



Afghanistan – Researched and compiled by the Refugee Documentation Centre of Ireland on 5 April 2018

Please provide evidence of the current risk of harm to young men under the age of 18 who have no family support in Afghanistan.

A report on Afghan returnees published by Asylos, an international network of volunteers, in a section titled “Consequences of lack of a support network, states:

“An August 2016 report 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 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 [...]” (Asylos (August 2017) *Afghanistan: Situation of young male 'Westernised' returnees to Kabul*)

This report also quotes this academic as follows:

“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 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[...]” (ibid)

An article from the Institute for War & Peace Reporting states:

“Afghanistan’s high rate of unemployment is driving young men into the arms of insurgent groups, speakers at a series of recent IWPR-organised debates agreed.

Participants in Paktika, Kunar and Helmand provinces all said that young men often had so few employment options that some travelled illegally to Pakistan or Iran to find work, while others joined an insurgent group.

'I know many people who have lost their lives travelling abroad illegally after joining the insurgency because they could not find work,' Gholam Rahman, head of the Paktika labour union, said at a debate in the southeastern province's Yusuf Khel district.

Mohammad Wasil, head of youth affairs in Paktika's department for information and culture, said young men were targeted by insurgent groups, but were also drawn to them by the power conferred by weapons." (Institute for War & Peace Reporting (10 February 2015) *Afghan Militants Find Unemployed Make Easy Recruits*)

A report published by the European Asylum Support Office, in a section titled "Orphans and other vulnerable children – social support" (section 4.3.1), states:

"Adoption is not legally recognised in Afghanistan. Parental custody over a minor is executed in principle by one of the parents, or a family member. Testamentary guardianship can be assigned to a person by court.

The Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs, Martyrs and Disabled (MoLSAMD) set up a number of programmes to help children they had identified as being at risk. Some of them are aimed at children with no family and support and are implemented through an orphanage network, others involve children who have families but still have to work on the streets. The ministry can provide small and larger loans in cooperation with non-governmental organisations; however, it admits that it is impossible to provide the aid to everyone who needs it because of scarce financial resources. The ministry lacks money to support existing orphanages.

The US Department of State 2016 Human Rights report on Afghanistan stated that, according to Ministry of Social Affairs, there are 84 Children's Protection Action Network (CPAN) centres and 78 residential orphanages that provide shelter and vocational training to children from destitute families. Some of these are private or NGO-run institutions. Often children there were not orphans but their families were not able to support them. Children in orphanages reported mental, physical or sexual abuse and sometimes they were victims of human trafficking. The living conditions in orphanage were poor. The facilities lacked running water, heating during the winter, education and recreational facilities. According to the head of the Orphanage Department in MoLSAMD, the 13,245 children in orphanages constitute about 10 % of all orphans in the country.

Orphanages run by NGOs deeply rely on foreign aid which diminished with the withdrawal of international forces in 2014. The number of organisations and charities is still insufficient to provide homes for all children in need." (European Asylum Support Office (August 2017) *Afghanistan: Key socio-economic indicators, state protection, and mobility in Kabul City, Mazar-e Sharif, and Herat City*, p.118)

The 2018 Human Rights Watch report for Afghanistan, in a section headed “Children’s Rights”, states:

“Despite the fact that the government in 2016 criminalized military recruitment of Afghans under 18 years old, the practice continued, most notably among the ALP and pro-government militias. The AIHRC reported on increased recruitment by groups affiliated with ISKP in Nangarhar. Both the ANSF and the Taliban continued to occupy or use schools for military purposes in contested areas, affecting the access to education of thousands of children, especially girls.

Afghanistan’s new penal code criminalizes the sexual abuse of boys, known in Afghanistan as *bacha bazi*.

Conflict-related deaths and injuries of children continued at high rates, with 689 deaths and 1,791 injuries in the first nine months of 2017. Almost half of the children detained in relation to the conflict reported being tortured or mistreated.” (Human Rights Watch (18 January 2018) *World Report 2018 – Afghanistan*)

A report published by the Refugee Support Network, in a section headed “Targeting due to issues related to original asylum claim”, states:

“Two examples were given of former unaccompanied minors being killed for having spent time in a European country. In one case, a returnee told of his anxiety after:

‘[A] boy who was also deported from UK was killed in our area. He had newly arrived from UK and was living peacefully with his family until people found out about him, though he did not have any enemy at that time. But he was badly targeted standing in front of a mosque in the village he was living. I participated in his funeral and Fatiha.’

