



Home Office

Country Policy and Information Note

Afghanistan: Afghans perceived as “Westernised”

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Preface

This note provides country of origin information (COI) and policy guidance to Home Office decision makers on handling particular types of protection and human rights claims. This includes whether claims are likely to justify the granting of asylum, humanitarian protection or discretionary leave and whether – in the event of a claim being refused – it is likely to be certifiable as ‘clearly unfounded’ under s94 of the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002.

Decision makers must consider claims on an individual basis, taking into account the case specific facts and all relevant evidence, including: the policy guidance contained with this note; the available COI; any applicable caselaw; and the Home Office casework guidance in relation to relevant policies.

Country information

COI in this note has been researched in accordance with principles set out in the [Common EU \[European Union\] Guidelines for Processing Country of Origin Information \(COI\)](#) and the [European Asylum Support Office’s research guidelines, Country of Origin Information report methodology](#), namely taking into account its relevance, reliability, accuracy, objectivity, currency, transparency and traceability.

All information is carefully selected from generally reliable, publicly accessible sources or is information that can be made publicly available. Full publication details of supporting documentation are provided in footnotes. Multiple sourcing is normally used to ensure that the information is accurate, balanced and corroborated, and that a comprehensive and up-to-date picture at the time of publication is provided. Information is compared and contrasted, whenever possible, to provide a range of views and opinions. The inclusion of a source is not an endorsement of it or any views expressed.

Feedback

Our goal is to continuously improve our material. Therefore, if you would like to comment on this note, please email [the Country Policy and Information Team](#).

Independent Advisory Group on Country Information

The Independent Advisory Group on Country Information (IAGCI) was set up in March 2009 by the Independent Chief Inspector of Borders and Immigration to make recommendations to him about the content of the Home Office’s COI material. The IAGCI welcomes feedback on the Home Office’s COI material. It is not the function of the IAGCI to endorse any Home Office material, procedures or policy. IAGCI may be contacted at:

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Information about the IAGCI’s work and a list of the COI documents which have been reviewed by the IAGCI can be found on the Independent Chief Inspector’s website at <http://icinspector.independent.gov.uk/country-information-reviews/>

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Policy guidance

Updated 15 January 2018

1. Introduction

1.1 Basis of claim

- 1.1.1 Fear of persecution or serious harm by non-state actors because the person is perceived as 'Westernised'.

1.2 Points to note

- 1.2.1 Being 'Westernised' is far from clearly defined, with sources describing it (vaguely) as a person who has adopted the values, appearance, language, or culture of a Western country.
- 1.2.2 This note concerns targeted risk by non-state actors as opposed to a generalised risk of indiscriminate violence under Article 15(c) of the Qualification Directive or Article 3 of the European Convention on Human Rights. For consideration of such claims see the Country Policy and Information Note (CPIN) on [Afghanistan: Security and humanitarian situation](#) and, for information on who Anti-Government elements (AGEs) perceive as a threat, see the CPIN on [Afghanistan: Fear of Anti-Government elements](#).

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2. Consideration of issues

2.1 Credibility

- 2.1.1 For information on assessing credibility, see the [Asylum Instruction on Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status](#).
- 2.1.2 Decision makers must also check if there has been a previous application for a UK visa or another form of leave. Asylum applications matched to visas should be investigated prior to the asylum interview (see the [Asylum Instruction on Visa Matches, Asylum Claims from UK Visa Applicants](#)).
- 2.1.3 Decision makers should also consider the need to conduct language analysis testing (see the [Asylum Instruction on Language Analysis](#)).

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2.2 Particular social group

- 2.2.1 Afghans perceived as 'Westernised' are not considered to form a particular social group (PSG) within the meaning of the 1951 UN Refugee Convention. This is because they do not share an immutable (or innate) characteristic that cannot be changed and, in general, they are not perceived as different and do not have a distinct identity in Afghan society.
- 2.2.2 In the absence of a link to one of the five Convention reasons necessary for the grant of refugee status, the question to be addressed in each case will be whether the particular person will face a real risk of serious harm sufficient to qualify for Humanitarian Protection (HP).

- 2.2.3 For further guidance on particular social groups, see the [Asylum Instruction on Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status](#).

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2.3 Assessment of risk

- 2.3.1 Civilians associated with, or perceived to be supporting the Government, civil society and the international community in Afghanistan, including the international military forces and international humanitarian and development actors, have been subject to intimidation, threats, abductions and targeted attacks by AGEs, such as the Taliban. This may include returnees from Western countries (see [Targeted incidents against returnees](#) and the Country Policy and Information Note on [Afghanistan: Fear of Anti-Government elements](#)).
- 2.3.2 There have been isolated reports that a small number of these returnees have been targeted and attacked by AGEs because they are 'Westernised' or at least have spent time in the West, although the motivations for these attacks are often unclear and factors such as the person's ethnicity appear to have been significant (see [Targeted incidents against returnees](#)).
- 2.3.3 In 2014, it was reported that two Afghan Hazaras were targeted and attacked by the Taliban. It was alleged that because, having recently returned from Australia, they were perceived as 'Western'. It has been widely reported that Hazaras – who are predominantly Shia Muslim and form the majority of Shia Muslims in Afghanistan – have been targeted by militants in Afghanistan. Evidence suggests that Hazaras may be at risk because of their ethnicity and/or religion. It is therefore likely that the reported incidents were due to the returnees' Hazara ethnicity as opposed to their perceived connections with a western country, political opinion, or because they had adopted Western values or appearance (see [Targeted incidents against returnees](#)).
- 2.3.4 There are anecdotal accounts of experiences of returnees, some of which reportedly included violent incidents. However, there is no evidence that these alleged violent incidents were a consequence of being 'Westernised'. There is no general indication that incidents of violence against returnees are due to any apparent 'Westernised' demeanour (see [Targeted incidents against returnees](#)).
- 2.3.5 In contrast, there are reports indicating that many returnees from the West are welcomed back into their families and society, particularly if they are seen as having made a success of themselves (see [Societal acceptance](#)).
- 2.3.6 Since the Taliban were ousted from power in 2001, large numbers of Afghans have travelled to Western countries – Europe, Australia, USA and Canada – many of these persons sought asylum. Thousands of these persons have subsequently returned to Afghanistan, including voluntarily. For example, in 2016, over 10,000 Afghans returned from European states collectively; while over 10,000 persons returned from the UK alone since 2004. Most of the returnees are young men, who have been returned to Kabul. While it is unknown how many of the returnees have become, or are perceived to have become, 'Westernised', many are likely to have adopted

‘Western’ tastes, behaviour and, in some cases, ‘values’ (see [Returnees from Western countries](#)).

