes through Pakistan / Iran-Turkey (see İçduyu 2005, Khosravi 2011, Marconi 2008, Sorensen 2006, Triandafyllidou & Maroukis 2012)

\(^9\) The data refer to border apprehensions and sea rescue during patrol. They do not include apprehensions inlands by the police in the islands.
The frequency of arrivals and their composition (unaccompanied minors, families, adult men) added pressure to an already troubled host system. Detention centers in Evros reached breaking point (FRA, 2011) and there were complaints about informal migrant returns (push-backs) to Turkey, in violation of the principle of non-refoulement; this in turn forced Greece in 2010 to submit a formal request for EU assistance. In response to the Greek request, Rabit (Rapid Border Intervention Teams) was activated for the first time, in the region of Evros. The presence of Frontex was not only important in guarding the border, but also in the development of operational cooperation with Turkey since via Rabit:

"Gradually an operational cooperation began at local level between Greece and Turkey, which is now institutionalized [...] many times the Greeks guards identify immigrant groups within the Turkish territory, they inform the Turkish authorities and they in turn often react and apprehend them before crossing onto Greek territory. We could not have imagined this few years ago" (Interview No.5).

At the time of drafting this paper, operation 'Shield' was in progress at the Evros region through the transfer of 1,800 border guards in the area. In parallel, the government completed the construction of the fence of 10,365 meters from the outpost of Kastanies to Evros, where Frontex continues to maintain a presence, albeit reduced, according to the Director of the Frontex’s regional office in Greece. The operational objective in accordance with the Police (Interview No. 13) was and remains the ‘closing’ of the border, preventing entry. On the basis of this specific operational objective, the police considers successful the measures adopted, given the dramatic drop in apprehensions over the past two years; for example the arrests in the first 2 months of 2013 amounted to 162 people, compared to 5,077 in the corresponding months of 2012 (data from Greek Police, 2013). The decrease in numbers, seems to reflect a broader decline in the number of immigrants trying to enter the country, according to the Aliens Division of the Hellenic Police

"Greece is no longer an attractive destination; this is the image we are trying to convey, that there are no jobs and they will not be able to cross to other countries. We are also improving the gap in our legislation regarding asylum. Immigration will not seize of course but the flow will reduce and we are already seeing evidence to that" (interview No.11)

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10 Of the 70 people deployed in the land border originally through Rabit, only 40 remain. According to Frontex, deployment numbers vary depending on arrivals and the presence of Greek border guards in the region.
It should be noted that reduction is not only due to apprehensions in Greece but also from the Turkish side. Both Frontex and the Greek Police emphasized that operational cooperation in Evros between Greeks and Turks, which includes exchange of personnel, has proven instrumental; as the Turkish side is informed of the attempted entry at the Greek-Turkish border, in most cases policemen are dispatched to apprehend immigrants before crossing (Interview No. 5 and No. 12). The reduced numbers however, do not mean that immigrants stop trying to enter the country. Besides, this is reflected in the gradual increase observed at the sea border, though it is still a far cry from the numbers of previous years. However, the current proposal of the Ministry of Mercantile Marine is to reopen the detention centers in Samos and Chios and dispatch screeners (for identity screening) and debriefers in the eastern Aegean islands (see Απάντηση Υπουργού Ναυτιλίας & Αιγαίου, 2012).

4.2. Entry and settlement

Entry to the country takes place via irregular means, especially in the case of Afghans, regardless of whether it takes place via the sea or the land borders. This implies that irregularity also characterizes their stay and/or onward travel to another country, since there are no alternative ways of legalization. Irregularity thus, is a key feature of the majority of Afghans (newcomers and past arrivals) and is a result of absence of alternative policies (e.g. legalization schemes), a fragmented asylum system that will be discussed below, and lack of documentations that certify their identity and/or legalization (i.e. from passports to ‘pink’ cards).

