



# **Afghanistan: Situation of young male 'Westernised' returnees to Kabul**

**Asylos, August 2017**

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## Foreword

The Country of Origin Information (COI) report 'Afghanistan: Situation of young male 'Westernised' returnees to Kabul' was compiled due to an increased demand by legal representatives who are representing young Afghan asylum seekers in Europe. Most of these asylum seekers have spent their teenage years in Europe having been granted some form of humanitarian/subsidiary form of protection until they reach their 18th birthday. Shortly before or once they turn 18 they are obliged to apply for an additional or new form of protection. Many are rejected though on the basis that the security situation in Afghanistan has improved and that return to or internal relocation to Kabul will be both reasonable and relevant.

Legal representatives, practitioners working with these young Afghan males, practitioners in a range of capacity in Afghanistan and especially Kabul, and other relevant stakeholders have repeatedly raised their concern about this trend. However, a general lack of understanding and lack of country information about the relevant issues at stake remain.

Asylos and ARC Foundation hope to fill this gap in the COI literature and contribute with this report to a more informed debate about the situation of young 'Westernised' returnees to Afghanistan. The report is also intended as a tool to assist legal practitioners and to help ensure that decision-makers consider all relevant material.

## Methodology

This COI report combines publicly available sources and written or oral contributions by academics and/or practitioners with a specific expertise on Afghanistan.

In May 2017 the Terms of Reference (ToR) were set by Asylos based on conversations they had with European legal representatives representing Afghan asylum seekers, with contributions provided by ARC Foundation and the Dutch Council for Refugees (DCR). The identified issues for research were:

1. Return procedure
2. State attitudes towards returnees
3. Provision of support from the Afghan state/ NGOs
4. Societal attitudes towards returnees
5. Consequences of having a lack of support network as a returnee
6. Access to healthcare for a returnee
7. Access to housing for a returnee
8. Access to employment for a returnee
9. Access to food and basic services for a returnee
10. The impact of mass returns of Afghans from Pakistan and Iran
11. Anecdotal evidence of returnees' experiences

The desk-based research was conducted by volunteers from Asylos in May and June 2017 using their in-house customized research engine<sup>1</sup>, which covers a wide range of publicly available local, national, regional and international sources. The time-frame for research covered the past three years.

This research was complemented with interviews with and written contributions by academics, practitioners, journalists and political analysts with an expertise on Afghanistan and the situation of Afghan returnees from Europe. During May and June 2017 the following experts provided their opinions to Asylos, with the exception of Liza Schuster and Shoaib Sharifi who were already contacted back in April 2016 for a research note<sup>2</sup> produced by Asylos, on the issues for research as set out above:

- ❖ 22 April 2016, interview with [Dr Liza Schuster](#), Reader in Sociology of the City University of London
- ❖ 23 April 2016, interview with [Shoaib Sharifi](#), Afghan journalist
- ❖ 28 May 2017, interview with [Abdul Ghafoor](#), Refugee rights activist and director of Afghanistan Migrants Advice and Support Organization (AMASO) based in Kabul
- ❖ 5 June 2017, written correspondence with [Dr Nassim Majidi](#), co-founder and co-Director of the think tank Samuel Hall, Affiliate Researcher at Sciences Po's CERI (Centre for International Studies) and Research Associate at the African Centre for Migration and Society at the University of the Witwatersrand, South Africa
- ❖ 11 June 2017, written correspondence with [Dr Anicée Van Engeland](#), Senior Lecturer in International Security at the Centre for International Security & Resilience of Cranfield University
- ❖ 21 June 2017, written correspondence with [Tim Foxley](#), Independent analyst running a political/military research company specialising in issues concerning Afghanistan
- ❖ 22 June 2017, written correspondence with Masood Ahmadi, National Program Manager at the International Organization for Migration (IOM) Afghanistan, responsible for the Return, Reintegration and Resettlement Program dedicated to Afghan migrants returning from the EU countries.

ARC Foundation and the Dutch Council for Refugees undertook a quality peer review in June and July 2017.

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<sup>1</sup> For more information contact Asylos directly at [info@asylos.eu](mailto:info@asylos.eu)

<sup>2</sup> 'Afghanistan: Internal Flight Alternative in Kabul, Jalalabad and Mazar-e-Sharif' <https://resources.asylos.eu/available-research/>

## Who we are

Asylos is a global network of volunteers providing free-of-charge Country of Origin Information research for lawyers helping asylum seekers with their claim. Asylos works to ensure that asylum seekers and their legal counsel have access to crucial sources and data to substantiate their claim. Asylos volunteers use their research and language skills to access detailed information. More information can be found [here](#).

ARC Foundation is the charitable branch of Asylum Research Consultancy (ARC). It was established in December 2016 to “undertake research into human rights violations around the world, to promote respect for people’s rights, to contribute to the sound administration of asylum law, to provide technical advice and training to governments and others on human rights matters, and to raise awareness of human rights issues”.

ARC was set up in 2010 in order to raise standards in the refugee status determination (RSD) process, improve the realisation of asylum seekers’ and refugees’ rights and entitlements and to ensure that those in need of protection are recognised as such. It is staffed by human rights researchers and COI specialists and undertakes research, advocacy and training to improve the quality of RSD. More information on ARC Foundation and ARC can be found [here](#).

The Dutch Council for Refugees (DCR) is an independent, non-governmental organization with a widespread network of local offices, paid staff and volunteers throughout the Netherlands. DCR offers asylum seekers and refugees practical support during their asylum procedure and their integration in the Dutch society. Through lobbying, campaigns, research and cooperation with partner-NGOs and ECRE, DCR advocates for the rights of anyone seeking protection in the Netherlands and Europe. Furthermore, DCR supplies information and advice to asylum lawyers, including on country of origin information at different stages of the asylum process.

More information on the Dutch Council for Refugees can be found [here](#).

Asylos, ARC Foundation and DCR share the belief that asylum matters and both have the desire to contribute to the fair and sound administration of asylum law. This COI report is the result of a joint pilot project looking into creating new and innovative forms of COI where such gaps are identified in the RSD process.

## Comments

Asylos and ARC Foundation would highly appreciate your comments on this COI report. If you have read this report, used any part of it to inform your case or decision and/or submitted it to court please go to <http://asylos.eu/give-feedback>, insert the case reference number **AFG2017-05**, leave your comment and press submit. Alternatively you can email [info@asylos.eu](mailto:info@asylos.eu) and [info@asylumresearchconsultancy.com](mailto:info@asylumresearchconsultancy.com) directly.

## Research outline

This report serves as a background document on existing Country of Origin Information (COI) on the situation of young Afghan males who have been returned, voluntarily or forcibly, from Europe to Kabul. More general information on the situation of returnees living outside of Kabul has also been included but clearly marked as such. COI available in the public domain has been complemented by expert commentaries collected by Asylos during May and June 2017 (see 'Methodology' section)

The following subtopics were researched:

1. [Return procedure](#)
2. [State attitudes towards returnees](#)
3. [Provision of support from the Afghan state / NGOs](#)
4. [Societal attitudes towards returnees](#)
5. [Consequences of having a lack of support network as a returnee](#)
6. [Access to healthcare for a returnee](#)
7. [Access to housing for a returnee](#)
8. [Access to employment for a returnee](#)
9. [Access to food and basic services for a returnee](#)
10. [The impact of mass returns of Afghans from Pakistan and Iran](#)
11. [Anecdotal evidence of returnees' experiences](#)

## Sources consulted

All web sources were consulted in May - June 2017. The majority of sources date from the last three years. They are presented in alphabetical order.

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*This response was prepared by the Research & Information Services Section of the Refugee Review Tribunal (RRT) in Australia after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the RRT within time constraints. This response is not, and does not purport to be, conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim to refugee status or asylum. This research response may not, under any circumstance, be cited in a decision or any other document. Anyone wishing to use this information may only cite the primary source material contained herein.*

## 3. NGOs and think tanks

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## 5. Other

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A copy of this report can be requested by contacting Asylos directly

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## 6. Interviews

- Interview carried out by Asylos on 22 April 2016 with Liza Schuster, UK-based scholar who spent 2013-2015 teaching at Kabul university
- Interview carried out by Asylos on 23 April 2016 with Shoaib Sharifi, an Afghan documentary filmmaker and journalist
- Expert opinion provided by email in response to Asylos's questions on 11 June 2017 by Dr. Anicée Van Engeland, UK-based scholar with extensive research experience in Afghanistan

- Expert opinion provided by email in response to Asylos's questions on 21 June 2017 by Tim Foxley, political analyst focussing on Afghanistan since 2001.
- Interview carried out by Asylos on 28 May 2017 with Abdul Ghafoor, the director of Afghanistan Migrants Advice and Support Organisation (AMASO) in Kabul
- Expert opinion provided by email in responses to Asylos's questions on 5 June 2017 by Nassim Majidi, return migration specialist, co-director and co-founder of Samuel Hall, an independent think tank with offices in Kabul
- Expert opinion provided by email in responses to Asylos's questions on sub-topic '1. Return procedure' on 22 June 2017 by Masood Ahmadi, National Program Manager of IOM Afghanistan

# Findings

## 1. Return procedure (for forced and voluntary returns)

### Forced returns

A recent report from the Afghan Analysts Network (AAN) describes in detail the return process for 18 Afghan men who were forcibly returned to Kabul after their asylum applications were rejected in Germany in February 2017. It describes how the returnees were accompanied by 60 German police officers on the flight, and on arrival were taken to the Ministry of Refugee and Repatriation (MoRR) office in the airport's arrival lounge. They were received by government representatives including officials from the Foreign Ministry and Ministry of Interior's Criminal Investigation Department. Representatives from the IOM and the non-profit organisation International Psychosocial Organisation (IPSO) were also present, as well as a doctor provided by the IOM. Deportees who wished to travel on to other provinces were provided money by the IOM. Those with no relatives in Kabul or other provinces took up the offer to be accommodated by MoRR and IOM in temporary accommodation at 'Jangalak reception centre.'

"On 23 February 2017, AAN had the opportunity to be at the airport when a charter flight from Munich – the third German one of five so far – landed at Hamed Karzai International Airport in Kabul. It was operated by Italy-based holiday flyer Air Meridiana, as German carriers had refused the contract, fearing loss of image. On the flight were 18 Afghan men whose asylum applications had been rejected by the German government, aged between 19 and 53 years. Originally, they came from ten different provinces, Balkh, Kabul and Herat as well as from Kandahar, Khost, Maidan-Wardak, Uruzgan, Kunduz, Paktia and Nangrahar. Only the first three provinces are considered safe (in part) for deportations by the German government, which has been the cause of a heated domestic policy debate. (5) There were also almost 60 German policemen on board the plane (three policemen per deportee). Returnees interviewed by AAN claimed their "personal" policemen threatened them with being shackled if they "misbehaved", so they did not even dare to speak with their fellow Afghans on board.

The final list of those on the plane was only handed over to the Afghan authorities by a representative of the German embassy upon the plane's arrival. Before it arrived, the Afghan authorities had a list of 88 Afghan names, apparently a 'pool' of Afghans earmarked for deportation. While the German government, for domestic consumption, claims that "many" of the deportees were criminal offenders (see a late April 2017 interview by foreign minister Sigmar Gabriel [here](#)), it also admitted that it does not inform the Afghan authorities about this, "for reasons of data protection," as it wrote in an answer to an official parliamentary query dated 20 April 2017. This has

been confirmed by a number of Afghan officials present on 23 February 2017, leading to complaints on the German side.

As the steady drop in the number of passengers on these five flights demonstrate, the German authorities appear to be struggling to fill the quota agreed on with the Afghan government of 50 deportees per flight. Lawyers and pro-refugee groups regularly manage to acquire last-minute halts to deportation for Afghan clients from German courts.

General Al-Haj Muhammad Asef Jabbarkhel, the paunchy airport police commander greeted the arrivals with “I do not welcome you as a policeman, but as a fellow-Afghan,” in an obvious attempt to cheer up the 18 men. The general asked his assistants to bring “water, tea and biscuits” and told the new arrivals that Afghan authorities would take care of their initial accommodation. He said that they were back on their home country’s “holy ground” and managed to entice the men into joining him in a joint prayer for peace.

Following this, all deportees were registered in the MoRR office in the airport’s arrival lounge that opened just two days prior to the flight’s arrival. Other government representatives included officials from the foreign ministry and the Ministry of Interior’s Criminal Investigation Department. Representatives of the UN-related International Organisation for Migration (IOM) and German-funded International Psycho-Social Organisation (IPSO) were also present at the arrival lounge, situated in the area before passport control. IOM had a doctor present to provide immediate medical treatment, if necessary. In that case, one older and obviously sick deportee (he was shaking and had to be helped out of the shuttle bus by two assistants), was immediately led into a separate room for medical care.

Those deportees who expressed a wish to travel on to home provinces or to relatives outside Kabul received travel money from IOM. Some of the 18, however, left the airport without bothering to speak to any of the organisations present. Eight, with no relatives in either Kabul or elsewhere in the country (most of them had lived in Iran for many years prior to their travel to Germany), took up the offer by IOM and MoRR for temporary accommodation in the Jangalak “reception centre” funded and managed by IOM. AAN spoke to some of the Afghan journalists present who had also been there when earlier flights had landed, and they noted that this time there were no relatives waiting.”

(Source: Afghanistan Analysts Network, *Voluntary and Forced Returns to Afghanistan in 2016/17: Trends, statistics and experiences*, 19 May 2017)

Abdul Ghafoor, director of AMASO in Kabul describes the procedure of return in an interview with Asylos. He states that NGOs and states are both responsible for a safe return for refugees, normally the deporting state sends a list including all names of deportees to the Ministry of Refugees and Repatriation and IOM. Those returnees, who do not have a place to stay, are staying in temporary housing provided by IOM for two weeks. Meanwhile they can

obtain different forms of financial assistance, however, afterwards there is no safety.

“There is no question upon arrival, the only thing they say is ok, they check their names ok, you are this person and if they have Tazkira (Afghanistan National Identity Card) they might register the name of the Tazkira, that is it. There is no any immigration person in the airport and nothing happens. There are not even proper medical facilities that to check if you are fit enough to come to Afghanistan, what problems you have. There is nothing like that.

For those who don't have place for living, they are moved to a temporary receiving centers, where they can stay for two weeks and that place is taken care by IOM. There is no guarantee of safety, no one takes care of their safety, they keep them for two weeks and after two weeks they are thrown on the streets, even those who don't have a place to live they have to leave the place..”

(Source: Abdul Ghafoor, Interview with Asylos, 28 May 2017)

This Policy Brief is part of the project ‘Possibilities and Realities of Return Migration’ (PREMIG), a large-scale research project led by Peace Research Institute Oslo (PRIO) that explores return migration from Norway and the United Kingdom. It explores the difficulties of reintegration that Afghans who have opted for voluntary return face.

“Those providing reintegration assistance face a difficult task. Considering reintegration equivalent to integration – a long complex process – shows why it is difficult. For example, assistance provided tends to be short-term. Migrants would not be expected to integrate in six months, so why returnees? Assistance is also hampered by a narrow understanding of what reintegration means. That reintegration is a process that could start prior to departure is not recognised; instead, assistance is only given in Afghanistan. Social capital seems to be the most important resource available to returnees; yet activities that strengthen networks (including with family, and potentially, other returnees) are not prioritised. Reintegration assistance provided focuses on business-planning and finding employment, but is not based on labour market or skills assessment, with most research participants being advised to start a small business, whatever their skills and experience. However, ultimately, the reintegration of Afghan returnees is shaped by the fact that even those who consented to assisted return mostly do not want to be in Afghanistan. They look outwards, towards future migration, as they do not trust the Afghan government to provide them with services or a stable secure environment. This will make reintegration difficult whatever assistance is provided.” (p.4)

(Source: Oeppen, C. and Majidi, N., *Can Afghans Reintegrate after Assisted Return from Europe?*, Peace Research Institute Oslo (PRIO), 22 May 2015)

Dr. Anicée Van Engeland, in her written response provided to Asylos on 11 June 2017

describes the returns procedure for deportees on arrival to Kabul airport.

“Upon arrival at the airport, returnees are met by the airport police. There is a centre located in the arrival lounge where returnees will firstly see a representative of the Ministry of Refugees and Repatriations office. They will be registered. Returnees can then speak to representatives from different ministries (foreign affairs, Interior...) and from the IOM. Doctors are also present. Returnees are under no obligation to speak to anyone but for the Ministry of Refugees and Repatriations. Yet, it is in their interest to communicate at least with the IOM representative as it is at the airport that the IOM arranges transportation to provinces by handing cash money. I have noted that many returnees refuse the support offered by the IOM and by Ministry of Refugees and Repatriations to find them an accommodation. My findings indicate that those most likely to accept the support are returnees from Pakistan and Iran as they have never lived in Afghanistan or they left it decades ago.

Many returnees report being verbally abused by the police and by custom officers at the airport: they say they were insulted for leaving the country and for becoming a burden now that they were back. The UNHCR monitors the whole arrival process.

At arrival, returnees are given the basic minimum in terms food and drinks. It often consists of biscuits and tea.

With regard to accommodation, returnees can either speak to the Ministry of Refugees and Repatriations office or the IOM. Both will direct them to the Jangalak reception centre in Kabul; the centre is funded and managed by the IOM.

If it one of the returnees is unwell, he will be separated from the group and taken in another room for medical assessment. A handful of returnees report having used this basic medical service and were satisfied of them. They also report that it is usually then that they were informally told whether they find their medicines easily or not. The centre can also refer them to a relevant medical centre anywhere in the country.”

(Source: Dr Anicée Van Engeland, written Expert Opinion, 11 June 2017)

## **Voluntary returns**

The IOM Afghanistan Briefing Note on “Afghanistan Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration (AVRR) Programme” provides insight on the management of the return procedure provided by the agency in the country.

“Assistance with preparation for return, return itself and then reintegration, through well-tailored programming, should pave a smooth way for returning migrants to comprehensively socially and economically reintegrate in their country of origin. This type of integration is critical for facilitating effective returns for all parties: the

migrants, and host and origin countries. This is particularly true in developing countries of origin or post-conflict situations such as Afghanistan, where there is a dire need to strengthen capacity in both the public and private sectors. [...]

As recognized in the Afghanistan National Development Strategy 2008-2013 (ANDS), without effective social reintegration, un- and underemployed returnees become more likely to re-migrate or become vulnerable displaced persons, as well as being more prone to start abusing drugs. Systematic and sustained efforts to provide opportunities for returnees are required to minimize the risk conflict that could be triggered by the competition for resources. [...]

In Afghanistan, a robust and comprehensive reception and reintegration mechanism has been developed and tested through years of successful implementation by IOM to support Afghan nationals returned to the country. Since 2003 IOM has assisted over 15,041 voluntary returnees from multiple countries, including the UK, Norway, Netherlands, Germany, Sweden, Denmark, France, Belgium and Australia.

## PROJECT COMPONENTS

IOM Afghanistan's AVRR projects are individually designed in collaboration with the relevant donors, taking advantage of IOM's experience of what is most effective for specific profiles of returnee. In general terms, AVRR projects compose of four main components: preparation; return; reception; and reintegration. These components can be tailored to suit specific contexts, but generally include the following:

Preparation (coordinated with IOM office in host country):

- Pre-departure orientation and information sessions
- Medical test and vaccinations, if required
- Support with travel documentation, if required

Return (coordinated with IOM office in host country):

- Travel arranged and purchased
- In-airport support offered on departure and transit

Reception:

- Assistance with facilitating immigration formalities upon arrival
- Medical assessment upon arrival, including basic treatment and referrals
- Onward transportation to final destination
- Temporary accommodation for returnees
- Information provision and counselling to returnees prior to leaving the airport
- Small cash grant to address the most immediate needs (clothing, communication etc.)
- More extensive post arrival counselling services with IOM's trained

## Reintegration Unit staff

### Reintegration:

- Training with a focus in three areas:
  - a) Educational training: basic office skills, English language training and basic computing skills;
  - b) Vocational training: construction trade skills such as carpentry, masonry, etc.
  - c) On-the-job training
- Development of Self-employment projects/Small business-start-up. Support with conceptualization of business ideas, and development and implementation of a business plan.
- Employment/Job referrals. IOM use its networks and sub-offices to identify suitable jobs for returnees in their location and refers beneficiaries to these positions.
- Schooling and living cost assistance. For returnee families with children, IOM will provide schooling and living cost assistance where needed to help meet immediate needs of returnee families.”

(Source: IOM, *IOM Afghanistan: BRIEFING NOTE: Afghanistan Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration (AVRR) Programme* (shared by IOM, not publicly available)

Masood Ahmadi, National Program Manager of IOM Afghanistan, shared some key points on the Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration (AVRR) Programme provided by IOM Afghanistan in his written response to Asylos on 22 June 2017.

- “ \* Returnees will have to apply before departure for reintegration assistance.
- \* They will have to approach any of the IOM offices in the country to claim the reintegration assistance.
- \* Reintegration packages differ from country to country.
- \* The reintegration packages includes both cash and in-kind. The cash is paid right upon arrival to the returnees in any of the IOM Office to enable returnees address their immediately basic needs in the country while for the in-kind, returnees should come up with a reintegration plan with the help IOM staff. IOM then buys good/services for the reintegration projects of returnees and the money is paid to suppliers/vendors.
- \* Quite few countries provide both cash and in-kind support. Mostly it is only in-kind support.”

(Source: Masood Ahmadi, Written response, 22 June 2017)

## 2. State attitudes towards returnees

Abdul Ghafoor from AMASO explains in an interview with Asylos on 28 May 2017 the state's attitude towards returnees and highlights the difficulties returnees face, especially for those who have never lived in Afghanistan.

"In Ministries, I have cases where returnees have been mistreated, because they don't have lots of option, so what they do is they go to the ministries and find answers, what should I do here? I don't have Tazkira? So they have lots of questions. The [police] are also not very friendly with those returnees, because some of them have never been to Afghanistan, they are setting foot in Afghanistan for the first time, so the problem is they don't know much about Afghanistan. There have been lots of cases like the boys have been stopped and asked of the way they look, they look different, and they have been asked for their Tazkiras. When they haven't had Tazkiras they have been in trouble, and even they have been in the police station for a day or two of questioning. They have to give bribe to police to let them go. There are not immigration officials, so we can refer it to the ministries, because that is where everything is."

(Source: Asylos interview with Abdul Ghafoor, 28 May 2017)

Dr. Anicée Van Engeland explains in her written response to Asylos on 11 June 2017 that state authorities perceive young male returnees as a security threat as the lack of education or job opportunities mean that they can easily turn to drug trafficking or are considered soft targets for recruitment by armed non-state actors.

"Institutions are overwhelmed with returnees and mass returns undermine the attempts at stabilizing a fragile country. As a result, the Afghan government has tried to prevent or slow down repatriations. Yet, the country has been compelled into taking back the returnees: the EU but also Iran and Pakistan have negotiated humanitarian aid and financial support in exchange for Afghanistan's compliance in the matter. The outcome is a feeling of resentment from the part of the State authorities towards returnees.

I have noted during my interviews with Afghans and during my work done as an expert witness that young male returnees are a financial burden for the State: they are often isolated from their family or community, have sold everything to travel, and come back as vulnerable individuals in need in a system that cannot provide assistance. These returnees are unable to contribute to a weakened economy and add up to an already strained labour market; the State would rather have them abroad, sending remittances back home.

State authorities are also very much aware of the security threat that these

young male returnees represent for the State: the lack of educational or job opportunity means that these individuals can turn to drug trafficking or that they constitute soft targets for recruitment by armed non-state actors. These are two of the threats Afghanistan continuously seek to address; therefore, taking in returnees to whom no support can be provided is an indirect contribution to drug and violence.

There is therefore very little sympathy for returnees. It is often expressed through rudeness and insults from authorities, but also an unwillingness to address returnees' claims or requests. I have heard of insults at the Afghan embassy where officials were very slow to issue relevant documents. This lack of sympathy is also explained by the security risk these young men represent: the Afghan National Police or local institutions are keen to avoid granting protection to returnees as this might impact the local security equilibrium. I have had cases where the local security was made possible through the collaboration of all institutional and non-institutional actors alike; yet this relative peace could be broken by the arrival a young male returnee if armed non-state actors began to fight to recruit him."

(Source: Dr. Anicée Van Engeland, written Expert Opinion, 11 June 2017)

### **3. Provision of support from the state / NGOs for returnees**

The International Organisation of Migration (IOM) offers an Assisted Voluntary returns and reintegration programme which includes reintegration assistance such as assistance with starting up a small business and financial assistance for housing.

"IOM's Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration programme offers a dignified, safe and cost-effective return option for Afghans who are unable or unwilling to remain in host countries and wish to return voluntarily to their countries of origin. The programme provides the following services to returnees: • Arrangement of travel, including assistance in transit and reception on arrival. • Pre-departure and post-arrival provision of information, counselling and referral. • Temporary accommodation in Kabul. • Medical assistance/referrals. • Arrangement of onward transportation to final in-country destination. • Provision of immediate and longer-term reintegration assistance. In 2016, a total of 6,711 Afghans voluntarily returned to their country through the AVRR programme.\* This report provides an overview of returns for the year, including country of arrival, demographics and final destination. [...] The substantial majority of returnees (79%, 912 individuals) who were eligible for reintegration assistance chose to start a small business, followed by financial support for housing (13%, 151 individuals)."

(Source: IOM, *IOM Afghanistan: Overview of Voluntary returns in 2016*, 30 March 2017)

A report from the Afghanistan Analysts Network describes the return process for voluntary

returnees from Germany to Kabul in February 2016. The German government cooperated with the International Organisation of Migration (IOM) to pay for the flight to Afghanistan and provided 700 euros to returnees

“On 24 February 2016, a group of 125 Afghans arrived in Kabul from Germany. This was the first group of voluntary returnees from Germany, after Europe’s ‘migration crisis’ in 2015. Germany hosts the highest number of Afghan refugees after Pakistan and Iran (for the number of Afghan refugees in Germany for the last 13 years). Apart from having their trips back to Afghanistan paid, the German government – in cooperation with the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) – also provided each of the 125 returnees with 700 Euros to help with their reintegration. Around 70 Afghans from this group continued their journey to their home provinces; IOM also covered the cost of this second stage of the trip, as well as accommodation in guesthouses in Kabul ahead of the journey.”

(Source: Afghanistan Analysts Network, *Afghan exodus: Can the government deal with more returnees from Europe?*, 31 October 2016)

An AAN report covering 2016/2017 outlines the types of assistance that is available to those returning both forcibly and voluntarily. The types of assistance are provided by the Afghanistan government, the countries which sent the returnees back, the IOM, and local organisations such as IPSO and AMASO. The report noted that there was no established co-ordination between the assistance providers to ensure that all returnees received equal assistance. Afghan government assistance is purported to centre around legal aid, job placement, land and shelter according to a representative from MoRR. However to date returnees have only received assistance in the form of two weeks provision of shelter from the government. Those returning voluntarily are entitled to financial assistance, the amount depending on the sending country, ranging between 700 and 4000 USD. The IOM provides reintegration assistance for voluntary returnees which includes financial assistance to start a small business and for housing. However in 2016, only 1,094 of over 6,800 returnees received post-arrival reintegration assistance, eligibility to which is decided by sending countries on an individual basis – many returnees do not apply for re-integration assistance even if they are eligible. As for deportees who are forcibly returned they are provided a basic package of humanitarian assistance from the IOM which includes transport from the airport and 2 weeks accommodation in Jangalak reception centre- no long term assistance is provided.

“There are several types of assistance that those returning, both forcibly and voluntarily, can pursue. The assistance comes from the Afghan government, the countries which sent the returnees back, international organisations such as IOM and local non-governmental organisation like IPSO and the Afghanistan Migrants Advice & Support Organisation (AMASO). There seem to be no established coordination mechanisms to ensure that all returnees receive the support they need or that they

are treated somewhat equally, that some returnees do not receive more support than they are entitled to or to ensure that there is comprehensive monitoring. The German government, for example, argues that their responsibility for returnees ends when they are handed over to the Afghan authorities upon arrival. Here below, an overview of available assistance:

- Afghan Government assistance

The government's current support to returnees from Europe is centred around legal aid, job placement (which is done through the Ministry for Labour and Social Affairs/MoLSA), land and shelter, Murtaza Rasuli, a director of an MoRR department that works with returnees from Europe told AAN. Nevertheless, AAN was told by several returnees that word of mouth among them was that few had actually received any other form of assistance, except the two-week provision of shelter from the government.

The Afghan parliament summoned MoRR, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and MoLSA representatives on 3 May 2017 for an interpellation session regarding, among other things, problems faced by repatriates and returnees following their arrival back in country. The questions posed by the MPs, however, focussed mainly on the largest group, the returnees from neighbouring Iran and Pakistan and those Afghan refugees still living there as well as in Saudi Arabia, and government preparations and plans for returning refugees in general. The small group of returnees – both volunteers and deportees – seems to figure only on the side-lines.