- 2.3.7 Given the handful of reported attacks when compared against the large number (many thousands) of returns, there appears to be a very low risk of violent attack or abduction.
- 2.3.8 Some Afghans who return from Western states may face discrimination and social stigma. However, this appears to have been due to being perceived to have ‘failed’ by being returned, rather than being ‘Westernised’. Notwithstanding this, such treatment is unlikely, by its nature and/or repetition, to amount to persecution or serious harm (see [Societal views of returnees, and social norms](#) and [Discrimination and stigma](#)).
- 2.3.9 There is little, if any, evidence that ‘discrimination and stigma’ reportedly faced by returnees results from the person having become ‘Westernised’; but in most cases it is due to feelings of shame and failure of having sought and failed to gain asylum and therefore failed to meet their family and community’s expectation of their migration (see [Discrimination and stigma](#)).
- 2.3.10 For further guidance on assessing risk, see the [Asylum Instruction on Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status](#).

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2.4 Protection

- 2.4.1 Where the person’s fear is of persecution and/or serious harm from non-state actors, decision makers must assess whether the state can provide effective protection.
- 2.4.2 In areas controlled by AGEs, the state will be unable to provide effective protection (see the Country Policy and Information Note [Afghanistan: Fear of Anti-Government elements](#)).
- 2.4.3 In Kabul, and other districts, cities and towns controlled by the government, the authorities are generally willing and able to offer effective protection against any discrimination arising against perceived ‘Westernised’ returnees (see also the Country Policy and Information Note [Afghanistan: Fear of Anti-Government elements](#)).
- 2.4.4 For further guidance on assessing the availability or not of state protection, see the [Asylum Instruction on Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status](#).

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2.5 Internal relocation

- 2.5.1 Internal relocation may be both relevant and reasonable, and this will depend on the person’s individual circumstances.
- 2.5.2 In [AK \(Article 15\(c\)\) Afghanistan CG \[2012\] UKUT 00163\(IAC\) \(18 May 2012\)](#), which was heard on 14-15 March 2012, when assessing whether Kabul city was a viable internal relocation alternative, the Upper Tribunal found that in general, return to Kabul was neither unsafe nor unreasonable (para 249B (iv)).
- 2.5.3 The Upper Tribunal qualified the above point, holding that it would be unreasonable to expect lone women and female heads of household to

relocate internally without the support of a male network (para 249B (v)). See also the country policy and information note on [Afghanistan: Women fearing gender based harm/violence](#).

- 2.5.4 In general, where the threat is from non-state actors internal relocation to another area of Afghanistan is likely to be reasonable. Nevertheless, decision makers must consider the nature and origin of the threat as well as the individual circumstances and profile of the person.
- 2.5.5 For further guidance on internal relocation and the factors to be considered, see the [Asylum Instruction on Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status](#).

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2.6 Certification

- 2.6.1 Where a claim is refused, it is likely to be certifiable as 'clearly unfounded' under section 94 of the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002.
- 2.6.2 This is because there is no general indication that incidents of violence or discrimination against returnees are due to the person being 'Westernised' on account of having spent time in a Western country.
- 2.6.3 For further guidance on certification, see [Certification of Protection and Human Rights claims under section 94 of the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002 \(clearly unfounded claims\)](#).

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2.7 Further submissions

- 2.7.1 When further submissions are made on the basis of risk due to being Westernised, they will be considered to be clearly unfounded for the above reasons. They will not qualify as a fresh claim under paragraph 353 of the Immigration Rules as they do not create a realistic prospect of success for the same reasons. There is no right of appeal against the refusal of further submissions.
- 2.7.2 For guidance on further submissions, see the [Asylum instruction on Further submissions](#).

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3. Policy summary

- 3.1.1 Some people may be at risk for working with Western Governments or organisations on account of their perceived political opinion (see the Country Policy and Information Note [Afghanistan: Fear of Anti-Government elements](#)) but this is markedly different from being perceived as so-called 'Westernised'.
- 3.1.2 The few, limited reports about attacks on so-called 'Westernised' returnees' points to other motives, for example, ethnicity. There is little credible evidence to suggest this is a real risk in terms of numbers of returns against reported attacks against returnees.
- 3.1.3 The treatment of returnees generally points to social stigma – many sources cite this as the key challenge faced – but this is implied in terms of having 'failed' and/or the economic implications. Notwithstanding this, such

treatment is unlikely, by its nature and/or repetition, to amount to persecution or serious harm.

- 3.1.4 There is no general indication that incidents of violence against returnees are due to any apparent 'Westernised' demeanour.
- 3.1.5 There is no indication that 'discrimination and stigma' reportedly faced by returnees results from the person having become 'Westernised', but rather due to the perception of shame and failure of having sought and failed to gain asylum.

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4. Returnees from Western countries

4.1 Overview

4.1.1 A July 2015 Policy Brief, by the Peace Research Institute Oslo (PRIO), a non-profit research organisation, reported on the reintegration of Afghans after assisted return from the UK and Norway. The Policy Brief stated that most Afghan research participants (interviewed post-return) had not wanted to return to Afghanistan; however, many Afghans with European passports, interviewed in the UK and Norway, told PRIO they had visited Afghanistan on a short-term basis, mostly for family reasons¹.