The practice and official policy in Greece is to arrest and detain irregular migrants and, where possible, deport them. Apprehensions take place both at the borders when entering but also within the country; the police performs random street checks (sweeps) that became systematized in the summer of 2012 under the code name "Xenios Zeus". Irregular migration thus, is treated as part of broader set of illegal activities to be eliminated (and often associated in the public dialogue with organized crime and trafficking). From the beginning of the operation in August 2012 until the 31st of December 2012, a total of 65,767 foreigners had been stopped for identity checks, of which 4,145 were apprehended for irregular stay in the country. During the interview with the Aliens Division Directorate, we enquired whether the relatively small number of apprehensions (in comparison to those initially screened) is associated with specific nationalities or access to asylum

«Q: 4,145 apprehensions is significantly less than those originally brought in for screening. How do you explain the disparity in the numbers?
A: Yes that is because they either had a residence permit but also a great number of ‘pink cards’. After all, asylum here is misused » (Interview No 11)

From August until mid-February of 2013 (02/15/2013) only 252 Afghans were detained in the framework of Xenios Zeus, all male, between the ages of 22 and 45. The extremely small percentage of detention in the Afghan population raises a question on the type of documents they are in possession of. Given that rejected asylum seekers are eligible for apprehension and expulsion, it is likely they were ‘pink card’ holders or recognized refugees. According to the Police, the number of those detained was not large precisely because they held ‘pink card’, were recognized refugees or opted in some cases to participate voluntarily in a return program (see section below on ‘Leaving the country’ see leaving the country for the participation of Afghans in return programs). Apprehended immigrants irrespective of the area of arrest (for figures see Table II below), are transferred to detention facilities whereby the process of expulsion is activated.

11 The operation had from the beginning the specific aim of removing migrants from urban centres and transporting them to places of detentions that would act as ‘waiting areas’ pending their in order to remove migrants from urban centres and transportation to places of detention but would act as pre departure centres. Apprehension was combined with an implementation of readmission agreements with third countries, either through the police or through joint return flight operations under the aegis of Frontex.
Table II: Apprehensions of Afghan nationals from Police and Coastguard

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>0</th>
<th>5,000</th>
<th>10,000</th>
<th>15,000</th>
<th>20,000</th>
<th>25,000</th>
<th>30,000</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Expulsion refers to the forced return of the individual and involves identification and issuing of travel documents, provided that the apprehended person does not lodge an asylum application, which automatically freezes the deportation process.

4.3. Screening

As previously mentioned, absence of legal documents has immediate consequences both for the detention and for the deportation of Afghans. While in detention centres and police stations, the process of identifying and recording their identity is essential in determining the possibility of return but also indirectly in relation to access to asylum.

Frontex conducted the screening process until recently, mainly due to lack of trained personnel in the Hellenic Police. The screeners are accompanied by interpreters and act as experts in identifying the immigrant’s nationality. The regulation stipulates that the process has to always take place in the presence of Hellenic Police personnel and includes an interview with the migrant, who is essentially asked to prove his nationality in the absence of relevant documents. The interpreters are from the countries of origin, in order to have knowledge of local dialects. The problem that arises, especially with the Afghans that resided in Iran for years, is one of language. The long stay, especially for the 2nd generation, and taking into consideration the growing racism and social isolation they faced, led many to not only learn the Iranian language (Farsi) but ultimately adopt it in an effort to integrate. According to Saito’s research for the 2nd generation in Iran and Pakistan “the Afghans in Iran were confronted with great pressure to publicly speak Persian; many who returned to Afghanistan were considered Iranians rather than Afghani” (2009:6). Similarly in Greece, there have been incidents of Afghans who were recorded as Iranians (because of their primary usage of Farsi) despite declaring their Afghan origin.

The issue of identifying the country of origin has far reaching implications for the access to asylum, since according to the Director of Frontex in Athens (Interview No.5), one of the purposes of screening, though not the primary one, is to clarify whether the immigrant needs protection (that activates a different procedure) or is eligible for return. This however, ends up predetermining someone’s access to asylum. As emphasized by UNHCR Greece (Interview No. 6), international protection needs to be requested by the individual on his/her own free will and it cannot be decided irrespective of that or on the sole basis of the country of origin.

Inability to identify the country of origin and by default to issue travel documents, makes deportation impossible. Unless the migrant opts to participate voluntarily in a return program, the law requires he is released with a temporary permit until such time as his expulsion is possible (see Ramboll & EurAsylum, 2012). Given the difficulties in identification for the Afghans of Iran and Pakistan, it is likely a number of them fall under this category whereby they are detained but not deported. This limitation is irrespective of practical
issues, for example limited flights to countries of origin. It is exclusively an issue of identifying and registering a population that until recently has never lived (or been registered) in the claimed country of origin.

### 4.4. Deportation

As previously mentioned, screening is directly linked with the process of deportation/return to the country of origin. Expulsions refer to forced returns, which in certain circumstances require returnees are accompanied by policemen. In Greece, forced returns fall under the operation Attica, part of the Joint Return Flights, which are coordinated by Frontex and the participating member countries. The program is being implemented since 2010 and carried out by the Greek Police. The process begins with screening and issuing of travel documents (a process that requires collaboration with the respective Embassies) and provision of escorts—where needed—for return operations. The coordinating center was set up at Petrou Ralli (the Aliens Division responsible for the issuing of pink cards and lodging of asylum claims). It is noteworthy that while initially returns were limited (two per year), in 2012 they increased to about two a month (interview n.3).

