



Afghanistan – Researched and compiled by the Refugee Documentation Centre of Ireland on 25 January 2018

Information on treatment of returnees to Afghanistan, particularly deportees/failed asylum seekers or those who have returned from studying abroad.

The 2016 US Department of State country report on Afghanistan, in a section titled “Freedom of Movement, Internally Displaced Persons, Protection of Refugees, and Stateless Persons” (paragraph headed “Emigration and Repatriation”), states:

“Refugee returns to the country rose in the last half of the year. As of mid-November UNHCR had assisted the return of more than 370,000 registered refugees (99 percent of whom returned from Pakistan), greatly surpassing the 58,460 returns in 2015. According to UNHCR surveys of returnees at arrival centers, many returnees claimed they left Pakistan due to increased rates of harassment and extortion and because they no longer believed they could stay in their homes safely or find jobs. Other reasons they cited included maintaining family unity with undocumented Afghans following their deportation, enhanced border controls, and uncertainty about legal status. Former refugees constituted more than 20 percent of the total country population, yet the government lacked the capacity to integrate large numbers of new arrivals due to continuing insecurity, limited employment opportunities, poor development, and budgetary constraints.” (US Department of State (3 March 2017) *2016 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices*, p.26)

A report jointly published by the Norwegian Refugee Council & Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, in a section titled “What Kind Of Durable Solutions Do IDPs Want?”, states:

“Returnee-IDPs are less likely than IDPs to still own housing, land or property in their places or origin, and across both groups those currently living in Kabul are the least likely to have assets to return to. The number of times people have been displaced and the length of displacement are also significant. Thirty-one per cent of those displaced once said they had assets to go back to, compared with 20 per cent of those displaced twice. Among people displaced for a year or less the figure was 36 per cent, compared with 21 per cent for those displaced for two years or more.” (Norwegian Refugee Council & Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (24 January 2018) *Escaping War: Where To Next?*, p.42)

A Glossary included in this report defines Returnee-IDPs as follows:

“Returnees become de facto IDPs in Afghanistan if they ‘are unable to settle in their homes and/or places of origin because of insecurity resulting from armed conflict, generalized violence or violations of human rights, landmines or ERW contamination on their land, land disputes or tribal disputes’. This

study refers to such people as returnee-IDPs. Returnees also become IDPs if they are unable to settle in their places of origin because of socioeconomic issues such as the loss of property and assets, or a lack of livelihood opportunities or other services as a consequence of their displacement. This study also considers such people returnee-IDPs on the basis that they may be exposed to a broad range of protection risks as a result of threats and vulnerabilities specific to their displacement.” (ibid, p.6)

A report from the United States Institute of Peace, in a paragraph headed “Insecurity and Exposure to Violent Conflict”

“Many returnees express dismay with their situation and the dearth of options open to them. Returnees are exposed to higher risks of violent conflict. Lack of information and social connections in the places to which they return add to their vulnerability. Their experiences upon return can impact their levels of confidence and trust in the government to represent their interests and provide for their basic needs. This can dispose returnees toward groups fighting the Afghan government. Other returnees become internally displaced as a result of insecurity in their areas of origin. Where the government is largely absent, young male returnees are particularly at risk for recruitment into violent extremist groups and criminal networks. Their high visibility in rural areas, social isolation, and lack of legitimate income opportunities make them easy targets for recruitment. NGOs working with returnees believe that competing violent extremist groups, such as the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham, may be more attractive for returnees because of the higher financial incentives they provide.” (United States Institute of Peace (January 2016) *The Forced Return of Afghan Refugees and Implications for Stability*, p.3)

A report published by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade of Australia, in a section headed “Conditions for Returnees” (paragraph 5.22), states:

“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. As noted in ‘People associated with the government or international community’, people who identified as having international associations face a high risk of being targeted by anti-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.” (Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (Australia) (18 September 2017) *DFAT Country Information Report Afghanistan*)

A report published by UK-registered charity the Refugee Support Network, in a chapter titled “Afghanistan overview”, states:

