



Home Office

Country Policy and Information Note

Afghanistan: Afghans perceived as 'Westernised'

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Preface

Purpose

This note provides country of origin information (COI) and analysis of COI for use by Home Office decision makers handling particular types of protection and human rights claims (as set out in the [Introduction](#) section). It is not intended to be an exhaustive survey of a particular subject or theme.

It is split into two main sections: (1) analysis and assessment of COI and other evidence; and (2) COI. These are explained in more detail below.

Assessment

This section analyses the evidence relevant to this note – i.e. the COI section; refugee/human rights laws and policies; and applicable caselaw – by describing this and its inter-relationships, and provides an assessment of, in general, whether one or more of the following applies:

- A person is reasonably likely to face a real risk of persecution or serious harm
- The general humanitarian situation is so severe as to breach Article 15(b) of European Council Directive 2004/83/EC (the Qualification Directive) / Article 3 of the European Convention on Human Rights as transposed in paragraph 339C and 339CA(iii) of the Immigration Rules
- The security situation presents a real risk to a civilian's life or person such that it would breach Article 15(c) of the Qualification Directive as transposed in paragraph 339C and 339CA(iv) of the Immigration Rules
- A person is able to obtain protection from the state (or quasi state bodies)
- A person is reasonably able to relocate within a country or territory
- A claim is likely to justify granting asylum, humanitarian protection or other form of leave, and
- If a claim is refused, it is likely or unlikely to be certifiable as 'clearly unfounded' under section 94 of the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002.

Decision makers **must**, however, still consider all claims on an individual basis, taking into account each case's specific facts.

Country of origin information

The country information in this note has been carefully selected in accordance with the general principles of COI research as set out in the [Common EU \[European Union\] Guidelines for Processing Country of Origin Information \(COI\)](#), dated April 2008, and the Austrian Centre for Country of Origin and Asylum Research and Documentation's (ACCORD), [Researching Country Origin Information – Training Manual, 2013](#). Namely, taking into account the COI's relevance, reliability, accuracy, balance, currency, transparency and traceability.

The structure and content of the country information section follows a [terms of reference](#) which sets out the general and specific topics relevant to this note.

All information included in the note was published or made publicly available on or before the 'cut-off' date(s) in the country information section. Any event taking place or report/article published after these date(s) is not included.

All information is publicly accessible or can be made publicly available, and is from generally reliable sources. Sources and the information they provide are carefully considered before inclusion. Factors relevant to the assessment of the reliability of sources and information include:

- the motivation, purpose, knowledge and experience of the source
- how the information was obtained, including specific methodologies used
- the currency and detail of information, and
- whether the COI is consistent with and/or corroborated by other sources.

Multiple sourcing is used to ensure that the information is accurate, balanced and corroborated, so that a comprehensive and up-to-date picture at the time of publication is provided of the issues relevant to this note.

Information is compared and contrasted, whenever possible, to provide a range of views and opinions. The inclusion of a source, however, is not an endorsement of it or any view(s) expressed.

Each piece of information is referenced in a brief footnote; full details of all sources cited and consulted in compiling the note are listed alphabetically in the [bibliography](#).

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 support him in reviewing the efficiency, effectiveness and consistency of approach of COI produced by the Home Office.

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. The IAGCI may be contacted at:

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Information about the IAGCI's work and a list of the documents which have been reviewed by the IAGCI can be found on the Independent Chief Inspector's pages of the [gov.uk website](#).

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Assessment

Updated: 21 April 2021

1. Introduction

1.1 Basis of claim

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

1.2 Points to note

1.2.1 This note concerns persons perceived as 'Westernised' after having spent time in the West, and the targeted risk by state or non-state actors. For consideration of such claims relating to a serious and individual threat to a civilian's life or person by reason of indiscriminate violence in situations of international or internal armed conflict (as within paragraph 339CA of the immigration rules) or Article 3 of the European Convention on Human Rights, see the Country Policy and Information Note (CPIN) on [Afghanistan: Security and humanitarian situation](#).