Systematic deportations of Afghans have been taking place since 2009, and we are referring here to those who do not wish to return voluntarily. From 2009 until 2012, the Hellenic Police deported 2,866 people to Afghanistan, with the largest number (1,112) having been returned in 2012. This confirms the information received from Frontex that returns have increased significantly in the last year. In parallel, return operations take place in the framework of police operations, with escorts from the Aliens Division. In that group of operations (with escorts), Afghanistan is in the first five nationalities (in relation to the total returns that have taken place), with Albania being first and Pakistan second. The variation in numbers of deportations (See table III) has to do with the geographical proximity—in the case of Albania—but also with the fact that it is easier to identify and issue travel documents for some nationalities more than others. For example, there is no Embassy of Afghanistan in Greece (unlike Pakistan’s) and no Readmission Protocol or other form of cooperation. This does not mean that there are no returns, but that the frequency and number is much lower compared to other countries.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>2010</th>
<th>2011</th>
<th>2012 (11 months)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>421</td>
<td>865</td>
<td>11,112</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: Hellenic Police, 2013.*

Again, if we compare the total number of apprehended Afghans (See table II previously) with those returned there is an evident disparity. There are likely two reasons for that. The first is in respect to the Afghans of Iran and Pakistan, where travel documents cannot always be issued, thus preventing their return because often they have no way of proving their country of origin, especially if they were never registered. This was also confirmed by the Embassy of Afghanistan in Bulgaria. In Greece there is no Consular or Embassy of Afghanistan, since the application was rejected by the Greek side (interview no.1). The Embassy in Bulgaria covers the needs of the Afghan population in Greece through a representative sent every six weeks to conduct interviews with those interested in travel documents and return. Furthermore, according to the Police (Interview No. 11) there is a significant delay in the issuance of travel documents for forced returns, as the Embassy prefers to issue travel documents only to those who wish to return voluntarily. This is a broader approach embassies of third countries adopt, preferring to issue travel documents for their nationals who wish

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12 A total of 15,746 people were deported in 2012.

13 According to the EU Delegation in Afghanistan, the Delegation assists in the return of Afghans through the UNHCR program by contributing with shelter assistance, cash for work incentives, and vocational training, however there is no official readmission agreement in place (interview No.12)
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to return (either in cases whether deportation switched to voluntary return or assisted voluntary return through IOM) as opposed to those who are forced to depart (unless there is a framework for cooperation between countries).

Irrespective however of whether return is with or without escort, jointly with Frontex or directly via the Hellenic Police, the submission of an asylum claim stops the process, which is the second reason why returns may be low. Many Afghans until recently sought ‘refuge’ in the asylum process, as means of legalizing their stay albeit temporarily but also because they identify themselves as prima facie refugees, making access to asylum their number one priority.

4.5. Asylum

Asylum, access to it and recognition, is considered to be the primary aim for the majority of Afghans, as they are a group that falls under the refugee status given the conflict in Afghanistan, although many, as mentioned above come from neighboring countries.

“Afghans are always refugees. Therefore, for the Afghans [Greece] is a transit country. They prefer other countries because they believe that the asylum system is better, with reception facilities and accommodation” (Interview No. 9).

The asylum system in Greece has been repeatedly criticized for failing to provide adequate protection. Eventually Greece was brought before the European Court for Human Rights for the conditions of reception and treatment. Since 2010, a process of restructuring and reforming the system of first reception and processing of asylum is in place. The initial proposal was part of the National Action Plan of 2010 and led to the enactment of the new law on asylum, L.3907/2011, which establishes a new Asylum Service and a First Reception service, in line with the European Directive 2008/115/EC.

The, until recently non-existent first reception services, meant that it was impossible to separate and identify people in need and/or protection at entry points. Instead, and particularly after 2010, migrants were asked to travel to Athens and Petrou Ralli to submit their asylum claim

“One must go once a week in Petrou Ralli to submit an asylum application, and it is a case of when and if one succeeds. Petrou Ralli accepts only 20 applications without any transparency to the process. Nobody knows how priority is given ” (Interview No. 3).