4.1.2 The UNHCR Eligibility Guidelines for Assessing the International Protection Needs of Asylum-Seekers from Afghanistan, published 19 April 2016, noted that an individual may be targeted because of they are perceived as 'westernised' and thus associated with, or perceived as supportive of, the Government or the international community².

4.1.3 DFAT also noted:

'While Afghanistan generally accepts both voluntary and involuntary returns from western countries, in recent months the government has refused to grant landing permission for incoming flights on a number of occasions. Returnees from western countries almost exclusively return to Kabul. Most returnees have been single men rather than family groups. DFAT understands that many returnees choose to remain in Kabul for economic reasons rather than return to their home provinces. There are no tracking mechanisms for those returned to Afghanistan, and it is difficult to assess the conditions they face on return. DFAT has no information to suggest that returnees from western countries attract negative attention from state authorities for having sought and failed to gain asylum.

'The European Union (EU) and Afghanistan signed an agreement in October 2016 to organise the 'dignified, safe and orderly return to Afghanistan of Afghan nationals who do not fulfil the conditions to stay in the EU'. Germany subsequently announced that it would temporarily stop returning Afghan nationals in response to the 31 May 2017 attack in Kabul and the overall deteriorating security situation.

'DFAT is aware of occasional reports alleging that returnees from western countries have been kidnapped or otherwise targeted based on their having spent time in a western country... people who identified as having international associations face a high risk of being targeted by anti-

¹ Peace Research Institute Oslo, 'Can Afghans reintegrate after assisted return from Europe', July 2015, http://file.prio.no/publication_files/PRIO/Oeppen%20-%20Can%20Afghans%20Reintegrate%20after%20Assisted%20Return%20from%20Europe,%20PRIO%20Policy%20Brief%207-2015.pdf. Accessed: 22 November 2017

² UNHCR, 'Eligibility Guidelines for Assessing the International Protection Needs of Asylum-Seekers from Afghanistan', (page 42), 19 April 2016, available at: <http://www.refworld.org/docid/570f96564.html>. Accessed: 23 November 2017

government elements. This may possibly include returnees from western countries. However, DFAT understands that most returnees take measures to conceal their association with the country from which they have returned, and keep a low profile on return. DFAT assesses that people in this situation do not face a significantly higher risk of violence or discrimination than other Afghans with a similar ethnic and religious profile.³

4.1.4 In its September 2017 report on Hazaras in Afghanistan, DFAT assessed:

‘... that Hazaras who are openly affiliated with the government or the international community by way of employment, public statements or other associations, face a high risk of being targeted by anti-government elements. This risk, however, is true for other ethnicities in the same situation. DFAT assesses that Hazaras who have international connections [i.e. affiliated with the government or international community] face a low risk of violence as a result, provided they do not openly highlight their links. This is true for those Hazaras who have spent time in western countries.’⁴

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4.2 Number of returns

4.2.1 According to official EU statistics, since 2008 nearly 40,000 Afghan nationals were returned to Afghanistan by European countries, including Norway; over 10,000 of those returns occurred in 2016⁵. Since 2004, over 10,000 Afghans have voluntarily left or been removed from the UK⁶.

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5. Societal attitudes and treatment

5.1 Societal views of the West

5.1.1 Citing a range of sources⁷, the European Asylum Support Office (EASO), reported on the position for Afghan’s returnees from Western countries:

‘Broadly, Western “influence” on Afghan society, in recent decades due to the international military presence, is seen by Afghans with a mixture of expectation, admiration, suspicion, and animosity. Afghan society encompass a broad range of views about the West, from urban liberal elites and young professionals in Kabul, to strains of urban and rural Afghans,

³ Australian Government, Department for Foreign Affairs and Trade, ‘DFAT Country Information Report Afghanistan’, (paragraphs 5.20 to 5.22), 18 September 2017, <http://dfat.gov.au/about-us/publications/Documents/country-information-report-afghanistan.pdf>. Accessed: 23 November 2017

⁴ Australian Government, Department for Foreign Affairs and Trade, ‘DFAT Thematic Report on Hazaras in Afghanistan’, (paragraph 3.18), 18 September 2017, <http://dfat.gov.au/about-us/publications/Documents/country-information-report-hazaras-thematic.pdf>. Accessed: 23 November 2017

⁵ Eurostat, ‘Asylum and Managed Migration: Third country nationals returned following an order to leave - annual data (rounded)’, last update: 17 July 2017, <http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/asylum-and-managed-migration/data/database>. Accessed: 28 November 2017

⁶ Home Office, ‘National Statistics: List of Tables’, (Returns), 24 August 2017, <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/immigration-statistics-april-to-june-2017/list-of-tables#returns>. Accessed: 30 November 2017

⁷ European Asylum Support Office, ‘EASO Country of Origin Report: Afghanistan – Individuals targeted under societal and legal norms’, (page 13), December 2017, https://coi.easo.europa.eu/administration/easo/PLib/Afghanistan_targeting_society.pdf. Accessed 20 December 2017

including youth, who align with a range of Islamic and fundamentalist ideologies, including among educated youth. In the conservative Afghan societal context, sources describe urbanites in Kabul as relatively more progressive in comparison to other more conservative areas of the country. Despite a very traditional cultural context, Western trends and influences such as fashions, entertainment and tattoos are increasingly popular among younger Afghans, according to some sources. Also, Kabul city has a number of restaurants and cafes where urbanite Afghan men and women mix and that are frequented by Westerners, though these have also been attacked by insurgents or raided by police. Dr. Schuster described Kabul city itself as a collection of different communities, including some that are very conservative. She explained that there is no “single attitude” toward “Westernisation” in Afghan society. She gave the view that there are significant elements of the population and society who are quite open about “Western values”, or who have worked with international forces, NGOs, or organisations, although there are also sufficient conservative elements in society, and also within individual families, that could pose a threat to someone returning from Europe. Abubakar Siddique gave the view that in Afghanistan, “Westernisation” entails broader societal and political attitudes as well as more narrowly defined appearances and fashion choices.’⁸