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2. Consideration of issues

2.1 Credibility

2.1.1 For information on assessing credibility, see the 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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Official – sensitive: End of section

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2.2 Exclusion

2.2.1 Decision makers must consider whether there are serious reasons for considering whether one (or more) of the exclusion clauses is applicable. Each case must be considered on its individual facts and merits.

2.2.2 If the person is excluded from the Refugee Convention, they will also be excluded from a grant of humanitarian protection.

- 2.2.3 For further guidance on the exclusion clauses and restricted leave, see the Asylum Instructions on [Exclusion under Articles 1F and 33\(2\) of the Refugee Convention](#), [Humanitarian Protection](#) and [Restricted Leave](#).

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2.3 **Convention reason(s)**

- 2.3.1 Actual or perceived political opinion or religion.
- 2.3.2 Establishing a convention reason is not sufficient to be recognised as a refugee. The question is whether the person has a well-founded fear of persecution on account of an actual or imputed Refugee Convention reason.
- 2.3.3 Decision makers must carefully consider each case on its facts, establishing the reasons why the alleged persecutor has an adverse interest in the person, for example, due their perceived political (western liberal) outlook or religious conversion, and whether this falls within the scope of the Refugee Convention. The person's profile, circumstances and length of time spent in the West should be taken into account. Depending on the basis of the claim, decision makers may need to consider whether the claimed persecution is on the basis of imputed political opinion or religion.
- 2.3.4 Afghans perceived as 'Westernised' do not, in general, fall within the scope of the Refugee Convention under the grounds of a particular social group (PSG).
- 2.3.5 This is because they do not share an innate characteristic, or a common background that cannot be changed, or share a characteristic or belief that is so fundamental to identity or conscience that a person should not be forced to renounce it – such as having adopted the values, appearance, language, or culture of a Western country – or they do not have a distinct identity in Afghanistan because, in general, the group is not perceived as being different by the surrounding society.
- 2.3.6 In regard to women, in the country guidance case, [NS \(Social Group - Women - Forced marriage\) Afghanistan CG \[2004\] UKIAT 00328](#), heard 21 September 2004 and promulgated 30 December 2004, the Tribunal found that women in Afghanistan form a PSG within the meaning of the Refugee Convention. This still remains the case. Therefore, a woman or girl who is perceived as 'Westernised' may fall within the scope of the Refugee Convention under the grounds of a PSG.
- 2.3.7 Although women in Afghanistan form a PSG, establishing such membership is not sufficient to be recognised as a refugee. The question is whether the particular person has a well-founded fear of persecution on account of their membership of such a group.

- 2.3.8 In the absence of a link to one of the 5 Refugee Convention grounds necessary for the grant of refugee status, the question is whether the particular person will face a real risk of serious harm sufficient to qualify for Humanitarian Protection (HP). For further guidance on HP see the [Asylum Instruction on Humanitarian Protection](#).
- 2.3.9 For further guidance on Convention reasons see the instruction on [Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status](#).

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2.4 Risk

- 2.4.1 Around 40% of Afghans have left Afghanistan at some point in their lives for various reasons so the concept of return is common and it is likely that some returnees have absorbed values and attitudes from different cultures. Many thousands of Afghans have travelled to Western countries and subsequently returned to Afghanistan. Between 2010 and 2019 over 57,000 Afghan nationals were returned to Afghanistan by EU countries and Norway, with over 8,000 returns from the UK during the same period. The vast majority of the returnees are young men (more than 98% of the returnees from the UK were male), who have been returned to Kabul (see [Returns to Afghanistan](#) and [Behaviour and appearance deemed as 'Westernised'](#)).
- 2.4.2 Monitoring and tracking of returnees from Western countries is limited to a few small-scale studies and anecdotal accounts so there is no comprehensive evidence base to draw conclusions about the generalised experience of returns. Being 'Westernised' is not formally defined, with sources describing it vaguely as a person who has adopted the values, appearance, language, accent, or culture of a Western country (see [Behaviour and appearance deemed as 'Westernised'](#)).
- 2.4.3 Traditional Afghan dress is still common and women continue to wear the chador (full covering), even in urban environments. However, Western trends, clothes and tattoos are becoming more popular amongst younger Afghans, who reserve their traditional Afghan clothing for special occasions. Some men shave or trim their beards although in some areas controlled by the Taliban such behaviour may be strictly policed (see [Social and cultural dress codes and norms](#)).
- 2.4.4 Some returnees report they face insults and harassment by border police on return, are accused by security and other state officials of betraying their country, being infidels or converts, or have difficulties obtaining official documentation, reportedly due to their time in a Western country. However, there is no information to suggest that returnees are generally discriminated against or targeted by the authorities for having spent time in, or been deported from, the West (see Mistreatment or targeting of returnees – [By the Afghan authorities](#)).
- 2.4.5 Social acceptance depends on the community in which a returnee lives and from where they have returned. A successful migration is linked to personal and family honour, and community standing and a person who sends back remittances is regarded highly. Returning to Afghanistan is a part of life, with most people knowing at least one returnee and often being sympathetic to their situation. Skilled returnees may be viewed positively. Most returnees