The endless queues and waiting conditions discouraged many. The First Instance degree (of asylum) remained (and remains) the responsibility of the Police; the majority of claims in 2011 received negative response independent of country of origin and reasons for applying. This, in turn, overloaded the appeal process, with the additional effect of immigrants waiting for as long as five (5) years and more for a decision. This dysfunctional system produced a contrast; on the one hand asylum became a way for many to legalize their stay in the country, and on the other hand, it discouraged those in need to access it effectively.

For the Afghans, asylum is largely synonymous with integration, social acceptance and better living conditions (Δημητριάδη, 2012) and we refer here particularly to those who are not escaping the conflict in Afghanistan, but are arriving from Iran and Pakistan. For many who fled these countries -precisely because they were not (or no longer) recognized as refugees and they did not wish or could not return to Afghanistan- Europe was the next step in their effort to be recognized as people in need of protection. It is important though to note that this protection, this quest for asylum, does not relate only to physical safety or freedom but also to social inclusion in the host society, access to benefits and opportunities:

14 For detailed analysis of asylum in Greece see McDonough & Tsourdi 2012.
"E: in your opinion are asylum and recognition of refugee status the main the issue for Afghans;
A: Yes! Because in 2005 and 2006 if someone applied for asylum the application took forever to be
processed. This became public knowledge "(Interview No. 7).

It is the impossibility of having their claim recognised, and receiving refugee status or other forms of long-term
protection like subsidiary protection, that pushes Afghan to continue their journey towards specific countries
with higher recognition rates

Between 2007 and until June 2010 Afghan migrants had filed a total of 5,938 claims (see Table IV below).
Significant reduction was observed in 2011 and 2012, likely associated with a lack of confidence in the Greek
asylum system. It could also indicate a tendency to explore ways to leave the country for other member states.
Equally important is the Dublin II mechanism in this process, since those who have crossed the Greek borders
and have avoided arrest prefer not to submit an asylum claim to avoid being registered in the Eurodac
(European Dactyloscopy) database, thereby increasing the chances of non-return to Greece from other
countries (Δημητριάδη, 2012:. 203).

Table IV: Asylum applications

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country of Origin</th>
<th>Afghanistan</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Year</td>
<td>2011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2012</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Applications</td>
<td>637</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>584</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second degree instance</td>
<td>285</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>345</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rejections</td>
<td>166</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>168</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Refugee status</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Humanitarian protection</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subsidiary protection</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Access to asylum became even more difficult for Afghans following the change in the law on detention.
Presidential Decree (PD) 114 of 2010, initially included provisions for detention of maximum six (6) months.
The PD was amended in 2012, extending the detention time for all (including asylum seekers) to a year and in
special cases to 18 months. The policy of detention was conceived not only as a punitive measure, but rather
as deterrence; it is based on the argument that immigrants are prevented from lodging asylum applications
indiscriminately, as a means of legalizing their stay.

"Q: It has been noted that several immigrants did not apply for asylum fearing they will be detained
longer. Would you argue that detention functions as a deterrent to asylum?
A: yes indeed, because they know that when they apply for asylum the process will take a long time and
they will likely be detained through out it "(Interview No. 4).

15 Rejections refer also to previously submitted claims that were pending review. Applications refer to those submitted from the
implementation of PD114/2010 and refugee status includes decisions of first and second instance.
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For a population that is primarily transit migrants, like the Afghans, detention for unknown period of time equals delay of the journey and entails a danger that by the time they are released their options for mobility might have changed.

On the other hand, the pink card guarantees a level of safety from apprehension, until the immigrant transits to the next destination, as indicated by interviews with representatives of Afghan associations in Greece. A notable change in recent months is that the approach towards Eurodac may have changed. The temporary cessation of returns to Greece under the Dublin II mechanism meant that if arrested in another country the immigrant was unlikely to be returned to Greece. Rather, according to the President of the Afghan Community in Greece, the cessation of returns likely facilitates the passage of Afghans to other countries.

“The main route is still Greece, only now because it is the one country where returns under Dublin II have stopped. Arrivals can be fingerprinted but if caught at another member state do not face the danger of return” (interview No.8)

The reduction in returns under the Dublin II is evident in the available data. In 2010, 374 Afghans were returned by member countries or affiliated countries with the EU, primarily Norway (93 people). By 2011 returns decreased dramatically, to 11 people, mainly due to reports of NGOs and human rights organisations on the conditions of detention and living standards, but also because of the –at the time pending-decision of the European Court of Human Rights on returns under Dublin II. The conviction of Greece and Belgium resulted in an almost complete stop of returns under the mechanism; only two persons from Afghanistan were returned.