5.1.2 The report continued:

‘Abubakar Siddique also stated that there is a strong difference in how the West is seen in rural areas, versus in the city of Kabul, noting though that saying the “wrong thing at the wrong time” can cause a negative reaction. The programme officer also said that saying something against Islam or society’s ideas can turn a situation bad quickly, giving the 2015 example of the mob killing of Farkhunda Malikzada. Dr. Schuster gave the opinion that the development of a critical stance on Islam while in the West is what puts people most at risk of being targeted, particularly young people who have spent extended periods in Europe. She noted however, that this also very much depends on an individual’s capacity to selfcensor, their maturity level, mental health, and ability to be astute about their social surroundings in Afghanistan and in picking up on what is inappropriate to say and do. Dr. Schuster explained that factors such as the specific location where a person is returning to, and the nature and attitudes of their immediate community and family are significant in whether a person returning from the West will encounter problems. She gave the opinion that ‘it is extremely difficult to predict how a returnee is going to be received’ in this respect as Afghan society has different degrees of tolerance for “Westernisation”. She explained that even within areas that are considered relatively safe, such as Dahst-e Barchi, in west Kabul, within individual families, a person may have individuals with strongly conservative views about notions of “Westernisation”.’⁹

⁸ European Asylum Support Office, ‘EASO Country of Origin Report: Afghanistan – Individuals targeted under societal and legal norms’, (pages 99-100), December 2017, https://coi.easo.europa.eu/administration/easo/PLib/Afghanistan_targeting_society.pdf. Accessed 20 December 2017

⁹ European Asylum Support Office, ‘EASO Country of Origin Report: Afghanistan – Individuals

5.2 Societal views of returnees, and social norms

5.2.1 The EASO report cited the contrasting views on how returnees were perceived by their families and society, which often depended on context:

‘In correspondence with EASO for this report, Ali M. Latifi, a Kabul-based Afghan journalist who has reported on Afghan refugees in Greece and Istanbul since 2013, stated that Afghans who make themselves stand out in one way or another can be perceived as “Westernised,” whether that is people who have lived their entire lives in Afghanistan and never left, Afghans who leave to study and return, or Afghans who left as children and returned as adult. The issue, he stated, is how a person ‘carries themselves’ while in Afghanistan. Afghans who grew up in Iran may be seen as “Iranised” or “not Afghan” enough by society, according to the programme officer. Afghans of Iranian upbringing are reportedly teased and face difficulties obtaining work because of having a particular accent. For instance, an article by Afghanistan Today about a young Afghan who used to live in Iran and who started a clothing design group in Kabul explains that his “Western” appearance and style, which is nevertheless popular among Afghan youth, has sometimes drawn sarcastic and offensive comments, or being called “gay”, or “Iranian” (Iranigak). Dr. Schuster remarked that in Afghanistan, a person must be constantly conscious about one’s actions, body language and how and what one is saying and how one is perceived. Someone who comes back from Europe and does not know the unspoken rules, forgets, errs, or makes mistakes, could be perceived to be “cheeky”, rude, or disrespectful.’¹⁰

5.2.2 According to the opinion of Ali Latifi, cited in the EASO report

‘... a person would have to be “very visible and very vocal” in “trying to seem different” to be perceived as “Westernised” and would have to go “out of your way” to make oneself seem Westernised. He stated that a person who makes themselves stand out by the way they dress or by using a lot of excessive foreign words will be seen as “Westernised”. He said that in rural areas, if a person does not try to adhere to local customs and standards, a person will stand out even more.’¹¹

5.2.3 The EASO report further noted:

‘According to IOM’s Masood Ahmadi, not respecting community norms may cause problems for a person. He explained that for young people who grew up in Europe, the problems may not come from society itself, but rather from

targeted under societal and legal norms’, (page 100), December 2017, https://coi.easo.europa.eu/administration/easo/PLib/Afghanistan_targeting_society.pdf. Accessed 20 December 2017

¹⁰ European Asylum Support Office, ‘EASO Country of Origin Report: Afghanistan – Individuals targeted under societal and legal norms’, (page 101), December 2017, https://coi.easo.europa.eu/administration/easo/PLib/Afghanistan_targeting_society.pdf. Accessed 20 December 2017

¹¹ European Asylum Support Office, ‘EASO Country of Origin Report: Afghanistan – Individuals targeted under societal and legal norms’, (page 102), December 2017, https://coi.easo.europa.eu/administration/easo/PLib/Afghanistan_targeting_society.pdf. Accessed 20 December 2017

the person's ability to adjust and reintegrate. He gave the view that the length of time a person spends in Europe and the degree to which that person has changed as a result will also affect the individual likelihood of encountering particular difficulties with reintegration in Afghan society. He stated that smooth reintegration into society is linked to the duration the person has spent outside the country and availability of network support. According to Abubakar Siddique, the time a person spends outside Afghanistan in this way has an impact on reintegration: contrasting someone who internalised the experience, with someone who knows and understands the local culture and customs. Ali Latifi noted that Afghans returning who do not adhere to local customs can "play it off as being urbanised" as the reason they do not know the local custom. He gave the view that it is more offensive when a person knows that there are local customs or traditions to be adhered to and the person chooses not to follow them or breaks them for the sake of it, which is a sign of disrespect.¹²

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5.3 Societal acceptance

5.3.1 The EASO report noted:

'According to a 2016 study on masculinity in Afghanistan by AREU, Afghan society links a man's ability to provide for his family with his self-image and honour, and as such, set high expectations and high pressure on such gendered definitions of integrity. Western and northern Europe hold high "symbolic value" and notions of successful migration are linked to personal and family honour and community standing in Afghanistan. A 2014 report on unaccompanied Afghan minors by the Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit (AREU) and UNHCR also explains that, Afghan children who go abroad and send back remittances are "held in high regard" by their communities at home, which frequently encourages other families to send their unaccompanied children on the journey also. According to Abubakar Siddique, a senior correspondent for Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL) and RFE/RL's Afghanistan-focused website, Gandhara, people who come back from the West are often looked up to as a model to emulate. Masood Ahmadi, the national programme manager on return, reintegration, and resettlement for IOM Afghanistan explained in correspondence with EASO for this report, that in his experience and based on interviews with Afghan returnees, most are positively received back by their families, relatives and communities after having gone to Europe.'¹³