- Financial assistance

For those returning voluntarily, financial assistance is available. The amount, however, depends on which country is returning them. It ranges from between 700 and 4,000 USD. Sweden, for example, gives a cash payment per person of 30,000 Swedish Kronas (approximately 3,150 Euros) and Belgium provides 500 Euros. Germany gives 700 Euros in cash in Germany at the departure airport and reintegration assistance in the range of between 800 to 2,500 Euros through IOM on a case-to-case basis following their arrival. The latter assistance is not cash-in-hands assistance, but a grant that could be used for education, vocational training, salary subsidy, micro business plans, etc.

[Update on 20 May 2017:] Since 1 February 2017, Germany offers an additional package, called Starthilfe Plus. It provides 1,200 Euros in cash assistance for voluntary returnees (over 12 years of age) if they decide to return to their country of origin before there is a final decision about their asylum request (it involves withdrawing this request and does not apply for all countries of origin). 800 Euros are offered to asylum seekers who have been rejected but refrain from appealing against the decision. For 2017, a total of 40 million Euros has been allocated for the “help for a start” programme.

- Reintegration assistance

Through the European Reintegration Network Specific Action Programme for Afghanistan (see here), IOM provides post-arrival and reintegration assistance to both forcibly and voluntarily returned Afghan nationals from 18 countries: Australia, Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Luxembourg, Malta, Netherlands, Norway, Romania, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom. (6) The planes for deportations, however, are paid for by the EU's Frontex border management agency. (7) Additionally, in early March 2017, the IOM signed an agreement with the EU Commissions' Directorate-General for International Cooperation and Development (DG DEVCO), worth 18 million Euros for a four-year term that will provide reintegration support to returnees and host communities across Afghanistan (see here). This programme will offer, in addition to individual assistance, community-based initiatives, which are meant to ease and facilitate the reintegration of individuals. In 2016, only 1,094 of over 6,800 returnees received post-arrival reintegration assistance, eligibility to which is essentially decided by sending countries on an individual basis. This obviously means that even not all voluntary returnees receive financial support following their return to Afghanistan. The majority of those 1,094 who were eligible for post-arrival assistance in 2016 chose to start a small business – 874 individuals. With 131 persons, a significantly lower number opted for financial support for housing; 76 received household items. Eight opted for an assisted job placement, two for house renovation, two for education or training assistance and only one for medical reimbursement. According to Masood Ahmadi, an IOM reintegration programme manager, “a lot of people do not ask for a reintegration package, even if they are eligible. They simply do not come back to IOM to claim it.” This is mainly due to technical and bureaucratic hurdles, although eligible returnees are informed about reintegration packages, both in the sending country and upon arrival. Ahmadi adds that “Many do not have a [local] phone number when they come back; and they can't follow up. We were thinking of distributing SIM cards, but that was not possible due to legal issues. We, however, do ask them to get in contact with the local IOM office in their province or main office in Kabul,” he said, underlining that “returnees are essentially informed about reintegration packages that they are eligible to receive, both in Kabul and in the sending countries.” IOM staff and migration authorities in sending and receiving countries inform voluntary returnees about the entitlements they are eligible to – but in practice, as NGO research in Germany showed (see this previous AAN dispatch), this often seems to be presented by authorities as a way to facilitate more ‘voluntary’ returns.

IOM post-arrival humanitarian assistance to forced returnees is a basic package, which includes a transportation fee from the airport to the person's residence and temporary accommodation if required. German authorities, for example, provide a small amount of pocket money to deportees. Some are also eligible for

reintegration assistance similar to the one for those returning voluntarily. According to Laurence Hart, the head of IOM Afghanistan, in most cases this is only “a parachute package,” an immediate form of post-arrival survival help, rather than sustainable and long-term assistance. As AAN interviews have shown, this is not sufficient to allay the considerable fears deportees have regarding their future.”

(Source: Afghanistan Analysts Network, *Voluntary and Forced Returns to Afghanistan in 2016/17: Trends, statistics and experiences*, 19 May 2017)

The AAN report describes further the type of accommodation provided by the Afghan government – Jangalak reception centre - for returnees who do not have families in Afghanistan. They can stay for a maximum of two weeks but in 2016 only 43 individuals opted to stay there for an average of seven nights.

“Most of the returnees and deportees return directly to their families or communities. However, for those who cannot do this, the government and IOM provide temporary accommodation. The Jangalak reception centre for those with that need is located within the Ministry of Refugees and Repatriation’s compound in the former Jangalak factory, which was once one of the country’s biggest but was destroyed during the war because it was Soviet-built. The 24-room (with two to three beds each) reception centre is open for both voluntary and forced returnees for a maximum of two weeks. A 12-member staff team headed by a former Hezb-e Islami commander looks after them. Each room is equipped with a fridge, TV, air conditioner and wardrobe. In 2016, only 43 individuals (including both voluntary and forced returnees) opted to stay in the centre. On average they stayed there for seven nights, meaning that in 2016, the reception centre had been occupied for a total of 149 nights, IOM told AAN”

(Source: Afghanistan Analysts Network, *Voluntary and Forced Returns to Afghanistan in 2016/17: Trends, statistics and experiences*, 19 May 2017)

The AAN report’s conclusive assessment of the returns procedure describes the services available to voluntary and forced returnees as “patchy and in many cases insufficient to provide a realistic chance to start a new life in Afghanistan.” The Afghan government is still in the process of developing policies and fundraising mechanisms and therefore unprepared to deal with the [massive influx of returnees](#).

“Although the Afghan government and local and international organisations managed to organise some kind of first response to both voluntary and forced returnees, it seems that services available to those returning are patchy and in many cases insufficient to provide a realistic chance to start a new life in Afghanistan. There is also no convincing approach yet on what to do in particular with ‘returnees’ who

have spent years in Iran and are out of touch with life in Afghanistan. Despite certain improvements – such as setting up of a software-based registration system at most official border crossings and at the airport office –, the government is still institutionally widely unprepared to cope with the massive influx of returnees. It is still in the process of developing policies and fundraising mechanisms. The variations in numbers between IOM and the MoRR, but also between IOM and individual member states show that there is incomplete information about those who returned from Europe in 2016 and early 2017. The voluntary returns and particularly the deportations from Europe add an additional and untimely burden.”

(Source: Afghanistan Analysts Network, *Voluntary and Forced Returns to Afghanistan in 2016/17: Trends, statistics and experiences*, 19 May 2017)

Concerning the different financial incentives from EU countries for returnees to Kabul, Abdul Ghafoor from AMASO explained in his interview with Asylos on 28 May 2017 that most countries provide assistance, however, only Norway gives incentives in cash to returnees and does not work together with IOM.

“Norway is working with another organization called Shajan and associates. So they also have person in the airport and the responsible person takes the returnees to hotel which is in Share-Now in Roshan Plaza, so they are taken there for two weeks and given them the money in cash.

The returnees, especially forced ones, they have to go through paper work, and they can have the assistance and obtain it. The paper work contains business start-up, sharing business with someone who already established the business. And for example if you don't have a place to stay, so you go and rent a place and IOM pay the rent for 6 months, they will also pay for trainings like for a computer course, so they will pay the fee for that training. So different countries have different incentive and cash assistances. In case of Germany it starts from € 700 to € 2000. The German government decides how to give to whom. In case of Sweden it's around €1000, so some countries don't have at all. In case of UK its 750 pound for forced returnees. Again for those who choose to come voluntarily the amount is different. In case of Norway its 30,000 Norwegian kroner, in case of Sweden is the same 30,000 Swedish kroner.”

(Source: Abdul Ghafoor, interview with Asylos, 28 May 2017)

In her written response to Asylos, Dr Anicée Van Engeland describes the readmission agreement that Afghanistan signed with the EU. She describes that the main support that is provided to returnees is financial assistance from the returning country and longer term support from the IOM. However, according to her not all returnees take up the support offered.

“In October 2016, Afghanistan signed a readmission agreement with the European Union. Parallel readmission agreements exist with States such as Germany and Sweden. The agreements are backed by the IOM. According to these agreements, the plane travel and the costs of luggage is met by the States for voluntary returnees and deportees. EU FRONTEX supports the organization of the returns by providing training to escorts or can pay for monitors.

As per the Joint Way Forward agreement between the EU and Afghanistan, Afghan nationals are usually returned via scheduled and non-scheduled flights to Kabul airport, which means that all returnees transit via Kabul. The IOM takes over once the individual is in Kabul: it pays for the costs of the second trip, if the returnee wishes to go back home to a province. The organization also supplies accommodation in Kabul if needed.

Some States give a sum of money to the returnee; the sum allocated depends on the country sending the individual back to Afghanistan. It is not defined as an incentive but rather as money to survive once back in Afghanistan, and perhaps to develop a personal project. Germany gives 700 euros per individual while the United Kingdom gives £100. The Finnish government gives around 1000 Euros. Sweden gives 30,000 Swedish Kronas (which amounts to 3000 Euros), Belgium gives 500 Euros and the Norwegians give 30,000 NOK (about 2,100 Euros). The money is handed in cash at the airport.

Starting February 2017, Germany began giving an extra financial support called Starthilfe Plus. The package amounts to 1,200 Euros in cash for any returnee above 12 years old. It is available to anyone who decides to voluntarily go back home before a final decision has been made with regard to their asylum request. There is another package of 800 Euros for those who are rejected and don't appeal.

The packages offered have improved as initially, they mainly targeted families: at the beginnings of the tripartite agreement, Iran had a small family package for those who accepted to leave the country. The United Kingdom also had an Assisted Voluntary Return to Afghanistan Programme that focused on families. Packages became more specific with time and now include young male Afghans as well.

It is to be noted that most countries and organizations are heading towards a different form of financial package, one that supports the State while encompassing the communities: as per the Joint Way Forward agreement, there is an EU reintegration package aimed at supporting reintegration. There is no money handed in cash to the returnee. Instead, the package is divided into three parts: there is an incentive package for the government to support the reintegration of the returning migrants by helping them find a job or develop skills. Then, part of the package comes in support of the IOM for all reintegration activities, from individual needs to helping communities' needs. The third part of the package goes to supporting employment in the country. It is possible that in the near future, Afghan returnees will only be provided with a basic survival sum while the usual package goes to the State and the

communities.

For those, who chose to benefit from the support offered by IOM, they will receive a basic package including the right amount of money to travel to Jangalak centre (in cash). They also receive clothing if necessary. The IOM will also assist them with any airport formalities. The IOM also provides counselling. They offer psychological counselling but also housing, job advices. The IOM offers mine-awareness trainings and brochures about medical facilities, transportation tips or information to open a bank account. The same information can be received from representatives of the Ministries. It is to be noted that most embassies have a representative who will be at the airport when the plane arrives. These officials are there to assist returnees and encourage them to speak to the different representatives of ministries and organizations present.

The UNHCR is also present at the airport: their role is to monitor the arrival and to help anyone who needs legal aid. They usually refer these individuals to the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission

The IOM has a special programme by which it can identify those returnees who arrive with a life plan. It can help returnees fresh of the plane look into option such as training, education, business start-up, job referrals and others. The money can also be used to cover for medical expenses. The purpose of this programme is to identify possible candidate for a package facilitating reintegration. This requires a follow-up so the returnee has to go back to an IOM office once they are settled in the temporary accommodation. If a returnee is selected to benefit from that special package, the money is handed via a bank account in three times.

The returnees who speak to an IOM representative are encouraged to contact their local IOM office so that their reintegration can be monitored and counselling can be arranged. Therefore, the IOM tries to begin the reintegration process from the moment returnees arrive at the airport.

It should be stressed that all the above is available to returnees who arrive by plane at Kabul airport and who are either voluntarily repatriated or are deported.

The issues are the following: most returnees don't trust Afghan authorities and have lost faith in NGOs. If they are deported, they usually feel humiliated and have no desire to linger around the airport. This is why they tend to leave as soon as possible and don't seek to interact with the IOM or any other representative. As a result, those who benefit from the services offered are usually returnees who are seeking them, such as those who have lived for decades in Iran or Pakistan and are in dire need of directions.

Another issue is that most returnees who have spoken to the authorities or the IOM upon arrival will not return to them later. Yet, returnees have 3 months to contact the IOM after arrival, and they often don't. This is explained by the fact that a return can be overwhelming and returnees often spend that time trying to fit in.

Others suffer from depression and cannot find the strength to do administrative tasks. Most of the times, returnees cannot afford to travel to their designated IOM office. This is how they miss on reintegration packages.

It should be noted that the process is the same for those returnees who arrive via land. The IOM is launching a programme to ensure that their arrival is smoother and part of the focus is on registration: the current procedures at the border are currently being assessed in order to be improved.”

(Source: Dr Anicée Van Engeland, written Expert opinion, 11 June 2017)

Dr. Anicée Van Engeland further describes the role that IOM plays in providing assistance for returnees which includes financial support as well as non-cash services such as training, childcare and job referrals. According to her, not all returnees benefit from the support that is available from the IOM.

“The main financial assistance is provided by IOM. The organization gives a small amount of money aimed at survival for a period of 14 days and it also provides accommodation for the same period of time. Individuals are entitled to 1,100 Euros in non-cash services (training, childcare, job referrals...). Past those two weeks, the IOM also grants a financial support to those who have a life plan. The returnee can apply for this package once at the airport or by visiting an IOM office within 3 months of their arrival. Returnees can then submit a business plan or can ask for support for education or vocational training. The IOM can give between 800 to 2,500 euros but this is not given in cash. There has been a follow-up of those who received financial support from the IOM: in 2016, 1 out of 6 returnees received this package and most of them started a business. A few used it to find housing or buy a house. Some preferred support finding a job and even fewer opted for education. Yet, many returnees fall through the cracks: they refuse to speak to the IOM representative at the airport or at the border and miss on an opportunity. Others who have spoken to the IOM representative don't come back to their office later. This is mainly due to the fact that some of them fear the IOM will share their details with the state. Others don't have a phone or the money to travel to one of the IOM offices. The main issue, however, seems to be the lack of information: returnees are never told they need to speak to the IOM representative upon arrival. Another issue is the framework: once the returnee receives the package, they have to act swiftly and find an opportunity as all payments must be completed within six months of the returnee's arrival in the country. The IOM monitors returnees' reintegration (for those who have registered the IOM) for up to a year.”

(Source: Dr. Anicée Van Engeland, written Expert Opinion, 11 June 2017)

Dr. Anicee Van Engeland also describes the provision of support for returnees offered by the Afghan government as follows:

“The government created a High Commission for Migration in April 2015. One of the purposes of this commission is to help with reintegration, even though there is no mention made of returnees. Yet, most of the individuals who have reached out to the commission are returnees. This is why, the Displacement and Returnees Executive Committee was created in November 2016: its role is to define a strategy to coordinate humanitarian and development programmes and design policies to help returnees, amongst others. The focus is on re-integration with the development of individual financial support but also a more community-oriented financial support. This is a way of ensuring that returnees can go back to their communities without being seen as having failed and as being unable to contribute, causing the returnee to be side-lined. This focus on helping communities rather than individuals has emerged in several policies and strategies; it means that in the future, the financial support could be rather given to the community to encourage them to welcome back a returnee. It is perceived as a more sustainable long-term solution as it encompasses the population and encourages it to play an active role. For example, the community could support the creation of a local business. This approach has been criticised by experts as it doesn’t take into account local corruption and the major issues with land ownership in the country.

The help returnees receive from the Afghan government address employment, legal aid and shelter. It is not provided by one institutions and the returnee has to take the initiative to go to each minister to receive help. For example, one needs to go to the Ministry of Labour to receive help finding a job.”

(Source: Dr. Anicée Van Engeland, written Expert Opinion, 11 June 2017)

Moreover, Dr. Anicée Van Engeland describes the assistance provided to returnees by smaller NGOs such as IPSO, AMASO and the local law firm Shahkan and Associates.

“Most of the help comes from the IOM but also from local and international non-governmental organizations such as the International Psychosocial Organisation or the Afghanistan Migrants Advice & Support Organisation. The Afghanistan Migrants Advice & Support Organisation offers accommodation to those travelling from Nordic countries for a period longer than 2 weeks. The Norwegian Refugee Council helps returnees claiming their legal rights over their lands while the ICRC helps them tracing their family.

Besides, some States, as part of their agreement with Afghanistan, has sub-contracted local firms and NGOs to provide assistance to returnees from their countries: for example, a local law firm (Shahkan and Associates) takes care of post-arrival matters for those coming back from Norway. This is usually available to those who have opted for voluntary repatriation, and not to those who were deported. The help is also provided for 14 days.

There are no current mechanisms in place to ensure that all returnees are treated equally. As stated above, some returnees walked away from the airport without seeking the support from the IOM, being thereby deprived of a financial aid. Others have been

good at receiving more money that they should have. This is mainly caused by a difficult transition from one authority to the other: the returnee is firstly at the hands of the German state; they are tend taken care of by the police during the flight, before being greeted by the Afghan police and an array of governmental institutions and the IOM upon arrival. Local and international NGOs then take over. It is consequently difficult to follow an individual and ensure that they receive their due.”

(Source: Dr. Anicée Van Engeland, written Expert Opinion, 11 June 2017)

#### **4. Societal attitudes towards returnees**

Refugee Support Network team member, Bryony Norman, in 2014 conducted interviews with young people who had spent their formative years in the UK's care system before being forcibly removed to Afghanistan on turning 18. In the blog post, she shares three key challenges<sup>3</sup> that these young people face on return.

##### **“3. Not being ‘known’**

Being ‘known’ and accepted are important qualities for any young people, regardless of where they are. But being ‘known’ in the context of forced return to Afghanistan is not just a confidence boost or about making friends and people ‘liking you’. Rather, it can mean safety and security in a volatile environment wracked with instability and distrust. Being ‘known’ can provide a relatively safe place to stay, or support in trying to re-build a life that has been shattered following the forced removal from your home in the UK.

Being ‘unknown’ or ‘distrusted’ within the current situation in Afghanistan, as I saw, creates a lack of safety and security, acute loneliness, depression, and hinders opportunities to progress and develop to one’s full potential. “I feel like it [my life in the UK] was all a dream. But now I have woken up. No one told me I was a foreigner when I was in the UK; I was just like any other English person. But when I came to Afghanistan they told me I was foreign to them. They told me “I don’t know you”. It was very painful and heart-breaking for me.” (Mohammed) [...] Even for those I interviewed who had been able to reconnect with family members upon their return, their experience denoted that it had been far from ‘easy’: “I was from this province originally, but it is eight years that I have been out of the community; out of the public there. When I was here before, it was completely different: different people even. Now that I have come back, it is all new people... There is a lot of pressure on my brother now that I have been living with him sometimes. It is the same pressure that comes on me. If he goes out, for example to work on the land, a lot of people and the commanders, they ask him questions about

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<sup>3</sup> The other two challenges for young returnees to Afghanistan cited in the blog was lack of personal safety and security and a hopelessness of a ‘survival’ mentality.

me. We have had some problems with local commanders before. They say, “Why is he living with you? He ran away and now he came back”. My brother says, “He is my brother. He lives with me. I will not hand him over...People there assume that if you are coming to Afghanistan from a foreign country, you must be rich. So they think to kidnap you.” (Mohammed)

These are young people trying to adjust to one of the biggest and most challenging changes of the lives, and for some they are doing on their own or with only the support from others in their situation. They demonstrated strength and determination as they juggled trying to make sense of what has happened to them and considered how they could make the best of the situation to remain safe and to survive. And for the most part, that is what it is about for the time being: survival.”

(Source: Refugee Support Network, *3 things you need to know about life for young returnees in Afghanistan*, 27 September 2014)

An article published in the Forced Migration Review in 2014 describes the varying experiences of Afghan who return voluntarily or forcibly from industrialised countries.

“Refugees returning ‘home’ are seen by the international community as the ultimate proof of peace and return to ‘normalcy’. Somewhat paradoxically, however, they are also seen as agents of change who can contribute to development and peacebuilding. Returnees from industrialised countries are considered to constitute the more highly educated, wealthy, entrepreneurial and strongly networked elite, who have acquired skills, capital and ideas while abroad. Furthermore, they are expected to be mediators between cultures. [...] However, returnees from Europe are a very heterogeneous group of people and not all of them have these characteristics. [Voluntary returnees] They return with optimism and energy, and many see the knowledge, skills and attitudes gained in Europe or elsewhere as assets that they can offer to Afghanistan. However, they find that their ‘foreign’ ideas are often viewed with suspicion and many soon become discouraged and disillusioned. [...] In contrast, involuntary returnees, who retain no legal status in the host country, tend to be of more modest background and have often spent all their savings or become indebted to finance their migration, and they return further impoverished, frustrated and disappointed rather than enriched by their migration experience. Having lived but never really participated in their former host country, they have picked up few new skills or ideas and tend rather to be conservative/traditional as a strategy to negotiate belonging in Afghan society.”

(Source: Forced Migration Review, *Afghan returnees as actors of change?*, May 2014)

An article by academics Liza Schuster and Nassim Majidi October 2014 explores the stigma of failure and of contamination attached to those deported, and the ways in which they respond

to and manage this stigmatisation, including by re-migrating, and the conditions under which it does or does not arise.

“Deportation creates at least three additional reasons that make re-migration the most likely outcome. These were debt, family commitments and the shame of failure and or ‘contamination’ leading to stigmatisation. [...] in the case of those deported from Europe, it seems the stigma is more likely to be that of failure. [...] We argue that families and communities will stigmatise those who challenge their images of migration destinations as lands of opportunity, preferring to believe only those who are lazy, stupid or unlucky (Alpes 2012) will be deported. We further suggest that this stigmatisation acts as an additional pressure to re-migrate. (p.635-636)

Deportation challenges established norms in sending states ‘and therefore returnees experience stigma, discrimination and shame due to discrepancies between what is socially expected and what is the actual reality’ (Gomes 2012, 2). Those who have been deported from Australia or Europe discredit the dominant shared understanding of migrants as successful adventurers and of those destinations as places where people go to succeed, to improve their own lives and the lives of their families (Galvin 2014). One way to preserve the idea of e.g. Australia or Germany as an ideal destination is to blame the person deported, to label them as criminal, lazy or unlucky. (p.640)

They are then stereotyped as failures, or in an ironic continuation of the pre-deportation stigmatisation, as criminals. [...]Often there is little awareness that those who enter without papers are liable to deportation, so there is an assumption that the person deported must have been engaged in criminal activities. Young men in Paris after re-migrating post-deportation spoke bitterly of their families’ lack of comprehension of what they had suffered en route to and in Europe. [...] the assumption is that they must have been doing drugs or stealing, and the injustice of these suspicions is keenly felt. [...] In Afghanistan, there is very little privacy, and it is common for family and neighbours to visit when someone returns and ply them with questions. When one returns without money or gifts, it is hard to hide a deportation. (p.641)

Tainted by their failure, they suffer an important loss of status. This in turn affects their employment or marriage prospects. [...]Questions will be asked of different family members and friends about the individual’s behaviour abroad and the reasons for his return if it is not voluntary and temporary. Similarly, the stigma of failure can make finding a bride difficult. [...]The dominant discourse generates stereotypes and rejection of those who challenge those stereotypes, leading to a process of exclusion, but also of internalised stigma. [...]Our research highlights the impact of internalising negative stereotypes. Fear of rejection by families and communities may lead those

deported to avoid rejection by excluding themselves from the labour market and ultimately by excluding themselves from their home society by remigrating. The cycle of stigma that is generated is in part self-imposed, since the person deported has failed to live up to his own expectations of himself. One coping strategy is to reject Afghan society as tainted, especially by corruption, as discredited and as different from 'normal societies', a common trend among those deported from Europe. (p. 642) The teenagers and young adults who left for Europe at a young age and returned with visible and invisible signs of their cultural change (clothing, behaviour, accent etc.) are sometimes seen by family and or the community as 'contaminated'. [...] "They all bother me because I went to the UK. They say I lost my culture, became a kafir ... all sorts of insults." In this case the stigma has to do with the time spent abroad, rather than the simple fact of having been returned against one's will. Deportation exposes and compounds the stigma of contamination, particularly for those without economic or social power. As seen from Najib's comments, this can lead to murder. The stigma of contamination could be mitigated if the person was seen to come back bringing benefits to his family, or if he could present himself as a successful migrant as with the KFC businessman above rather than a failure. (p.644)

For those deported from outside the region there is considerable stigma attached to their forced return, and their deportation is experienced as a catastrophe, but for irregular Afghan workers in Iran, deportation has become an occupational hazard. We suggest that this is due to the level of investment these different types of migration require. (p.646)

A process of stigmatisation seemed to attach more to those who had been deported from further afield, and less to those who were deported from neighbouring states. In this article we have explained this in terms of the level of investment in the project not only by the family of the migrant who has been deported, but also familiarity with conditions in the state from which one is being deported. [...] stigmatisation may be seen as a way of punishing those who have failed to repay the family's investment and as a way of holding on to the dream of a better life in a distant destination, a dream challenged by deportation. (p.648)"

(Source: Schuster, L. and Majidi, N., *Deportation Stigma and Re-migration*, 30 October 2014)

A September 2016 article written by Nassim Majidi and Laurence Hart from the Migration Policy Practice journal describes how the concept of stigma and "contamination" in the West applies to the experiences of deported Afghans.

"The shame of failure and the perceptions of "contamination" in the West are clear among those forced to return from the West, as analysed in an article published in the Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies (Schuster and Majidi, 2015). The

concept of stigma and contamination applies to the experiences of deported Afghans. This is particularly true for deportees from Europe who fall on the margins of their society: they are looked at differently and treated differently. A recent study on urban displaced youth (Samuel Hall, 2016a) goes a step further and shows the mental health needs among all youth, and specifically among deportees. According to the Health Index developed for this study, deportees remain more than 50 per cent more likely to be deprived from basic access to health care and have fewer socioeconomic ties to the local communities than other returnees. The difficulties of deportees upon return go beyond the economic and financial aspects, to include the importance of stigma, contamination and rejection upon return. The biggest impediment remains the lack of attractiveness and of suitability of the assistance packages to the profiles of these deportees.” [p.39]

(Source: Majidi, N. and Hart, L. *Return and reintegration to Afghanistan: Policy implications* :Migration Policy Practice, June-September 2016)

The 2016 UNHCR Eligibility guidelines state that AGEs (Anti-Government Elements) reportedly target individuals who are perceived to have adopted values and/or appearances associated with Western countries, due to their imputed support for the Government and the international community. There are reports of individuals who returned from Western countries having been tortured or killed by AGEs.

“AGEs (Anti-Government Elements) reportedly target individuals who are perceived to have adopted values and/or appearances associated with Western countries, due to their imputed support for the Government and the international community. There are reports of individuals who returned from Western countries having been tortured or killed by AGEs on the grounds that they had become “foreigners” or that they were spies for a Western country. Individuals who fall under other profiles, such as profile 1.e (humanitarian workers and development workers) and profile 1.i (women in the public sphere) may similarly be accused by AGEs for having adopted values and/or appearances associated with Western countries, and may be targeted for that reason.” (p.41)

(Source: UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), *UNHCR Eligibility Guidelines for Assessing the International Protection Needs of Asylum-Seekers from Afghanistan*, 19 April 2016)

In email correspondence with Asylos, Tim Foxley described the risk of being perceived as ‘Westernised’ in Afghanistan and cited two examples of Taliban violence against ‘Westernised’ Afghans.

“There are several examples of persecution by insurgent groups based on chance encounters. A report from September 2014 highlighted the fate of an Afghan returning to Afghanistan after some years away, seen as a “Westerner” and dragged

off a bus at a Taliban checkpoint. He was the only person on the bus this happened to. He was beaten, tortured and executed. In October 2014, a member of the Hazara ethnic group was captured and tortured by the Taliban after he had been returned to Afghanistan following an asylum bid in Australia.”

(Source: Email correspondence with Tim Foxley, 22 June 2017)

An academic research published in July 2014 describes how the situation for returnees differs and their experience of reintegration into Afghan society depends on whether they were returned voluntarily or involuntarily, and on their socio-economic status prior to migration.

“The transnational turn therefore raised renewed expectations on the contribution of migrants to development. In addition to being considered as the higher educated, wealthy, entrepreneurial, and strongly networked élite, these migrants are expected to benefit from their migration to industrialised countries and obtain additional knowledge, skills, savings, and ideas. Their transnational ties to the country of origin are expected to motivate them to invest these material and immaterial capacities to benefit the development of the country of origin. [...] Contrary to voluntary return, involuntary return felt like a step back rather than an improvement. If involuntary returnees succeeded economically, this was despite rather than thanks to their time abroad.

[...] Their migration experience felt like wasted time and money. Although they were not amongst the poorest within the Afghan society before migration, their migration experiences often left them impoverished and frustrated.

[...] Socio-economic differences that existed prior to migration are reinforced by the migration experience, which results in strongly differentiated patterns of multi-local embeddedness and transnational mobility.”

(Source: Van Houte, M., Siegel m. Davids. T., *Return to Afghanistan: Migration as Reinforcement of Socio-Economic Stratification*, 19 July 2014)

A returnee speaking to the Afghan Analysts Network describes the humiliation of being returned to Afghanistan.