5. Main characteristics of Afghan migrants in Greece

The exact number of Afghans in Greece is unknown. The Embassy of Afghanistan in Bulgaria noted that though there is no estimate on the number of irregulars, legal migrants (primarily pink card holders) were estimated at approximately 2,900. The President of the Community of Afghans in Greece estimates the population to about 10,000 of which regular are believed to be approximately 1,500 (the figure includes pink card, recognized refugees, humanitarian or subsidiary protection).

The two official organizations of Afghans in Greece, the Community Afghan migrants and refugees and the association of United Afghans in Greece have a total number of 160 registered members but they both declared that participation in organizations is limited and they have several Afghans who assist unofficially, without registering. Both also emphasized that the numbers have dropped significantly due to transit and / or return of Afghans. The extremely low participation of Afghans in organizations is linked with their integration but also way of life; as the president of the association of United Afghans in Greece states, the Afghans reproduce the system of tribal ties and local associations, which by default fragments them and isolates them from their fellow co-ethnics.

The majority of Afghans in Greece are single men, evident also in the apprehension and asylum figures. One noticeable change of the last three years is the increase in family arrivals from Afghanistan primarily and Iran, as well as members of the Afghan middle-class that developed during the presence of foreign troops in the country. The living standards in Afghanistan, lack of employment and uncertainty but also the change towards the Afghans in the neighboring host countries resulted in the migration of professionals and families towards Europe. Women do not usually migrate alone, though there have been recorded cases of women who transit from Greece in the company of their children, leaving their husbands behind (who will later on seek family reunification).

The group however that is perhaps the most problematic in terms of protection is the unaccompanied minors. To begin with, it is extremely difficult to identify who is a minor, especially for those who are 15 years and
older. The available procedure (that requires the consent of the individual) is medical tests (X-rays) but there is a danger of deviation of two years and because they place undue burden on the body, they are not used. This means that during screening the police officers records whatever age the individual decides to declare. As a result we have cases of

"Children who register as adults to avoid falling under the process that is in place for minors, children who are recorded as adults precisely because the authorities do not want to go through the process reserved for minors, and a lesser extent we have adults who claim to be minors in order to be transferred to reception facilities for minors from where they can leave freely" (Interview No. 4).

There is no record of the total number of unaccompanied minors, even though we know they are more than the 350 available positions in reception centers for minors. In fact, Afghan minors form a group for which we have the least knowledge. According to Monsutti (2007) and the President of the Association of Afghans, in Afghanistan one child of 15 years old is not considered a minor, but an active member of the family. Migration thus, does not seem impossible but is part of the economic survival of the group. On the other hand, it is unclear to what extent the minors are "unaccompanied" throughout, i.e. to what an extent some beginning migration with the family which they lose on the way or are left behind.

We have equally poor knowledge of the employment of Afghans in Greece. Until 2008, the knowledge of the Afghan associations was that the majority of those in Greece were employed, but the crisis inevitably led many to unemployment. Main occupations (based on interviews) were construction, welding, carpentry and other types of manual labor. According to the President of the Association of United Afghans (interview No.7), many performed similar jobs to those they held in Iran and Pakistan, but this is not always possible as many of these jobs have been abolished in Greece. The second point stressed by the associations, is that many of those who originally planned to use Greece as a transit country purposefully chose to not work. This seems to be of a broader approach, similar to the one followed on the issue of education and integration. Knowing that they wish to leave, they chose to integrate as little as possible in the society.

6. Leaving the country

The perception of Greece as a transit country is a common element in both the interviews and literature focusing on Afghan migrants, who are in turn seen as interested in further mobility either to another country or return to their country of departure and/or origin. On this basis, "exit" from the country can be divided into two broad categories; irregular exit to other EU member states and voluntary return either via IOM or Hellenic police programs.

6.1. Transit to neighboring countries

The irregular crossing to a neighboring country can take place via two ways; through usage of forged travel documents or without any, via the ports of Patras, Cofru and Igoumenitsa\textsuperscript{16}. In practice, this means that immigrants must successfully bypass the coastguard and Hellenic police checks at the harbor from Greek side, but also to avoid arrest in the corresponding Italian port. In some cases, crossing takes place with small boats or dinghies, whereby the migrant needs to successfully bypass the sea patrols in the territorial waters between Greece and Italy under the umbrella of Frontex. If apprehended in the Italian harbor with direct

\textsuperscript{16} An alternative option of course is to travel via plane to another EU member state, which requires forged passports and is of significant cost. The report focuses on the sea crossing primarily because it remains to this day the predominant route used by Afghans transiting to Italy, particularly for men and unaccompanied minors.
connection to a respective Greek harbor, the migrant is immediately returned. A fast track process is followed, independent of Dublin II, based on a bilateral agreement between Italy and Greece (Readmission Agreement 1999), which regulates the return process.