5.3.2 The EASO report noted that some sources stated that:

'Afghans who return from the West are looked up to and positively received by their communities and families. According to Neamat Nojumi, returning

¹² European Asylum Support Office, 'EASO Country of Origin Report: Afghanistan – Individuals targeted under societal and legal norms', (pages 103-104), December 2017, https://coi.easo.europa.eu/administration/easo/PLib/Afghanistan_targeting_society.pdf. Accessed 20 December 2017

¹³ European Asylum Support Office, 'EASO Country of Origin Report: Afghanistan – Individuals targeted under societal and legal norms', (page 96), December 2017, https://coi.easo.europa.eu/administration/easo/PLib/Afghanistan_targeting_society.pdf. Accessed 20 December 2017

from a study in the West is a significant gain for the family and as well as for the community; by contrast, being deported is a significant loss, and the impact on the person and his family is seen negatively. Ali Latifi explained that there will always be comments, jokes, or doubts when a person returns to Afghanistan after an absence, giving examples of Afghans who leave to go study and upon return are teased by family for becoming “Americanised” after going to the US. He added such teasing and joking is “natural” after an Afghan returns; however, to avoid abuse or ostracisation, a person needs to adapt to the customs and practices of the local culture.¹⁴

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5.4 Discrimination and stigma

- 5.4.1 Refugee Support Network (RSN) monitored 25 returnees (former unaccompanied minors) between March 2014 and March 2015. RSN identified 3 key challenges affecting reintegration following return to Afghanistan: financial difficulties; having to move out of Kabul; and unable to live with family members¹⁵.
- 5.4.2 The RSN report frequently stated that being identified as a returnee exposed the returnee to ‘discrimination’ and ‘stigma’. The report noted ‘Some young people are not welcomed by family as they have returned from the UK without having met family expectations of their initial migration, while, for others families’ resources are too limited for them to provide for a returning young person.’¹⁶
- 5.4.3 Asylos, a global network of volunteers providing free-of-charge Country of Origin Information (COI) research for lawyers helping asylum seekers with their claim, published a report in August 2017 on ‘Afghanistan: Situation of young male “Westernised” returnees to Kabul’. The report combined publicly available COI alongside written or oral contributions by academics and/or practitioners with a specific expertise on Afghanistan¹⁷.
- 5.4.4 The Asylos report cited an article by academics Liza Schuster and Nassim Majidi, dated October 2014, which explored the stigma of failure and ‘contamination’ reportedly attached to those who had been deported. The cited article noted that young people deported to Afghanistan and with signs of cultural change, for example, clothing, behaviour, and accent, were sometimes seen by family and community as ‘contaminated’. The stigma of

¹⁴ European Asylum Support Office, ‘EASO Country of Origin Report: Afghanistan – Individuals targeted under societal and legal norms’, (page 102), December 2017, https://coi.easo.europa.eu/administration/easo/PLib/Afghanistan_targeting_society.pdf. Accessed 20 December 2017

¹⁵ Refugee Support Network, ‘After Return: Documenting the experiences of young people forcibly removed to Afghanistan’, (page 18), April 2016, https://hubble-live-assets.s3.amazonaws.com/rsn/attachment/file/8/After_return_April_2016.pdf. Accessed: 22 November 2017

¹⁶ Refugee Support Network, ‘After Return: Documenting the experiences of young people forcibly removed to Afghanistan’, (page 22), April 2016, https://hubble-live-assets.s3.amazonaws.com/rsn/attachment/file/8/After_return_April_2016.pdf. Accessed: 22 November 2017

¹⁷ Asylos, ‘Afghanistan: Situation of young male “Westernised” returnees to Kabul’, (pages 2 and 4), August 2017, <https://asylos.eu/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/AFG2017-05-Afghanistan-Situation-of-young-male-Westernised-returnees-to-Kabul-1.pdf>. Accessed 22 November 2017

contamination was multiplied for those who returned without economic or social status although the article added that this could be mitigated if the person returned as a successful migrant and was thus seen as bringing benefits to their family¹⁸.

- 5.4.5 The Schuster/Majidi article said ‘... in the case of those deported from Europe, it seems the stigma is more likely to be that of failure ...’ adding ‘... therefore returnees experience stigma, discrimination and shame due to discrepancies between what is socially expected and what is the actual reality.’¹⁹
- 5.4.6 According to the July 2015 PRIO Policy Brief, most returnees expressed a general fear of violence; difficulties in finding employment; and the shame of having disappointed their family who had either saved or borrowed money for their migration²⁰.
- 5.4.7 The PRIO Policy Brief noted that a small minority of research participants reportedly faced specific threats after returning, usually in the form of violent demands for money, because of the assumption, according to one interviewee, that returnees from Europe were wealthy. Another assumption returnees reportedly faced was that they had become “westernised” or “anti-Islamic” in Europe. One interviewee claimed he was threatened that he had to give money to an insurgency group to prove his “non-Western” credentials²¹.
- 5.4.8 Abdul Ghafoor, Director of Afghanistan Migrants Advice and Support Organisation (AMASO), Kabul, interviewed in May 2017 by Asylos, said that some returnees did not want to tell their families they had been deported because deportation carried a huge stigma, and due to feelings of failure²².
- 5.4.9 In correspondence with Asylos in June 2017, Dr. Anicée Van Engeland, a UK-based scholar with extensive research experience in Afghanistan, provided her opinion on returnees to Afghanistan and indicated that many young male returnees bring shame on their family and themselves, and are seen as a failure if they return without any financial resources²³.