“One of the deportees that AAN (Afghanistan Analysts Network) spoke to was Gul Sayed Hussain, a 23-year old from Kunduz province. He said that he could not tell his family that he had been deported back to Afghanistan. “It is embarrassing,” he said. Gul Sayed told AAN he had been in Frankfurt since 2011 and had left Afghanistan when he was 17-year old boy. He said he had travelled via Pakistan, Iran, Turkey, Greece and Italy to Germany, which was his final destination. He learned German and finished school in Darmstadt. In 2012 he found a job as a cook, and “fell in love with cooking”, he emphasised. At the time he was deported, he had been working in a restaurant of a large hotel chain. Gul Sayyed, who had been a bread-winner for his big

family in Afghanistan, consisting of 14 sisters and five brothers, does not see his future in Afghanistan. He said he was now thinking of going to Dubai and trying his luck with restaurants there. He was going to first spend some time with his sister in Kabul, and figure out what story to tell his father back in Kunduz province.

[...] “We talk to them about why they decided to leave, why they were not accepted, what experiences they had en route, why they came back,” Missmahl told Afghanistan Analyst Network (AAN). She pointed out that those Afghans who have been returned, but left a long time ago have some very different experiences and needs to those who left in 2015 and only returned recently. According to her, those who left years ago have accepted and adjusted to a European value system, which is not the case for those who left in 2015. Nevertheless, both groups experience stigma and feel a deep humiliation once they have been deported back. This requires both mitigation and counselling that Missmahl’s organisation provides. “We try to provide them with a moment of empowerment, so they feel self-efficient again,” she said, adding that a lot of people “never really found their own voice,” and left Afghanistan in search of one.”

(Source: Afghanistan Analysts Network, *Voluntary and Forced Returns to Afghanistan in 2016/17: Trends, statistics and experiences*, 19 May 2017)

In a report carried out by Refugee Support Network in 2016, returnees describe discrimination in the job market.

#### “Discrimination

Other young people struggled to either find or sustain work as a result of experiencing discrimination against returnees. In five separate cases, young people talked about being made redundant or refused employment when it emerged that they were a returnee. It appears that this is not an issue that subsided with time, with one young person reporting that even several months after being back in Afghanistan, his employer “had to let me go - because he said I had a bad story... now it’s hard to find work because if anyone knows about my story I’m afraid because my life would be in danger” (R18, ILD). Another two young people said that fear of being discovered as a returnee had prevented them from going out to find work, with one explaining that “they will find out who I am and where I have come back from if I work. The rumours will spread from there” (R22, IM3). Another explained that he was told by a potential employer to go to the ministry to get his UK school certificates validated, but that he didn’t go because he was afraid of what might happen if people “know that I studied in the UK” (R23, SI2). (p. 42) ”

(Source: Refugee Support Network, *After Return: documenting the experiences of young people forcibly removed to Afghanistan*, April 2016 )

Writing in the Forced Migration Review, Emily Bowerman of the Refugee Support Network

describes that throughout her research, it was clear that many of the young people wanted to hide the fact that they had been in the UK because, for example, return was seen as a failure or associated with criminality which in turn affected their ability to secure work, housing and to reconnect with their family.

“A few years ago, preliminary research undertaken by the UK-based Refugee Support Network (RSN) revealed some of the key challenges confronting this cohort of youth facing forced return. These challenges were exacerbated firstly by the abrupt transition from being ‘looked after’ children one day to being failed adult asylum seekers with limited rights the next, and secondly by the lack of connections and joined-up approaches between the UK-focused refugee and asylum support sector while they are in the UK and the international development sector after their return to their country of origin. (p.78)

Throughout the research, it was clear that many of the young people wanted to hide the fact that they had been in the UK because, for example, return was seen as a failure or associated with criminality and for their perceived westernization which in turn affected their ability to secure work and housing and to reconnect with family. When travelling in Taliban-held areas in particular, they would not want to be heard speaking English or to be seen to have international contacts on their phone. [...] The research highlighted a range of interconnected challenges facing former child asylum seekers after forced removal to Afghanistan. These include:

- the impact of weakened or disappeared family and social networks
- fear of stigma and discrimination impeding the formation of new social networks, leading in turn to increased isolation
- challenges in accessing institutional support and reliance on ad hoc assistance from people in the UK
- generalised insecurity and victimization due to issues related to the original asylum claim or to their identity as a returnee [...] (p.79)”

(Source: Bowerman, E., *Risks encountered after forced removal: the return experiences of young Afghans*, February 2017)

In an interview with Asylos in 2016, Shoaib Sharifi, an Independent Afghan documentary filmmaker and journalist described the stigma and suspicion that returnees carry after having been sent back from being in the West.

“People who spend time in the West and their opinions and beliefs change, the way they express themselves, the opinions are different, they may have been targeted for their way of thinking, practices, their way of wearing clothes, or people convert or become atheist. Or when they went to the West sometimes they are called spies. Only when someone continues that way of their lifestyle it can be a problem. If people know they are deported, there is rather little sympathy for these people, as they are

left with nothing, as they spent so much to go. Until they start practicing a Western lifestyle in that area or village, then there are problems and groups may start hating you. I do not know of anyone being targeted especially because of returning only. “

(Source: Asylos Interview with Shoaib Sharifi, 23 April 2016)

The director of AMASO, Abdul Ghafoor, described the situation for returnees in Afghanistan in an interview with Asylos on 28 May 2017 as follows and analysed the context in light of financial and religious issues and a westernized lifestyle.

“In general it depends on what kind of society the returnees live in for example in places like Kabul it might be easier to get into the social acceptance, and again for those who never been to Afghanistan it is not very easy. They are afraid of the whole security, being exploited, being misused by powerful men and we know how the system works here. So this kind of people are the most vulnerable those who don't have networks and when they are too young. Norway and Sweden are sending too many young people back to Afghanistan 17 and 18 years old, and for such kind of people it has been very difficult. In the society people don't think very positive about them, because the concept here is that if you have been deported, it means you have done something wrong in that country. There are case they have been asked ok, why your cousin's asylum claim was accepted and yours wasn't, so maybe you have done something wrong, something criminal. So overall, it has not been perceived very positively.

Some returnees, they don't want to let their family know they have been deported, because they are afraid of the stigma of the deportation. Deportation has a bad stigma and there is a stamp on your face saying ok this guy is deported. In terms of finances, people still don't think about [the consequences of] deportation. They think well this guy has come back from UK, Germany, and Norway, so other people will try to misuse as much as they can. But, people here don't understand that this person has spent thousands of dollars and now he has been deported back with empty pockets. In the rural areas they are afraid of kidnappings and the perception is that this guy has been from UK and he would have lots of money.

In terms of westernized lifestyle and religious issues, they aren't perceived very well. It has been very easy to recognize a person if someone has been to Europe from the way of style, haircut and clothes. Yes, there are times they are excluded from the society. Both because people will not accept it, and the fear of failure they have of deportation. They think they failed in the journey, and necessarily they are not included in the society, and this is a huge problem for them. One of the other big issues is that some returnees are converted to Christianity. In a country like

Afghanistan, if they find out that you are not Muslim anymore that is would be the end of your life, your story.

Even in the family are not welcomed very well. It is because that the majority of people in Afghanistan are poor, so if you want to go to Europe, you have to borrow money from you relatives. The person who borrowed all his money to get to Europe, now is being deported. He has to pay all the money he borrowed and as a result there are lots of pressures from the family: 'okay you failed and we you have to give this much to this person, this much to that person and how you are going to pay?'. As mentioned before, most of the returnees don't even want their families know about the deportation. They have the fear of failure with them, and say 'well how are we going to face our family'.

Regarding the westernized lifestyle let me talk about the stigma of deportation. We all know we have been raised in Muslim family. For someone who has been in Europe for 5 or 6 years and he has been away from religious issues, so it is very difficult to reintegrate into the family and society. Yes, there have been case that returnees were marginalized by the family because they are too westernized and they can create problems for their brother, their sister and parents, so they tell them don't come to the area and stay away from us."

(Source: Abdul Ghafoor, Interview with Asylos, 28 May 2017)

A Policy Brief, part of the project 'Possibilities and Realities of Return Migration' (PREMIG), a large-scale research project led by PRIO (Peace Research Institute Oslo) that explores return migration from Norway and the United Kingdom, explores the possibilities for Afghans to actually and effectively reintegrate after assisted return from Europe.

"Firstly, a small minority had faced specific threats after returning, usually in the form of violent demands for money, perhaps – as one interviewee suggested – because people who had been in Europe were assumed to be wealthy, although in reality most had returned with little or no savings. Another assumption returnees faced was that they had become 'westernised' or 'anti-Islamic' in Europe. One was even threatened that he had to give money to an insurgency group to prove his non-western credentials. For a larger proportion, it was fear of (rather than direct) violence, that was affecting them, resulting in being unable to leave the house and gain employment. Some moved regularly from family member to family member – partly to avoid outstaying hospitality but also for security reasons and to avoid 'settling in', which would disrupt plans to re-migrate. Secondly, un/underemployment was a major problem." (p.3)

(Source: Oeppen, C. and Majidi, N., *Can Afghans Reintegrate after Assisted Return from Europe?*, Peace Research Institute Oslo (PRIO), 22 May 2015)

Dr Anicée Van Engeland in her written response to Asylos on 11 June 2017 describes the stigma attached to having been returned from the West, explaining that “there is a clear rejection of those who have changed when abroad”, citing changes such as embracing secularism, turning towards another religion or expressing their sexuality.

“Society fears returnees as they are perceived as intoxicated by western values; some of the youngest ones even picked up an accent when speaking Dari or Pashto, making them foreigners in their own home country. There is a clear rejection of those who have changed when abroad: for example, some might have embraced secularism or might have turned towards another religion; other might have discovered their sexuality and became homosexuals. Such behaviours will be rejected and will cause rejection if not death.

These young men who have spent time abroad have changed. Their cultural, religious and traditional compass has been altered at an age where one is flexible and resilient, making it a challenge for them to fit into existing societal structures. Some have learned another language or have adopted another religion; they have changed the way they dress or behave in society. They might have begun drinking alcohol. It is a real challenge for them to shed that skin and go back to the traditional ways. For example, when abroad, these young men had to make decisions by themselves on a daily basis, and without having the possibility to rely on a religious authority or the local jirga to provide guidance. They have become more individualist and empowered. The younger they are, the most difficult it is for them to re-integrate: a young Afghan male who arrived at 12 or 15 years old in the West usually attends school, makes friends, go out and grow up to be westernized. A return to Afghanistan is then a shock. Society doesn’t look kindly on those young men and refuse association with them: this means that it is very difficult for these young men to find wives, for example.

Attitude towards religion is often a problem for returnees: when living abroad, some Afghans might have discovered secularism or a more relaxed way of practicing Islam. They find themselves at odds with the rest of society when they are returned: they lost the habit of praying or fasting, got used to drinking alcohol, have learned to speak to women... Many of the young individuals I interviewed in Europe admitted they didn’t pray or fast anymore. They have forgotten those rituals because the society they lived in had other rules.

Return within an individual community is therefore complex. Relocation proves even more complex as the returnee will have to re-enter a society with rituals it has forgotten about and will have also to adapt to local mores, as each province of Afghanistan is different.”

(Source: Dr. Anicée Van Engeland, written Expert Opinion, 11 June 2017)

Dr Anicée Van Engeland further explains that many returnees face a hostile welcome from

their families and community, and that in general public opinion is not favorable to helping returnees as they believe that there are other more important domestic issues.

“Public opinion is not favourable to helping returnees. Afghans believe that the government is not doing enough to support the economy, protect the population from armed non-state actors, promote education, and encourage women to work and other issues. There is, as a result, little empathy for returnees as people would rather see funding allocated to major domestic issues rather than to those who tried to leave the country. This explains why the State and local institutions have done so little to assist returnees: it is not a popular move.

I have witnessed many cases where returnees have found themselves without protection against family members and society. For example, upon return, some young men have claimed their right over a land or a house, only to be faced with stern opposition by the rest of the family or the community. Local institutions will tend to either refuse to referee the matter or will side with the family, clearly breaking the law. The jirga would also side with the family, leaving the young male without a land. The rationale is that the individual left and abandoned his goods to others. Jirga in non-urban areas can be very unfair towards returnees and I have seen many cases where the individual lost against the community. This context explains any attempt at land redistribution upon arrival of returnees has have been met with anger by the locals. In other cases, young men have gone back to a community that was angry at them for different reasons (eloping with a local girl, losing cattle, refusing to comply with a jirga’ order to join the Taliban, giving information to NATO...). In such circumstances, local authorities will not protect the returnees as they have little interest in doing so: the returnee has alienated the family or a community and helping him would come down to taking sides with the weakest link.

Many of these young men come back with debts and with nothing in their pockets: a return within the family or the community is therefore impossible as it would shame everyone, the returnee included. Some locals also believe that the returnee is hiding his good luck, and young men are often mugged, kidnapped or ransomed. There reports of returnees being abducted in the grounds that he must have come back rich; the family is then bribed and some have to sell everything they have left to rescue the returnee. This shows that reintegrating a returnee back into a home is risky: the returnee is firstly seen as a failure and there is resentment is the family has sold everything for the individual to go abroad and be successful. Then, the community could be scared of having him in their midst: the returnee could draw unwanted attention from local warlords or armed non-state actors. This is applicable when a returnee is relocated. Very few communities welcome a returnee for fear of his past: is he a criminal? Did he leave to avoid the Taliban? Did he hurt a girl? In communities that are tight-knit, a stranger is never welcomed; a stranger who has spent time abroad and whose records cannot be checked is scary.”

(Source: Dr. Anicée Van Engeland, written Expert Opinion, 11 June 2017)

Dr Anicée Van Engeland further elaborates in more detail about returnees' relationship with their families when they are returned to Afghanistan.

"For many, a returnee brings shame: families who sent a young man abroad expect success and remittances. This is why families sacrifice everything they have – houses, lands, cattle- for one member of the family, usually a young male, to go abroad and provide for everyone. By doing so, I have seen fathers taking the risks of having to sell his daughter into slavery if the son sent abroad didn't succeed. A return is therefore equivalent to failure. There is little compassion for the hardship these young men have encountered, and no understanding for their fears or anxiety. This adds up to their stress: not only are these returnees often traumatized, they cannot share their stories with their family, friends and community.

Besides, anyone who has become different during the trip abroad will be rejected by society: speaking with an accent, engaging into conversation when not talked to, dressing differently, going to the gym, using skype to speak to friends abroad are all examples I have encountered that have justified family exclusion.

This is why many young men don't return back home: they know they are not welcome. They prefer living in slums or be homeless than face disapproval. This is also what feeds the revolving-door scenario: I met young men who were at their third attempt, and swore they would come again as they had nowhere to go [...]

A survey found out that 72% of young Afghans have witnessed the loss of a family member. Families and communities are often torn apart for ethnic, political and war reasons. It is therefore not uncommon to find Afghans who have severed ties with their families and communities, or have been separated, willingly or not, and find themselves without any support. Returnees fall under this category: a documentary demonstrates that returnees, whether they suffer from mental health issues or not, are isolated and tend to become homeless: it is almost impossible for them to go back where they lived as returning would be a death sentence. Most asylum-seekers we interviewed during our UNHCR survey explained they would never go back home to their family if deported; they all stated they would attempt the journey again rather than go back to their family and communities. Part of the issue is the danger they would face when going home. Another issue lies with honour: families and communities made a lot of sacrifices for these asylum-seekers to leave the country. It makes it impossible for an individual to go back home without being successful. Such conception of honour might be difficult for us to apprehend but they explain why many returned Afghans end up being homeless or commit suicide. Those who have mental health problems face a double punishment: not only are they lonely, they also suffer from mental health disorders that will impact their interaction with others: there is a stigma associated with mental health problems.

Returnees suffering from mental health disorders can sometimes be abandoned by their families: shame is often associated with mental health troubles as disorders are thought to be the result of demons (*djinn*) that have taken over an individual. As a result, some families chase the family member suffering from mental health issues or lead him to be chained in front of a shrine. Others are left to beg in the streets. In such circumstances, returnees become extremely vulnerable, as not only do they suffer from mental health issues; they are also unable to provide for themselves. They then become prey for drug traffic, prostitution, human smugglers, warlords or the Taliban.”

(Source: Dr. Anicée Van Engeland, written Expert Opinion, 11 June 2017)

Dr Anicée Van Engeland also describes how young returnees to Kabul are prone to recruitment by non-state actors.

“Kabul is prone to recruitment. The Taliban and other non-state actors have, so far, largely recruited from non-urban and remote areas; they are turning now to urban areas. This is explained by the fierce recruiting competition between different non-state actors and the arrival of ISIS on the scene. There is a dire need for fresh fighters as most young males living in non-urban areas have departed when faced with the risk of being recruited. They either left for larger cities or went abroad. This is why groups like the Taliban now take the risk to recruit inside cities, and this is where many returnees hide. The recruitment takes all forms and happens everywhere. Besides, the young men who are returned and sent to Kabul (or any other large city) soon face unemployment because of the lack of community and family support. These children, adolescents and young adults often become homeless or drug addicts and are vulnerable to recruitment by non-state actors. This explains the presence of the Taliban inside Kabul and other cities: the Taliban know they can prey on easy targets, namely youngsters freshly arrived, lost and vulnerable.

In some areas, the Taliban and ISIS now offer a salary to new recruits; in a country where unemployment is rampant, young men who have been returned could be tempted to join an armed group.”

(Source: Dr. Anicée Van Engeland, written Expert Opinion, 11 June 2017)

## **5. Consequences of lack of a support network**

An August 2016 report<sup>4</sup> by academic Liza Schuster states that those returned to Afghanistan without a support network will struggle to find shelter and employment, and access health care. She also states that a lack of local knowledge and contacts will mean returnees will not have the necessary experience to assess and deal with risks like which areas are safe to travel to etc. She reports that those without support are more likely to be recruited by insurgent

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<sup>4</sup> This expert report was written by Liza Schuster in August 2016 for Asylos in response to queries from lawyers in the UK on the situation of returnees to Kabul

groups. Due to these difficulties most returnees she interviewed left Afghanistan again after being returned.

“The danger is that when people who do not have any networks in Kabul are forcibly returned there, they will be unable to stay and so will risk returning to provinces where they have family, but where they are unsafe. I have interviewed young men returned from Norway and the UK in precisely this situation. In most cases, they have returned again to Kabul, leaving as soon as they could for Iran (or India in 2 cases). In a handful of cases, those who went to Nangarhar, left for Pakistan. In one of the earliest interviews I conducted in Afghanistan in 2012, I interviewed the friend of a young man, removed from the UK who had returned to Jalalabad, but as it was still unsafe he had left again for Pakistan. He was killed by those he had initially fled as he returned to try and visit his fiancée [...]

As mentioned above, interactions between strangers meeting for the first time inevitably begin with establishing identity and trying to find common acquaintances or family members. Trust in Afghanistan has been severely tested through more than three decades of war, and until or unless someone’s identity has been established, they will be unable to find somewhere to stay, or someone to give them employment or support. Unless they have access to support networks, they will find it difficult, perhaps impossible, to find livelihood opportunities [...]

A further concern is that those returned after spending years in Europe, in particular formative teenage years would stand out. Though those returned may still speak Dari or Pashtu, their accents and comportment are different, and they do not have the local knowledge and experience necessary to assess and deal with risks. If they do not have family or friends in Kabul, they will not have the necessary guidance and advice on where to go and how to behave. This is as true in Kabul as in the provinces, since most of those displaced to Kabul have reproduced their village and social structures when resettling in Kabul[...]

Those who return as young men without social networks are also vulnerable to recruitment by insurgents. In the course of my research I have met young men, who say they are desperate, have been approached by recruiters and are considering joining insurgent groups (see also Institute for War and Peace Reporting, Afghan Militants Find Unemployed Make Easy Recruits, 10 February 2015, available at: <http://www.refworld.org/docid/54e5cacd6.html> [accessed 6 March 2015]. The JSSP manager cited in previous paragraphs offered three examples from his own experience of University graduates who had followed this route, one of whom had completed his degree in India, and over two years was unable to find employment so joined the insurgency[...]

In some cases, Jangalak [reception facility] provides an opportunity for the young men to think and pool resources, but it offers only temporary shelter. For those who have no family in Afghanistan or who cannot return to their families, the initial period at

Jangalak is traumatic. Some have only the vaguest memories of Afghanistan, most do not know Kabul. Many have spent long periods if not their whole lives in exile and all they know of Afghanistan is from a television screen or social media. I have interviewed a number of young people who have been returned who are afraid to go into the streets. Again, judging from the interviews conducted over the last three years, it is clear that those who have grown up in Kabul, and or who have relatively recently left Kabul seem to be best placed to find their feet again as they had some familiarity with the city.”

(Source: Expert Report by Liza Schuster, *Risks on Return to Kabul*, 12 August 2016)

The UNHCR Eligibility Guidelines for Assessing the International Protection Needs of Asylum-Seekers from Afghanistan 2016 highlight the importance of an asylum seeker from Afghanistan of having traditional support mechanisms provided by extended family or members of their ethnic group for Internal Flight Alternative to be considered reasonable. In an absence of these support networks they would likely find themselves in a situation comparable to that of other urban IDPs.

“For the remaining areas of Afghanistan, i.e. areas that are neither affected by active conflict nor controlled by AGEs, an assessment of the reasonableness of a proposed IFA/IRA must give particular attention to:

(i) the effective availability of traditional support mechanisms, provided by members of the applicant’s extended family or members of his or her ethnic group; (ii) access to shelter in the proposed area of relocation; (iii) the availability of basic infrastructure and access to essential services in the proposed area of relocation, such as potable water and sanitation, healthcare and education; (iv) the presence of livelihood opportunities, including access to land for Afghans originating from rural areas; and (v) the scale of internal displacement in the proposed area of relocation... Where the proposed area of relocation is an urban area where the applicant has no access to pre-identified accommodation and livelihood options, and where he or she cannot reasonably be expected to be able to fall back on meaningful support networks, the applicant would likely find him- or herself in a situation comparable to that of other urban IDPs. To assess the reasonableness of such an outcome, adjudicators need to take into account the scale of internal displacement in the area of prospective relocation, and the living conditions of IDPs in that location. Relevant considerations in this regard include the fact that IDPs are considered to be among the most vulnerable groups in Afghanistan, many of whom are beyond the reach of humanitarian organizations; as well as available information to the effect that urban IDPs are more vulnerable than the non-displaced urban poor, as they are particularly affected by unemployment; limited access to water and sanitation; and food insecurity. The limited availability of adequate housing must also be taken into

account, including in particular for IDPs, with land allocation schemes reportedly often ill-managed and marred with corruption (see also Section II.E). The UNHCR eligibility Guidelines for Assessing the International Protection Needs of Asylum-Seekers from Afghanistan 2016 highlights the importance of an asylum seeker from Afghanistan of having traditional support mechanism provided by extended family or members of their ethnic group for Internal Flight Alternative to be considered reasonable. In an absence of these support network they would likely find themselves in a situation comparable to that of other urban IDPs.”

(Source: UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), *UNHCR Eligibility Guidelines for Assessing the International Protection Needs of Asylum-Seekers from Afghanistan*, 19 April 2016)

A report by Refugee Support Network published in April 2016 demonstrates the crucial role of support networks for young people who have been forcibly returned to Afghanistan. It states that "the role of social networks - friends, family and acquaintances - in helping young returnees to adapt to life back in Afghanistan is critical. Their presence influences access to basic necessities, emotional support, and future prospects".

“The majority of young returnees monitored have experienced significant practical challenges on return to Afghanistan, with their logistical and practical efforts hampered by security concerns, a lack of social networks and fears of becoming a burden on others. Almost two thirds have not been able to remain in Kabul, and have moved on to other provinces. Over half have not been able to live with their family and have had to source accommodation elsewhere, often with great difficulty. Financial difficulties have also been a key feature of life for the majority of young returnees...

Although insecurity may at times prevent young returnees moving to live with friends or family, nine young returnees still described the presence or absence of social networks as a key factor influencing their location (or attempts to locate themselves in a particular place).

Motivated by the potential of establishing a social network, one young returnee chose to move out of Afghanistan to Peshawar in Pakistan, explaining “I did not have anyone in Kabul or Afghanistan”, but that, because his uncle was in Pakistan, “it was much easier for me to come back here and find somebody who could help me settle” (R07, IAR). For other young people, it is not the presence of family that draws them away from Kabul, but a lack of family in their province of origin that forces them to remain there. One young returnee explained that going back to a province of origin without family there was nigh on impossible, and that he therefore couldn’t return to Ghazni, “because I don’t have any family network [there] to go to” (R08, ILD).

For young people without family remaining in Afghanistan, the decision about where to live was often based on the location of less stable networks. One young returnee,

who returned to Afghanistan with no connections other than those he met on the return flight, said that “I am staying in Jalalabad. I came here with some of the other returnees who came with me in the same plane” (R10, IAR).

The role of social networks - friends, family and acquaintances - in helping young returnees to adapt to life back in Afghanistan is critical (and explored further in Chapter 6). Their presence influences access to basic necessities, emotional support, and future prospects - and is thus key in informing young people’s attempts to locate, or relocate, in a particular place [...]

Although just over half of the young returnees monitored for this research have not been able to reintegrate with their families, for the 12 young people who have, this has proved the most secure and reliable source of accommodation. The 13 young returnees not able to live with their families have taken a variety of routes to securing somewhere to live, with a lack of institutional, state or voluntary sector assistance meaning most rely on non-family social networks [...]

Almost two thirds of the young returnees monitored (16 separate cases) reported struggling to meet their basic financial needs following return to Afghanistan. The majority of the young people were using all that they had to pay for their food, shelter and other necessities and sometimes failing to make ends meet. Such tight budgets forced the young people to prioritise their expenses, with anything not considered essential for survival abandoned.

Whilst nine young returnees were able, at different times, to get small amounts of money from irregular day labour, temporary work, or for a time, more stable employment, other young people were entirely dependent on friends and family, or gifts from the UK[...]

The above-described weak social networks have led many of the young returnees monitored to seek support from organisations or institutions in Afghanistan. For the majority however, such support was difficult or impossible to obtain. Young returnees had some success securing in-kind support from IOM, and assistance with family tracing from the Afghan Red Crescent. Others depended on informal support from UK-based organisations (predominantly advice and contacts) or individuals (finance).

In addition to seeking assistance from IOM, two young people had sought support with family tracing from the Afghan Red Crescent. One had successfully registered with them, and was still waiting (after 6 months) for any news of family members, and the other had repeatedly failed to locate the office, and then moved on from Kabul. None of the young people approaching other organisations for support (predominantly for support with employment) had received help.

Instead, 10 young people were forced to rely on informal and unsustainable networks of support in the UK. None of the UK organisations contacted have a mandate to support, help or advise young people after return, and, in the majority of cases, staff members had provided informal emotional support or advice in a personal capacity,

outside of the parameters of their role. One young returnee expressed the psycho-social value of this support, often the only continuum between their former and current lives, saying “maybe no-one can help me, but just keeping in touch with [name of support worker from UK] has helped me, because she knows everything about me” (R18, ILD). Other young returnees were provided with ad-hoc and informal financial and emotional support from their UK foster carers, teachers or friends.

Familial and social networks are a critical part of Afghanistan’s social fabric. Whilst some young returnees have been shown significant generosity and hospitality by friends and family, for the majority, these networks have disappeared, weakened or become fractured. A fear of stigma or discrimination has, in many cases, created a barrier to building open and honest friendships, leaving young people internally isolated and disconnected. Institutional support, particularly from IOM, has been helpful to a minority of young people, but the majority have faced substantial barriers to accessing help and remained either without support or dependent on unsustainable and ad-hoc assistance from individuals in the UK.

Strength of personal networks emerged as the single most important factor in determining a young person’s likelihood of finding work following forced return. As noted above, seven of the 12 young people who obtained work during the course of this research (albeit often temporary, manual labour) did so as a result of personal connections.

For many returnees however, this presents a considerable problem. Spending formative years outside Afghanistan disrupts the formation of natural connections within Afghan society. The significant numbers of young people not able to be reintegrated into family units following forced return (see Chapter 6) find themselves with little recourse to social networks. It is perhaps not surprising then, that in the cases of nine separate young people, this was cited as a primary barrier to finding work.”

(Source: Refugee Support Network (RSN), *After Return: documenting the experiences of young people forcibly removed to Afghanistan*, April 2016)

A November 2016 article by News Deeply notes that returnees may not find it easy to access healthcare due to a lack of family support. Without a network, they may find it difficult to reintegrate into society and find work; this could result in them finding it more difficult to access services like healthcare:

“Many young Afghan men we interviewed had mental health problems before leaving Afghanistan, and the psychological trauma caused by their treacherous journey and rejection in Europe made their condition even worse. Young returnees have lost time, years of education and confidence. Some find themselves alone, without family or professional networks to rely on for support. With little left after the financial and social sacrifices they made to migrate, resuming a

normal life in Afghanistan becomes nearly impossible.”

(Source: News Deeply, *Young Afghans Returning From Europe Face Isolation and Fear Back Home*, 16 November 2016)

The director of AMASO, Abdul Ghafoor, explains in his interview with Asylos of 28 May 2017 that one of the main problems for returnees to Afghanistan is the lack of a support network which may lead them to re-migrating out of the country.