from Europe are positively received back by their families and community although if a person is deemed to have been deported or not met their family's expectations they may be viewed less favourably (see [Attitudes towards returnees in general and from Western countries](#) and [Stigma and perceptions of failure](#)).

- 2.4.6 A person's ability to reintegrate successfully after return may depend on their level of maturity, mental health and awareness of their social surroundings and community norms. This level of understanding might vary depending on the age at which a person left Afghanistan, how long they have been abroad and the amount of support they have on return (see [Attitudes towards returnees in general and from Western countries](#)).
- 2.4.7 Sources indicated that, in general, there was no discrimination or major tensions against returnees by host communities. However, some returnees from Western countries are viewed with suspicion and avoid being identified as such due to fear of stigma, discrimination, being questioned about their religious beliefs and practices, or being accused of acting immorally whilst in a non-Muslim country (see [Attitudes towards returnees in general and from Western countries](#) and [Mistreatment or targeting of returnees – By family and society](#)).
- 2.4.8 Some returnees from Western countries may face societal discrimination and social stigma, which often appears to be due to the perception of having 'failed' in their migration, or that the person has committed a crime abroad which resulted in deportation, or due to the subsequent debts incurred (see [Stigma and perceptions of failure](#)).
- 2.4.9 Some returnees may be perceived as wealthy and be threatened or targeted by non-state actors on account of this rather than because they are perceived as 'Westernised'. Criminality in general is common, and middle class, affluent Afghans in Kabul are at risk of being targeted by criminal gangs (see [Mistreatment or targeting of returnees – By Anti-Government Elements \(AGEs\)](#)).
- 2.4.10 A 2019 study of 31 returnees from Germany reported that less than 20% claim to have faced threats by the Taliban because of their time in Europe – which the Taliban see as espionage and treachery – and were accused of being infidels or spies, or were targeted for recruitment, or threatened by a third person that they would be reported to the Taliban (see [Mistreatment or targeting of returnees – By Anti-Government Elements \(AGEs\)](#) and the [Country Policy and Information Note on Afghanistan: Anti-Government Elements \(AGEs\)](#)).
- 2.4.11 In the country guidance case [AS \(Safety of Kabul\) Afghanistan \(CG\) \[2020\] UKUT 130 \(IAC\)](#) (1 May 2020), heard on 19 and 20 November 2019 and 14 January 2020, the Upper Tribunal held, in relation to risk from the Taliban on return to Kabul, that 'A person who is of lower-level interest for the Taliban (i.e. not a senior government or security services official, or a spy) is not at real risk of persecution from the Taliban in Kabul' (paragraph 253(i)).
- 2.4.12 In [AS \(Safety of Kabul\) \[2020\]](#), the Tribunal also held 'There is widespread and persistent conflict-related violence in Kabul. However, the proportion of the population affected by indiscriminate violence is small and not at a level

where a returnee, even one with no family or other network and who has no experience living in Kabul, would face a serious and individual threat to their life or person by reason of indiscriminate violence' (para 253(ii)).