“The situation faced by the returnee population is in fact bleaker, with unemployment and difficulties securing a sustainable livelihood an especial challenge for returnees and IDPs, particularly those attempting to re-settle in Kabul and Herat. Whilst there is funding available to support child returnees, there is almost no funding available for those aged 18 and over. There are

limited support structures in place for returnees, especially those returning from Europe, and a growing burden on families to provide assistance, where contact with them is possible. These factors are leading increasing numbers of returnees to consider, or attempt, leaving Afghanistan a second time, and to take similarly dangerous risks in doing so.” (Refugee Support Network (1 April 2016) *After Return*, p.13)

In a chapter titled “Reintegration” (sub-section headed “Security”) this report states:

“Security, or lack of it, is the dominant factor informing young returnees’ location in Afghanistan. The young returnees monitored have prioritised security (or perceptions of security) over the whereabouts of family, employment opportunities and cost of living when making decisions about location. One young returnee described how insecurity has been a barrier to him reuniting with his family, saying ‘my mum and sister are in Lashkar Gar, but it’s too dangerous for me to be there... I would like to see my mum and my sister and they want to see me, but it is very dangerous to travel to Helmand” (ibid, p.18)

See also section in this chapter headed “Employment opportunities and cost of living” which states:

“it must be noted here that employment prospects were the third most significant factor affecting young returnees’ location or moves, with six young people citing this as a strong influence. One young returnee, for example, explained how he ‘came to Kabul for the search of work, but I could not stay there more than a day - there was no work, and the expenses were too high so I chose to go back to Jalalabad’. Other young people have felt compelled to move away from family in order to attempt to find work, and for some, the lack of employment opportunities have fuelled their desire to leave Afghanistan again. One told us that having failed to find work in his current province, he would be forced to ‘go to another province or the capital...and if I don’t find work there I will have to try to go back to another European country rather than starving here in Afghanistan.’ (ibid, p.19)

An article from UK newspaper The Independent states:

“Those deported have mostly spent their formative years in Britain living with foster parents, taking GCSEs and A-levels, and having little or no contact with the country of their birth. But, under Britain’s immigration policies, their ‘leave to remain’ is automatically cancelled when they are 18 and they are in line for deportation. In many cases, those sent back no longer know where their families live, having gone years without contact. Their Westernised mannerisms and accents also mean they are often regarded with suspicion in Afghanistan, and some told the Bureau they have been left homeless, chased by the Taliban, kidnapped, ransomed and beaten.” (The Independent (17 July 2015) *Hundreds of Afghans who grew up in UK face deportation to country they 'barely remember'*)

A BBC News report on Afghans deported from the UK states:

“As an Afghan, you might expect Najib to be used to the Taliban violence, but the city is as strange to him as it would be to any foreigner.

He spent much of his childhood in the UK. Originally from Lashkar Gah, the capital of Helmand province, when his father and brother went missing his mother arranged for him to be got out of the country by agents. He spent months on the journey including walking through the mountains between Pakistan and Iran.

But Najib was deported by the Home Office back to his country of birth two years ago.

'I don't belong here, I wasn't educated here and I don't know the culture. Britain is my home,' he says in a strong Midlands accent. Najib still sports a hairstyle that wouldn't be out of place on David Beckham and is wearing a trendy shirt, jeans and trainers.

He couldn't look more British, but he says that is a problem. 'The Taliban attack the West here, people who work for the British government or even people who just come from Britain and America, It is dangerous here.'" (BBC News (17 July 2015) *The young people sent back to Afghanistan*)

See also IRIN report which states:

"Now aged 23 and still waiting for a decision on his final appeal to remain in the UK, Zakir's life has been on hold for the past five years, but he remains determined to avoid deportation to his home country.

'There is no way I can go home,' he said in a pre-recorded speech played at an event in London on Tuesday night to launch a study into what happens to former child asylum seekers forcibly returned to Afghanistan. 'People are still looking for me [there],' Zakir said. 'My culture has changed. I feel British.'