“Nowadays, there are two big problems for returnees; one is security and the second one is the lack of a support network. In Afghanistan, mainly in Kabul, if you don’t have support network, if you don’t know minister or MP (Member of Parliament), it is really tough for you to find and get a good job. For returnees, since they have been far from here, some of them have not been to Afghanistan and they are settling for the first time for them it is very hard, and have narrow chances for survival. So what happens, they try their best, but when they fail the only option they have is to get out of the country. The people I have worked with, I would confidently say that 50% of them are now out of the country. Because they couldn’t survive here, they couldn’t find job and the fear of whole security situation. Now they are out in countries like Iran, Turkey and Europe. The cases are the same and it doesn’t matter where you came from, but for those who come from rural areas it will more difficult.”

(Source: Abdul Ghafoor, Interview with Asylos, 28 May 2017)

This Policy Brief is part of the project ‘Possibilities and Realities of Return Migration’ (PREMIG), a large-scale research project led by PRIO (Peace Research Institute Oslo) that explores return migration from Norway and the United Kingdom. It explores possibilities for Afghans to actually and effectively reintegrate after assisted return from Europe.

“The nature of hiring practices in Afghanistan means those who did not have strong social connections, or were trying to keep a low public profile, could not find work. For others, the corrupt working environment was unbearable. Here, the livelihoods component of reintegration assistance (managed by IOM) could help. However, many of the research participants who had received IOM assistance were unhappy with it. In part, their unhappiness can be related to the fact that most did not want to be back in Afghanistan, and no assistance was going to change that. Nevertheless, there were specific problems that multiple research participants noted, such as rushed meetings with IOM caseworkers, and/or a feeling that caseworkers took a ‘onesize-fits-all’ approach to business-planning advice rather than a tailored response to their individual needs and skills. Also, sometimes face-to-face follow-up by caseworkers did not take place due to security constraints. Thirdly, many felt they had disappointed their family, who had saved or borrowed money to pay for their

migration. Now, rather than being a source of remittance income, the returnees were often a drain on household resources, and consequently, felt disempowered within the family structure. A noticeable trend amongst younger research participants was that one of the first things they did after return was get married – could this be a way of trying to renegotiate membership (and adult identity) in Afghan social and cultural life?” (p.3)

(Source: Oeppen, C. and Majidi, N., *Can Afghans Reintegrate after Assisted Return from Europe?*, Peace Research Institute Oslo (PRIO), 22 May 2015)

Dr. Anicée Van Engeland describes in her written response to Asylos on 11 June 2017 how Afghanistan is a country of ethnic belongings and tribes who provide support in all areas of life, without which a young returnee will be deprived of a safety valve and protection granted by the group.

“It is difficult to rebuild a life for these young male returnees due to the absence of network support in a new place: Afghanistan is a country of ethnic belongings and tribes where the family, extended relatives and the community provide support in all areas of life. This is even truer for minors who are still children and need assistance. When a young male returns to Afghanistan, he needs his family and community to help him find him a job, shelter him and provide financial support. He will be deprived of a safety valve and the protection granted by the group and will be exposed. In Afghanistan, removing an individual from his environment to place him in a new environment is a social death: relocation means exclusion. In non-urban areas, one cannot survive without the group. Everything, from land to work and marriage is provided by the community. Without support, a returnee will not make it. The newcomer will not integrate the new social fabric, unless he is sent to a large city such as Kabul and at present, big cities are targeted by insurgents.

Big cities offer the opportunity to hide but anonymity is still impossible: in Afghanistan, everyone comes from somewhere and belongs to a tribe. One is defined by the language he speaks, the clothes he dons, the physical features he sports... There is a social determinism that prevents anyone from re-building a life from scratch. The only life-line that exists in Kabul is the massive presence of foreign NGOs that can find a young male returnee a job.

The consequences are that returnees have no access or a restricted to the job market, the housing market and the marriage market. They are aware of it and this is why they prefer to leave the country again.”

(Source: Dr. Anicée Van Engeland, written Expert Opinion, 11 June 2017)

## 6. Access to health care for returnees

A 2014 IOM report suggests that returnees' incomes are not enough to afford private health care and that public healthcare services are often inadequate.

“The private health-care sector is more advanced than the public health-care system. According to a physician in Kabul who agreed to be interviewed, “the returnees' income is far too low to permit their referral to private-sector service providers, so we can only refer them to the public hospitals. There, however, because of the low salaries and the lack of equipment, the services are unacceptable. In the private sector, services are good, but they cost too much for the patient.” Of course, there is a need for medicine, but I don't have money to buy them.[. . .] I am borrowing money just to meet my subsistence needs. (Return migrant, male, 54, Afghanistan) ”

(Source: International Organisation for Migration, *Challenges in the Reintegration of Return Migrants with Chronic Medical Conditions*, 2014)

According to the NGO Afghanistan Analysts Network, public health care involves many hidden costs for the patient including paying for medication, laboratory tests and doctor's fees. The article estimates that the average Afghan household spends about 150 USD per year on healthcare.

“Despite the fact that healthcare should be free of charge, as promised under the national free care policy (article 52 of the Afghan constitution), this is not the case in many public facilities. Instead, people must pay for drugs, doctor's fees, laboratory tests and in-patient care.

According to the survey carried out by MSF, medication ranked as one of the highest costs people incurred. Across all four locations, more than half (56 per cent) of patients who had visited a public facility reported that they ended up paying for all the medication they needed. The National Risk and Vulnerability Assessment (NRVA) also found that for many households, health expenditure may be prohibitive, especially if advanced and prolonged treatment or hospitalisation is required. According to the NRVA's figures, less than one quarter of all households had spent money on in-patient care – but if costs were paid, they were usually large, with an average expenditure of 34,000 Afghani (around 580 USD). Expenditure on out-patient care was considerably lower, with a mean of 1,500 Afghani (around 25 USD) by all households, but was made twice as often – by 51 per cent of all households – compared to in-patient care. Other health-related expenditures were smaller but more frequent (63 per cent of households).

Overall, households in Afghanistan spent on average more than 9,000 Afghani on healthcare (around 150 USD). It is notable that urban households had a significantly

higher level of expenditure than rural households, which is likely related to lower urban poverty levels and better access to health services. In a country where, according to the World Bank, more than one third of the people are living below the national poverty line of less than 1.25 USD per day, such expenditures can be crippling.”

(Source: Afghanistan Analysts Network, *Between Rhetoric and Reality: Access to health care and its limitations*, 2 December 2014)

Dr. Anicée Van Engeland describes in her written response to Asylos on 11 June 2017 the varying quality of healthcare in Afghanistan depending on public or private clinics, and that the public hospitals, although they are meant to be free, often charge for hidden costs.

“Through a study conducted in 2013<sup>5</sup>, MSF discovered that while the public system promises free care, it does not always translate in practice: Afghans reported they often had to pay for drugs and some doctors’ fees that were not free. In addition of those hidden charges, there were accusations of corruption: patients reported that they had to pay for services that were supposed to be free. Some public doctors also own their own private clinics and push patients to go there for there and medicines, claiming that the equipment is better.

While medicine is available and there are well-functioning pharmacies, the cost of buying medicine vary because of the war: It is sometimes difficult to ensure that medicines will arrive. While in theory medicine is supposed to be free, MSF has noted that patients had to pay for them. In other cases, patients report having to pay for medicines that were not available in the public service, forcing them to go to the private service instead. As a result, many Afghans prefer to buy it at the market, where there is no certainty that they will find the right medicine and that it will not be expired.”

(Dr. Anicée Van Engeland, written Expert Opinion, 11 June 2017)

In a 2012 article Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty explores access to mental health treatment in Afghanistan and interviews the then head of the state-run Society of Mental Health Specialists. Mr Azizuddin Hemat praises the services available in the private Alemi Neuro Psychiatric Hospital in Mazar-I Sharif; however he indicates that the reality for most of the population is less positive. He refers to the traditional cures for mental disorders and that there needs to be more public awareness on the issue:

“In Kabul, the state's main facility has a capacity to treat just 60 patients at a time. There are specialized hospital wards in Jalalabad, in eastern Afghanistan, and Herat, in the west. In the northern city of Mazar-i Sharif a gleaming, private hospital helps fill the void. Other than that there are no other medical facilities to treat mental

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<sup>5</sup> [http://www.msf.org/sites/msf.org/files/msf\\_afghanistan\\_report\\_final.pdf](http://www.msf.org/sites/msf.org/files/msf_afghanistan_report_final.pdf)

patients throughout Afghanistan's 34 provinces.

Azizuddin Hemat, head of the government-run Society of Mental Health Specialists, says the situation is dire, especially in the country's regions, but that there are positive developments. He singles out the private Alemi Neuro Psychiatric Hospital in Mazar-i Sharif - the administrative center of Balkh Province - as a particular source of pride when it comes to treating patients with mental health-problems. Unlike the dilapidated state hospital in Kabul's crowded Alauddin area, the four-story Alemi facility is gleaming and equipped with modern equipment. Dr. Nader Alemi, the owner of the hospital, claims patients come from all over Afghanistan. "In the past 12 months, 964 patients from different provinces have sought treatment here," Alemi says. "But it's just a drop in the ocean. We have millions of people suffering from depression in villages and cities who desperately need treatment." [...]

Public awareness of the problem is seen as key to treating it in a country where mental illnesses are seldom recognized as a medical issue, and are often covered up by family members out of shame.

Traditional treatments, according to Alemi, involve employing mullahs to "cure" people by means of exorcisms or the reading of verses.

Sufferers often turn to holy shrines known as "ziyarats" for treatment. Prominent "ziyarats" such as Niali Saheb in Nangarhar, Shams Saheb in Ghazni province, and Shpole Baba in the eastern Mahipar town have become a popular destination for tens of thousands of people suffering from depression.

Only when patients' distress and suffering becomes unbearable for the patients and their families do they find their way to the country's few specialized facilities. Alemi says that when it comes to proper treatment, psychological counseling "goes a long way."

(Source: Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, *Little Succor For Afghanistan's Mentally Ill*, 3 May 2012)

The 2015 news article on Afghanistan's 'hidden mental health epidemic' reports on the growth of counselling and psychosocial therapy across Afghanistan as a way of treating mental health issues such as post-traumatic stress disorder and 'other war-induced illnesses'. Despite traditional beliefs, counselling is slowly becoming more accepted:

"The Afghan government has made tackling mental illness a priority and developed a national mental health strategy. All provincial hospitals now offer counselling. Counselling is free, and even available online [...]

Modern therapy is also at odds with the sense of privacy so paramount in Afghan culture. "Many people don't like the concept of counselling. It is not appropriate in our culture to share intimate matters and family secrets," said Fatma Dauladzai, a counsellor from Paktia province.

But while the idea of counselling has yet to take firm root, women, especially, are

growing more receptive.”

(Source: The Guardian, *Afghanistan tackles hidden mental health epidemic*, 2 September 2015)

The Afghan Analysts Network describe the services provided by the German psychosocial organisation known as IPSO which is based in Kabul. The organisation offers counselling as well as other services to empower individuals. The network also suggests differences in experiences of those who left a long time ago and have ‘adjusted to a European value system’ and those who left in 2015:

“The German government has contracted IPSO, a humanitarian organisation of German-origin based in Kabul, to offer psycho-social help to those deported from Germany. The organisation assists 400 to 500 individuals a day, but this number includes also, and mainly, local people that need psycho-social help, as Inge Missmahl, founder and director of IPSO told AAN. The organisation organises self-awareness groups, Afghan-life skills training, one-to-one counselling, painting and handcraft skills. Those Afghans who have been returned, but left a long time ago have some very different experiences and needs to those who left in 2015 and only returned recently. According to (Missmahl), those who left years ago have accepted and adjusted to a European value system, which is not the case for those who left in 2015. Nevertheless, both groups experience stigma and feel a deep humiliation once they have been deported back. This requires both mitigation and counselling that Missmahl’s organisation provides. “We try to provide them with a moment of empowerment, so they feel self-efficient again,” she said, adding that a lot of people “never really found their own voice,” and left Afghanistan in search of one. IPSO provides up to five sessions for those in need, and the organisation keeps in Skype contact with returnees in remote provinces. They have also assisted people who have been deported from Finland and Norway, although the organisation does not have bilateral grant agreements with these two countries.”

(Source: Afghan Analysts , *Voluntary and Forced Returns to Afghanistan in 2016/17: Trends, statistics and experiences*, 19 May 2017)

UNHCR outlines the overall health infrastructure available in Afghanistan, which includes Basic Package of Health Services (BPHS) and Essential Package of Health Services. The best care is offered at BPHS services:

“The health infrastructure in Afghanistan is made up of the Basic Package of Health Services (BPHS), including health posts, basic health centers, comprehensive health centers and the district hospitals, which provides some basic services such as maternal and newborn health, immunization, and nutrition; the Essential Package of Health Services, including some district, provincial and regional hospitals, with a range

of health services including minor surgeries; and the clinics and hospitals in the private sector. Tertiary level hospitals are available only in Kabul and few provincial centers such as Herat, Mazar, Kandahar, etc.”

(Source: UNHCR, *UNHCR Afghanistan: Voluntary Repatriation to Afghanistan - 2015. Key Findings of UNHCR Return Monitoring, 01 January – 31 December 2015*, 2015)

The 2014 IOM report further emphasises the importance of family support for returnees with a medical condition.

“In a country with a protracted war history like Afghanistan, the much needed family and relatives are not always available: they may not be alive anymore, have fled the country or the return migrant may have lost contact with them. If the family is available, returnees may not be accepted. The returnees went away to sustain an income abroad, returning without anything to offer and with a medical condition to care for can be problematic. To a certain extent, there is the idea that they must have done something wrong; otherwise, they would not have been deported. Since a network is very important for survival, the absence of a family network poses serious challenges to migrants’ reintegration in Afghanistan[...]

Returnees who get reunited with their families will face fewer challenges, especially if their family background and financial status can support them. Afghans without this support system need an income in order to meet their daily needs.”

(Source: International Organisation for Migration, *Challenges in the Reintegration of Return Migrants with Chronic Medical Conditions*, 2014)

In an interview with Asylos in 2016, scholar Liza Schuster describes how mental health care is severely lacking in Afghanistan which is an issue for Afghans who have been forcibly returned and have issues such as Post traumatic stress disorder, depression, anxiety etc.

“Well this is an important point because there are some people being sent back with Post traumatic stress disorder , depression , anxiety and other medical issues. Two things that are very important to note: Mental health care in Afghanistan is virtually non-existent. There is one hospital in Kabul where it is common to chain people to their beds. There is a private hospital in Mazar where people are sleeping in the hospital because they can’t cope with the demands. This is private and charges money. The drugs that are used- there is no guarantee that they are genuine, the market is flooded with counterfeit drugs. Even if they were genuine, doctors don't know what to prescribe . Many of the doctors have actually bought their qualification in Kazakhstan, in Tajikistan, in Iran and Pakistan. So medical care is not available in particular for Post traumatic stress disorder, for anxiety, for schizophrenia the treatment is to chain somebody to their bed or to put them in a cage. So for people

with medical issues should definitely not be deported.”

(Source: Asylos Interview with Liza Schuster on 22 April 2016)

The first of a three-part series on a study focusing on urban displaced youth in Kabul highlights the role of Afghanistan’s youth in transition and the concerns around mental health as well as the availability of infrastructure and trained professionals to provide targeted support to IDPs and returnees, being the most at-risk categories.

“This study shows that youth with no migration background present much healthier profiles on average, while return migrants and especially IDPs find themselves the most vulnerable. A large majority (70%) of young Kabulis have experienced traumatic experiences (one or multiple shocks that include not only personal traumas, but also criminal or terrorist related issues). According to the Health Index developed in this study, IDPs remain more than a third more likely than youth with no migration background to be deprived from basic access to healthcare, and deportees more than 50% more likely. Deportees are by far the worst off.” (p.11)[...]

The physical and mental health situation of Afghan youth is a matter of significant political, social and economic concern, but this issue is often invisible or unseen – especially as it affects the most vulnerable, the displaced and the migrant. [...] A constant observation of this study, whatever the vulnerability or socio-economic dimension considered, is that the return migrant category hides stark differences between those who benefited from assisted voluntary return and those who were deported by force. [...] These two findings from the quantitative survey clearly point to a recurrent observation made during most focus group and individual discussions with interviewed youth: deportees and IDPs have fewer socio-economic ties with local host communities and are *de facto*: i) less likely to access basic health and safety services, and ii) more likely to be exposed to safety hazards and health issues.” (p.14)[...]

Youth with no migration background drive the average health and safety score down, with much healthier profiles on average, while return migrants and especially IDPs find themselves the most vulnerable.

- IDPs remain more than a third likely to be deprived, and deportees more than half.
- The return migrant category hides stark differences between those who
- Benefited from assisted voluntary return and
- Those who were deported by force, who are worst off by far. The situation of deportees is alarming in today’s Afghanistan, raising the question of the political responsibility of the countries that send them back.” (p.15)

Lack of research and data on mental health

The lack of psychosocial infrastructure and high quality data on mental health conditions in Afghanistan presents challenges in assessing the psychological status of

the Afghani population. While data obtained in this study suggest a likelihood of such conditions as Post-traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), for instance, the inability to undertake official diagnostic assessments undermines analysis of vulnerabilities faced by Afghani displaced youth. Throughout this study, the researchers have thus focused on negative psychological symptoms as opposed to disorders. However, the researchers call for further research endeavours to assess the prevalence of mental disorders across Afghanistan’s urban displaced youth population.” (p.17)

The dramatic absence of mental health experts in Afghanistan has often been highlighted. When asked about their coping strategies, respondents highlighted a mix of strategies. Importantly, youth reported that their problem was most often not discussed or solved within their household. Instead, they felt more comfortable turning to their religion or to community elders for help.” (p.19)

#### No taboo – Strong willingness to seek treatment

Of the 2,006 respondents 633 (31.6%) indicated that they suffered from an illness or injury in a three-month period preceding the survey. Only 12.2% of these stated that they did not seek any help or treatment for their ailment. As Table 6 shows, the majority went to a private doctor (30.6%), followed by clinics or mobile clinics (25.9%) or a hospital (25.7%).

Table 6: Help in case of sickness/injury

	Frequency	Percentage
None	77	12.2
Private doctor	194	30.6
Clinic / mobile clinic	164	25.9
Hospital	163	25.7
Traditional birth attendant	29	4.6
Traditional healer	3	0.5
Other	3	0.5
Total	633	100

However, when disaggregating the data, socio-economic determinants appear to be crucial in the decisionmaking process. As shown in graph 5 below, illiterate people are for instance less likely to:

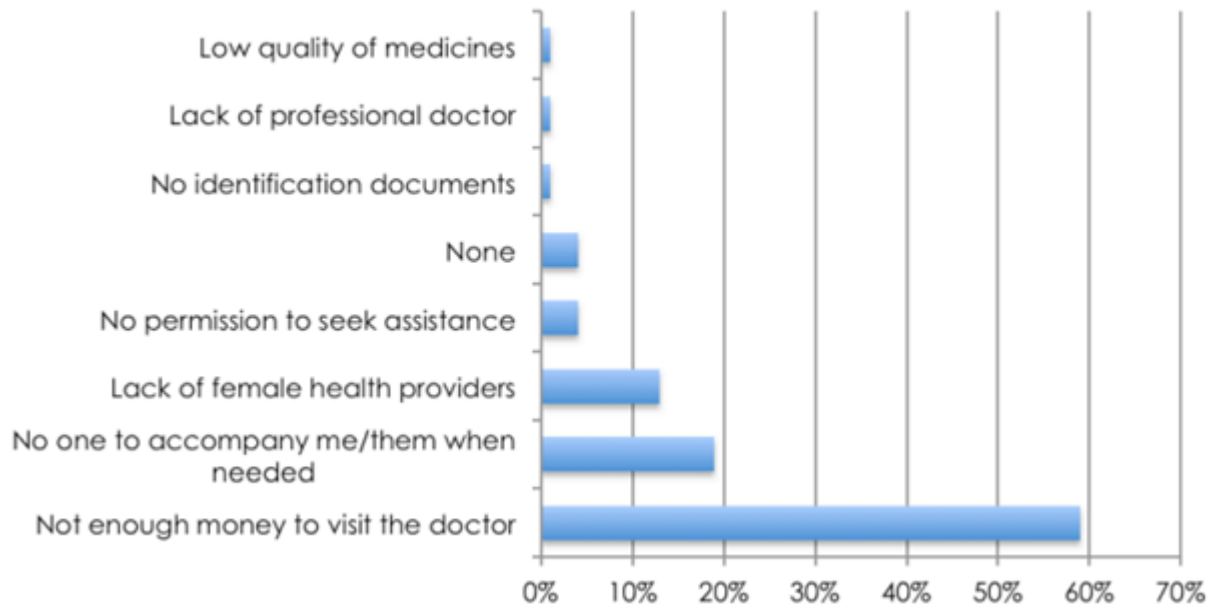
- Seek assistance or treatment from private doctors or hospitals, as they tend 'to be too expensive' (Focus Group Participant, Kabul, April 2014);
- Be aware of the existing opportunities, as 'their access to information and services is more limited' (KII with NGO, Kabul, May 2014)." (p.20)

#### Obstacles to health care for youth

Discrimination on health care is a de facto reality for urban displaced youth in Kabul with concerning facts. Qualitative fieldwork showed that some people do not have access to health care due to an invisible urban barrier. This was particularly the case in IDP settlements, where clinics are lacking while needs are high. Even 21 more, when community members of one IDP settlement visit other clinics, they complain about not getting sufficient attention because they are poor IDPs suggesting that IDPs feel discriminated against when accessing health facilities. This is also confirmed in the quantitative data. There we find that while 53.9% of IDPs indicate not having faced any sort of discrimination in accessing health care, this number is much higher for the other groups at between 63.7% for voluntary return migrants and 77.9% for rural-urban migrants.

Second, financial obstacles remain a key challenge in accessing health care. When asked what stood in the way of their access to health care, 59% of the surveyed youth (and 75.6% for IDP youth) stated not having enough money to pay for a private doctor, clinic or hospital. Most of the health care in Kabul city is not free of charge, a fact that leads one quarter of respondents to identify discrimination by financial status. (p.20-21)

Graph 7: Main obstacles to access health services



The major finding of this section is not only that Kabul's youth is voicing its suffering of mental health issues, but also that migration and displacement are relevant variables to understand and analyse the problem. As confirmed by focus group discussions with both youth and parents, as well as interviews with WHO respondents and NGO aid workers, traumatic disorders are likely to restrict youths' ability to engage, study, find a job and get fully integrated into the Afghan capital's socio-economic network." (p.24)

(Source: Samuel Hall, *Urban displaced youth in Kabul – Part 1. Mental Health Also Matter*, 2016)

Regarding the issue of access to healthcare, especially mental health, Abdul Ghafoor told Asylös on 28 May 2017 that AMASO conducted research in 2016 and found that the service provided is inadequate. Psychological services are often provided privately and there is only one organisation helping returnees called IPSO which is funded by the German government.

"There are only 3 or 4 professionals who can provide Psychological services. There are other experts too, but most of them are working privately and require lots of money. For returnees who don't have lots of money this could be very difficult to continue whatever problem he or she has. In terms of governmental services, there would be hospital, but they don't have such capacity to provide services. There are few places, but they are very temporary, for example there is a center called IPSO. They provide mental health services to returnees from Germany, because that is supported by Germany. They have very limited sources and services, and I don't think they help someone who has been in trouble in very bad mental state for many years.

(...). Recently we have been discussing with them, if we think someone need mental health services we recommend them for this organization. IPSO only provides two weeks services for the returnees. It may have been helpful for someone, but not for all of them.”

(Source: Abdul Ghafoor, Interview with Asylos, 28 May 2017)

Dr Anicée Van Engeland in her written response to Asylos on 11 June 2017 noted that there is stigma attached to mental health issues in Afghanistan. She also explains how access is unequal and inadequate with a lack of beds and psychiatrists.

“Returnees who are in need of mental health care can find support in the community or in the few existing hospitals. Yet, rather than going to hospitals and doctors, Afghan often use collective methods for healing such as praying. Few Afghans go to the doctor; there is a stigma attached to going to a hospital or a treatment centre. When they are seriously ill, Afghans tend to rather go to international organisations’ hospitals such as those established by MSF, or will go and see a private doctor. Seeing a private doctor ensures discretion, but it is expensive. There is a high level of stigmatization of mental health disorders in Afghanistan: the distinction is hardly ever made between the different types of disorders and one can still find people who are mentally-ill chained at home or outside a shrine. The shrine of Mia Ali Baba outside of Jalalabad is known for the chained people who then survive on charity. The stigma is an issue to address mental health issues and to train staff: for example, shackles were only removed recently from bed frames.

A national mental health strategy was designed in 2009. The document acknowledges the impact of the war on children, domestic violence, the need to train medical staff and to avoid social disintegration through the isolation of individuals affected by mental health disorders. The program aims at promoting mental health of the people of Afghanistan; minimising the stigma attached to disorders; supporting individuals, families and communities; preventing the development of problems when possible; and providing medical healthcare for those affected by mental health issues. Despite the effort, there is still a gap between theory and practice, as demonstrated by the report.

Access to mental health care is unequal: it emerged from several studies that women were giving the priority and there is an absence of beds reserved to children, adolescents and young adults. Access is also inadequate: since there are not enough beds, prospective patients have to take turns to check into medical facilities, private and public, including day cares. It is easier for Afghans to buy over the counter self-medicine and to buy drugs than to check into a mental health care centre. The government sought to address the issue by including mental health care in primary cares, without delivering the proper training to primary care patients. So while there is an increased access to primary care, people suffering from mental disorders hardly ever reach the relevant trained medical staff.

The infrastructures available are limited: WHO<sup>6</sup> reported that there are only 200 beds for psychiatric services. The majority of beds in the country are provided by inpatient units in general hospitals. Kabul and the northern town of Shebargan, have treatment facilities for mental health problems. Besides hospitals, there are day centres: social centres have opened in Kabul and Herat. A Psychiatric and Drug Dependency Treatment Center has also opened in Kabul and offers 60 beds. It treats mainly issues dealing with *feshar* (stress), *asabi* (nerves) to *jigar khun* (depression). Those day centres are not monitored by the Ministry of Health. These facilities cares have been criticised for keeping incomplete patients' records and there are little data regarding duration of stay, readmission and follow up. The Kabul Psychiatric hospital has also admitted patients without a bed so homeless patients living in *marastoon*, or local refuges, that are supported by the Afghan Red Crescent Society. There are since 2005 three private mental hospitals. Each of them has 20 beds but do not liaise with the Ministry of Public health, so little is known about their activities.

There are financial matters but also human resources constraints that explain why the medical structures are not fully developed. There are not enough mental health experts trained. There are only 8 psychiatrists, 18 psychiatrist nurses and 20 psychologists for a population of 28 million. For example, the department of neuropsychiatry of the Nangarhar medical faculty has only a few beds, with little access to medicines and is understaffed, with one certified psychiatrist, and no psychiatric nurses. Mental health services are not offered as part of the basic health package but there are no psychiatric treatment protocols for primary care staff; as a result, people walking in hospitals for mental health issues are not always diagnosed well. Yet, doctors are now allowed to prescribe medications dealing with mental health disorders during a primary care visit of the patient. While there is a single module on mental health in the Basic Package for Health Service training developed by the Ministry of Public Health, this does not empower the staff to make a diagnostic. The lack of training and the absence of protocol mean that these doctors often ignore symptoms and are not able to properly identify disorders or prescribe the right medication. None of the existing infrastructure is specialised so returnees don't benefit from tailored support and care. There are now training programs for psychiatrist at Kabul University and there is a governmental attempt to provide more training to medical staff (one day a year). This attempt is supported by the European Union and International Medical Corps."

(Source Dr. Anicée Van Engeland, written Expert Opinion, 11 June 2017)

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<sup>6</sup> [http://www.who.int/mental\\_health/evidence/Afghanistan\\_WHO\\_AIMS\\_Report.pdf](http://www.who.int/mental_health/evidence/Afghanistan_WHO_AIMS_Report.pdf)

## 7. Access to housing for returnees

A paper by June de Bree, researched in 2008 discusses the shortage of housing in Kabul and the difficulty for returnees to buy a house on return especially if they had sold their house to migrate and on their return house prices increased. The paper suggests that returnees often end up renting or living with family members.