- 2.4.13 Information on the position of returnee women and girls is limited as the vast majority of returnees from the West are men. Afghanistan is a deeply patriarchal and conservative society and the rights of women and girls are restricted. Therefore, a woman or girl who returns from a Western country and is perceived to have adopted 'Western' ways may be perceived as contravening cultural, social, and religious norms. If a woman or girl is perceived as 'Westernised' they could face discriminatory treatment that – combined with their disadvantages as a woman – may in some circumstances amount to persecution. Each case must be considered on its facts (see [Position of women and girls](#), Mistreatment or targeting of returnees – [By Anti-Government Elements \(AGEs\)](#) and, for the general situation of women, the [Country Policy and Information Note on Afghanistan: Women fearing gender-based violence](#)).
- 2.4.14 When considering the experience of returnees and returnee assistance, the Upper Tribunal in [AS \(Safety of Kabul\) \[2020\]](#) noted:
- 'UNHCR, in the 2019 COI UNHCR Report, cites extensively from a recent German study which found that returnees to Kabul from Germany have faced violence, suspicion and hostility. This study (which we have not seen) was based on only 55 individuals, and therefore caution must be exercised before drawing generalised conclusions from it. We accept that some people in Kabul are suspicious of and hostile towards returnees. However, the evidence before us, considered together and as a whole, points to returnees facing challenging circumstances not because they have returned from the west (risk from westernisation was categorically rejected in the 2018 UT decision [[AS \(Safety of Kabul\) Afghanistan CG \[2018\] UKUT 118 \(IAC\) \(28 March 2018\)](#)] (at para. 187) and this finding was not appealed), but primarily because of poverty, lack of accommodation and the absence of employment opportunities, as well as the security situation. The mere fact of being a returnee does not prevent a person accessing accommodation (the evidence is that the "tea house" accommodation is available to all males) or being taken on for day labour work in the informal market. Nor does it prevent a person establishing, or re-establishing, a network, although care would need to be taken to avoid people who are hostile to returnees' (paragraph 246).
- 2.4.15 The German study cited by the Upper Tribunal was initially based on 55 returnees. However, the study only considered the experiences of 31 men, due to the fact that many returnees leave the country soon after arriving (see Mistreatment or targeting of returnees – [By the Afghan authorities](#) for details of the study's methodology)
- 2.4.16 Whilst some returnees have faced harassment, threats, discrimination and stigma there is little evidence to indicate this is solely because they have returned from a Western country or because they are perceived as 'Westernised'. In general, returnees perceived as 'Westernised' are unlikely to be subject to treatment or discrimination by state or non-state actors that is sufficiently serious by its nature or repetition to amount to persecution.

Decision makers must consider the individual circumstances and profile of the person.

- 2.4.17 For further information relating to particular groups, for example, women, children, lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans and intersex (LGBTI) persons and ethnic and religious minorities, see the relevant [Country Policy and Information Note](#).
- 2.4.18 For further guidance on assessing risk, see the instruction on [Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status](#).

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2.5 Protection

- 2.5.1 Where the person has a well-founded fear of persecution from the state they will not, in general, be able to avail themselves of the protection of the authorities.
- 2.5.2 Where the person has a well-founded fear of persecution from non-state actors, including 'rogue' state actors, decision makers must assess whether the state can provide effective protection. Any past persecution or past lack of effective protection may indicate that effective protection would not be available in the future. The onus is on the person to demonstrate why they would be unable to access effective protection.
- 2.5.3 In Kabul, and other districts, cities and towns controlled by the government, the authorities may be willing but will usually be unable to offer effective protection given the structural weaknesses in the security forces and the justice system. In areas controlled by anti-government elements (AGEs), the state will usually be unable to provide effective protection (for further information on the capabilities of the security forces and the justice system see [Country Policy and Information Note on Afghanistan: Anti-Government Elements \(AGEs\)](#) and the [Afghanistan Background Note](#)).
- 2.5.4 For further information relating to particular groups, for example, women, children, LGBTI persons and ethnic and religious minorities, see the relevant [Country Policy and Information Note](#).
- 2.5.5 For further guidance on assessing the availability of state protection, see the instruction on [Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status](#).