The research, which followed 25 returnees over 18 months, shows that Zakir's fears are well founded. It discovered that the young people experience numerous severe difficulties after their return to Afghanistan. These range from insecurity to a lack of social networks, work or education opportunities, and mental health problems. More than half the returnees said they planned to leave Afghanistan again. By the end of the research period, six had done so, while the whereabouts of 11 others was unknown." (IRIN (6 April 2016) *What became of 25 young Afghan deportees?*)

This report also states:

"The 'After Return' study found that 12 of the returnees interviewed had experienced security incidents including bomb blasts and targeted attacks. One was beaten unconscious by unknown assailants in Kabul and another witnessed the killing of another young returnee.

'Being a returnee does increase their risk,' said Bowerman. 'It makes them stand out and subjects them to particular targeting by Taliban groups.'

She added that it also affected their ability to form new friendships or reconnect with family. 'Other people in society fear they'll put them at risk,' she said.

Many young people in the study hid their status as returnees from new friends while less than half were living with their families. In some cases families were still paying off debts incurred from funding their migration to the UK and couldn't afford to support them. Some even resented their return." (ibid)

An article from UK newspaper The Guardian states:

"However, the men who landed in Kabul on Thursday were not recent arrivals to Europe. Everyone the Guardian spoke to had lived in Germany for at least four years. They now returned to a country that has become more dangerous since they left. 'I lived like a German. I had an apartment, I paid my taxes,' said Zabiullah Noori, 23. When he left his home in Kunduz six years ago, the city was peaceful. Since then, it has fallen twice to the Taliban. The highway there is beset by fighting and sporadic insurgent checkpoints. 'I'm very afraid. Look at my clothes,' Noori said. Like most of the returnees adjusting to Kabul in the early morning darkness, he would stand out as soon as he left the airport in his European attire of sneakers, skinny jeans and leather jacket. 'I don't know how to get to Kunduz. If the Taliban stop the car and see my documents, they will cut off my head,' Noori said." (The Guardian (15 December 2016) *First wave of Afghans expelled from EU states under contentious migration deal*)

A policy brief published by the Peace Research Institute Oslo, in a section titled "Afghans' experiences post-return", states:

"For most research participants, life after re-turning to Afghanistan had been difficult. This was compounded by the fact that most had not wanted to leave Europe in the first place. Most of them wanted to leave Afghanistan again, if the opportunity arose, similar to findings from a study of 120 returnees from the United Kingdom, which found 74% wanted to leave Afghanistan. Our research participants described a number of difficulties.

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. 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 re-search 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 'one-size-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." (Peace Research Institute Oslo (PRIO) (2015) *Can Afghans Reintegrate after Assisted Return from Europe?*)

A report on networks available to returning Afghans published by the European Asylum Support Office, in a chapter titled "Possibility of settling in urban centres without a network" (section headed "Access to the labour market"), states:

"Access to the labour market is a critical factor for successful reintegration. The labour market in Afghanistan is challenging and the unemployment rate is high. It is difficult to estimate the rate of unemployment because of the informal nature of the market. Even for those who are highly educated and well qualified, it is, according to a source in the UN difficult to get work without a network, and without someone recommending you and introducing you to an employer. Afghanistan is described as highly corrupt by Transparency International. Nepotism is widespread and most of the senior positions in both the administration and society in general are distributed on the basis of relationships or prior acquaintances. From an employer's point of view, it is practical to hire someone from one's own network, since he will know exactly what he is getting. If someone in the extended family is hired, the resources are kept within the family network. A 2012 study by the International Labour Organization (ILO) about employment patterns in Afghanistan confirms that employers value personal relationships and networks above formal qualifications and this is key to securing employment. There is, according to Landinfo's analysis, no evidence that suggests that the situation has changed since 2012." (European Asylum Support Office (January 2018) *Afghanistan: Networks*, pp.27-28)

This response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Research and Information Unit 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. Please read in full all documents referred to.

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