“Urban areas in Afghanistan, Kabul especially, suffer from a shortage of housing. This issue also affects Afghans that have involuntarily returned from the West, as they often end up living in families’ housing. The total of returnees who live with family is higher, as those who rent a house usually have some family members moving in with them. Two returnees live with their nuclear family only (1-2 persons), the others share a house with an average of 8,5 (extended) family members. It is questionable however whether returnees find this problematic. IOM states that almost all Afghan urban residents live in shared housing. Also, the fact that the majority of returnees can rely on their family for housing could be more important to them. In addition, there is no one in the caseload whose family refused him to stay. Still, a quarter of returnees who live in family housing point at family tensions. Their family wants them to leave as long as they do not earn an (proper) income. It is clear however that lack of housing also affects returnees, and although the majority of them can probably rely on their family for housing, for some this remains to be seen. Furthermore, lack of ownership of housing is quite an issue for returnees from Western societies. It should be noted that buying a house is highly preferred to renting. Especially in Kabul, where rents are extremely high in comparison to average salaries, it is much more secure to own a house. None of the returnees in the caseload were able to buy a house upon return. When returnees were asked how their return should be assisted, 54% said they should be provided housing or land to build a house. Many returnees degrade in terms of housing after return. Those who owned a house during pre-migration sold this house in order to pay a smuggler to take them to Europe, which costs \$10,000 - \$20,000. Upon return, they are not able to buy another house because of the high price increases since the arrival of foreign NGOs and UN agencies. In comparison to pre-migration, the percentage of returnees that rent their house rises from 4% to 29%. Some returnees are worse off in terms of housing when return is considered as the result of the whole migration cycle.”

(Source: June de Bree, *Return Migration to Afghanistan, Monitoring the Embeddedness of Returnees*, January 2008)

A 2014 joint publication by the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre and the Norwegian Refugee Council reports on the acute problem of lack of legal security of tenure for urban IDPs and returnees who face poverty, marginalisation and lack of adequate housing. The

report documents 9,600 families affected by forced evictions.

“30 per cent of Afghans now live in towns and cities, the majority in informal settlements located in or around the major cities of Kabul, Herat, Mazar-e-Sharif, Jalalabad and Kandahar. Rapid urban growth has been fuelled by the repatriation of refugees, the arrival of IDPs fleeing conflict and disasters as well as economic migration from rural areas. As Afghanistan faces an unpredictable future, achieving durable solutions for the country’s internally displaced and refugee-returnee populations remains inextricably linked to delivering housing, land and property (HLP) rights. This report reviews cases of actual and threatened evictions of IDPs and refugee returnees from informal settlements in and around all the major Afghan cities where the Norwegian Refugee Council has an established field presence. Its main message is the urgent need to ensure legal security of tenure for urban IDPs and refugee returnees, based on a better understanding of Afghanistan’s complex urban dynamics. Poverty, informality and marginalisation are a reality for the majority of urban dwellers in Afghanistan and much of the wider urban poor also lack access to adequate housing and secure tenure. Forced evictions or threats of evictions affected 9,600 families in the cases documented. Both recently-arrived and longer-term residents are at risk. Lacking affordable housing options, vulnerable internally displaced and returnee families across Afghanistan occupy private and public land without permission. This exposes them to sub-standard living conditions and the constant risk of forced eviction as private landowners and government authorities seek to remove those living without authorisation in order to build public housing, roads, government offices, parks or private housing.”

(Source: IDMC and Norwegian Refugee Council, *Still at risk: Security of tenure and forced eviction of IDPs and refugee returnees in Afghanistan*, February 2014)

The Refugee Support Network noted in its April 2016 report that there are no housing facilities provided to returnees by the state. For returnees, family accommodation is considered as the most trusted and safe means to live. Some of the returnees rely on social networks as they were unable to live with families.

“Although just over half of the young returnees monitored for this research have not been able to reintegrate with their families, for the 12 young people who have, this has proved the most secure and reliable source of accommodation. The 13 young returnees not able to live with their families have taken a variety of routes to securing somewhere to live, with a lack of institutional, state or voluntary sector assistance meaning most rely on non-family social networks. The International Organization for Migration (IOM) run an initial reception facility, where returnees can stay for up to 15 days. None of the young people monitored had stayed in this facility,

with the majority explaining that they believed to stay there would put them at risk by identifying them as a returnee. Instead, the young returnees monitored depended on even the most fragile social connections for help with accommodation, with three young people staying with other returnees they met on the plane, and one staying with a friend of a friend. Two others worked without pay in return for accommodation.”

(Source: Refugee Support Network, *After the return: documenting the experiences of young people forcibly removed to Afghanistan*, April 2016)

In an interview with Asylos in April 2016, scholar Liza Schuster explains that apartments are normally rented out to families rather than single tenants and you need to know someone who will vouch for you.

“The housing situation is very interesting because if you look around Kabul, there are dozens, if not hundreds of high rise buildings going up. They are incomplete, so it looks like there are lots of apartments available, but in fact they are being built up by a way of laundering money and so they are not actually intended for sale. They are also jerry built, so when there are big earthquakes, they would get knocked down. Also if you do find somewhere to rent, even though this is very difficult, people don’t want to rent unless it is to a family. So the expectation is that families will rent apartments. If a single person, especially a woman, even a man, in general it won’t be rented to him because he will be regarded with suspicion. Why isn’t he staying with an extended member of the family or with friends? If he is alone will be bringing women in, is he going to have male friends who will be drinking, is he going to disturb other members of the block?

So homes are normally rented to families, you normally will know somebody who will vouch for you. If you don’t, and I’ve actually seen this, you might be able to persuade one of the estate agents to rent you a property but then they will follow up, they will have had a conversation with you to try and identify mutual acquaintances and go through the network until they can get some information about you. They will want to know, are you a good character, are you going to pay your bills? The good character is very important. So if you are arriving in Kabul and you don’t have a social network, you don’t have somebody who can vouch for you, it becomes very difficult to get a contract. And it can also be withdrawn from you within days.”

(Source: Asylos Interview with Liza Schuster on 22 April 2016)

In an expert report provided for lawyers in the UK in August 2016, Liza Schuster describes access to accommodation for returnees on return to Kabul.

“Accommodation (and property) in Kabul is extremely expensive. It is difficult

to find a single room and they cost around 4-6,000 Afs per month, whereas salaries for most people are around 4,000-4,500 Afs per month. Most of those who come to Kabul to work or study stay with members of their extended family. Increasingly, but still rarely, groups of young men will rent a room together. Young men I have interviewed who have been deported have had to stay at the IOM run reception centre at Jangalak, Wasil Abad, but they are asked to leave after a few days (two weeks on average). In an interview with the manager of that centre at the beginning of April 2014, he told me that in general those deported from the UK did not stay there. He speculated that this was probably because they left quickly to try and return to Europe, or in some cases, unable to stay in Kabul with contacts, they risked returning to home villages. This echoes my own findings...”

(Source: Liza Schuster, Expert report: *Risks on return to Kabul*, August 12 2016)

An NGO which provides accommodation for returnees is the Afghanistan Migrants Advice and Support Organisation (AMASO). The organisation opened a safe house in January 2017 for those who have no alternative options after they have reached their maximum length of stay at the government run shelter.

“The Afghanistan Migrants Advice and Support Organisation, run by Abdul Ghafoor, a returnee from Norway himself, aids returnees mainly from Nordic countries. The organisation opened a safe house in January 2017, offering accommodation to those who have nowhere to go following the two weeks – the maximum period allowed – in the government-run shelter. This was the case with a deportee from Germany, who arrived on 24 January 2017 and who was injured in the bomb blast near the Supreme Court on 7 February 2017. Since his injury, he has been accommodated in the AMASO safe house, financed by private donations from Europe.”

(Source: Afghanistan Analysts Network, *Voluntary and Forced Returns to Afghanistan in 2016/17: Trends, statistics and experiences*, 19 May 2017)

Abdul Ghafoor, the director of AMASO, in an interview with Asylos in May 2017 states that access to accommodation is very difficult for a single man and that generally there is no help from the state.

“In Kabul they don’t easily provide houses. Because if you are with a family you will find a place easier rather than being single. So it is a bit difficult to find place and all the furniture. What the returnees do is that they get together about 5 or 6 in a single room and trying to survive temporarily until they are able to find long term solutions, or whatever the plan they have (leaving the country.) There is no one to care what happens to returnees. They [state and non-state actors] only provide short-term solutions.”

## 8. Access to employment for returnees

The Refugee Support Network's fieldwork on young returnees to Afghanistan in April 2016 highlights the difficulties of the participants in the study finding work due to lack of personal networks and the broader unemployment situation in Afghanistan.

“Without strong personal networks and connections, finding sustainable work has been almost impossible for the young returnees monitored, and setting up a business only a potentially viable option for the small minority with access to money and resources. Lack of work has made it difficult for the majority of young returnees to establish a life for themselves post return, and 19 of the 25 young people monitored said that their work situation was so desperate they would have to leave Afghanistan again. [...]

### Barriers to finding work

A number of issues preventing young returnees from finding work emerged during the course of the research (see figure 27). Some of the identified barriers are related to the broader employment situation in Afghanistan (lack of available work), and others are either caused or exacerbated by young people's status as returnees (lack of connections, lack of certificates and discrimination). Significantly, whilst each barrier is examined separately for the sake of clarity below, it is important to note that the majority of young people monitored have experienced multiple, interconnected barriers. For example, a lack of personal connections significantly reduces initial possibilities for work; then lack of certificates or documents makes approaching businesses directly without connections less fruitful; and then, if work is obtained, suspicion of or discrimination against returnees often makes it impossible for the young person to sustain the role[...]

someone and I don't know anyone" (R23, SI2). Interestingly, this appeared to be a challenge that persisted for young returnees throughout the research period, with young people citing this as a barrier to finding work even after being back in Afghanistan for several months. This was particularly the case when looking for what they described as "a job for an educated person" (R13, IM3). Several young people hoped their UK qualifications in IT or Business might enable them to find employment with a Government ministry, in a school or other public institution. Their experience however, suggests that the role of personal connections is even more pronounced in these sectors, with young people explaining, months after return, that "I haven't been able to find work [because] I did not have any contacts in the government" (R15, IFI),

and that vacancies in the public or NGO sector “will only come to those who have strong contacts within those organisations” (R13, IM9). ” ”

(Source: Refugee Support Network, *After Return: Documenting the experiences of young people forcibly removed to Afghanistan*, April 2016)

In the second part of “Afghans on the Migration Trail” of the online newspaper Refugees Deeply, migration specialist Nassim Majidi presents testimonies from interviewees about their difficulties in accessing jobs because of corruption.

“While many men we interviewed had left family and loved ones behind, they said that, at the very least, they experience something in the E.U. that they do not have at home – “the rule of law.” [...]

We found that many Afghans know what the phrase “rule of law” means – and what the lack of it entails. Analysts at Transparency International have described the impact of corruption on peace, while Afghans themselves describe the direct impact on their own lives. In their experience, corruption threatens the pursuit of a decent life.

For many of the Afghans we interviewed, the lack of a “rule of law” was based on the arbitrary exercise of power that affects their access to documentation and, ultimately, jobs.

Qasem’s experience trying to get a passport provides an example. “When I go to the passport department, the focal point person I meet will tell me the date. He will tell me to come straight to him and not other people, in order to proceed with my application without delays in the procedure.” His point is that one person has arbitrary power over him and will – implicitly or explicitly – ask him for direct compensation for what would be a routine civil service officer’s job in any other country.

Corruption also prevents people from accessing jobs. Returnees told us their most difficult experience upon their return has been accessing the local labor market. Beyond the obvious difficulties of finding a job in a country and an economy at war, they identified other, related issues.

“The lack of sufficient facilities, the corruption and bribes, and the lack of employment opportunities negatively impact our ability to find a decent job.” one returnee, Atiquallah, said.

Another, 25-year-old Ziah, lamented the connections needed for securing work. “Corruption, bribes and using middle men are the main reasons for unemployment,” he said.

Some returnees said they felt unable to express their opinion back home, let

alone impact the way things get done. “Everyone [here] does whatever they like and there is no one to ask people and take [their opinions],” says 25-year-old Shapoor, who had to turn back from his journey to Europe.

Afghans who do not have a foot in the door are effectively blocked from participating in their local economies and communities. So they turn to Europe, where some migrants told us the reality even exceeded their dreams.”

(Source: News Deeply, *‘No Justice, No Equality:’ the Corruption that Drives Afghans Overseas*, 14 October 2016)

The following article published by the Migration Policy Institute in February 2016 describes how urban areas such as Kabul are home to half of Afghanistan's displaced household including IDPs and returnees. The issue of employment for returnees is the mismatch between the demand for skilled labour and the existing skillsets of returnee populations in the labour market. Displaced youth are particularly vulnerable.

“Afghanistan’s urban areas are home to half of the country’s displaced households, as IDPs, returnees, and migrants from rural areas prefer to resettle to urban locations for safety and jobs. Amid the greater migration flows, cities such as Kabul have experienced threefold growth in the last decade. The urban challenge is thus twofold: managing public protection and employment expectations, and a pressing policy concern that requires greater attention to how migration, urbanization, and security interact. The lack of coordination among line ministries to address the growing migration to cities constitutes a key challenge for Afghanistan over the next decades.

Intersecting development challenges exacerbated in the urban sphere include food insecurity, livelihoods, and social exclusion. These are complicated by decreasing funds, growing insecurity, and the siloed nature of humanitarian activities. Such vulnerabilities become chronic as cities become places of entrenched poverty, within which the displaced fare worst. Evidence shows a mismatch between the demand for skilled labor and the existing skillsets of returnee populations in the labor market. Literacy remains low and language barriers hinder labor-market integration. Recruitment practices often focus on personal connections and candidates’ places of origin, showcasing constraints in re-establishing livelihoods for returnees and the displaced.

As a result of discriminatory labor-market practices, social-integration processes have stalled. Displaced youth in particular suffer from a triple layer of vulnerability: illiteracy and lack of skills, un/underemployment, and social isolation, as per a forthcoming Samuel Hall study.”

(Source: Migration Policy Institute, *Seeking Safety, Jobs, and More:*

Abdul Ghafoor, in an interview with Asylos in May 2017, describes the situation of employment possibilities for returnees in Afghanistan, which depends exclusively on contacts and a large and well-connected network. Generally, skills acquired abroad are not valid in Afghanistan.

“None of them [skills] are in the condition that we have in Afghanistan, none of them will help them here. The only thing that could be as bonus point is that when you have been educated when you were in Afghanistan, If you have a BA or MA.

Those who are uneducated they have very slim chances of survival here. There is nothing that can help you if whatever skills you might have. Yes, some European countries might say this person have been here for 4 or 5 years here and he has skills now, but those skills are not enough to work. Because here it is not about skills, it is about network, it is about knowing lots people and power. Here people don't care what skills you have. And if you have skills there are no organization or nothing done by the government to utilize those skills.

The Ministry of Labour which is basically tasked to help Afghans (returnee or not) to find work. The Ministry of Repatriation sends the returnees to the Ministry of Labour and what they can do is nothing. Because returnees are not the only who have been unemployed, there are millions of people who don't have jobs.”

(Source: Abdul Ghafoor, Interview with Asylos, 28 May 2017)

In her written response to Asylos in June 2017 Dr Anicée Van Engeland describes that some skills that returnees have acquired abroad can be useful for finding a job on return. However, in her opinion there are not enough long-term packages to support re-integration. She mentions the NGO AGEF which assists with the training of unskilled returnees from the UK and Germany.

“It has become clear that skills acquired abroad have played an important role in finding a job. I am aware of the class of a man who had begun an IT training abroad and was able to open a computer shop back home thanks to the IOM package. I also know of individuals who became translators after a vocational training. The main issue remains the financial support offered: it has become clear that there aren’t enough long-term packages to support re-integration and minors who went to school abroad are not supported into going to university when they returned.

There are employment service centres in charge of placement. Most of the jobs they offer are in the armed forces, the police and agriculture. It usually takes up to four years for an individual to re-integrate the job market, so for someone who used to work in Afghanistan before leaving.

The Association of Experts in the Fields of Migration and Development (AGEF) only assists returnees from the UK and Germany. They offer the same support as the IOM: there is a package for those who wish to launch a business or enrol into a vocational training. AGEF is more restrained in its activities: the package can only be attributed to open a business or join a business. The NGO offers to train unskilled returnees and then helps them find a placement. It then compensates the returnee and the enterprise for 6 months.”

(Source: Dr Anicée Van Engeland, written Expert Opinion, 11 June 2017)

## **9. Access to food and basic services for returnees**

This extract from an article in the Washington Post published in November 2016 quotes a spokesman for UNHCR in Kabul in which he explains that displaced and returnees in Kabul are reliant on aid agencies for food and blankets.

“Even as the numbers [of returnees from Pakistan and Iran] grew, Afghanistan agreed to accept Afghan asylum seekers deported from the European Union. The deal, signed in October [2016], could lead the E.U. to construct a separate terminal for deportees at Kabul’s international airport, and as many as 100,000 Afghans could return.

“This sudden increase [in the displaced] has put a lot of pressure on Afghanistan, which has had 30 years of war,” said Nader Farhad, spokesman for the U.N. refugee

agency in Kabul. “It’s not easy to put together the infrastructure, to provide the services that are required,” he said, adding that the displaced need everything from food and blankets to jobs and health care.

“To the European countries, we say: Instead of investing in the return of Afghans to Afghanistan, tackle the root causes,” Farhad said. If the United Nations and other aid agencies fail to provide emergency assistance, “it will be a humanitarian crisis,” he said.”

(Source: Washington Post, *A humanitarian crisis looms in Afghanistan as the number of displaced climbs*, 2 November 2016)

In an expert report written by Liza Schuster to lawyers in the UK, she describes how basic infrastructure has not kept pace with the large number of returnees to Kabul.

“Kabul’s population has exploded from 500,000 to 5 million + in the space of 10 years (even bearing in mind the unreliability of statistics – the numbers have exploded), as a result of the largest repatriation operation in history<sup>1</sup>. Many of the 5.7 million people who have returned from Iran and Pakistan, and the 1.2 million IDPs who have been displaced inside Afghanistan, have been unable to return to their original homes and a significant number of these have settled around Kabul and other cities. The basic infrastructure, including sanitation, education and health, has not kept pace. There are daily power cuts, the water is contaminated and many of the schools run 3 short shifts a day. There are many hospitals in the city, but like schools many of these are private, run for profit and are inadequately staffed by poorly qualified doctors and nurses...”

(Source: Expert Report by Liza Schuster, *Risks on Return to Kabul*, 12 August 2016)

In the 2017 Humanitarian Needs report on Afghanistan by UNOCHA, it has been highlighted that areas affected by increased returns have led to an increase in market prices for basic commodities, increasing food insecurity. As a result, returnees are in need of humanitarian assistance.

“Against a national backdrop of low income and vulnerability to natural disasters, continued conflict resulting in high numbers of IDPs, refugees and returnees, poor infrastructure, low levels of female participation in the labour force, high levels of unemployment especially under-employment, high fertility and dependency ratio are the bases for the Afghan population’s vulnerability to food insecurity. The recent Seasonal Food Security Assessment found that market prices for basic commodities in areas affected by increased returns have increased whereas labour wage rates has gone down significantly. The initial rapid assessment of returnees indicated that families had less than a week’s worth of food stocks. As a result, new conflict IDPs,

returnees, host communities and refugees remain in need of critical humanitarian assistance; based on preliminary findings, food, livelihood support, shelter and protection are identified as major humanitarian needs.”

(Source: UNOCHA, *Humanitarian Needs Overview 2017*, 31 December 2016)

## 10. The impact of mass returns of Afghans from Pakistan and Iran

AAN’s May 2017 report on returnees highlights that the mass returns from Iran and Pakistan mean that those returning from Europe in comparatively low numbers will be sidelined in considerations for support.

“The available but very limited care and accommodation is far from sufficient for some returnees who need to re-acclimatise to a society that is effectively still war-ridden and under social duress. The mass return from Iran and Pakistan significantly adds to this duress. There is a great chance, therefore, that those returning from Europe in comparatively low numbers will end being sidelined, as a quantitatively less important and therefore less urgent humanitarian issue.”

(Source: Afghanistan Analysts Network, *Voluntary and Forced Returns to Afghanistan in 2016/17: Trends, statistics and experiences*, 19 May 2017)

An article from the Washington Post from February 2017 describes Kabul’s services stretched thin and no public housing available for returnees from Pakistan.

“Last year, President Ashraf Ghani encouraged all refugees to return from Pakistan and renewed vows to help them. But Afghan officials are the first to admit that they are severely limited in their capacity to assist and keep track of the returnees, especially those who never registered in Pakistan. They also did not expect the separate flood of people displaced by conflict to keep pouring into the crowded capital, where there is no public housing and utilities are stretched thin. “We are lucky that Pakistan stopped sending people for the winter,” said Rohullah Hashimi, an official in the Ministry of Refugees and Repatriations. “Before, we were getting 6,000 to 7,000 undocumented people arriving every day. Now it is only about 300 to 400.” The government’s assistance budget for them is only about \$165 million, he said. “We are trying to do our best. They are not facing catastrophe, but they have many difficulties. And in the spring, it will all start again.””

(Source: Washington Post, *Amid Kabul winter, Afghan war refugees shiver in frigid informal settlements*, 1 February 2017)

An International Monetary Fund report from January 2017 describes the effect of mass returns of refugees to Afghanistan, estimated to be around 700,000 in 2016. The report

describes the prospects of absorbing returning refugees is further complicated by the existence of more than one million internally displaced persons. A typical refugee is at high risk of falling into poverty and increased demand for food, goods, health services and housing can put upward pressure on prices and rents, negatively affecting the poor.

“Aid officials estimate that more than 700,000 refugees returned to Afghanistan in 2016. Afghans—the second largest refugee group after Syrians, according to the UN’s refugee agency—are primarily returning from Pakistan, often not voluntarily. There are also returnees from Iran and to a lesser extent from Europe. Analysts project that up to 2½ million will follow over the next 18 months, which will add nearly 10 percent to Afghanistan’s population (see infographic below). To put this in perspective, this would be akin to 50 million migrants entering the European Union over a two-year period.

Many of the Afghans who lived abroad for decades are returning to a country facing conflict, insecurity, and widespread poverty. Given the difficult economic climate, prospects for returnees are generally poor. While there are also wealthier returnees, a typical returning refugee has a high risk of falling into poverty—they are typically laborers and workers in the informal economy with limited savings, or small business owners who are forced to liquidate their assets at fire sale prices.

Moreover, the prospects for absorbing returning refugees are further complicated by the existence of more than one million internally displaced people, the number of which significantly increased in 2016 as the insurgency intensified. Together with the large number of people who already live in poverty in Afghanistan, these problems will severely stretch the country’s capacity to cope.

When a country receives a large influx of refugees over a short period, significant social and economic effects are likely, which are exacerbated in poorer countries like Afghanistan. On the positive side, returning refugees generally share the same culture as the local population, facilitating assimilation. In addition, increased spending, both by the private and public sectors, as well as increased output if the incoming refugees are able to find jobs, can contribute positively to economic growth both in the short and medium term.

However, increased demand for food, consumer goods, health services, and housing can put upward pressure on prices and rents, negatively affecting the poor. And the increased supply of labor is likely to raise the already very high unemployment rate and put downward pressure on wages”

(Source: International Monetary Fund, *Return of Afghan Refugees to Afghanistan Surges as Country Copes to Rebuild*, 26 January 2017)

A report from Human Rights Watch in February 2017 on forced returns of Afghan refugees from Pakistan evidences reports from various UN agencies that have warned that increased expulsions and deportations from Pakistan and Iran will have a “toxic effect” on the country’s

social fabric and security. The report recommends that EU states should exercise their discretion to defer deporting rejected asylum seekers as Kabul cannot cope with mass forced return of Afghan refugees from Pakistan.

“Various UN agencies have warned against the toxic effect that increased expulsions and deportations from Pakistan and Iran to Afghanistan will have on the country’s social fabric and security.”[276]

In October 2016, UNHCR and the World Bank warned that “the history of displacement and returns to Afghanistan indicates the potential destabilizing effects of increasing population pressure on limited local resources,” that “additional returns from Pakistan, Iran, or Europe are likely to result in further secondary displacement, unemployment, and instability,” that “further population shocks could undermine civilian and military aid efforts and further escalate conflict;” and advised that “peace and stability in Afghanistan are not only a pre-requisite for its development but also a global public good.”[277]

In November 2016, the head of IOM in Kabul said that “with all these returns from Pakistan and Iran as well, and looming returns from Europe, it’s a perfect recipe for a perfect storm because that puts a strain on the capacity of the government to respond.”[278]

In December 2016, UNHCR warned that:

Kabul has been significantly affected by the surge in returns from Pakistan, with almost a quarter of the 55,000 registered returnee families, and a similar percentage of the 240,000 undocumented returnee families, settling in Kabul’s overcrowded informal settlements. In light of the well-documented contraction of Kabul’s economy following the withdrawal of international forces in 2014, the city’s absorption capacity has been extremely limited due to the low availability of livelihoods ... appropriate shelter, and access to basic services, particularly health and education.[279] And as far back as March 2015, UNHCR also warned that “unprepared returns ... can induce tensions and prompt resort to negative coping strategies, including radicalization of ... dispossessed people, particularly [of] youth.”[280] The EU should be guided by a moral and strategic response to the current returnee crisis in Afghanistan. Under its October 2016 migration declaration, the EU committed €80 million to help returnees from Pakistan and Iran survive after they return to Afghanistan.[281] To that end, the EU should also generously fund the January 2017 Humanitarian Response Plan for Afghanistan.[282]

EU member states should also exercise their discretion to defer deporting rejected Afghan asylum seekers, until it is clear how Kabul and other parts of the country are able to cope with the mass forced return of Afghan refugees from Pakistan. Afghans with pending removal orders whose deportation is deferred should not be detained and should be granted the most favorable status under national law for persons in this situation. Should EU Member States end up deporting tens of thousands of Afghans,

they will risk fueling the very instability the EU says it wants stopped.”

(Source: Human Rights Watch, *Pakistan Coercion, UN complicity: The mass forced return of Afghan refugees*, 13 February 2017)

Abdul Ghafoor, director of AMASO, explains in his interview to Asylos in May 2017 that mostly attention is drawn to returnees from Iran and Pakistan, which leaves returnees from Europe with very little support.

“The thing is if we consider Kabul city, we all know this city was built for one million people, today there around 5 or 6 million people living in Kabul. So, there are lots of pressure on the Ministry of Refugees and Repatriation as well as the international organizations like IOM and UNHCR because of the returnees from neighboring countries. Lots of sources and focuses go that way. Therefore, the returnees from European countries have been marginalized. Not people know and care about them. We have to think there are lots of people they lost more than the returnees from neighboring countries. It doesn’t mean we have to ignore returnees from neighboring countries, but to the returnees from the European countries they have not given attention. So what the government is doing that they sign lots of MOUs, but with providing very limited services to them, there is no improvement in the security situation, there are not job opportunities and there is no hope for the youth in Afghanistan.”(Source: Abdul Ghafoor, Interview with Asylos, 28 May 2017)

Dr Anicée Van Engeland describes in her written response to Asylos from June 2017 how the Afghan state is overwhelmed with arrivals of returnees, especially the mass returns from Pakistan and is less equipped to addressing the needs of European returnees.

“The State is overwhelmed with arrival from both sides and struggles to accommodate all returnees. Despite knowing that more and more returnees will arrive from Europe, the government is not reforming its structures and is still focusing more on the UNHCR tripartite agreement with Pakistan and Iran than on European returnees. It is clear that without the support of the EU through financial packages and without the IOM, the Afghan government couldn’t cope.

Besides, it should be noted that returnees from Pakistan and Iran have shown resilience and have adapted to their circumstances better than those coming from Europe, thereby giving arguments to those in Afghanistan who believe returnees should not be accommodated through special policies and laws.

It is clear that while Afghanistan struggles to control and absorb the shock of the massive arrival from Pakistan, it is even less equipped when it comes to addressing the needs of European returnees: the government is under pressure as it must provide education, employment, housing, security... to all these returnees.”

(Source: Dr. Anicée Van Engeland, Expert Opinion, 11 June 2017)

## 11. Anecdotal evidence of returnees' experiences

The following is an excerpt from AAN's May 2017 report describing anecdotal evidence of a 28 year old man originally from Ghazni province, deported to Kabul from Germany.

"Essa, a 28-year old man from Ghazni province and one of the deportees from Germany, opted for Jangalak because he had spent almost ten years living in Germany. Before he had grown up in Iran where his parents had moved in the mid-1990s and where he finished high school. As a result, he had no family in the country to return to. Essa had never even been in Kabul before. In Germany, he had applied for asylum but had been rejected. He managed to get a work permit anyway but following a change of policy, he lost it in 2014 after working for a company producing spare parts for cars in Stuttgart for four years. He told AAN, "I am scared here, there are people with guns everywhere." The last time AAN saw him in mid-March 2017, he said that he was planning to go back to Iran to reunite with his family. He was waiting for the money that his family promised to send him to pay for the journey. In contrast to Germany, Switzerland has a policy in place that does not send back Afghans to Afghanistan who have spent most of their time in Iran."

(Source: Afghanistan Analysts Network, *Voluntary and Forced Returns to Afghanistan in 2016/17: Trends, statistics and experiences*, 19 May 2017)

A report from AAN in October 2016 describes anecdotal evidence of two young Afghan men who were deported from Norway to Kabul in June and September 2016 respectively.