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2.6 Internal relocation

- 2.6.1 Where the person has a well-founded fear of persecution from the state they are unlikely to be able to relocate to escape that risk.
- 2.6.2 Where the person has a well-founded fear of persecution from non-state actors, decision makers must give careful consideration to the relevance and reasonableness of internal relocation taking full account of the individual circumstances of the particular person.
- 2.6.3 In the country guidance case [AS \(Safety of Kabul\)](#), the Tribunal held that:
'Having regard to the security and humanitarian situation in Kabul as well as the difficulties faced by the population living there (primarily the urban poor but also IDPs and other returnees, which are not dissimilar to the conditions

faced throughout many other parts of Afghanistan) it will not, in general, be unreasonable or unduly harsh for a single adult male in good health to relocate to Kabul even if he does not have any specific connections or support network in Kabul and even if he does not have a Tazkera [paragraph 253(iii)].

‘However, the particular circumstances of an individual applicant must be taken into account in the context of conditions in the place of relocation, including a person’s age, nature and quality of support network/connections with Kabul/Afghanistan, their physical and mental health, and their language, education and vocational skills when determining whether a person falls within the general position set out above. Given the limited options for employment, capability to undertake manual work may be relevant [paragraph 253(iv)].

‘A person with a support network or specific connections in Kabul is likely to be in a more advantageous position on return, which may counter a particular vulnerability of an individual on return. A person without a network may be able to develop one following return. A person’s familiarity with the cultural and societal norms of Afghanistan (which may be affected by the age at which he left the country and his length of absence) will be relevant to whether, and if so how quickly and successfully, he will be able to build a network [paragraph 253(v)].’

2.6.4 The Upper Tribunal in [AS](#) held that ‘The country guidance in [AK \(Article 15\(c\) Afghanistan CG \[2012\] UKUT 163 \(IAC\)\)](#) in relation to the (un)reasonableness of internal relocation to Kabul (and other potential places of internal relocation) for certain categories of women remains unaffected by this decision [paragraph 253(vii)].’

2.6.5 In [AK](#), the Upper Tribunal held that it would be unreasonable to expect lone women and female heads of household to relocate internally without the support of a male network (paragraph 249B (v)).

2.6.6 For further guidance on internal relocation see the instruction on [Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status](#).

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2.7 Certification

2.7.1 Where the claim (based on the sole reason that the person will be perceived as ‘Westernised’ due to time spent in a Western country) is refused, it is likely to be certifiable as ‘clearly unfounded’ under section 94 of the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002.

2.7.2 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.

2.7.3 Decision makers must carefully consider each case on its facts, and whether this falls within the scope of certification under section 94 of the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002

- 2.7.4 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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2.8 Further submissions

- 2.8.1 When further submissions are made solely on the basis of risk due to being Westernised, each case should be considered on its facts to determine if it falls within the scope of the Refugee Convention and/or whether it will qualify as a fresh claim under paragraph 353 of the Immigration Rules.
- 2.8.2 For guidance on further submissions, see the [Asylum instruction on Further submissions](#).

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Country information

Section 3 updated: 21 April 2021

3. Returns to Afghanistan

3.1 Returnees

- 3.1.1 A report of an April 2019 fact-finding mission (FFM) to Kabul on the conditions for returnees by the Finnish Immigration Service's Country Information Service, which consulted a range of sources, noted that according to an interview with UNHCR, 'The concept of returning is a part of life in Afghanistan, as approximately 40 per cent of Afghans have been forced to leave their country at some point in their lives.'¹
- 3.1.2 According to official European Union (EU) statistics, between 2010 and 2019 over 57,000 Afghan nationals were returned to Afghanistan by 28 EU countries (including the UK) and Norway². In that period there were over 8,000 returns to Afghanistan (voluntary and enforced removals) from the UK, over 98% of this number were male³.
- 3.1.3 The UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA) noted that in 2020, around 6,000 people were deported to Afghanistan from Turkey⁴.
- 3.1.4 The UNOCHA added that, in 2020 alone, 860,000 Afghans returned to Afghanistan from Iran, and 7,900 from Pakistan⁵. According to the International Organization for Migration (IOM), over 325,000 of returnees from Iran were deported, whilst the remainder were spontaneous returns⁶.
- 3.1.5 The Australian Government's Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT), noted in its June 2019 report on Afghanistan, compiled from a range of sources, that, 'Returnees from western countries almost exclusively return to Kabul. Most returnees have been single men rather than family groups. In-country sources report 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.'⁷