If one looks at the data available (see table V) of apprehensions at exit sights, a clear picture emerges of migrants attempting to leave the country. However, it should be noted that the same person may have been arrested several times in the same year in an effort to cross to Italy. On the other hand, the number of those who succeed in crossing remains unknown.

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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>APPREHENDED MIGRANTS (all nationalities)</td>
<td>349</td>
<td>1,128</td>
<td>464</td>
<td>681</td>
<td>815</td>
<td>1,084</td>
<td>1,634</td>
<td>2,483</td>
<td>2,593</td>
<td>3,859</td>
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<td>4,681</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APPREHENDED AFGHANS</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>234*</td>
<td>421**</td>
<td>-</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Ministry of Mercantile & Αιγαίου, 2013, * apprehensions within the port area, ** data for the months of January to June 2010 for both the port and surrounding area.

Afghans are one of the principal nationalities in the ports across from Italy, mainly Patras and Igoumenitsa. As previously mentioned they are mostly men and unaccompanied minors attempting to cross, hidden in trucks and cars. Readmission usually takes place in the port of Patras. Although apprehension data are not categorized by age, according to the NGO Praxis, from September 2011 to June 2012, 19 returns of unaccompanied minors, took place; all of Afghan nationality. ProAsyl’s report on readmission between Greece and Italy (ProAsyl, 2012) shows corresponding findings as well the investigation of the OHCHR unaccompanied minors in Europe (Mougne, 2010), according to which Afghans are one of the largest groups of minors heading to Europe.

In contrast, families and especially women with children invest in forged travel documents or borrow real ones and with minor alterations attempt to leave via an airport. Frontex once more is present in this case, but only in designated areas outside the Schengen airport sections. For those arriving from Schengen, the Hellenic Police is entirely responsible for border controls, though it is at times assisted through the presence of experts from EU member states that are popular destinations for immigrants (Interview No.5). The use of counterfeit passport or the borrowing of a real one is a common way of migrating but also an expensive one, with simple forged documents estimated at 200 euros and good quality counterfeit passports ranging between 600 to 800 euros.

### 6.2. Returns

There are essentially three type of return programs in which Afghans participate; voluntary assisted return (directly through IOM), forced without the consent of the third country national, who is essentially deported and it has been previously discussed above (Hellenic Police), and the “voluntary” return scheme by the Police

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17 Returns from Italy are not very representative of exit trends, because they include also legal migrants who fall short of one of the requirements for entry (e.g. the sum they should have with them upon entry) and are returned to Greece. They are usually incorporated in the total number of readmitted persons though Greece does not apprehend them nor do they fall into any category of ‘irregularity’ (interview no.7).
which may include the participation of IOM or not. This section focuses on the voluntary return through IOM and/or Police. Voluntary return is encouraged increasingly by police and Frontex, as it decongests services and is simpler on an operational level, whether conducted by IOM or through the Police.

Voluntary return\textsuperscript{18} is a special process, since the immigrant seeks to return on his own volition. Secondly, it implies the migrant has the necessary travel documents to do so. IOM is currently working with the Embassy of Afghanistan in Bulgaria and forwards directly the requests for travel documents of those wishing to voluntarily return. This fast-track process, no longer requires the Ambassador to travel every few weeks only for the purpose of collecting applications. This however is a recent collaboration, not in place prior to 2013.

The President of the Community of Afghan migrants and refugees said that voluntary returns under the Police were particularly active in 2010 and 2011, taking place primarily from detention facilities near border areas and in his opinion they were not entirely voluntary

"The policy in place is such that it proactively cultivates a climate of insecurity and discomfort to new arrivals; basically telling them that they will be detained for a long time and return is a better option" (Interview No.8)