"Both men had spent a small fortune to pay for their travel to Europe. Rahmatullah, a cook who had worked for international media companies in Kabul since 2010, paid 17,000 US dollars to reach Norway. Since he returned in June 2016, he lives in Kabul on his own, while his family is still in Karachi. He has no job and no money to pay his debts. He told AAN:

I am not happy with my life, because I cannot freely walk in the city as other people can [he is referring to threats he said he received from locals in Samangan, because he worked with international organisations as a cook]. I am waiting for the response from my lawyer, I hope he will help me get back to Norway. If nothing happens I may go to Karachi and join my family. I don't feel safe here and I don't want to stay here. Muder Khan worked as an interpreter and contractor with the American military in Khost and as a project supervisor with MEC, earning 600 US dollars a month. He paid 13,000 US dollars for his trip to Norway. He is in Kabul. He told AAN he cannot go back to Khost province:

I am going from one friend to another [staying in their houses]. I have no job at all. Currently I am in debt for 7,000 US dollars to my friends who helped me. I also sold a

car to finance my trip to Europe.[...]

Both Rahmatullah and Muder Khan said there was little help on offer. Muder Khan, for example, said:

The Norwegians paid me 350 US dollars for travel expenses in Afghanistan. The police who deported me told me I can also submit an application [for a reintegration grant] to the Norwegian embassy to provide me with 1200 US dollars, but I have not submitted it yet... The Afghan government did not support me and I have no budget to start a business with, but still I am looking to find a job.

Rahmatullah, it seems, got his 1200 US dollars grant from the Norwegian government immediately:

When the Norwegian police deported me to Kabul, they gave me 1160 US dollars. The Norwegian government also paid the expenses for a hotel in Kabul where I stayed for 14 days. The Afghan government did not give me anything; instead the Afghan police at the airport insulted me by using abusive words against me.”

(Source: Afghan Analysts Network, *Afghan Exodus: Can the Afghan government deal with more returnees from Europe?*, 31 October 2016)

In an interview with Asylos in 2016, scholar Liza Schuster, recounts cases that she knows of where Afghans forcibly returned from Europe to Kabul have been put in danger and killed since their return.

“So I know of a handful of cases, where I’ve spoken to the family or friends of the people , who had serious life-threatening issues. [...]

One case was three years ago, who had been returned from Norway and was unable to survive in Kabul, he was originally from outside Jalalabad, and so he went back and his father had been killed so he went to stay with his father’s close friend who tried to protect him. But there was a threat against his life, so his father’s friend sent him to another village with another man but there was an attack and this man was killed and the boy ran back to Kabul. He then left the country and last I heard he was in India.

When I had just arrived in Kabul I spoke to somebody who told me a story about his best friend who had been deported from the UK. This was almost 4 years ago, he couldn’t stay in Afghanistan because he felt under threat but he had no money. So his friends pooled together money to buy a ticket to fly to Pakistan. But he didn’t have family there and found it hard to get money, but he wanted to get married. So his family in Nangarhar arranged a marriage for him, and he snuck back secretly to try and attend an engagement party and was killed on the road.”

(Source: Liza Schuster, Interview with Asylos, 22 April 2016)

Abdul Ghafoor, director of AMASO, in an interview with Asylos in May 2017 meets a lot of returnees and deals with their problems and shared his experiences in an interview with

Asylos in May 2017:

“Recently there are lots of deportations. I have met lots of the returnees; they mostly talk about wasting of their time. Those who have been deported they have been there for 8 or 9 years. They have learned the language; they have been integrated to the society. Now when they arrive to Afghanistan they see nothing but hopelessness and uncertainty about the future. The only thing they think about it is to find a way they can get out of the country. They are in contact with their lawyers and their support group to take them out Afghanistan. In recent cases even families who have been deported 3 or 4 months ago, they have already left the country, because they had seen no chances for themselves nor for their children.

There has been some case where the returnees had been identified and killed. In case of a boy who deported from Australia, so he was traveling to Ghazni province, and they found some picture with him which he has taken in that country, and then he was held as a captive for two day and then he managed to escape somehow. There are other cases like recently we had one from Germany a boy was deported in January and February and then got killed 2 or 3 weeks ago.”

(Source: Abdul Ghafoor, Interview with Asylos, 28 May 2017)

Dr Anicée Van Engeland provides anecdotal evidence of cases of returnees in her written response to Asylos of June 2017 that she has encountered through her field work.

“A fifteen year old male had ran away after flirting with the daughter of a Kabuli merchant. He had been training with the merchant to become a tailor. The father had found out when he opened a box containing love letters. The teenager was terrified he would be killed in an honour killing and he ran away. He left for the United Kingdom where his credibility was never questioned but the judges found his rationale for running away to lack seriousness. The teenager was returned to Kabul; the merchant never spoke to him or touched him, but made sure he would never find a job in the tailoring business. This was an issue for the teenager who had no other skills. The last I heard of him, he was living with his mother in a slum of Kabul and still couldn’t find a job.

A hazara male teenager was working in a shop in a provincial city. One day, two young males entered the job and started bullying him. They stole from him. The hazara teenager ran after them as the shop wasn’t his and he feared retaliation from the owner. The young men ended up fighting with knives, and the teenager thought he ended up killing of his aggressors. He ran away and asked for protection under Article 3 of the Human Rights Act for fear he would be deported and imprisoned, then ill-treated in prison because of his ethnic belonging. The judge returned him. The boy never went back to that city for fear of retribution but he found out he only lightly wounded the man and no

charges were pressed against him. He lives in fear that the two men will find him to seek retribution.

A Pashtun male young teenager was approached by the Taliban when he was in the mountains with his friends. They asked him his name as they were after a specific child. All the children lied about his identity. They ran back home to discover a few days later that the Taliban had come to claim the child as one of their own after an agreement with the tribal leader. The uncle of the child got him out. Once in the United Kingdom, the judge questioned the child's credibility and he was returned. The last I heard of him, he had been recruited by the Taliban in other province.

Another case is that of a young man in his twenties who had been returned and didn't dare to go home. I interviewed him on his second attempt at remaining in Belgium and he was about to be deported again. He was fleeing the Taliban and knew he would be safer on the roads between Afghanistan and Europe than in the country. He swore to travel again and again until he made it as an asylum seeker.

Another case involved a 21 years old I met in Belgium and who was desperate to attend school. Yet, the system makes it very difficult for an asylum-seeker to go to school if he is above 16 years old. He was cutting himself to cope with the pressure building in his head. He was returned and committed suicide.

There have been several reports of young males who were returned to Kabul as it was considered to be a safe city and who died/were wounded in terrorist attacks."

(Source: Dr. Anicée Van Engeland, written Expert Opinion, 11 June 2017)

# Annex 1

## Interview Questions for country experts

### Situation of 'westernised' young male returnees to Kabul

#### 1. Return procedure

- Are returnees returned with a financial incentive if so in cash, kind or once they have registered with an organisation or similar? Does this differ depending on which country they've been returned from and whether return is forced or 'voluntary'?
- Who takes charge of the returnees upon arrival and monitors their 'safe' arrival? Are returnees monitored after arrival and is this done by state or NGOs?
- Are returnees provided with housing, financial support, food once they arrive and if so for how long? Do they need to register for this before leaving or once they have arrived? Do they have to register or is this done automatically (e.g. IOM)?
- Are returnees questioned upon their return at the airport by government officials e.g. immigration officials?

#### 2. State attitudes

- How are returnees from Europe perceived by government authorities e.g. immigration officials at airport, the police on the street, civil servants at Ministries?
- Is there anecdotal evidence that returnees feel they cannot go to the authorities if they feel threatened by family members or society at large?

#### 3. Availability of support from the state / NGOs

- What financial support is available and for how long for returnees from the state or NGOs? Are there any conditions attached to receiving this support?
- Are there any NGOs that support returnees after arrival at Kabul airport? What kind of support do they provide and for how long?

#### 4. Societal attitudes

- How are returnees from Europe perceived by the rest of society?  
( in terms of their a) actual financial situation, b)their attitude towards religion and c) 'Western' lifestyle eg. clothing, behaviour not adhering to strict Islamic values, language)
- How are returnees from Europe perceived by their family?
- Is there risk of discrimination or persecution from non-state actors specifically directed at returnees?
- Is there any stigma attached to being returned from Europe (e.g. can it lead to a rejection from the family as seen as too 'westernised')?

#### 5. Consequences of lack of support network

- What are the consequences when a returnee does not have a support network in Kabul?

#### 6. Access to healthcare

- What is the cost of access to healthcare for a returnee? Is there a national health service that returnees can access and if so how does it work in practice?
- Given that many returnees are likely to suffer from mental health issues, what provision of mental health services is available?
- What is the procedure to access health care for a returnee with a pre-existing health condition?

## **7. Access to housing**

- What are the procedures for returnees to access rented accommodation?
- How long on average does it take for a returnee to access rented accommodation and where does he/she stay in the meantime?
- Is anyone tasked specifically with assisting returnees to access housing? Both state and non-state?

## **8. Access to employment**

- Are there any factors that would specifically disadvantage or advantage returnees in searching for work (e.g. language skills they gained in Europe, vocational training or basic education they received in Europe)?
- Are there any particular difficulties in accessing state jobs for returnees?
- Is anyone tasked specifically with assisting returnees to access employment? Both state and non-state?

## **9. Access to food and basic services**

- What are the procedures for returnees to access food and basic services?

## **10. Impact of returns from Pakistan and Iran**

- What has been the impact of the large scale returns from Pakistan and Iran on Kabul's ability to absorb returnees from Europe?
- Can you provide anecdotal cases of recent returnees to Kabul from Europe and their experience?

## Annex 2

### **Interview with Abdul Ghafoor, Director of Afghanistan Migrants Advice and Support Organisation, Kabul,** **28 May 2017**

#### 1. Return procedure

- Are returnees returned with a financial incentive if so in cash, kind or once they have registered with an organization or similar? Does this differ depending on which country they've been returned from and whether return is forced or 'voluntary'?

"Different countries have different kinds of incentive for what we call reintegration packages. Not all of the countries provide incentives in cash except Norway, is providing cash assistance to returnees. They give 350\$ to forced returnees those who have been deported. They give 350 \$ in Norway and 350\$ in Afghanistan after one or two days. The other countries they do not provide cash. The returnees especially forced ones have to go through paper work, and they can have the assistance and obtain it. The paper work contains business start- up, sharing business with someone who already establish the business for example you don't have a place to stay, so you go and rent a place and IOM pays the rent for 6 months, they will also pay for trainings like for a computer course, so they will pay the fee for that training. So different countries have different incentives and cash assistance. In the case of Germany, it starts from 700 Euro to 2000Euro. The German government decides how to give to whom. In case of Sweden it's around 1000Euro. Some countries don't have at all. In case of UK its 750 Pound for forced returnees. Again for those who choose to come voluntarily the amount is different. In case of Norway its 30000 norwegian kroner, in case of Sweden is the same 30000 norwise kroner, and in case of Germany it around 200 Euro."

- Who takes charge of the returnees upon arrival and monitors their 'safe' arrival? Are returnees monitored after arrival and is this done by state or NGOs?

"Both the states and NGOs are responsible for safe arrival. So the deporting state will send a list of deportees to the Ministry of Refugees and Repatriation and IOM and they have the list and they are in the airport when they are arriving, when they arrive, for those who don't have place for living, they are moved to a temporary returnees receiving centers, where they can stay for two weeks and that place is taken care by IOM. And after that during the stay they can go for the IOM paper work and stay for money they getting. So yes the state and IOM are responsible but except the case of Norway, because Norway is working with another organization called Shajan and associates. The reason behind that is because Norway was also working with IOM but there was a corruption with funding Norway was sending to IOM, and Norway stopped with them. So they also have a person in the airport and the responsible person takes the returnees to hotel which is in Share-Now in Roshan Plaza, so they are taken there for two weeks and given them the money in cash. There is no guarantee of safety, no one takes care of their safety, they keep them for two weeks and after two weeks they are driven on the streets, even those who don't have place to live they have to leave the place."

- Are returnees provided with housing, financial support, food once they arrive and if so for how long? Do they need to register for this before leaving or once they have arrived? Do they have to register or is this done automatically (e.g. IOM)?

"I may have already answered all of this, yes they are given financial assistance but not in cash except Norway, they are given two weeks housing, the place called Jangalak for Norway it is Share-Now Roshan Plaza. They don't necessarily need to register because the ministry and IOM already have their names in the list so there is no need of registration in a way, but the place "the housing" is only for those who choose to go that they don't have family, they don't have a network, but those whose families are in Kabul or in Afghanistan they don't stay in the housing, they go to their families. But those who do not have, yes they have housing for two weeks and are given 3 times food and after two weeks they have to find their own accommodation."

- Are returnees questioned upon their return at the airport by government officials e.g. immigration officials?

"No, there is no question upon arrival, the only thing they say is ok, they check their names ok, you are this person"

and if they have Tazkira (Afghanistan National Identity Card) they might register the name of the Tazkira, that is it. There is no any immigration person in the airport and nothing happens. There are not even proper medical facilities that to check if you are fit enough to come to Afghanistan, what problems you have. There is nothing something like that.”

## 2. State attitudes

- How are returnees from Europe perceived by government authorities e.g. immigration officials at airport, the police on the street, civil servants at Ministries?

“In Ministries, I have cases where returnees have been mistreated, because they don’t have lots of options, so what they do is they go to the ministries and find answers, what should I do here? I don’t have Tazkira? So they have lots of questions.

The Police, how do they behave with returnees? They are also not very friendly with those returnees, because some of them have never been to Afghanistan, they are setting foot in Afghanistan for the first time, so the problem is they don’t know much about Afghanistan.

-How do the police deal with them if they don’t Tazkiras?

“There have been lots of cases like the boys have been stopped and asked of the way they look, they look different, and they have been asked Tazkiras. When they haven’t had Tazkiras they are in trouble, and even they have been in police station for a day or two questioning. They have to give bribe to police to let them go.

There are not immigration officials, so we can refer it to the ministries, because that is where everything is.”

- Is there anecdotal evidence that returnees feel they cannot go to the authorities if they feel threatened by family members or society at large?

“Based on my experience for the last four years and I had met lots of them; they have the fear to go back to their provinces. The first thing is they are westernized and way they look. The second thing is they have been so far from the religious issues. They may not pray anymore, they may not do what they used to 5 or 6 years ago. There also fear kidnapping. There have been new cases shared that they are afraid of kidnapping, because in the rural areas, people don’t understand what deportation means, what they understand is that well, this person has been to UK or France or Germany and now he is back. And if we kidnap we can get money, he can be a spy working for the foreign forces, he is an infidel and etc, so these are some worries most of the returnees have been sharing with me.”

## 3. Availability of support from the state / NGOs

- What financial support is available and for how long for returnees from the state or NGOs? Are there any conditions attached to receiving this support?

“There is not a lot of support. There is only financial assistance that IOM is providing. There is nothing else for returnees. They keep them for two weeks and after two weeks they are on the streets, they don’t have family, they don’t have support networks. They literally on the streets, they sleep in the mosques, they sleep in restaurants. So there is no other organization with any conditions that can help them.”

- Are there any NGOs that support returnees after arrival at Kabul airport? What kind of support do they provide and for how long?

“There is not any organization to support returnees in the airport. Our organization is a small one. We only help them with advice, because we don’t have lots of resources to provide them with job opportunities and other support. Recently we have started our support with sort of shelter facilities and safe houses for those who are kept out of the IOM guest houses. They live on the streets, they don’t know anyone and by the help of some of our networks in Europe we do provide housing facilities a little longer to 1 month.”

## 4. Societal attitudes

- How are returnees from Europe perceived by the rest of society?( in terms of their a) actual financial situation, b)their attitude towards religion and c) ‘Western’ lifestyle eg. clothing, behaviour not adhering to strict Islamic values, language

“I already shared a little bit about it, in general it depends on what kind of society the returnees live in for example in

places like Kabul it might be easier to get social acceptance, and again for those who have never been to Afghanistan it is not very easy. They are afraid of the whole security, being exploited, being misused by powerful men and we know how the system works here. So this kind of people are the most vulnerable those who don't have networks and when they are too young. Norway is sending young people back to Afghanistan- 17 and 18 years old, and for such kind of people it has been very difficult. In the society people don't think very positive about them, because the concept here is that if you have been deported, it means you have done something wrong in that country. There are case they have been asked ok, why your cousin's asylum claim was accepted and yours wasn't, so maybe you have done something wrong, something criminal. So overall, it has not been perceived very positive. Some returnees they don't want to let their family know they have been deported, because they are afraid of the stigma of the deportation. Deportation has a bad stigma and there is a stamp in your face saying, 'ok this guy is deported'. In terms of financial people still don't think about deportation. They think well this guy has come from UK, Germany, and Norway, so the people will try to misuse as much as they can. But, people here don't understand that this person has spent thousands of dollars and now he has been deported back with an empty pocket. In the rural areas they are afraid of kidnap and the perception is that this guy has been from UK and he would have lots of money. In terms of westernized lifestyle and religious issues, they aren't perceived very well. It has been very easy to recognize a person if someone has been to Europe from the way of style, haircut and clothes. Yes, there are times they are excluded from the society. Both because people will not accept it, and the fear of failure they have of deportation. They think they failed in the journey, and necessarily they are not included in the society, and this is a huge problem for them. One of the other big issues is that some returnees are converted to Christianity. In a country like Afghanistan, if they find out that you are not Muslim anymore that is would be the end of your life your story."

- How are returnees from Europe perceived by their family?

"Even in the family are not welcomed very well. It is because that the majority of people in Afghanistan are poor, so if you want to go the Europe, you have to borrow money from your relatives. The person who borrowed all his money to get to Europe, now is being deported. He has to pay all the money he borrowed and as a result there are lots of pressures from the family 'okay you failed and we you have to give this much to this person, this much to that person' and how you are going to pay. As mentioned before, most of the returnees even don't want their families know about the deportation. They have the fear of failure with them, and say 'well how are we going to face our family'."

- Is there risk of discrimination or persecution from non-state actors specifically directed at returnees?

"Yes, there has been some case where the returnees had been identified and killed. In case of a boy who deported from Australia, so he was traveling to Ghazni province, and they found some picture with him which he has taken in that country, and then he was held as a captive for two day and then he managed to escape somehow. There are other cases like recently we had one from Germany a boy was deported in January and February and then got killed 2 or 3 weeks ago."

- Is there any stigma attached to being returned from Europe (e.g. can it lead to a rejection from the family as seen as too 'westernised')?

"Regarding the westernized lifestyle let me talk about the stigma of deportation. We all know we have risen in Muslim family. For someone who has been in Europe for 5 or 6 year and he has been way from religious issues, so it is very difficult to reintegrate to the family and society. Yes, there have been case that returnees were marginalized by the family because they are too westernized and they can create problems for their brother, their sister and parents, so they tell them don't come to the area and stay away from us."

## 5. Consequences of lack of support network

- What are the consequences when a returnee does not have a support network in Kabul?

"Nowadays, there are two big problems for returnees; one is security and seconds one is the lack of support network. In Afghanistan, mainly in Kabul, if you don't have support network, if you don't know minister or MP (Member of Parliament), it is really tough for you to find and get a good job. For returnees, since they have been far from here, some of them have not been to Afghanistan and they are settling for the first time for them it is very hard, and have narrow chances for survival. So what happens, they try their best, but when they fail the only option they have is to get out of the country. The people I have worked with, I would confidently say that 50% of them are now out of the country. Because they couldn't survive here, they couldn't find job and the fear of whole security situation. Now they

are out in countries like Iran, Turkey and Europe. The cases are the same and it doesn't matter where you came from, but for those who come from rural areas it will be more difficult."

## 6. Access to healthcare

- What is the cost of access to healthcare for a returnee? Is there a national health service that returnees can access and if so how does it work in practice?

"We did research on mental health services in 2016. In that research we found out that there have not been many experts whom we can count on them as an expert. There are only 3 or 4 professionals who can provide Psychological services. There are other experts too, but most of them are working privately and require lots of money. For returnees who don't have lots of money this could be very difficult to continue whatever problem he or she has. In terms of governmental services, there would be hospital, but they don't have such capacity to provide services."

- Given that many returnees are likely to suffer from mental health issues, what provision of mental health services is available?

"Not a lot. There are few places, but they are very temporary, for example there is a center called IPSO. They provide mental health services to returnees from Germany, because that is supported by Germany. They have very limited sources and services, and I don't think they help someone who has been in trouble in very bad mental state for many years."

- What is the procedure to access health care for a returnee with a pre-existing health condition?

"They are not accessible to everyone. I mean they are not in the internet and not lots of people know about it. Recently we have been discussing with them, if we think someone needs mental services we recommend them for this organization. IPSO only provides two weeks services for the returnees. It may have been helpful for someone, but not for all of them."

## 7. Access to housing

- What are the procedures for returnees to access rented accommodation?

"In Kabul they don't easily provide houses. Because if you are with a family you will find a place easier rather than being single. So it is a bit difficult to find place and the whole furniture. What the returnees do is that they get together about 5 or 6 in a single room and trying to survive temporarily until they are able to find long term solutions, or whatever the plan they have (leaving the country.)"

- How long on average does it take for a returnee to access rented accommodation and where does he/she stay in the meantime?

"Again, what happens to most of them when they are in the IOM guesthouse that is the time they have to start thinking about finding a place for them and 5 or 6 of them get together and sharing the room between them. Those returnees who have been deported earlier, they may contact some of the dealers and that is going to take up to 2 months."

- Is anyone tasked specifically with assisting returnees to access housing? Both state and non-state?

"No, there is no one to care what happens to returnees. They only provide short-term solutions."

## 8. Access to employment

- Are there any factors that would specifically disadvantage or advantage returnees in searching for work (e.g. language skills they gained in Europe, vocational training or basic education they received in Europe)?

"None of them are in the condition that we have in Afghanistan, none of them will help them here. The only thing that could be as a bonus point is that when you have been educated when you were in Afghanistan, If you have a BA or MA. Those who are uneducated they have very slim chances of survival here. There is nothing that can help you if

whatever skills you might have. Yes, some European countries might say this person have been here for 4 or 5 years here and he has skills now, but those skills are not enough to work. Because here it is not about skills, it is about network, it is about knowing lots people and power. Here people don't care what skills you have. And if you have skills there are not organization or nothing done by the government to utilize those skills."

- Are there any particular difficulties in accessing state jobs for returnees?

"Again yes there are difficulties. It belongs to the network, the number of people you know, how many ministers and MPs you might know."

- Is anyone tasked specifically with assisting returnees to access employment? Both state and non-state?

"No, the Ministry of Labor which is basically tasked to help Afghans it doesn't matter if it is returnee or not to find work. The Ministry of Repatriation send the returnees to the Ministry of Labor and what they can do is nothing. Because returnees are not the only who have been unemployed, there are millions of people who don't have jobs."

## 9. Access to food and basic services

- What are the procedures for returnees to access food and basic services?

"There is no procedure, there is nothing like free food when they arrive to Afghanistan. Basis services even not that neither."

## 10. Impact of returns from Pakistan and Iran

- What has been the impact of the large scale returns from Pakistan and Iran on Kabul's ability to absorb returnees from Europe?

"The thing is if we consider Kabul city, we all know this city was built for one million people, today there around 5 or 6 million people living in Kabul. So, there are lots of pressure on the Ministry of Refugees and Repatriation as well as the international organizations like IOM and UNHCR because of the returnees from neighboring countries. Lots of sources and focuses go that way. Therefore, the returnees from European countries have been marginalized. Not many people know and care about them. We have to think there are lots of people they lost more than the returnees from neighboring countries. It doesn't mean we have to ignore returnees from neighbouring countries, but to the returnees from the European countries they have not given attention. So what the government is doing that they sign lots of MOUs, but with providing very limited services to them, there is no improvement in the security situation, there are not job opportunities and there is no hope for the youth in Afghanistan."

- Can you provide anecdotal cases of recent returnees to Kabul from Europe and their experience?

"Recently there are lots of deportations. I have met lots of the returnees; they mostly talk about wasting of their time. Those who have been deported they have been there for 8 or 9 years. They have learned the language; they have been integrated to the society. Now when they arrive to Afghanistan they see nothing but hopelessness and uncertainty about the future. The only thing they think about it is to find a way they can get out of the country. They are in contact with their lawyers and their support group to take them out of Afghanistan. In recent cases even families who have been deported 3 or 4 months ago, they have already left the country, because they had seen no chances for themselves nor for their children."

## Annex 3

**Written ‘Expert Opinion’ provided by Dr Anicee Van Engeland, over email on 11 June 2017.**

### 1. RETURN PROCEDURE

ARE RETURNEES RETURNED WITH A FINANCIAL INCENTIVE IF SO IN CASH, KIND OR ONCE THEY HAVE REGISTERED WITH AN ORGANISATION OR SIMILAR? DOES THIS DIFFER DEPENDING ON WHICH COUNTRY THEY’VE BEEN RETURNED FROM AND WHETHER RETURN IS FORCED OR ‘VOLUNTARY’?

“In October 2016, Afghanistan signed a readmission agreement with the European Union. Parallel readmission agreements exist with States such as Germany and Sweden. The agreements are backed by the IOM. According to these agreements, the plane travel and the costs of luggage is met by the States for voluntary returnees and deportees. EU FRONTEX supports the organization of the returns by providing training to escorts or can pay for monitors.

As per the Joint Way Forward agreement between the EU and Afghanistan, Afghan nationals are usually returned via scheduled and non-scheduled flights to Kabul airport, which means that all returnees transit via Kabul. The IOM takes over once the individual is in Kabul: it pays for the costs of the second trip, if the returnee wishes to go back home to a province. The organization also supplies accommodation in Kabul if needed.

Some States give a sum of money to the returnee; the sum allocated depends on the country sending the individual back to Afghanistan. It is not defined as an incentive but rather as money to survive once back in Afghanistan, and perhaps to develop a personal project. Germany gives 700 euros per individual while the United Kingdom gives £100. The Finnish government gives around 1000 Euros. Sweden gives 30,000 Swedish Kronas (which amounts to 3000 Euros), Belgium gives 500 Euros and the Norwegians give 20,000 NOK (about 2,100 Euros). The money is handed in cash at the airport.

Starting February 2017, Germany began giving an extra financial support called Starthilfe Plus. The package amounts to 1,200 Euros in cash for any returnee above 12 years old. It is available to anyone who decides to voluntarily go back home before a final decision has been made with regard to their asylum request. There is another package of 800 Euros for those who are rejected and don’t appeal.

The packages offered have improved as initially, they mainly targeted families: at the beginnings of the tripartite agreement, Iran had a small family package for those who accepted to leave the country. The United Kingdom also had an Assisted Voluntary Return to Afghanistan Programme that focused on families. Packages became more specific with time and now include young male Afghans as well.

It is to be noted that most countries and organizations are heading towards a different form of financial package, one that supports the State while encompassing the communities: as per the Joint Way Forward agreement, there is an EU reintegration package aimed at supporting reintegration. There is no money handed in cash to the returnee. Instead, the package is divided into three parts: there is an incentive package for the government to support the re-integration of the returning migrants by helping them find a job or develop skills. Then, part of the package comes in support of the IOM for all reintegration activities, from individual needs to helping communities’ needs. The third part of the package goes to supporting employment in the country. It is possible that in the near future, Afghan returnees will only be provided with a basic survival sum while the usual package goes to the State and the communities.”

WHO TAKES CHARGE OF THE RETURNEES UPON ARRIVAL AND MONITORS THEIR 'SAFE' ARRIVAL? ARE RETURNEES MONITORED AFTER ARRIVAL AND IS THIS DONE BY STATE OR NGOS?

"Upon arrival at the airport, returnees are met by the airport police. There is a centre located in the arrival lounge where returnees will firstly a representative of the Ministry of Refugees and Repatriations office. They will be registered. Returnees can then speak to representatives from different ministries (foreign affairs, Interior...) and from the IOM. Doctors are also present. Returnees are under no obligation to speak to anyone but for the Ministry of Refugees and Repatriations. Yet, it is in their interest to communicate at least with the IOM representative as it is at the airport that the IOM arranges transportation to provinces by handing cash money. I have noted that many returnees refuse the support offered by the IOM and by Ministry of Refugees and Repatriations to find them an accommodation. My findings indicate that those most likely to accept the support are returnees from Pakistan and Iran as they have never lived in Afghanistan or they left it decades ago.

Many returnees report being verbally abused by the police and by custom officers at the airport: they say they were insulted for leaving the country and for becoming a burden now that they were back.

The UNHCR monitors the whole arrival process."

ARE RETURNEES PROVIDED WITH HOUSING, FINANCIAL SUPPORT, FOOD ONCE THEY ARRIVE AND IF SO FOR HOW LONG? DO THEY NEED TO REGISTER FOR THIS BEFORE LEAVING OR ONCE THEY HAVE ARRIVED? DO THEY HAVE TO REGISTER OR IS THIS DONE AUTOMATICALLY (E.G. IOM)?

"At arrival, returnees are given the basic minimum in terms food and drinks. It often consists of biscuits and tea.

With regard to accommodation, returnees can either speak to the Ministry of Refugees and Repatriations office or the IOM. Both will direct them to the Jangalak reception centre in Kabul; the centre is funded and managed by the IOM.