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3.2 Reintegration and social support networks

- 3.2.1 A September 2020 EASO query response based on a range of sources noted:

'Many returnees entirely depend on the support of their family members. It would be therefore more difficult for the returnees returned to areas from which they do not originate. An International organisation interviewed during

¹ Finnish Immigration Service, '[Afghanistan: Fact-Finding Mission...](#)' (page 20), 19 October 2020

² Eurostat, '[Third country nationals returned following an order to leave](#)', last updated 8 February 2021

³ Home Office, '[National Statistics...](#)' (Returns summary tables), 28 February 2021

⁴ UNOCHA, '[Afghanistan: Snapshot of population movements](#)', 23 January 2021

⁵ UNOCHA, '[Afghanistan: Snapshot of population movements](#)', 23 January 2021

⁶ IOM, '[Return of undocumented Afghans](#)', 31 December 2020

⁷ DFAT, '[Country Information Report Afghanistan](#)' (paragraph 5.41), 27 June 2019

the Finnish fact-finding mission in Kabul in 2019 stated that the “[n]ewcomers are welcomed by the community to a certain extent and many share houses with each other.”

‘The Afghanistan Migrant Advice and Support Organization (AMASO), a humanitarian, nongovernmental and non-profit organization, which supports deported Afghan asylum seekers from Europe and Australia, indicated that the biggest challenges in general for returnees are lack of income and networks. A 2017 study by the REACH Initiative, a humanitarian initiative providing data and analysis related to crisis, disaster and displacement, found that in general, obstacles faced by Afghan returnees include unemployment, homelessness, insecurity and lack of networks. Similarly, the January 2019 MMC [Mixed Migration Centre] report noted that “discrimination is a lesser challenge for many returnees. Most Afghans know at least one returnee and are often sympathetic to their situation. The majority (58%) of returnees in to a 2017 UNHCR survey reported problems with their communities relating to jobs and the cost of living (rather than discrimination). Skilled returnees may be seen positively if they promote business or employment”.’⁸

3.2.2 For more information on networks, see the [EASO COI Report: Afghanistan – Networks \(February 2018\)](#).

3.2.3 For information relating to reintegration such as employment, housing, healthcare and documentation, see the [Afghanistan Background Note](#) and the [Country Policy and Information Note on Afghanistan: Medical and healthcare provision](#).

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Section 4 updated: 21 April 2021

4. Social and cultural dress codes and norms

4.1 In government-held areas

4.1.1 Citing a range of sources, the European Asylum Support Office (EASO) report on ‘Individuals targeted under societal and legal norms’, dated December 2017, noted ‘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.’⁹

4.1.2 The online Encyclopedia Britannica indicated that, in the post-Taliban era:

‘... urban women have continued to wear the chador (or chadri, in Afghanistan), the full body covering mandated by the Taliban. This has been true even of those women of the middle class (most in Kabul) who had shed that garment during the communist era. Some men have shaved or trimmed their beards, but, aside from disregarding the style of turban associated with the Taliban, most have continued to dress traditionally – generally in the

⁸ EASO, ‘[COI Query Response](#)’ (pages 5 to 6), 2 September 2020

⁹ EASO, ‘[Individuals targeted under societal and legal norms](#)’, (page 100), December 2017

loose, baggy trousers typical of many parts of South and Central Asia, over which are worn a long overshirt and a heavy vest.’¹⁰