¹⁸ Asylos, ‘Afghanistan: Situation of young male “Westernised” returnees to Kabul’, (page 32), August 2017, <https://asylos.eu/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/AFG2017-05-Afghanistan-Situation-of-young-male-Westernised-returnees-to-Kabul-1.pdf>. Accessed 22 November 2017

¹⁹ Asylos, ‘Afghanistan: Situation of young male “Westernised” returnees to Kabul’, (page 31), August 2017, <https://asylos.eu/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/AFG2017-05-Afghanistan-Situation-of-young-male-Westernised-returnees-to-Kabul-1.pdf>. Accessed 22 November 2017

²⁰ Peace Research Institute Oslo, ‘Can Afghans reintegrate after assisted return from Europe’, July 2015, http://file.prio.no/publication_files/PRIO/Oeppen%20-%20Can%20Afghans%20Reintegrate%20after%20Assisted%20Return%20from%20Europe,%20PRIO%20Policy%20Brief%207-2015.pdf. Accessed: 22 November 2017

²¹ Peace Research Institute Oslo, ‘Can Afghans reintegrate after assisted return from Europe’, July 2015, http://file.prio.no/publication_files/PRIO/Oeppen%20-%20Can%20Afghans%20Reintegrate%20after%20Assisted%20Return%20from%20Europe,%20PRIO%20Policy%20Brief%207-2015.pdf. Accessed: 22 November 2017

²² Asylos, ‘Afghanistan: Situation of young male “Westernised” returnees to Kabul’, (Annex 2, pages 82-83), August 2017, <https://asylos.eu/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/AFG2017-05-Afghanistan-Situation-of-young-male-Westernised-returnees-to-Kabul-1.pdf>. Accessed 22 November 2017

²³ Asylos, ‘Afghanistan: Situation of young male “Westernised” returnees to Kabul’, (Annex 3, pages 89 and 92), August 2017, <https://asylos.eu/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/AFG2017-05-Afghanistan-Situation-of-young-male-Westernised-returnees-to-Kabul-1.pdf>. Accessed 22 November 2017

- 5.4.10 In its report 'Afghanistan: No Safe Country For Refugees', published August 2016 (translated into English in May 2017), PRO ASYL, a human rights and refugee protection organisation, based in Germany, noted the stigma of returnees who may be deemed to have failed or acted irresponsibly²⁴.

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5.5 Targeted incidents against returnees

- 5.5.1 RSN reported that some individuals were targeted due to their status as a returnee:
- 'Seven young returnees reported incidents in which other young people were targeted simply because they were a returnee, and an additional two articulated their perception that being a returnee puts individuals at particular risk of attack.
- 'Young returnees believed that this was because, in the eyes of the Taliban and local residents alike, "those who have gone to European countries and now have come back are spying for those countries".'²⁵
- 5.5.2 RSN cited examples of incidents allegedly arising due to the person's returnee status. Without provided further details, the report noted:
- 'Seven examples are cited of specific incidents arising due to returnee status. In one case, a young returnee was held up at gunpoint by someone who said, "we know you have come back from UK" (R06, ILD), a second knew of a "guy [who] had returned from UK voluntarily and [who] was kidnapped in our area" (R13, IAR), while a third was warned by relatives not to return to his home province because his "life would be in danger if the militant extremist find out I have been to UK and have returned back. They don't know what deportation means! They would kill me on the spot calling me infidel and spy" (R25, ILD). A fourth young person told of the abduction by the Taliban of an older returnee interpreter working with ISAF [International Security Assistance Force], and a fifth of the killing of another older returnee affiliated with the ANA [Afghan National Army].'²⁶
- 5.5.3 Returnees gave RSN 2 examples of former unaccompanied minors being killed for reportedly having spent time in a European country; one "boy" [age was not provided] who had recently returned from the UK was reportedly targeted outside a mosque in his home area; another returnee from Norway

²⁴ PRO ASYL, 'Afghanistan: No Safe Country For Refugees', (page 14), May 2017 (first published in German in August 2016), <https://www.proasyl.de/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/PRO-ASYL-Afghanistan-Broschuere-englisch-web-Mai17.pdf>. Accessed: 24 November 2017

²⁵ Refugee Support Network, 'After Return: Documenting the experiences of young people forcibly removed to Afghanistan', (page 28), April 2016, https://hubble-live-assets.s3.amazonaws.com/rsn/attachment/file/8/After_return_April_2016.pdf. Accessed: 22 November 2017

²⁶ Refugee Support Network, 'After Return: Documenting the experiences of young people forcibly removed to Afghanistan', (page 29), April 2016, https://hubble-live-assets.s3.amazonaws.com/rsn/attachment/file/8/After_return_April_2016.pdf. Accessed: 22 November 2017

was cited as being killed by the Taliban because they found his international papers and bank card²⁷.

- 5.5.4 In written correspondence with Asylos in June 2017, Tim Foxley, an independent political analyst focussing on Afghanistan, stated there were '...several examples of persecution by insurgent groups based on chance encounters'. However, Mr Foxley went on to cite only 2 specific examples of violence against purported 'westernised' Afghans, stating:

'A report from September 2014 highlighted the fate of an Afghan returning to Afghanistan after many 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.'²⁸

- 5.5.5 Several media sources reported on the murder of Sayed Habib Musawi, an Afghan-Australian dual national who held an Australian passport, who was captured by Taliban militants on 6 September 2014 whilst travelling on a bus between Ghazni province and Kabul. Mr Musawi's body was later found with signs of torture in a Taliban-held area. Ghazni's deputy governor, Mohammed Ali Ahmadi, said Mr Musawi had been killed because he was an Australian citizen^{29 30 31}. Media reports also indicated that Mr Musawi was of Hazara ethnicity³². Sources did not consistently state that it is because Mr Musawi was westernised that he was targeted.