These returns, which are categorized as voluntary, are different from forced expulsions that usually take place under the Attica program (see above section 'expulsion\textsuperscript{19}'). However often, both voluntary and forced return is implemented using the same means (i.e. a chartered plane can include both voluntary and forced returnees). The Hellenic police developed a collaboration program with IOM, whereby representatives of the organization visit detention facilities, register and encourage detainees to participate in return programs. IOM undertakes the responsibility for the issuing of travel documents that are then submitted to the police who is in turn responsible for issuing the travel ticket. Because the process entails the cooperation of the immigrant, the expulsion order is revoked with reservation and the immigrant is also eligible to receive the 300 €. This means that in technical terms, forced deportation becomes voluntary or assisted voluntary return. To facilitate this process an additional incentive is offered to those in detention; those participating in the programs will not be registered in the black list entry, which means that if they wish in the future to travel legally to Greece or the EU, they will be able to do so (based on information from interview no.11)

Afghan participation in voluntary returns is best illustrated through the available IOM data (interview No.10). From May 2010 until February 2013, a total 3,842 Afghans had applied for voluntary return, of which 1,406 had successfully returned. Participation in the program, especially for assisted voluntary return, is not guaranteed; rather it is based on certain criteria. The migrant needs to either have an irregular status or waive the asylum papers (if any) and undertake responsibility for the issuing of travel documents. An additional 133 Afghans have been returned through the program funded by the European Economic Area (EEA) and another 12 were included in the UK Return Fund (interview No.10). IOM points out that based on registrations, 2,133 Afghans are still waiting to be returned. The Organisation notes that the discrepancy in the figures of applications and successful returns are not solely the responsibility of the program. Often, migrants change their minds and do not complete the program, either because they found employment or because they simply changed their mind to return

Compared with the data of apprehensions, the participation of Afghans for voluntary return is not great. On the other hand, as noted in past surveys (Turton & Marsden 2002, Kronenfeld 2011), but also from the communication with the NGO in Afghanistan, return is not always a feasible solution, as Afghanistan is still

\textsuperscript{18} Voluntary is when the migrant decides on his own free will and at his own cost (unless assisted) to return to a third country outside the European Union. This type of return is important to note, involves no compulsion hence it is implied that the migrant has not been arrested, threatened with deportation or coerced into leaving. If the return decision is taken during detention it is considered voluntary under compulsion. This means that the migrant is either a rejected asylum applicant, or unable to stay in the country (due to lack of valid permit or authorization). In this case a return decision (or deportation order) has been issued and return is considered voluntary because the migrant is not forcefully led to be deported. If monetary assistance is offered, it is voluntary assisted return (for the definitions see Triandafyllidou & Dimitriadi 2009).
Migration from Afghanistan to third countries and Greece

largely lacking in basic infrastructure, security and employment opportunities for the repatriated population. Given the close social networking relations of Afghans and the maintenance of contacts with both countries of origin and transit, it is likely that return does not seem attractive or practical, especially for families, which constitute an important part of the newly arriving population in Greece.
7. Conclusions

Afghans constitute one of the least researched immigrant groups in Greece. The majority of the literature focuses on Afghan immigration to neighboring countries of Pakistan and Iran. This is to be expected considering that both received the bulk of Afghan immigrants in the last thirty (30) years. Changes in their reception policies, forced many to seek out alternative destinations in search of a better life.

There are many similarities in the migration to Pakistan and Iran. Both countries shared, until recently, extremely porous borders with Afghanistan. Both countries received, prior to 1979, economic migration from Afghanistan, often seasonal. The Pashtun tribes straddle the Afghan-Pakistani border and the tribe of Hazaras share affinity with the Persian tribes. Immigration to both these countries is not only a natural consequence of the socio-economic situation in Afghanistan but also a result of historical and tribal relations.

Both Pakistan and Iran developed parallel policies in response to Afghan migration. The period of 1979-2000 was in both countries one of open hospitality towards Afghans; a result of the religious code, the Soviet invasion, political balance in the region and foreign policy of both countries. Together they received more than 6million refugees (registered). They differed however, in their reception practices. In Pakistan, Afghans had freedom of movement and settlement (either in one of the 400 camps or in the cities), to employment and education. In Iran, registration was systematic. They issued blue cards for Afghans that recognized them as refugees, but imposed restrictions in employment (only 17 manual labor categories were open) and internal mobility. Similarly, however, to Pakistan they were free to settle in urban centers and for more than a decade they received subsidies for basic good, education and health services.

