New Wave of Emigration from Afghanistan

**Author:** IWPR Afghanistan

Unemployment and security concerns prompt tens of thousands of young people to leave the country.

Two months ago, Abdulkhalil Jawid paid a human trafficker 40,000 afghanis (600 US dollars) to ensure his son got to Europe.

“When I heard that the Taleban had taken over Kunduz province and that Islamic State was killing young men on a daily basis, I decided to send my son Rashid abroad for his education so that he could have a better future,” said Jawid, a resident of Samangan province in the north of Afghanistan.

The smuggler said it would take two months to get Rashid to Norway, where he could start a new life. But Jawid has no idea what has happened to his son, and bitterly regrets his decision.

Tens of thousands of young Afghans are leaving the country because of a worsening security situation and rising rates of unemployment. According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), around 80,000 Afghans applied for asylum in Europe in the first half of 2015, a huge increase on previous years.

Participants in IWPR debates this month warned that the Afghan government must take urgent action to address this mass exodus.

Unemployment has risen since international forces withdrew from Afghanistan last year, and speakers at events in Ghor, Parwan, and Samangan provinces said the government had failed to create new jobs.

Many debate participants also warned that security problems, particularly the rise of groups pledging allegiance to the Islamic State in the east of the country, were fuelling migration.

The mass exodus also creates long-term risks for the economy and stability in Afghanistan.

“If the trend continues, it will have very bad consequences for our country,” said Abdul Hamid Natiqi, a provincial councillor in the central province of Ghor. “One of these is that Afghanistan's reputation in the world and in the region will worsen. Another is anxiety among those who remain in the country, which will result in falling public support for the government.”

Ghor civil society leader Khudayar Waqif said that corruption and bad leadership had made the situation worse.

“Any country which lacks political stability and where people have no confidence in their future will have problems with migration,” he said.

Young people are not only seeking better lives in Europe. Tens of thousands travel illegally to other countries in the region to find work, taking terrible risks in the process.

Alidad Rezaie recently paid people-smugglers to get him across the border to Iran. He said he was abused by the traffickers and saw other migrants die at the hands of the Iranian security services.

“Four months ago, I was brought illegally into Iran. The smuggler put 12 of us into one car. If any of us said a word, they would beat us, and they didn’t give us water or food for several nights. I also saw with my own eyes how Iranian police fired at a passenger vehicle, killing some [migrants] and injuring others.”

Abdul Ghafur Shinch, acting head of the department of for refugees and repatriation in Samangan in the north of Afghanistan, said that about 500 young men from the province had travelled to Europe illegally over the past year.

“Human trafficking is a crime. but our department is unable to take steps to prevent it in this province, because we are a policy-making body,” he said.

Samangan activist Abdujali Munis said that local civil society groups were trying to inform young people about the dangers of travelling abroad illegally.

“These public awareness campaigns explain that using people-smugglers means risking many problems, including being robbed or even dying,” he said.

Ghulam Mohammad, the secretary of Jabal Saraj district council in Parwan, a province northwest of Kabul, said that other countries were exploiting Afghan migrants.
“Foreign countries attract young people to boost their own economy because they hire them do more work for less money,” he said.

Lida Ahmadi – head teacher at a girls’ high school in Jabal Saraj – said that multiple factors were contributing to the exodus.

“Increasing political instability, unemployment and bleak prospects for the future have caused young people to leave the motherland that nurtured them,” she said.

Ahmadi asked her fellow panellist, district government chief Samandar Sikandari, what the government was doing to stop the flood of young people leaving the country.

Sikandari said that efforts to create more jobs were under way.

“Families also have a responsibility to change attitudes,” he added. “Mothers and fathers should tell their sons that leaving the country is a bad choice and that we all have to defend our homeland.”

Agha Shirin Khalil, head of the department for refugees and repatriation in Parwan province, said that 150,000 Afghans had applied for asylum in 44 countries across the world in the course of 2015.

“If you think about it, they are mostly the young workforce that forms the foundations of this country. If young people leave, how will the country develop and who will develop it?” he asked.

This report is based on an ongoing series of debates conducted as part of IWPR’s Afghan Youth and Elections programme.