- 5.5.6 In October 2014, The Guardian reported on the kidnap and torture of Zainullah Naseri, an Afghan Hazara deported to Afghanistan from Australia in August 2014. Mr Naseri claimed he was kidnapped by the Taliban at a roadside checkpoint and tortured for two days before escaping. The kidnap reportedly took place a week before Mr Musawi was taken, along the same

²⁷ Refugee Support Network, 'After Return: Documenting the experiences of young people forcibly removed to Afghanistan', (pages 29-30), April 2016, https://hubble-live-assets.s3.amazonaws.com/rsn/attachment/file/8/After_return_April_2016.pdf. Accessed: 22 November 2017

²⁸ Asylos, 'Afghanistan: Situation of young male "Westernised" returnees to Kabul', (pages 33-34), August 2017, <https://asylos.eu/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/AFG2017-05-Afghanistan-Situation-of-young-male-Westernised-returnees-to-Kabul-1.pdf>. Accessed 22 November 2017

²⁹ ABC News, 'Daughter thought dual citizen tortured and killed in Afghanistan would be ransomed and released', 29 September 2014, <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2014-09-29/daughter-of-murdered-afghan-australian-held-hopes-of-ransom/5775004>. Accessed: 23 November 2017

³⁰ The Australian, 'Australian man Sayed Habib 'tortured and killed by Taliban', 29 September 2014, <http://www.theaustralian.com.au/news/nation/australian-man-sayed-habib-tortured-and-killed-by-taliban/news-story/be118fde9aba2ac55dafb79524c39d60>. Accessed: 23 November 2017

³¹ The Guardian, 'Australian man tortured and killed by Taliban in Afghanistan, family says', 28 September 2014, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/sep/28/australian-man-tortured-and-killed-by-taliban-in-afghanistan-family-says>. Accessed: 23 November 2017

³² The Sydney Morning Herald, 'Son of Afghan-Australian killed by Taliban denied refugee status', 29 September 2014, <http://www.smh.com.au/national/son-of-afghanaustralian-killed-by-taliban-denied-refugee-status-20140929-10nrtp.html>; The Guardian, 'Australian man tortured and killed by Taliban in Afghanistan, family says', 28 September 2014, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/sep/28/australian-man-tortured-and-killed-by-taliban-in-afghanistan-family-says>. Accessed: 23 November 2017

highway³³. ABC News provided footage and a transcript, in which Afghan police say shows the interrogation of Mr Naseri after he was stopped at a police post following his escape from the Taliban. Mr Naseri told police the Taliban took his Australian driver's license, beat him, and said 'This boy is from Australia. That country is full of infidels.'³⁴

- 5.5.7 In 2015, the Guardian reported the case of two Hazara teen brothers were deported from Denmark; shortly after arrival and travel to their home province of Wardak, they were robbed and the younger brother went missing. He was later found dead. According to his own declarations, the boy's older brother claimed the Taliban killed him due to his Hazara ethnicity.³⁵
- 5.5.8 In contrast, the national programme manager on return, reintegration, and resettlement for the International Organization for Migration (IOM) Afghanistan, Masood Ahmadi, explained in email correspondence with the European Asylum Support Office (EASO) that '...based on his information on returnees to Afghanistan, there have been no ethnically-based killings of returnees coming back from Western countries, unless someone becomes caught in a crossfire between government forces and insurgents.'³⁶
- 5.5.9 Sources have reported that Hazaras – who are predominantly Shia Muslim and form the majority of Shia Muslims in Afghanistan – have been targeted by militants in Afghanistan^{37 38}. As reported by The Guardian '... the Hazara community, [...] has been regularly persecuted by the Taliban. Several other murders of religious and ethnic minorities have recently occurred in the area where Habib [Musawi] was taken.'³⁹ Also reporting on Mr Musawi's death in September 2014, ABC News noted 'In the last week, Taliban fighters have

³³ The Guardian, 'Torture' of deported Afghan Hazara asylum seeker to be investigated', 9 October 2014, <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2014/oct/09/torture-of-deported-afghan-hazara-asylum-seeker-to-be-investigated>. Accessed: 24 November 2017

³⁴ ABC News, 'Returned Hazara held hostage by Taliban', 27 October 2014, <http://www.abc.net.au/lateline/returned-hazara-held-hostage-by-taliban/5845892>. Accessed: 24 November 2017

³⁵ The Guardian, 'Tragic tale of Afghan brothers sent home from Denmark to an uncertain fate', 6 October 2015, <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2015/oct/06/tragic-tale-afghan-brothers-sent-home-from-denmark-to-an-uncertain-fate>. Accessed: 20 December 2017

³⁶ European Asylum Support Office, 'EASO Country of Origin Report: Afghanistan – Individuals targeted under societal and legal norms', (page 95), December 2017, https://coi.easo.europa.eu/administration/easo/PLib/Afghanistan_targeting_society.pdf. Accessed 20 December 2017

³⁷ UNAMA, 'Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict: Attacks Against Places of Worship, Religious Leaders and Worshippers', (footnote 5, page 3), 7 November 2017, https://unama.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/unama_report_on_attacks_against_places_of_worship_7nov2017_0.pdf. Accessed: 24 November 2017

³⁸ Human Rights Watch, 'Afghanistan's Shia Hazara Suffer Latest Atrocity', 13 October 2016, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2016/10/13/afghanistans-shia-hazara-suffer-latest-atrocity>. Accessed: 24 November 2017

³⁹ The Guardian, 'Australian man tortured and killed by Taliban in Afghanistan, family says', 28 September 2014, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/sep/28/australian-man-tortured-and-killed-by-taliban-in-afghanistan-family-says>. Accessed: 23 November 2017

killed more than 100 people in that area...'⁴⁰ Kidnappings for ransom were common in Afghanistan^{41 42}.