Another young person was particularly distressed as he recounted the killing of his friend, a young returnee from Norway, explaining:

‘I have just made one friend here. [...He] told me I can’t stay here, I will go back to EU. I told him not to go, but he was arrested by Taliban on way to Iran on the way to Kandahar – between Ghazni and Kandahar - and they killed him because he had all his international papers and bank card on him. They killed him by cutting his head off and putting it on the street.’” (Refugee Support Network (April 2016) *After Return: Documenting the experiences of young people forcibly removed to Afghanistan*, pp.29-30)

An article from UK newspaper The Guardian refers to the experiences of two brothers returned to Afghanistan as follows:

“When they arrived in Kabul in late June, they immediately found themselves living on the street. On the third day, they travelled to their volatile home province of Wardak to apply for identification documents, and Abolfazl inexplicably disappeared while waiting for his brother outside a government office. Vahid returned to Kabul, but over the following months he would come back to Wardak every day to search for his brother. ‘I walk around like a homeless person and ask people, ‘Have you seen a boy who looks like this?

You haven't seen him? He's 16 years old.' I walk around like that all day,' he said at the time. At dusk, when Wardak became too unsafe, Vahid would return to Kabul to sleep on the muddy riverbanks by a bridge in Pol-e Sokhta, an area notorious for housing scores of drug addicts. Most of them are returnees from Europe or Iran." (The Guardian (6 October 2015) *Tragic tale of Afghan brothers sent home from Denmark to an uncertain fate*)

This article also states:

"Due to the brothers' vulnerability, the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) said it could not provide the level of assistance the brothers needed, and declined to be involved in their return. The brothers were on their own. Then they landed in Kabul. 'In Denmark, I had nightmares about Afghanistan. And now it was all there, right in front of me,' Vahid said. In their new environment, pockets full of cash made the brothers vulnerable, and their belongings were soon stolen. To some experts, it comes as no shock that the brothers ended up on the street. Without identified family and social networks, it is almost impossible to survive in Afghanistan, said Richard Danziger, IOM's chief of mission in the country." (ibid)

A report from the UN Human Rights Council, in a section titled "Child rights and protection concerns" (paragraph 46), states:

"In its midyear report 2016 on the protection of civilians in armed conflict, UNAMA stated that the consequences of displacement on the civilian population were particularly harsh for children. Aside from physical injuries, the psychological well-being of children emerged as a primary concern during assessments of internally displaced persons. Children displaced by conflict-related violence also experienced limited access to education owing to insufficient education facilities in receiving communities and documentation requirements for enrolment. Furthermore, poverty placed additional pressure on children to contribute to income-generating activities at the expense of their education." (UN Human Rights Council (12 April 2017) *Report of the Special Rapporteur on the human rights of internally displaced persons on his mission to Afghanistan*, p.12)

In paragraph 47 this report states:

"Child recruitment by non-State armed groups remained a concern and was fuelling displacement in some cases as families displace themselves to avoid children being recruited into non-State armed groups. Some commentators expressed their concern over a generation of young people with psychosocial distress that was not dealt with adequately owing to a lack of service provision or access to specialist medical support. Unaccompanied children were particularly vulnerable and required specialist care and protection mechanisms, including protection from trafficking." (ibid, p.12)

See also paragraph 48 which states:

"The Special Rapporteur was informed that internal displacement and poverty resulted in displaced children becoming more vulnerable to exploitation of their labour in hazardous industries, including brick-kilns, metal works or garbage picking. In Kabul, the Special Rapporteur met with a 7-year-old boy who worked as a garbage collector to support his family, and learned that

such activities were common among displaced children who worked to provide a small income for their families. Children may also be employed in carpet weaving and work long hours for meagre wages. Without other means of assistance or support, families saw few options other than to send their children to work. While there is legislation prohibiting child labour in hazardous industries, it is poorly implemented in practice.” (ibid, p.12)

An article from the Institute for War & Peace Reporting states:

“Afghanistan is a signatory to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and has its own child protection laws, but observers say these are not implemented properly. It is against the law for children under the age of 11 to do any kind of work, and until the age of 18 they should not be employed more than 35 hours a week. These rules are clearly not being enforced. Abdullah is among the many children who have dropped out of school to sell knick-knacks on the streets of Kabul. 'I am 13 years old and don't go to school. I want to study but can't,' he said. 'I sell things from a tray, and earn 200 or 300 Afghanis daily.' The United Nations children's agency UNICEF has estimated that 60,000 children were working on the streets of Kabul alone.” (Institute for War & Peace Reporting (9 December 2016) *No Respite for Kabul's Street Children*)

See also article from the Institute for War & Peace Reporting which states:

“The Taleban and other groups find it easy to exploit vulnerable minors

Insurgent groups continue to use radical propaganda and exploit local poverty to recruit teenage boys to their ranks, according to speakers at an IWPR debate in Paktika.

‘Due to government negligence, poverty, poor levels of education and propaganda, many young children are among the insurgents,’ said Saif-ul-Rahman Shahab, head of Paktika’s Independent Journalists Association. ‘Children join the armed groups after they watch videos clips and other propaganda prepared by insurgents to brainwash children.’

He told the event, held in the provincial capital Sharan on July 24 and attended by some 100 men and women, that the Taleban and others found it easy to exploit children’s innocence.

‘Children can’t think critically and their minds are impressionable, so they soon start believing the ideology pushed by the insurgents and secretly approach these groups without informing their families. This means that the insurgents find it easy to recruit them to their armed groups.’” (Institute for War & Peace Reporting (31 July 2017) *Afghanistan: Insurgents Prey on Teenage Boys*)

A report published by the Landinfo Country of Origin Information Centre of Norway, in a section headed “Young persons between the ages of 15 and 18”

“Documents are not a key feature of the Afghan society, and many people do not know exactly how old they are. The knowledge Landinfo has about the recruitment of minors indicates that the majority are between 15 and 18 years old. Those who are incorporated into the Taliban are probably only assessed

according to usability and qualifications; i.e. a person is mobilised if deemed suitable. Recruitment to both the government security forces and to the armed opposition (including Taliban) is, in the way Landinfo sees it, first and foremost an expression of structural conditions affecting choices, rather than concrete coercion from any of the parties involved. As mentioned earlier, in many areas, armed groups and/or services for one of the parties in the conflict appear to be the only possible income-generating activity and career opportunity for young people.” (Landinfo Country of Origin Information Centre (29 June 2017) *Afghanistan: Recruitment to Taliban*, p.22)

An article from the Institute for War & Peace Reporting states:

“Activists and officials in the Afghan province of Herat have warned that rising numbers of children are being recruited to work as drugs mules by local trafficking networks. Street children are particularly vulnerable, amid a massive rise in addiction among minors in the western province.” (Institute for War & Peace Reporting (29 November 2016) *Afghan Children Targeted by Drug Gangs*)

This article also states:

“Officials in Herat say that they have noticed a massive increase in the number of child addicts. A 2014 survey carried out by local NGOs in coordination with the Wasa foundation, a charity working to protect the rights of women and children, documented some 3,000 child addicts in Herat. Farhad Jelani, the spokesman of Herat’s governor, said that this figure had nearly doubled in just two years. ‘According to a survey conducted by Wasa, today there are 70,000 drug addicts in Herat of whom 5,500 are children,’ he said. ‘The survey also showed that some of the children became addicts because they lived on the streets and so were easily influenced by drug dealers, while others became addicts because family members were using drugs.’” (ibid)

A report from the London-based independent news organisation the Bureau of Investigative Journalism states:

“Emily Bowerman works with Refugee Support Network, a charity that currently is supporting 27 Afghan boys in their late teens and early 20s who face the possibility of return to Afghanistan. She said: ‘Most have been in the UK since they were about 15 and are terrified about being sent back to an unfamiliar and insecure environment.

This judgement will have devastating implications on many young people who have spent their formative teenage years in the UK and are now being told that they must return to Afghanistan. As boys who arrived in the UK by themselves, they no longer have the vital networks of support that they’d need to reintegrate safely, and we are deeply concerned that they will be especially vulnerable to exploitation, targeted violence and discrimination.’” (Bureau of Investigative Journalism (3 March 2016) *Theresa May wins right to deport failed asylum seekers to Afghanistan after judges remove court injunction*)

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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