If it one of the returnees is unwell, he will be separated from the group and taken in another room for medical assessment. A handful of returnees report having used this basic medical service and were satisfied of them. They also report that it is usually then that they were informally told whether they find their medicines easily or not. The centre can also refer them to a relevant medical centre anywhere in the country.

For those, who chose to benefit from the support offered by IOM, they will receive a basic package including the right amount of money to travel to Jangalak centre (in cash). They also receive clothing if necessary. The IOM will also assist them with any airport formalities. The IOM also provides counselling. They offer psychological counselling but also housing, job advices. The IOM offers mine-awareness trainings and brochures about medical facilities, transportation tips or information to open a bank account. The same information can be received from representatives of the Ministries. It is to be noted that most embassies have a representative who will be at the airport when the plan arrives. These officials are there to assist returnees and encourage them to speak to the different representatives of ministries and organizations present.

The UNHCR is also present at the airport: their role is to monitor the arrival and to help anyone who needs legal aid. They usually refer these individuals to the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission

The IOM has a special programme by which it can identify those returnees who arrive with a life plan. It can help returnees fresh of the plane look into option such as training, education, business start-up, job

referrals and others. The money can also be used to cover for medical expenses. The purpose of this programme is to identify possible candidate for a package facilitating reintegration. This requires a follow-up so the returnee has to go back to an IOM office once they are settled in the temporary accommodation. If a returnee is selected to benefit from that special package, the money is handed via a bank account in three times.

The returnees who speak to an IOM representative are encouraged to contact their local IOM office so that their reintegration can be monitored and counselling can be arranged. Therefore, the IOM tries to begin the reintegration process from the moment returnees arrive at the airport.

It should be stressed that all the above is available to returnees who arrive by plane at Kabul airport and who are either voluntarily repatriated or are deported.

The issues are the following: most returnees don't trust Afghan authorities and have lost faith in NGOs. If they are deported, they usually feel humiliated and have no desire to linger around the airport. This is why they tend to leave as soon as possible and don't seek to interact with the IOM or any other representative. As a result, those who benefit from the services offered are usually returnees who are seeking them, such as those who have lived for decades in Iran or Pakistan and are in dire need of directions.

Another issue is that most returnees who have spoken to the authorities or the IOM upon arrival will not return to them later. Yet, returnees have 3 months to contact the IOM after arrival, and they often don't. This is explained by the fact that a return can be overwhelming and returnees often spend that time trying to fit in. Others suffer from depression and cannot find the strength to do administrative tasks. Most of the times, returnees cannot afford to travel to their designated IOM office. This is how they miss on reintegration packages.

It should be noted that the process is the same for those returnees who arrive via land. The IOM is launching a programme to ensure that their arrival is smoother and part of the focus is on registration: the current procedures at the border are currently being assessed in order to be improved."

ARE RETURNEES QUESTIONED UPON THEIR RETURN AT THE AIRPORT BY GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS E.G. IMMIGRATION OFFICIALS?

"There is at the airport a representative from the Ministry of Interior's Criminal Investigation department.

It should be noted that in 2014 the IOM helped establishing an Identity Checking Unit within the Ministry of Interior to help the government's capacity to check identity, detect fraud, establish authenticity, and manage other border control activities. The system was tested first at Kabul airport and will soon be used at the borders. This helps the government identifying non-registered returnees who might show up at the border, claiming a package, or individuals posing as Afghans.

I am not aware of any returnee being questioned upon return, except for the regular questions one might face when handing out passport to a custom officers."

## 2. STATE ATTITUDES

HOW ARE RETURNEES FROM EUROPE PERCEIVED BY GOVERNMENT AUTHORITIES E.G. IMMIGRATION OFFICIALS AT AIRPORT, THE POLICE ON THE STREET, CIVIL SERVANTS AT MINISTRIES?

"Institutions are overwhelmed with returnees and mass returns undermine the attempts at stabilizing a fragile country. As a result, the Afghan government has tried to prevent or slow down repatriations. Yet,

the country has been compelled into taking back the returnees: the EU but also Iran and Pakistan have negotiated humanitarian aid and financial support in exchange for Afghanistan's compliance in the matter. The outcome is a feeling of resentment from the part of the State authorities towards returnees.

I have noted during my interviews with Afghans and during my work done as an expert witness that young male returnees are a financial burden for the State: they are often isolated from their family or community, have sold everything to travel, and come back as vulnerable individuals in need in a system that cannot provide assistance. These returnees are unable to contribute to a weakened economy and add up to an already strained labour market; the State would rather have them abroad, sending remittances back home.

State authorities are also very much aware of the security threat that these young male returnees represent for the State: the lack of educational or job opportunity means that these individuals can turn to drug trafficking or that they constitute soft targets for recruitment by armed non-state actors. These are two of the threats Afghanistan continuously seek to address; therefore, taking in returnees to whom no support can be provided is an indirect contribution to drug and violence.

There is therefore very little sympathy for returnees. It is often expressed through rudeness and insults from authorities, but also an unwillingness to address returnees' claims or requests. I have heard of insults at the Afghan embassy where officials were very slow to issue relevant documents. This lack of sympathy is also explained by the security risk these young men represent: the Afghan National Police or local institutions are keen to avoid granting protection to returnees as this might impact the local security equilibrium. I have had cases where the local security was made possible through the collaboration of all institutional and non-institutional actors alike; yet this relative peace could be broken by the arrival a young male returnee if armed non-state actors began to fight to recruit him."

IS THERE ANECDOTAL EVIDENCE THAT RETURNEES FEEL THEY CANNOT GO TO THE AUTHORITIES IF THEY FEEL THREATENED BY FAMILY MEMBERS OR SOCIETY AT LARGE?

"Public opinion is not favourable to helping returnees. Afghans believe that the government is not doing enough to support the economy, protect the population from armed non-state actors, promote education, and encourage women to work and other issues. There is, as a result, little empathy for returnees as people would rather see funding allocated to major domestic issues rather than to those who tried to leave the country. This explains why the State and local institutions have done so little to assist returnees: it is not a popular move.

I have witnessed many cases where returnees have found themselves without protection against family members and society. For example, upon return, some young men have claimed their right over a land or a house, only to be faced with stern opposition by the rest of the family or the community. Local institutions will tend to either refuse to referee the matter or will side with the family, clearly breaking the law. The jirga would also side with the family, leaving the young male without a land. The rationale is that the individual left and abandoned his goods to others. Jirga in non-urban areas can be very unfair towards returnees and I have seen many cases where the individual lost against the community. This context explains any attempt at land redistribution upon arrival of returnees has have been met with anger by the locals. In other cases, young men have gone back to a community that was angry at them for different reasons (eloping with a local girl, losing cattle, refusing to comply with a jirga' order to join the Taleban, giving information to NATO...). In such circumstances, local authorities will not protect the returnees as they have little interest in doing so: the returnee has alienated the family or a community and helping him would come down to taking sides with the weakest link.

Many of these young men come back with debts and with nothing in their pockets: a return within the family or the community is therefore impossible as it would shame everyone, the returnee included. Some locals also believe that the returnee is hiding his good luck, and young men are often mugged, kidnapped or

ransomed. There reports of returnees being abducted in the grounds that he must have come back rich; the family is then bribed and some have to sell everything they have left to rescue the returnee. This shows that reintegrating a returnee back into a home is risky: the returnee is firstly seen as a failure and there is resentment if the family has sold everything for the individual to go abroad and be successful. Then, the community could be scared of having him in their midst: the returnee could draw unwanted attention from local warlords or armed non-state actors. This is applicable when a returnee is relocated. Very few communities welcome a returnee for fear of his past: is he a criminal? Did he leave to avoid the Taliban? Did he hurt a girl? In communities that are tight-knit, a stranger is never welcomed; a stranger who has spent time abroad and whose records cannot be checked is scary.”

### 3. AVAILABILITY OF SUPPORT FROM THE STATE / NGOS

-WHAT FINANCIAL SUPPORT IS AVAILABLE AND FOR HOW LONG FOR RETURNEES FROM THE STATE OR NGOS? ARE THERE ANY CONDITIONS ATTACHED TO RECEIVING THIS SUPPORT?

“The main financial assistance is provided by IOM. The organization gives a small amount of money aimed at survival for a period of 14 days and it also provides accommodation for the same period of time. Individuals are entitled to 1,100 Euros in non-cash services (training, childcare, job referrals...). Past those two weeks, the IOM also grants a financial support to those who have a life plan. The returnee can apply for this package once at the airport or by visiting an IOM office within 3 months of their arrival. Returnees can then submit a business plan or can ask for support for education or vocational training. The IOM can give between 800 to 2,500 euros but this is not given in cash. There has been a follow-up of those who received financial support from the IOM: in 2016, 1 out of 6 returnees received this package and most of them started a business. A few used it to find housing or buy a house. Some preferred support finding a job and even fewer opted for education. Yet, many returnees fall through the cracks: they refuse to speak to the IOM representative at the airport or at the border and miss on an opportunity. Others who have spoken to the IOM representative don't come back to their office later. This is mainly due to the fact that some of them fear the IOM will share their details with the state. Others don't have a phone or the money to travel to one of the IOM offices. The main issue, however, seems to be the lack of information: returnees are never told they need to speak to the IOM representative upon arrival. Another issue is the framework: once the returnee receives the package, they have to act swiftly and find an opportunity as all payments must be completed within six months of the returnee's arrival in the country. The IOM monitors returnees' reintegration (for those who have registered the IOM) for up to a year.

The government created a High Commission for Migration in April 2015. One of the purposes of this commission is to help with reintegration, even though there is no mention made of returnees. Yet, most of the individuals who have reached out to the commission are returnees. This is why, the Displacement and Returnees Executive Committee was created in November 2016: its role is to define a strategy to coordinate humanitarian and development programmes and design policies to help returnees, amongst others. The focus is on re-integration with the development of individual financial support but also a more community-oriented financial support. This is a way of ensuring that returnees can go back to their communities without being seen as having failed and as being unable to contribute, causing the returnee to be side-lined. This focus on helping communities rather than individuals has emerged in several policies and strategies; it means that in the future, the financial support could be rather given to the community to encourage them to welcome back a returnee. It is perceived as a more sustainable long-term solution as it encompasses the population and encourages it to play an active role. For example, the community could support the creation of a local business. This approach has been criticised by experts as it doesn't take into account local corruption and the major issues with land ownership in the country.

The help returnees receive from the Afghan government address employment, legal aid and shelter. It is not provided by one institutions and the returnee has to take the initiative to go to each minister to receive

help. For example, one needs to go to the Ministry of Labour to receive help finding a job.

The UNHCR that takes care of the voluntary repatriation programmes from Iran and Pakistan operates a cash support system that is often perceived as an incentive. The programme has been suspended since December 2016 as the UNHCR is lacking funds. Besides, the UNHCR is only helping those who are registered with them. The IOM will take care of others, the non-registered refugees.”

ARE THERE ANY NGOS THAT SUPPORT RETURNEES AFTER ARRIVAL AT KABUL AIRPORT? WHAT KIND OF SUPPORT DO THEY PROVIDE AND FOR HOW LONG?

“Most of the help comes from the IOM but also from local and international non-governmental organizations such as the International Psychosocial Organisation or the Afghanistan Migrants Advice & Support Organisation. The Afghanistan Migrants Advice & Support Organisation offers accommodation to those travelling from Nordic countries for a period longer than 2 weeks. The Norwegian Refugee Council helps returnees claiming their legal rights over their lands while the ICRC helps them tracing their family.

Besides, some States, as part of their agreement with Afghanistan, has sub-contracted local firms and NGOs to provide assistance to returnees from their countries: for example, a local law firm (Shahkan and Associates) takes care of post-arrival matters for those coming back from Norway. This is usually available to those who have opted for voluntary repatriation, and not to those who were deported. The help is also provided for 14 days.

There are no current mechanisms in place to ensure that all returnees are treated equally. As stated above, some returnees walked away from the airport without seeking the support from the IOM, being thereby deprived of a financial aid. Others have been good at receiving more money that they should have. This is mainly caused by a difficult transition from one authority to the other: the returnee is firstly at the hands of the German state; they are then taken care of by the police during the flight, before being greeted by the Afghan police and an array of governmental institutions and the IOM upon arrival. Local and international NGOs then take over. It is consequently difficult to follow an individual and ensure that they receive their due.”

#### 4. Societal attitudes

HOW ARE RETURNEES FROM EUROPE PERCEIVED BY THE REST OF SOCIETY?

“Society fears returnees as they are perceived as intoxicated by western values; some of the youngest ones even picked up an accent when speaking Dari or Pashto, making them foreigners in their own home country. There is a clear rejection of those who have changed when abroad: for example, some might have embraced secularism or might have turned towards another religion; other might have discovered their sexuality and became homosexuals. Such behaviours will be rejected and will cause rejection if not death.

These young men who have spent time abroad have changed. Their cultural, religious and traditional compass has been altered at an age where one is flexible and resilient, making it a challenge for them to fit into existing societal structures. Some have learned another language or have adopted another religion; they have changed the way they dress or behave in society. They might have begun drinking alcohol. It is a real challenge for them to shed that skin and go back to the traditional ways. For example, when abroad, these young men had to make decision by themselves on a daily basis, and without having the possibility to rely on a religious authority or the local jirga to provide guidance. They have become more individualist and empowered. The younger they are, the most difficult it is for them to re-integrate: a young Afghan male who arrived at 12 or 15 years old in the West usually attends school, makes friends, go out and grow up to be westernized. A return to Afghanistan is then a shock. Society doesn't look kindly on those young men and refuse association with them: this means that it is very difficult for these young men to find wives, for

example.

Attitude towards religion is often a problem for returnees: when living abroad, some Afghans might have discovered secularism or a more relaxed way of practicing Islam. They find themselves at odds with the rest of society when they are returned: they lost the habit of praying or fasting, got used to drinking alcohol, have learned to speak to women... Many of the young individuals I interviewed in Europe admitted they didn't pray or fast anymore. They have forgotten those rituals because the society they lived in had other rules.

Return within an individual community is therefore complex. Relocation proves even more complex as the returnee will have to re-enter a society with rituals it has forgotten about and will have also to adapt to local mores, as each province of Afghanistan is different."

HOW ARE RETURNEES FROM EUROPE PERCEIVED BY THEIR FAMILY? IS THERE ANY STIGMA ATTACHED TO BEING RETURNED FROM EUROPE (E.G. CAN IT LEAD TO A REJECTION FROM THE FAMILY AS SEEN AS TOO 'WESTERNISED')?

"For many, a returnee brings shame: families who sent a young man abroad expect success and remittances. This is why families sacrifice everything they have –houses, lands, cattle- for one member of the family, usually a young male, to go abroad and provide for everyone. By doing so, I have seen fathers taking the risks of having to sell his daughter into slavery if the son sent abroad didn't succeed. A return is therefore equivalent to failure. There is little compassion for the hardship these young men have encountered, and no understanding for their fears or anxiety. This adds up to their stress: not only are these returnees often traumatized, they cannot share their stories with their family, friends and community.

Besides, anyone who has become different during the trip abroad will be rejected by society: speaking with an accent, engaging into conversation when not talked to, dressing differently, going to the gym, using skype to speak to friends abroad are all examples I have encountered that have justified family exclusion.

This is why many young men don't return back home: they know they are not welcome. They prefer living in slums or be homeless than face disapproval. This is also what feeds the revolving-door scenario: I met young men who were at their third attempt, and swore they would come again as they had nowhere to go."

IS THERE RISK OF DISCRIMINATION OR PERSECUTION FROM NON-STATE ACTORS SPECIFICALLY DIRECTED AT RETURNEES?

"There is currently a surge in children, adolescent and young men's recruitment in Afghanistan. Children, teenagers and young adults are at risk of being recruited by armed non-state actors, warlords and/or drug lords. There have been reports of different recruitment techniques and approaches: some are kidnapped, others are bribed. Sometimes, the Taleban storm in at night and kill everyone but those at fighting age. At other times, they take over the streets of cities looking for orphans or homeless young men. As it happens, many young males who have returned are living in the streets or in slums, and often fall into the hands of the Taleban. The Taleban also enter madrasa (religious schools) to kidnap children and young men who have found a safe haven in such places. Some returnees also seek armed non-state actors: they need to survive and joining a group is a way of gaining protection.

Kabul is prone to recruitment. The Taleban and other non-state actors have, so far, largely recruited from non-urban and remote areas; they are turning now to urban areas. This is explained by the fierce recruiting

competition between different non-state actors and the arrival of ISIS on the scene. There is a dire need for fresh fighters as most young males living in non-urban areas have departed when faced with the risk of being recruited. They either left for larger cities or went abroad. This is why groups like the Taliban now take the risk to recruit inside cities, and this is where many returnees hide. The recruitment takes all forms and happens everywhere. Besides, the young men who are returned and sent to Kabul (or any other large city) soon face unemployment because of the lack of community and family support. These children, adolescents and young adults often become homeless or drug addicts and are vulnerable to recruitment by non-state actors. This explains the presence of the Taliban inside Kabul and other cities: the Taliban know they can prey on easy targets, namely youngsters freshly arrived, lost and vulnerable. In some areas, the Taliban and ISI Snow offer a salary to new recruits; in a country where unemployment is rampant, young men who have been returned could be tempted to join an armed group.”

## 5. CONSEQUENCES OF LACK OF SUPPORT NETWORK

WHAT ARE THE CONSEQUENCES WHEN A RETURNEE DOES NOT HAVE A SUPPORT NETWORK IN KABUL? FOR SOMEONE ORIGINALLY FROM KABUL and FOR SOMEONE WHO IS ORIGINALLY FROM OTHER AREAS OF AFGHANISTAN

“It is difficult to rebuild a life for these young male returnees due to the absence of network support in a new place: Afghanistan is a country of ethnic belongings and tribes where the family, extended relatives and the community provide support in all areas of life. This is even truer for minors who are still children and need assistance. When a young male returns to Afghanistan, he needs his family and community to help him find him a job, shelter him and provide financial support. He will be deprived of a safety valve and the protection granted by the group and will be exposed. In Afghanistan, removing an individual from his environment to place him in a new environment is a social death: relocation means exclusion. In non-urban areas, one cannot survive without the group. Everything, from land to work and marriage is provided by the community. Without support, a returnee will not make it. The newcomer will not integrate the new social fabric, unless he is sent to a large city such as Kabul and at present, big cities are targeted by insurgents.

Big cities offer the opportunity to hide but anonymity is still impossible: in Afghanistan, everyone comes from somewhere and belongs to a tribe. One is defined by the language he speaks, the clothes he dons, the physical features he sports... There is a social determinism that prevents anyone from re-building a life from scratch. The only life-line that exists in Kabul is the massive presence of foreign NGOs that can find a young male returnee a job.

The consequences are that returnees have no access or a restricted to the job market, the housing market and the marriage market. They are aware of it and this is why they prefer to leave the country again.”

## 6. ACCESS TO HEALTHCARE

WHAT IS THE COST OF ACCESS TO HEALTHCARE FOR A RETURNEE? IS THERE A NATIONAL HEALTH SERVICE THAT RETURNEES CAN ACCESS AND IF SO HOW DOES IT WORK IN PRACTICE?

“The basic Afghan healthcare system is free of charge. The poorest and female-headed households used to have a waiver cards. There was also a community-based health insurance. Such insurance is a way of avoiding placing the strain of the healthcare costs on the individual alone or on the State. Instead, a system is set up that collect money from the collective, for example through taxes, to support those who need financial support when it comes to healthcare. Both projects ended in 2006. Fees were suspended in 2008 for primary and urgent care but the cost was very high for the government. It was instead decided that primary healthcare and emergency care, and that includes psychiatric cares, will be free. Different international organisations support the initiative by contributing financially. However, it still cost more than

a dollar for an Afghan to travel to the care centre to and from remote areas. To remedy the high transportation costs, the Mental Health Strategy seeks to ensure access to mental health care for all by 2020 through community-based mental health care services.

Through a study conducted in 2013, MSF discovered that while the public system promises free care, it does not always translate in practice: Afghans reported they often had to pay for drugs and some doctors' fees that were not free. In addition of those hidden charges, there were accusations of corruption: patients reported that they had to pay for services that were supposed to be free. Some public doctors also own their own private clinics and push patients to go there for there and medicines, claiming that the equipment is better.

While medicine is available and there are well-functioning pharmacies, the cost of buying medicine vary because of the war: it is sometimes difficult to ensure that medicines will arrive. While in theory medicine is supposed to be free, MSF has noted that patients had to pay for them. In other cases, patients reports having to pay for medicines that were not available in the public service, forcing them to go to the private service instead. As a result, many Afghans prefer to buy it at the market, where there is no certainty that they will find the right medicine and that it will not be expired."

GIVEN THAT MANY RETURNEES ARE LIKELY TO SUFFER FROM MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES, WHAT PROVISION OF MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES IS AVAILABLE?

"A survey found out that 72% of young Afghans have witnessed the loss of a family member. Families and communities are often torn apart for ethnic, political and war reasons. It is therefore not uncommon to find Afghans who have severed ties with their families and communities, or have been separated, willingly or not, and find themselves without any support. Returnees fall under this category: a documentary demonstrates that returnees, whether they suffer from mental health issues or not, are isolated and tend to become homeless: it is almost impossible for them to go back where they lived as returning would be a dead sentence. Most asylum-seekers we interviewed during our UNHCR survey explained they would never go back home to their family if deported; they all stated they would attempt the journey again rather than go back to their family and communities. Part of the issue is the danger they would face when going home. Another issue lies with honour: families and communities made a lot of sacrifices for these asylum-seekers to leave the country. It makes it impossible for an individual to go back home without being successful. Such conception of honour might be difficult for us to apprehend but they explain why many returned Afghans end up being homeless or commit suicide. Those who have mental health problems face a double punishment: not only are they lonely, they also suffer from mental health disorders that will impact their interaction with others: there is a stigma associated with mental health problems.

Returnees suffering from mental health disorders can sometimes be abandoned by their families: shame is often associated with mental health troubles as disorders are thought to be the result of demons (djinn) that have taken over an individual. As a result, some families chase the family member suffering from mental health issues or lead him to be chained in front of a shrine. Others are left to beg in the streets. In such circumstances, returnees become extremely vulnerable, as not only do they suffer from mental health issues; they are also unable to provide for themselves. They then become prey for drug traffic, prostitution, human smugglers, warlords or the Taleban. Families who returnees who are in need of mental health care can find support in the community or in the few existing hospitals. Yet, rather than going to hospitals and doctors, Afghan often use collective methods for healing such as praying. Few Afghans go to the doctor; there is a stigma attached to going to a hospital or a treatment centre. When they are seriously ill, Afghans tend to rather go to international organisations' hospitals such as those established by MSF, or will go and see a private doctor. Seeing a private doctor ensures discretion, but it is expensive. There is a high level of stigmatization of mental health disorders in Afghanistan: the distinction is hardly ever made between the different types of disorders and one can still find people who are mentally-ill chained at home

or outside a shrine. The shrine of Mia Ali Baba outside of Jalalabad is known for the chained people who then survive on charity. The stigma is an issue to address mental health issues and to train staff: for example, shackles were only removed recently from bed frames.

A national mental health strategy was designed in 2009. The document acknowledges the impact of the war on children, domestic violence, the need to train medical staff and to avoid social disintegration through the isolation of individuals affected by mental health disorders. The program aims at promoting mental health of the people of Afghanistan; minimising the stigma attached to disorders; supporting individuals, families and communities; preventing the development of problems when possible; and providing medical healthcare for those affected by mental health issues. Despite the effort, there is still a gap between theory and practice, as demonstrated by the report.

Access to mental health care is unequal: it emerged from several studies that women were giving the priority and there is an absence of beds reserved to children, adolescents and young adults. Access is also inadequate: since there are not enough beds, prospective patients have to take turns to check into medical facilities, private and public, including day cares. It is easier for Afghans to buy over the counter self-medicine and to buy drugs than to check into a mental health care centre. The government sought to address the issue by including mental health care in primary cares, without delivering the proper training to primary care patients. So while there is an increased access to primary care, people suffering from mental disorders hardly ever reach the relevant trained medical staff.

The infrastructures available are limited: WHO reported that there are only 200 beds for psychiatric services. The majority of beds in the country are provided by inpatient units in general hospitals. Kabul and the northern town of Shebargan, have treatment facilities for mental health problems. Besides hospitals, there are day centres: social centres have opened in Kabul and Herat. A Psychiatric and Drug Dependency Treatment Center has also opened in Kabul and offers 60 beds. It treats mainly issues dealing with feshar (stress), asabi (nerves) to jigar khun (depression). Those day centres are not monitored by the Ministry of Health. These facilities cares have been criticised for keeping incomplete patients' records and there are little data regarding duration of stay, readmission and follow up. The Kabul Psychiatric hospital has also admitted patients without a bed so homeless patients living in marastoon, or local refuges, that are supported by the Afghan Red Crescent Society. There are since 2005 three private mental hospitals. Each of them has 20 beds but do not liaise with the Ministry of Public health, so little is known about their activities.

There are financial matters but also human resources constraints that explain why the medical structures are not fully developed. There are not enough mental health experts trained. There are only 8 psychiatrists, 18 psychiatrist nurses and 20 psychologists for a population of 28 million. For example, the department of neuropsychiatry of the Nangarhar medical faculty has only a few beds, with little access to medicines and is understaffed, with one certified psychiatrist, and no psychiatric nurses. Mental health services are not offered as part of the basic health package but there are no psychiatric treatment protocols for primary care staff; as a result, people walking in hospitals for mental health issues are not always diagnosed well. Yet, doctors are now allowed to prescribe medications dealing with mental health disorders during a primary care visit of the patient. While there is a single module on mental health in the Basic Package for Health Service training developed by the Ministry of Public Health, this does not empower the staff to make a diagnostic. The lack of training and the absence of protocol mean that these doctors often ignore symptoms and are not able to properly identify disorders or prescribe the right medication. None of the existing infrastructure is specialised so returnees don't benefit from tailored support and care. There are now training programs for psychiatrist at Kabul University and there is a governmental attempt to provide more training to medical staff (one day a year). This attempt is supported by the European Union and International Medical Corps."

WHAT IS THE PROCEDURE TO ACCESS HEALTH CARE FOR A RETURNEE WITH A PRE-EXISTING HEALTH

CONDITION?

"I am afraid I am unable to comment on this specific matter"

## 7. ACCESS TO HOUSING

WHAT ARE THE PROCEDURES FOR RETURNEES TO ACCESS RENTED ACCOMMODATION?

HOW LONG ON AVERAGE DOES IT TAKE FOR A RETURNEE TO ACCESS RENTED ACCOMMODATION AND WHERE DOES HE/SHE STAY IN THE MEANTIME?

IS ANYONE TASKED SPECIFICALLY WITH ASSISTING RETURNEES TO ACCESS HOUSING? BOTH STATE AND NON-STATE?

I am afraid I am unable to comment on this specific matter

## 8. ACCESS TO EMPLOYMENT

ARE THERE ANY FACTORS THAT WOULD SPECIFICALLY DISADVANTAGE OR ADVANTAGE RETURNEES IN SEARCHING FOR WORK (E.G. LANGUAGE SKILLS THEY GAINED IN EUROPE, VOCATIONAL TRAINING OR BASIC EDUCATION THEY RECEIVED IN EUROPE)?

"It has become clear that skills acquired abroad have played an important role in finding a job. I am aware of the class of a man who had begun an IT training abroad and was able to open a computer shop back home thanks to the IOM package. I also know of individuals who became translators after a vocational training. The main issue remains the financial support offered: it has become clear that there aren't enough long-term packages to support re-integration and minors who went to school abroad are not supported into going to university when they returned."

ARE THERE ANY PARTICULAR DIFFICULTIES IN ACCESSING STATE JOBS FOR RETURNEES?

"I cannot comment directly on the questions but I can say this:

The job recruitment process is usually conducted through personal networks. When it comes to job attributions, there is a quota system for ethnic groups but Hazaras have reported discrimination during the hiring process.

In terms of opportunities, there is a difference between returnees from Iran and Pakistan and the returnees from Europe. Statistics demonstrate that those returned from Pakistan and Iran and those who are skilled are the most likely to find a job. Yet, most of them find that their situation back in Pakistan and Iran was better. They have created their own network in Afghanistan they often owned their own business and women usually work. The issue is rather with young men returning from Europe who are often less skilled: it is those young men, those who were between 16 and 25 years old when they left who are the most exposed to unemployment when they come back as they are the least likely to have received an education when abroad. They are the ones who will re-enter the migration flow."

IS ANYONE TASKED SPECIFICALLY WITH ASSISTING RETURNEES TO ACCESS EMPLOYMENT? BOTH STATE AND NON-STATE?

"There are employment service centres in charge of placement. Most of the jobs they offer are in the armed forces, the police and agriculture. It usually takes up to four years for an individual to re-integrate

the job market, so for someone who used to work in Afghanistan before leaving.