- 5.5.10 In a Bureau of Investigative Journalism report, dated 2015, Dr Liza Schuster, a City University academic based in Kabul, having interviewed around 100 failed asylum seekers, stated that returnees from Europe were 'often seen as a source of both suspicion and money'. The report cited one example of a returnee who said he felt like a stranger due to the way he dressed, and because he was unable to communicate effectively. He claimed he was kidnapped and beaten by a gang demanding money. The report also stated '... little is known of what happens to those that are sent back to Afghanistan.'⁴³ Other reports cited by EASO suggested individuals returning from the West feared being, or had reportedly been, targeted because of their perceived wealth⁴⁴.
- 5.5.11 In an April 2016 interview with Asylos, Shoaib Sharifi, an independent Afghan documentary filmmaker and journalist, considered that returnees may be targeted if their views or clothing were perceived as Western. However, he stated that he had no knowledge of a returnee being killed or targeted following return from a Western country, or because they may be regarded as practicing a Western lifestyle⁴⁵.
- 5.5.12 Dr Anicée Van Engeland told Asylos that returnees faced a 'clear rejection' by society, particularly if they had changed their cultural or traditional values, or religious doctrine. Dr Van Engeland cited changes that justified family exclusion included: accent; speaking when not being spoken to; dress; going to the gym; or using Skype to contact friends abroad⁴⁶.
- 5.5.13 When asked by Asylos how returnees from Europe were perceived, Abdul Ghafoor stated that social acceptance depended on the society in which a returnee lived. Mr Ghafoor noted that social acceptance in Kabul, for example, might be easier. Mr Ghafoor said that it was easy to recognise a

⁴⁰ ABC News, 'Daughter thought dual citizen tortured and killed in Afghanistan would be ransomed and released', 29 September 2014, <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2014-09-29/daughter-of-murdered-afghan-australian-held-hopes-of-ransom/5775004>. Accessed: 23 November 2017

⁴¹ UNAMA, 'Afghanistan Annual Report on Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict: 2016', February 2017, https://unama.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/protection_of_civilians_in_armed_conflict_annual_report_2016_final280317.pdf. Accessed: 24 November 2017

⁴² US Department of State, 'Country Report on Human Rights Practices for 2016', 3 March 2017, <http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/hrrpt/humanrightsreport/index.htm?year=2016&dld=265530>. Accessed: 24 November 2017

⁴³ The Bureau of Investigative Journalism, 'From Kent to Kabul: The Former Asylum Seeking Children Sent Back to Afghanistan', 17 July 2015, <http://labs.thebureauinvestigates.com/from-kent-to-kabul/>. Accessed 22 November 2017

⁴⁴ European Asylum Support Office, 'EASO Country of Origin Report: Afghanistan – Individuals targeted under societal and legal norms', (page 99), December 2017, https://coi.easo.europa.eu/administration/easo/PLib/Afghanistan_targeting_society.pdf. Accessed 20 December 2017

⁴⁵ Asylos, 'Afghanistan: Situation of young male "Westernised" returnees to Kabul', (Annex 5, page 107), August 2017, <https://asylos.eu/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/AFG2017-05-Afghanistan-Situation-of-young-male-Westernised-returnees-to-Kabul-1.pdf>. Accessed 22 November 2017

⁴⁶ Asylos, 'Afghanistan: Situation of young male "Westernised" returnees to Kabul', (Annex 3, pages 91-92), August 2017, <https://asylos.eu/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/AFG2017-05-Afghanistan-Situation-of-young-male-Westernised-returnees-to-Kabul-1.pdf>. Accessed 22 November 2017

person who had been to Europe by their clothes or haircut, adding ‘there are times they are excluded from the society.’⁴⁷

5.5.14 Abdul Ghafoor referred to a case in which he claimed a returnee from Germany, deported to Afghanistan in January or February 2017, was ‘killed 2 or 3 weeks ago’. He provided no further information on the killing⁴⁸. IOM indicated in correspondence with EASO that the killing of a returnee from Germany ‘has not been confirmed by any reliable sources’⁴⁹. Corroborating information on any incident concerning an Afghan deportee from Germany could not be found amongst the sources consulted by CPIT.

5.5.15 The EASO report noted that:

‘Abubakar Siddique expressed the view that returnees are not targeted solely because they have returned from the West; he said it may be used against someone for individualistic disputes, explaining that accusations about one’s past in the West can be instrumentalised to target a person for other, different reasons. For example, a neighbour knows about a person’s past in a Western country and this can be used to start a negative rumour about someone or to accuse them of something later. Marieke van Houte also noted that mistrust in the community generated fear for returnees that neighbours might use their migration history against them, such as informing the Taliban because of jealousy or envy. In a similar way, Masood Ahmadi said that rumours from the local population were problematic for those returning, though IOM had not documented any specific cases of targeting of Afghans returned from the West on the basis of “Westernisation”.’⁵⁰

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⁴⁷ Asylos, ‘Afghanistan: Situation of young male “Westernised” returnees to Kabul’, (Annex 2, page 83), August 2017, <https://asylos.eu/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/AFG2017-05-Afghanistan-Situation-of-young-male-Westernised-returnees-to-Kabul-1.pdf>. Accessed 22 November 2017

⁴⁸ Asylos, ‘Afghanistan: Situation of young male “Westernised” returnees to Kabul’, (Annex 2, page 83), August 2017, <https://asylos.eu/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/AFG2017-05-Afghanistan-Situation-of-young-male-Westernised-returnees-to-Kabul-1.pdf>. Accessed 22 November 2017

⁴⁹ European Asylum Support Office, ‘EASO Country of Origin Report: Afghanistan – Individuals targeted under societal and legal norms’, (page 96), December 2017, https://coi.easo.europa.eu/administration/easo/PLib/Afghanistan_targeting_society.pdf. Accessed 20 December 2017

⁵⁰ European Asylum Support Office, ‘EASO Country of Origin Report: Afghanistan – Individuals targeted under societal and legal norms’, (page 102), December 2017, https://coi.easo.europa.eu/administration/easo/PLib/Afghanistan_targeting_society.pdf. Accessed 20 December 2017

Annex A

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Version control and contacts

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Clearance

Below is information on when this note was cleared:

- version **1.0**
- valid from **16 January 2018**

Changes from last version of this note

First version.

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