The period of 2000-2001 is characterized by a noticeable shift in reception policies towards Afghan migrants. This was the result of many factors, including but not limited to the population growth (high birth rates) amongst the Afghans in these countries, their insufficient registration and identification and the change in the relation with Afghanistan. Both Pakistan and Iran sought the return of the refugee population and although this was largely achieved, the porous borders, living conditions in Afghanistan and political instability (and insecurity) led many to immigrate once more. At the same time, the generation born and raised in countries outside Afghanistan faced substantial difficulty in returning to an unknown country. In an effort to ‘push’ Afghans towards return, both Iran and Pakistan developed restrictive policies and practices, significantly changing the reception and settlement framework. Pakistan terminated access to education and destroyed the camps. Those who already held refugee status were invited, in 2007, to receive a new registration card that would allow them three-year stay-at the end of which they would return to Afghanistan. In parallel, new arrivals were perceived and treated as irregular. Although in 2012 Pakistan acknowledged that under its proposed program, return had not been achieved and expressed its readiness to extend the ‘waiting period’, it simultaneously proceeded to close the border with Afghanistan, increase controls and deportations of irregular Afghans.

Iran, in contrast, adopted a more structured policy that relied on the registering of refugees. The Amayesh registered the refugee population, who now had to pay for each renewal card in conjunction with a range of taxation services and goods. Thirty districts became inaccessible for Afghans, forcing those already living in them to become internally displaced. Access to employment became even more difficult, while the regularization of irregular migrants in 2011 was set up in such a way as to record an ‘invisible’ until then population but also facilitate future deportation proceedings. In both countries, Afghans became victims of racial violence and social exclusion. From "religious" refugees they were labeled economic migrants, an inferior and demeaning status in both Pakistan and Iran. What should be stressed is that the previously discussed policies of Pakistan and Iran, took place at the same time. This parallel move from inclusion to exclusion effectively created a "wall" around the movement of Afghans, who were suddenly cut off from their traditional destinations. Unable to stay but also to return, many sought new destinations.
Their presence therefore in Greece should be examined in relation not only to Afghanistan but also the country they arrived from, their motivations and the policies of countries of origin and transit. Their movement in Europe is often secondary, with mixed motives, making difficult the automatic recognition of all Afghans as "refugees". In reality, they are a truly mixed migratory group, which makes individual assessment of needs necessary. As acknowledged by UNHCR, the chief institution responsible for Refugees, in its 2007 report on the challenges in the field of protection, mixed migratory flows have mixed incentives for migration, driven by a combination of insecurity, fear, and hope and expectations, often difficult to distinguish (UNHCR, 2007).

It is clear that a significant number of Afghans considers Greece as a transit country meaning that settlement in the country is either consciously not pursued or is seen as difficult, due to existing policies in place; absence of legalization measures, ‘sweep’ operations like Xenios Zeus, fragmented asylum system, racist violence (see ProAsyl 2012a), social exclusion and economic crisis that is increasing unemployment rates. The aforementioned are some of the features immigrants wishing to stay in the country will encounter. According to Afghan associations, difficulties in residence and integration led even those who have received the much sought after refugee status or residency permit to consider migrating to another EU member state. Simultaneously, leaving the country is consistently becoming harder, with intensification of checks at major ports, mainly Patras and Igoumenitsa but also airports. In conjunction with the policies of reception and asylum, the result is the emergence of a population that is urged to return “home”, though we often forget that it is sometimes difficult to identify where home lies.
8. ANNEX I - Organizations referenced in the report

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interview number</th>
<th>Organization/Institution</th>
<th>Communication</th>
<th>Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Embassy of Afghanistan in Bulgaria</td>
<td>Written communication</td>
<td>11 &amp; 12/2/ 2013</td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>NGO in Afghanistan</td>
<td>Skype interview</td>
<td>13/3/2013</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>The Greek Ombudsman</td>
<td>Interview</td>
<td>5/2/2013</td>
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<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>UNHCR Greece</td>
<td>Interview</td>
<td>11/2/ 2013</td>
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<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Frontex</td>
<td>Interview</td>
<td>1/2/2013</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>Hellenic Coastguard</td>
<td>Telephone interview</td>
<td>26/3/2013</td>
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<td>7</td>
<td>United Afghans in Greece</td>
<td>Interview</td>
<td>7/2/2013</td>
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<td>8</td>
<td>Afghan Community of Migrants and Refugees in Greece</td>
<td>Interview</td>
<td>27/1/2013</td>
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<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Greek Refugee Forum</td>
<td>Interview</td>
<td>15/2/2013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>International Organisation for Migration</td>
<td>Interview</td>
<td>15 &amp; 18/2/2013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Hellenic Police, Aliens Division</td>
<td>Interview</td>
<td>5/4/2013</td>
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<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>EU Delegation to Afghanistan</td>
<td>Written communication</td>
<td>21/5/2013</td>
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