The Association of Experts in the Fields of Migration and Development (AGEF) only assists returnees from the UK and Germany. They offer the same support as the IOM: there is a package for those who wish to launch a business or enrol into a vocational training. AGEF is more restrained in its activities: the package can only be attributed to open a business or join a business. The NGO offers to train unskilled returnees and then helps them find a placement. It then compensates the returnee and the enterprise for 6 months.”

## 9. Access to food and basic services

WHAT ARE THE PROCEDURES FOR RETURNEES TO ACCESS FOOD AND BASIC SERVICES?

“I am not able to comment on that matter.”

## 10. IMPACT OF RETURNS FROM PAKISTAN AND IRAN

WHAT HAS BEEN THE IMPACT OF THE LARGE SCALE RETURNS FROM PAKISTAN AND IRAN ON KABUL'S ABILITY TO ABSORB RETURNEES FROM EUROPE?

“The State is overwhelmed with arrival from both sides and struggles to accommodate all returnees. Despite knowing that more and more returnees will arrive from Europe, the government is not reforming its structures and is still focusing more on the UNHCR tripartite agreement with Pakistan and Iran than on European returnees. It is clear that without the support of the EU through financial packages and without the IOM, the Afghan government couldn't cope.

Besides, it should be noted that returnees from Pakistan and Iran have shown resilience and have adapted to their circumstances better than those coming from Europe, thereby giving arguments to those in Afghanistan who believe returnees should not be accommodated through special policies and laws.

It is clear that while Afghanistan struggles to control and absorb the shock of the massive arrival from Pakistan, it is even less equipped when it comes to addressing the needs of European returnees: the government is under pressure as it must provide education, employment, housing, security... to all these returnees.”

CAN YOU PROVIDE ANECDOTAL CASES OF RECENT RETURNEES TO KABUL FROM EUROPE AND THEIR EXPERIENCE?

“A fifteen years old male had ran away after flirting with the daughter of a Kabuli merchant. He had been training with the merchant to become a tailor. The father had found out when he opened a box containing love letters. The teenager was terrified he would be killed in an honour killing and he ran away. He left for the United Kingdom where his credibility was never questioned but the judges found his rationale for running away to lack seriousness. The teenager was returned to Kabul; the merchant never spoke to him or touched him, but made sure he would never find a job in the tailoring business. This was an issue for the teenager who had no other skills. The last I heard of him, he was living with his mother in a slum of Kabul and still couldn't find a job.

A hazara male teenager was working in a shop in a provincial city. One day, two young males entered the job and started bullying him. They stole from him. The hazara teenager ran after them as the shop wasn't his and he feared retaliation from the owner. The young men ended up fighting with knives, and the

teenager thought he ended up killing of his aggressors. He ran away and asked for protection under Article 3 of the Human Rights Act for fear he would be deported and imprisoned, then ill-treated in prison because of his ethnic belonging. The judge returned him. The boy never went back to that city for fear of retribution but he found out he only lightly wounded the man and no charges were pressed against him. He lives in fear that the two men will find him to seek retribution.

A Pashtun male young teenager was approached by the Taleban when he was in the mountains with his friends. They asked him his name as they were after a specific child. All the children lied about his identity. They ran back home to discover a few days later that the Taleban had come to claim the child as one of their own after an agreement with the tribal leader. The uncle of the child got him out. Once in the United Kingdom, the judge questioned the child's credibility and he was returned. The last I heard of him, he had been recruited by the Taleban in other province.

Another case is that of a young man in his twenties who had been returned and didn't dare to go home. I interviewed him on his second attempt at remaining in Belgium and he was about to be deported again. He was fleeing the Taleban and knew he would be safer on the roads between Afghanistan and Europe than in the country. He swore to travel again and again until he made it as an asylum seeker.

Another case involved a 21 years old I met in Belgium and who was desperate to attend school. Yet, the system makes it very difficult for an asylum-seeker to go to school if he is above 16 years old. He was cutting himself to cope with the pressure building in his head. He was returned and committed suicide.

There have been several reports of young males who were returned to Kabul as it was considered to be a safe city and who died/were wounded in terrorist attacks. I saw that on the news."

## Annex 4

### **Transcript of interview with Liza Schuster carried out on April 22 2016.**

Liza Schuster is a scholar at City University in the UK but between 2013 and 2015 lived in Kabul and undertook field research and has been back to visit recently in January 2016.

Asylos: Are there particular groups who are more under threat in Kabul?

Liza: It depends on who you are talking about. So for example if it is somebody who has a high profile who has fled the Taliban, or who has made some kind of statement which has attract the attention of not just the Taliban but more conservative elements of society, they would be under attack. Here I am thinking of somebody who might write an article in a newspaper, or there was a case of a young woman who did performance art where she wore body armour and then was assaulted in the street. So there are a number of cases who are high profile like that. Then there are also people who may be seen to be , who are close family members for example who are in the Taliban or other armed groups who may be vulnerable to being arrested by the authorities and who would be at risk of arbitrary detention or beatings as the security forces try to get information. Otherwise the kind of threats that are experienced by people in Kabul are the threats of being in the wrong place at the wrong time- which should not be underestimated. So although the Taliban will claim to be attacking for example like yesterday the ministry of interior [referring to Taliban suicide bomb in Kabul on 19/14/2016], overwhelmingly the people who will be caught up in that kind of violence will be civilians.

Asylos: Are there specific geographical areas within Kabul which are of more grave security concern?

Liza: It is really important to understand that .. I read recently that Kabul is a 'large anonymous city where it possible to disappear'- that is completely wrong. Kabul is divided into different sectors which reflect different ethnic groups. It tends in its massive expansion over the last few years to reproduce villages, towns and ethnic divisions. So very crudely speaking the East of Kabul is Pashtun and the West of Kabul is Hazara, and the north of Kabul is Tajik. There are parts of the city which is more or less mixed, but the overwhelming majority of the Hazara population live in the West of Kabul , and the majority of the Pashtun population live in the East, and Tajiks and more wealthy Tajiks live around Microroyan. The reason why that's important is that if you are from one ethnic group, it is very difficult for you to avoid people that you are threatened by from your own ethnic group by moving to a different area of the city. Because you will stand out in a different area, people will wonder who you are, if you don't have social networks in those other parts of the city it can be very difficult to find employment. You are forced to seek employment and accommodation from people who are from your own group. This goes on down quite narrowly because even within your own group there are splits and divisions. So you need to go somewhere you're known, but the fact that you are known makes it very easy for people who are looking for you to find you.

Asylos: Apart from the recent, can you describe other recent activity of the Taliban or ISIS?

Liza: I don't have a list off the top of my head, but there have been a number. But Tolo News and The facebook group called Kabul Security Now detail attacks all the time.

Asylos: Ok now we will move onto Civil and political rights. Are there are particular socio-economic or ethnic groups which are discriminated against in Kabul?

If you look at the population in Kabul which is estimated somewhere between 5 and 7 million- but it's a really rough estimate because there hasn't been a census in the city. But it's a really huge city and it's overwhelmingly peopled by people who are extremely poor. The unemployment rate- I've seen 25% and I've seen 60%. The 60% I've seen quoted by somebody doing their research PhD at SOAS who is an Afghan

and worked for ministry of finance and he estimated it at 60%. Unemployment is rife, and there is large numbers of people who survive from selling vegetable, chewing gum, doing day labour. There are also in Kabul an extraordinarily large proportion of people who are beggars and destitute. There is no support for people who have disabilities. There is a ministry for social affairs and the disabled and they are supposed to offer help, but actually you see that many disabled who have suffered amputations from mines etc, have no support. You can judge the level of poverty by the amount of child labour. This is true across all ethnic groups – you can see them in the streets- women carrying babes in arms, children as young as 5 selling plastic bags, selling bits of chewing gum, washing cars. That's indicative of the very very high levels of poverty in general, child poverty in particular. The recourse to child labour indicates that this is a survival strategy for most poor families. Some of those children aged 8 and 9 are the sole support for those families.

Having said that there is a huge proportion of the population that are barely surviving, it is then worth noting, in particular the Hazara continue to face discrimination. I don't want to underplay the real poverty suffered by many of the Pashtun population living in Kabul – it is serious and it is chronic , but when you look at the Hazara they have benefitted enormously in the changes that have happened in the past 10-15 years, nonetheless they remain at an extreme disadvantage. The growing Hazara middle class, defined as those who have taken advantage of the education that has been available, are full of resentment and frustration because their access to employment at an appropriate level for their skills is really limited. And one of the reasons is for that, is because power traditionally is in the hands of mostly the Pashtun but also the Tajik. So they have well-established networks amongst the middle and upper classes. Whereas as the Hazara are new socially mobilised, they don't have those networks and there is still a lot of resentment among those other ethnic groups at those "upstarts" coming in and presuming to take these kind of jobs. And of course women are doubly and triply disadvantaged and that is a real issue. Britain hasn't, but both Norway and Denmark have deported women head of households and families and that is in contravention of Memorandum of Understanding, it should never happen and those people should be brought back.

Asylos: That touches on the next question which is, are there specific human rights abuses that are related to gender, race or age?

Liza: Yes, I guess probably one of things that is most disturbing is the normality of physical violence in the street. I have walked down in the street for example and a boy has gone flying in front of me. He was a 10 year old child working in a shop and his boss who was 16 had smacked him across the face because he had made a mistake and knocked him flying across the pavement into the road. And that is considered normal, that kind of violence. People are often brutal to children. Within families, not every family, there is a high level of violence against women and children. There is an issue in particular in families where the male head of the family has been killed, because those families are then the responsibility of the father's brother, but they are often seen as a burden, so it is not uncommon for those children to not be sent out to school anymore but to be sent out to work and it is common for the women to be used as a maid and subject to violence.

Asylos: Now we will talk about the socio-economic situation in Kabul. We have already talked about unemployment, but the question is what is the possibility of gaining employment in Kabul?

Liza: The most important thing to stress is that the only way to get a job in Kabul is if you know somebody. That is far more important than having skills, competence or experience of any kind. Employment is gained strictly through knowing someone. Therefore there are positions for which people are very unqualified for and there are many people who have qualifications who are not employed. Having said that, another big issue of Kabul is that the education standards at every level from primary to secondary, up to university level, are abominable. So even when you have people who spent 3 or 4 years in university studying, they are not actually able to do jobs, but even if they were, they wouldn't be able to get a job unless they knew somebody. Even people who are qualified, who do have contacts, may find it very difficult to find work, because there isn't much work. With the withdrawal of the International forces and international

community in 2014 has seen a massive contraction in the economy. Pretty much every family has been touched by that. In addition to the vast majority of people who are already poor and barely survive; there is now another group of people who we may call 'working class', who were drivers, cleaners for the international community, who are now unemployed and are now tainted by their previous employment. Then there is the other group of middle class who had management level jobs in NGOs and earned extraordinary salaries and are now unemployed, and I would suggest it is those who are deciding to invest whatever savings they have to get their whole family out the country. There continues to be an elite which are the criminally rich, and you need their permission to do everything. You can't start your own business without their say so, you can't buy property without their say so.

Asylos: What is the housing situation?

Liza: The housing situation is very interesting because if you look around Kabul, there are dozens, if not hundreds of high rise buildings going up. They are incomplete, so it looks like there are lots of apartments available, but in fact they are being built up by a way of laundering money and so they are not actually intended for sale. They are also jerry built, so when there are big earthquakes, they would get knocked down. Also if you do find somewhere to rent, even though this is very difficult, people don't want to rent unless it is to a family. So the expectation is that families will rent apartments. If a single person, especially a woman, even a man, in general it won't be rented to him because he will be regarded with suspicion. Why isn't he staying with an extended member of the family or with friends? If he is alone will be bringing women in, is he going to have male friends who will be drinking, is he going to disturb other members of the block? So homes are normally rented to families, you normally will know somebody who will vouch for you. If you don't, and I've actually seen this, you might be able to persuade one of the estate agents to rent you a property but then they will follow up, they will have had a conversation with you to try and identify mutual acquaintances and go through the network until they can get some information about you. They will want to know, are you a good character, are you going to pay your bills? The good character is very important. So if you are arriving in Kabul and you don't have a social network, you don't have somebody who can vouch for you, it becomes very difficult to get a contract. And it can also be withdrawn from you within days. The case which I saw, in the building where I lived, there was somebody who was moving in and they hadn't fully unloaded the furniture and the word had come back – 'don't rent to this person', and they had to pack up and move again. And that's not unusual. I got my place through a friend of a friend and that's how it works.

If you come back to Kabul and you've been in Iran or Pakistan or your family is from Kunduz and you don't have any family in Kabul, it is almost impossible.

Asylos: And so do many people end up living in informal housing?

Liza: There are a number of informal settlements which are populated largely by returnees that have come back from Iran and Pakistan. These have not been very successful. Mostly because they have no income generating activities. At best, women and children may be left in their homes whilst the husband goes and find work in another city or another country. But things like clinics and schools, especially running water, access to land where you can grow something, is really limited. So there is a big scandal in Kabul about the Land Allocation Scheme, even those people who manage to get a plot, are coming into the city to beg or putting their children to work. The answer is, in Kabul if you have the money and the connections you will probably be ok although you are still at risk of an explosion, a bomb, a suicide attack. If you don't have money or connections, life is going to be so difficult (at least this is what I have seen from the returnees who I have interviewed), that you will take the risk and go back to your province, even though you were at risk there, because you are afraid of starving to death or having to sleep on the street. In that situation where people have done that, they have come back to Kabul and then headed onto Pakistan or Iran. This is why most people who I have worked with are no longer in Kabul.

Asylos: what are the possibilities to enrol in education?

Liza: To enrol in secondary school it is free to go to government secondary school. But the schools are so overcrowded that they run in 3 shifts a day. You have 3 shifts – one will work from 7 until 12, another will work from 1-4 and another is from 5 until 8. The result is that the teachers do not have time to mark or set homework so that's why I said the level of education is very poor. You can't get into the government university unless you pass the concours, which is extremely difficult. Not because the standard is high, but because it consists of 240 something questions that you have to answer in 3 hours and you've learnt that answers off by heart over the previous year or two and they're non-sensical. It is quite normal, outside of Kabul and potentially even in Kabul for the warlords to physically take the ministry of education officials and rob them of the answers to give them to their students. Or to give them telephones to students coming to the exam hall so they can call out to get the answers to the questions. So if you don't have the money to pay for the private university, and you haven't swatted for the concours, it is going to be difficult, it will take some time and some money to prepare yourself. You won't easily go in. There are thousands of private universities in Afghanistan, but they aren't really universities. They are more like colleges and often the only subjects they teach are computer technology and business administration. There are a few private universities but you have to pay. I'm not sure what the prices are but they aren't cheap.

Asylos: So access is difficult in that sense because it is expensive.

Liza : yes

Asylos: What is access to medical care like?

Liza: Well this is an important point because there are some people being sent back with Post traumatic stress disorder , depression , anxiety and other medical issues. Two things that are very important to note: Mental health care in Afghanistan is virtually non-existent. There is one hospital in Kabul where it is common to chain people to their beds. There is a private hospital in Mazar where people are sleeping in the hospital because they can't cope with the demands. This is private and charges money. The drugs that are used- there is no guarantee that they are genuine, the market is flooded with counterfeit drugs. Even if they were genuine, doctors don't know what to prescribe . Many of the doctors have actually bought their qualification in Kazakhstan, in Tajikistan, in Iran and Pakistan. So medical care is not available in particular for Post traumatic stress disorder, for anxiety, for schizophrenia the treatment is to chain somebody to their bed or to put them in a cage. So for people with medical issues should definitely not be deported.

Asylos: We have touched on the consequences of not having a family network. So does the presence or absence of a network influence the socio-economic situation in these cities. Is the socio-economic situation different for someone who has always lived in Kabul compared to someone from another region?

Liza: Absolutely. If you have family in Kabul, on the whole they will look after you. It is quite normal to arrive in Kabul and phone them up and say let me stay with you. Obviously that is provided that there hasn't been a family feud which is the reason why you had to leave Kabul and also provided that being with your family isn't going to put them in danger. Even if there was a risk, I have experienced myself where I didn't know I was putting family at risk and they put me up. But they got me out of town within two days, they didn't tell me why, they just told me they were taking me to Mazar to see the city because they didn't want to frighten me. There had been a threat against me. So if there was a threat against somebody, there would be an attempt to get them out of Kabul. If there wasn't a threat because they have been an interpreter or worked for the government, the family would put them up, but then again it does depend on the resources of the family. Because for many families it is hard enough to make ends meet for their own family, never mind taking on a cousin. While the hospitality would last for as long as their curiosity about their time abroad lasted, then it would become difficult because there would be a resentment about why this person had come back and wasted all that money. Did they do something criminal in Europe to be deported, so they must have been either criminal or very unlucky. And unluckiness is felt to be catching. Or people would start to make comments about how your time abroad changed you – 'do you think you are

better than us?', 'are you still a real Muslim'?, 'did you drink alcohol while you were out there?', 'did you sleep with women while you were there?', what kind of nasty things did you get up to? So it becomes very difficult. If the family is wealthy and has money it is not such a problem, it's an issue when the family is already under strain.

Asylos: Moving onto threats to returnees. Do you know of recent cases of returnees who have been put in danger or even killed after they have returned?

Liza: Over the last few years I have worked with a group of people, I never got close to them. One case was three years ago, who had been returned from Norway and was unable to survive in Kabul, he was originally from outside Jalalabad, and so he went back and his father had been killed so he went to stay with his father's close friend who tried to protect him. But there was a threat against his life, so his father's friend sent him to another village with another man but there was an attack and this man was killed and the boy ran back to Kabul. He then left the country and last I heard he was in India. When I had just arrived in Kabul I spoke to somebody who told me a story about his best friend who had been deported from the UK. This was almost 4 years ago, he couldn't stay in Afghanistan because he felt under threat but he had no money. So his friends pooled together money to buy a ticket to fly to Pakistan. But he didn't have family there and found it hard to get money, but he wanted to get married. So his family in Nangarhar arranged a marriage for him, and he snuck back secretly to try and attend an engagement party and was killed on the road. So I know of a handful of cases, where I've spoken to the family or friends of the people, who had serious life-threatening issues. I've spoken to one young man who was deported from Denmark and sent back to Kabul but didn't feel able to stay there. During the course of the interview I asked him what he was going to do and he told me he was going to return to Europe. I said 'are you going to say the same story'? He said 'yes that's all I have'. He told me the story and I told him that I didn't believe him and the authorities were not going to believe him. He told me though that he really had to leave and this story would get him asylum. But I said I don't understand – 'why do you have to leave if you aren't being persecuted by the Taliban (which was his story)'. He said to me, 'Because I am under threat by a politician who lives in a Hazara town in Pakistan who is part of a big and powerful family that straddles the border. And he had actually eloped with this man's daughter, so he was under a death threat and wasn't safe in Pakistan nor Afghanistan. When I explained that that would be grounds for asylum, he didn't believe me, and thought that the Taliban thing would work. He was desperate to get out of Kabul and now he is back in Taliban.

Asylos: What organisations are present in Kabul to help returnees?

Liza: Sod all! IOM will dish out funds if the people meet certain criteria. Those funds are largely used to make attempts to leave the country again. They are short term and they don't really work. There isn't any focus. The only person really is Abdul Ghafoor from AMASO (Afghanistan Migrants Advice Support Organisation) which is the NGO that he and I set up 2 years ago. All he can do is offer a friendly shoulder to cry on, and a listening ear and some orientation information. He can help people prepare their applications to the IOM – he has good contacts there. He can't get them jobs.

There are voluntary return schemes available. But Afghans rarely take advantage of these. Given that the voluntary return schemes are more generous, than the amount that is available for the forcibly returned, you would think that logically, following European government's logic, that people would be more willing once that they see that there is no alternative, to take up the voluntary return. But they don't. Part of the reason is that Afghanistan simply doesn't have the economic infrastructure of all the people that are coming back. Now the Europeans are saying it is only a few hundred, but that needs to be put into the context of the thousands that are being returned all the time from Iran and Pakistan. Kabul has no more absorption capacity- it is oversaturated. It simply cannot cope. The infrastructure, the drains, medical infrastructure, economic, employment, education, the health system is dreadful. None of it is able to cope with the current population. The notion that other people coming back who don't have any resources is going to be helped by 1500 dollars is completely ridiculous. It is true that work needs to be done, there should and could be employment possibilities to be created but really that should be done at a national

level. You can't focus it on just returnees well then that gives further incentive to go. Ghani needs more help with the economy, but before that he needs to fix the corruption.

Asylos: Can you give examples of returnees who didn't have a support, what were the consequences of not having one?

Liza: Often they leave Kabul relatively quickly, within weeks, sometimes within days. Because there is no way for them to survive in Kabul. They won't even wait to try and access the IOM funds because they are scared in Kabul, or because they can't survive. The choice is to sleep on the streets. There are lots of drug addicts, there's lots of criminal violence on the streets. So they will decide, ok social networks are so important that I will risk my life to go back to where I was from to see if I can get some help. Or at least to see my parents before they die, and or before I die. Once they've gone back, there have been a handful of incidents where people have been killed, or been threatened or beaten up. Often that return is for a short period of time, so they can raise the money to get out the country again.

Asylos: Is there a possibility to obtain an ID for one region if you are from another region?

Liza: Because of the way that things work in Afghanistan, even if you were born in Pakistan, if you want to get a tazkira [identity card], you have to go back to your father's village in order to get it. In Afghanistan that documents that have been produced so far, even though there have been attempts to change things with the 'e-tazkira'. Documents are fairly simple things, so why would you risk going all the way back to Kandahar for example and risk your life, when you can get pretty much the same thing made up in Kabul. It would have the same information, it would be identical. The person issuing it to you wouldn't know if it is true or not, so on one hand it is a fake document being produced for money, but on the other hand it may provide all the relevant information. So you can have one made up.

Asylos: So it doesn't hold much weighting?

Liza: Not really. There are valid documents around. Telling the difference between a valid and a fake document is not that easy. Partly because some of the fakes look the way a genuine document should, and some of the genuine documents look like fakes because they are full of mistakes.

One other thing is that Minister Balkhi, I've already written extensively on his view that people should not be deported. He's been ridiculed by the British government in particular as a lone voice – that's not true. There was a debate in parliament about a month ago and most of the MPs were shouting at Ghani 'Why are you doing the dirty work of European governments? Afghans should not be deported'. So Balkhi has a lot of support from the MPs but Ghani and Robani have been bullied by European governments and the British government in particular, into saying that they have no sympathy with those who are leaving.

You also mentioned Mazar and Jalalabad. Mazar is probably a lot safer than Jalalabad. However the big issue is that most people in Afghanistan cannot fly. They are forced to go on the roads. The roads are extremely dangerous. The Kabul – Jalalabad road is extremely terrifying. And the road to Mazar goes through Parwan and Baglan province and both of those are controlled by the Taliban.

## Annex 5

**Interview with Shoaib Sharifi Independent Afghan documentary filmmaker and journalist on April 23 2016 for a previous Aylos research note.**

**-Shoaib Sharifi is an independent Afghan documentary filmmaker and journalist.**

**-Last visited Afghanistan in February 2016. Visited Mazar-i-Sharif and the Southern and Northern provinces.**

1. What is the security situation in Kabul, Jalalabad and Mazar-e-Sharif?

a. Are there particular groups who are more under threat?

Women are under threat, and anybody with open and liberal beliefs or opinions, or thoughts...those types of people.

b. Are there specific geographical areas of grave security concern?

In Nangarhar, the immediate boundaries and the location outside of Jalalabad city's boundaries, immediately outside of the city is of grave concern. Jalalabad itself is safe.

The other two...Logar is one of most dangerous places...Char Asiab district of Kabul in the South...Surabi is also unsafe in East. Some parts of Paghman district are unsafe. There is threat of Taliban and armed opposition groups.

c. Do death threats from the Taliban carry over from one region to the other?

Not necessarily, the Taliban now at the moment do not operate in a well organized and coordinated system as they did when they were ruling Afghanistan in the late 1990s. You can operate in a low profile if you move town, because the Taliban themselves are not moving. Unlike in the past they were moving, but if you are publically declaring through Facebook or heard in the media, then they can harm you, then you are at risk.

d. What is the recent activity of the Taliban and ISIS in these cities?

Recent, in Nangarhar, I would say in Jalalabad city, there was an explosion in the city...Daesh were in the city centre in Jalalabad. Also recently in Jalalabad by the Taliban, the most recent is a car bomb attack on a bus of Afghan army recruits just last week.

In Kabul the most-high profile was on the Afghan parliament by the Taliban. I don't think there were any Daesh related in Kabul.

In Mazar, the most-high profile was an attack on an Indian consulate in the city center by the Taliban.

2. What is the situation in terms of civil and political rights in Kabul, Jalalabad and Mazar-e-Sharif?

a. Are particular (socio-economic / ethnic) groups discriminated against?

The most serious one is Hazara's, and Shia's - who are identifiable, like Hazara's. They are targets for Daesh and the Taliban.

Political... members of any non-Islamic political parties, non- Mujahedeen parties, for example like women's rights, human rights, supporting a cause. Women's groups they are seen to be representing the values of the West. Minority Hindus and Sikhs are also. Homosexuals, if they open about that they may have issues...basically Afghans who have any other beliefs other than Islam are under threat, like Christians.

b. Are there other practices of human rights abuse- gender/race/age - related?

Yes, of course. In Kabul, in the Afghan parliament there is a very bad culture of impunity against those who are violators of human right.

3. What is the socio-economic situation in Kabul, Jalalabad and Mazar-e-Sharif?

a. What are the possibilities of gaining employment?

These three cities compared to everywhere else have good employment. I do not want to imply that employment is good - Afghanistan suffers from severe employment issues, but these three cities and Herat would have good opportunities and are fairly in a better position compared to rest of the country.

b. What is the housing situation?

The housing situation in Kabul is not scarce, but there are unaffordable house prices. In Kabul, a one-bedroom house, in a poor area of Kabul, you cannot get anything less than \$250 a month to rent. This would be around \$200 in Jalalabad.

c. What are the possibilities to enroll in education?

Kabul is the best for universities, there are so many private ones. Education is probably the best in these three places for opportunities and access. Private education is very expensive, one child for a primary school, would require \$60 a month to cover school fees and then transportation. There are enough places in government primary schools.

Government universities are high in demand and almost impossible to get in. Many people apply for entrance. The three top universities in Kabul, Jalalabad and Mazar only up to 80,000 get places. The remaining people will have to go through private, which is not affordable....it is very expensive.

d. What is access to health care?

Access is good, but the quality is terrible. Hospitals and basic health centers in small districts, in all three cities, they are government run and there is emergency ambulance service, but the quality is close to none in the government hospitals. There are good private hospitals, but they are too expensive, some of which you have to pay up to \$100 a night.

e. What are the consequences of not having a support network (family etc)? Does the presence or absence of a support network particularly influence the socio-economic situation in these cities? Is the socio-economic situation different for persons who have always lived there compared to persons who originate from another region in Afghanistan?

Afghans have survived based on their support networks, because the government system is weak and unresponsive, it is only your support network through which you can survive and have access to justice, education. If you don't have that, it is very difficult to resolve issues, if you are in trouble economically, legally, socially. However, if you manage to spend a year in a location, in a place, people are very open to those in the neighborhood and you can build a network, but only if you manage to live there for a year, and you manage to grow your own network.

4. Are there any particular threats to returnees?

a. Are there recent cases of returnees put in danger / killed?

Nobody has been killed or targeted as a returnee only from a Western country from my knowledge. However, people who spend time in the West and their opinions and beliefs change, the way they express themselves, the opinions are different, they may have been targeted for their way of thinking, practices, their way of wearing clothes, or people convert or become atheist. Or when they went to the West sometimes they are called spies. Only when someone continues that way of their lifestyle it can be a problem. If people know they are deported, there is rather sympathy for these people, as they are left with nothing, as they spent so much to go. Until they start practicing a Western lifestyle in that area or village, then there are problems and groups may start hating you. I do not know of anyone being targeted especially because of this.

b. What organisations are present in the cities to help returnees / persecuted?

(BOTH Q's) Yes and no, IOM, is present in all three cities...UNHCR has offices in these cities, and they have their implementing partners, but they are not very well organized. I went to try and track people who returned for my work and they did not have a database of what happened to these people. Their projects are very small and minimal. They may give some advice, but there is no group supporting deportees. Maybe there are organizations by name but there is not much happening on the ground. Therefore, the support network is very important. Also, if something happens to you, it is only the support network who would learn and inform rights groups, and then the government would do something. If you don't have any one, for example a disabled person and cannot do anything, your protection from all aspects will be lost.

5. Are there any administrative obstacles to IFA in Kabul and Jalalabad and Mazar-e-Sharif?

a. Is there a possibility to obtain an ID in another region other than the region of origin?

No – if you are from Nangarhar, you cannot get an ID in Kabul, you have to get it in the place of birth. The reason is because when you go to the national statistics department, everything is until now in hard copies. They open a 50-year-old book, and have to physically connect you, like your family members. You cannot just say I am an Afghan. You have to take your dad's, uncle's ID card number, then they can open that book. This may change, when these controversial ID cards start, but this will take years until all these books are digitized.