- 4.1.3 Abdullah Qazi, publisher and editor of Afghanistan Online, a privately owned, independent web site that provides updated news and information on Afghanistan¹¹, gave a [description of traditional Afghan clothing](#) for men and women, calling it ‘generally loose-fitting and conservative’. Qazi added ‘Today, in the major cities, such as Kabul, more and more young Afghans are wearing western clothes, and reserve their traditional Afghan clothing for special occasions, such as weddings or to celebrate major holidays like Nowroz or Eid.’¹²
- 4.1.4 Atiq Rahimi, a contributor to the multi-media platform, YaLa Press, wrote in October 2020 on fashion in Afghanistan over the last 100 years. Rahimi noted that clothing and fashion evolved alongside other sectors in the post-Taliban era and ‘... more people started wearing modern clothes in major cities once again.’ Rahimi added that:
- ‘Returnees from Iran and Pakistan, who were born and raised there, brought with them the prevailing clothing and fashion of their host countries to Afghanistan. Most of them settled in big cities of Afghanistan and inspired others to adopt their way of clothing and fashion. Millions of Afghans shifted to Kabul and other major cities seeking greater job and education opportunities. Therefore, one can see a mix of traditional and modern clothing and fashion styles in Kabul.
- ‘Current Afghan laws do not impose restrictions on clothing or fashion, but it is actually families and society in general that control to what extent men and particularly women may expose their body in public spaces now...
- ‘Women’s sexuality is policed by the society in Afghanistan; short veils and thin coats are still an essential part of women dressing and almost no girl or woman dares to appear without a short veil outside their home. They must wear a veil even if it doesn’t fully cover their head.’¹³
- 4.1.5 Rahimi added ‘One of the main characteristics of the change in the way men and women dress and fashion in Afghanistan in the last 19 years is that these changes are not specific to Kabul; clothing and fashion in other cities in Afghanistan have also changed and people wear modern clothes sporadically.’¹⁴
- 4.1.6 The community channel, Afghan Mirror, which aims to ‘promote and reflect true Afghan culture’¹⁵, uploaded a video on its YouTube channel, portraying a Kabul shopping centre, [Park Mall](#), which had a range of shops selling both traditional and Western-style clothing¹⁶. The [Afghan Mirror channel](#) posted a range of videos showing life in Afghanistan.

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¹⁰ Encyclopedia Britannica, ‘[Afghanistan: Daily life and social customs](#)’, 17 August 2020

¹¹ Afghanistan Online, ‘[About](#)’, no date

¹² Afghanistan Online, ‘[Clothes](#)’, 12 March 2018

¹³ Rahimi, A, ‘[Fashion Rights in Afghanistan](#)’, 8 October 2020

¹⁴ Rahimi, A, ‘[Fashion Rights in Afghanistan](#)’, 8 October 2020

¹⁵ Afghan Mirror, ‘[About](#)’, no date

¹⁶ Afghan Mirror, ‘[Park Mall](#)’, 30 November 2020

4.2 In Taliban-held areas

4.2.1 A June 2020 Human Rights Watch (HRW) report based on 138 interviews including 120 in-person interviews with Taliban officials, commanders, and fighters, as well as interviews with teachers, doctors, elders, students, and other local residents, which focussed on the everyday experiences of people living in Taliban-held districts in Helmand, Kunduz and Wardak provinces, noted, 'As the Taliban has gained control of districts across Afghanistan, "vice and virtue" officials again have a role in enforcing social norms.'¹⁷

4.2.2 The same report explained:

'These officials patrol communities to monitor residents' adherence to Taliban prescribed social codes regarding dress and public deportment, beard length, men's attendance at Friday prayers, and use of smartphones or other technological devices. The rigidity or flexibility with which the Taliban impose these rules varies by province and district, with Kunduz among the most flexible and Helmand among the least. Violating the rules can result in a warning for a first-time or relatively minor offense. While public punishment for infractions is infrequent compared to the 1990s, for offenses deemed more serious, Taliban officials have imprisoned residents and inflicted corporal punishments such as beatings.'¹⁸

4.2.3 The HRW report also noted:

'The Taliban's experience in provinces like Helmand, where the rural population generally wears traditional dress, has influenced their approach to local variations in dress and appearance elsewhere in Afghanistan. In Kunduz province, particularly in more urban areas, and to some extent in Wardak, men (but very seldom women) sometimes wear more Western clothes. As the Taliban has gained control of districts in these provinces, some residents have switched back to more traditional clothes to avoid facing threats or punishment by the Taliban...'¹⁹

4.2.4 The USSD HR Report 2020 noted 'Women in some areas of the country said their freedom of expression in choice of attire was limited by conservative social mores and sometimes enforced by Taliban in insurgent-controlled areas as well as religious leaders.'²⁰

See also [Position of women and girls](#).

4.2.5 In 3 separate studies exploring Taliban rule in territories under their control, published in October 2020 and January 2021, the Afghanistan Analysts Network (AAN) looked at Andar district in Ghazni province²¹, Nad Ali district in Helmand province²², and Dasht-e Archi district in Kunduz province²³. The AAN noted that the vice and virtue (religious police) had been replaced by

¹⁷ HRW, ["You have no right to complain"...](#) (page 37), 30 June 2020

¹⁸ HRW, ["You have no right to complain"...](#) (page 5), 30 June 2020

¹⁹ HRW, ["You have no right to complain"...](#) (page 38), 30 June 2020

²⁰ USSD, ['2020 Human Rights Report'](#) (section 2a), 30 March 2021

²¹ AAN, ['Living with the Taleban \(1\): Local experiences in Andar district...'](#), 19 October 2020

²² AAN, ['Living with the Taleban \(2\): Local experiences in Nad Ali district...'](#), 18 January 2021

²³ AAN, ['Living with the Taleban \(3\): Local experiences in Dasht-e Archi district...'](#), 25 January 2021

the outreach and guidance (dawat aw ershad) committee and its restrictions were not as harsh as its predecessor^{24 25}.

- 4.2.6 Referring to Helmand, Kunduz and Wardak provinces, the HRW report claimed that in some districts the Taliban monitored men's beards and hair styles and had imposed punishments for violations, including beating and detention²⁶. Such monitoring was not always consistent and varied between districts and commanders²⁷.
- 4.2.7 Similarly, an Afghanistan Analysts Network (AAN) study exploring Taliban rule in territories under their control, indicated that, in Nad Ali district, Helmand province, the Taliban enforced rules for men such as growing a beard and not growing long hair²⁸. In another study in Andar district, Ghazni province, the AAN noted that the Taliban did not enforce such rules²⁹. In a third study on Dasht-e-Archi district, Kunduz province, the AAN noted that the Taliban's outreach and guidance committee was active in Kunduz, but did not refer to any monitoring of attire, beards or hair³⁰.
- 4.2.8 On 29 December 2020, Voice of America (VoA) reported on the Taliban's reaction to a private fashion show in Kabul where the models wore Western clothing. VoA noted 'In a commentary published on its official website, the Islamist insurgent group condemned last week's event as a demonstration of "obscene Western culture" that "trampled all religious and Afghan values".'³¹

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5. Societal attitudes and treatment

5.1 Perception of the West

- 5.1.1 Citing a range of sources, the European Asylum Support Office (EASO) report on 'Individuals targeted under societal and legal norms', dated December 2017, noted:

'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, 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

²⁴ AAN, '[Living with the Taleban \(1\): Local experiences in Andar district...](#)', 19 October 2020

²⁵ AAN, '[Living with the Taleban \(2\): Local experiences in Nad Ali district...](#)', 18 January 2021

²⁶ HRW, '["You have no right to complain"...](#)' (pages 42, 46, 48 and 49), 30 June 2020

²⁷ HRW, '["You have no right to complain"...](#)' (pages 7, 37 and 48), 30 June 2020

²⁸ AAN, '[Living with the Taleban \(2\): Local experiences in Nad Ali district...](#)', 18 January 2021

²⁹ AAN, '[Living with the Taleban \(1\): Local experiences in Andar district...](#)', 19 October 2020

³⁰ AAN, '[Living with the Taleban \(3\): Local experiences in Dasht-e Archi district...](#)', 25 January 2021

³¹ VoA, '[Taliban Denounces Western-Style Kabul Fashion Show](#)', 29 December 2020

that are frequented by Westerners, though these have also been attacked by insurgents or raided by police. Dr. Schuster [Liza Schuster, sociologist at City University of London] 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 [author and journalist] gave the view that in Afghanistan, “Westernisation” entails broader societal and political attitudes as well as more narrowly defined appearances and fashion choices.³²

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 [anonymous] 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 [murdered in Kabul after being falsely accused of burning the Koran]...’³³

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5.2 Behaviour and appearance deemed as ‘Westernised’

5.2.1 Asylos, a global network of volunteers providing free-of-charge country of origin information (COI) research for lawyers helping asylum seekers, published a report in August 2017 on the situation of young male returnees to Kabul, deemed “Westernised”. Mr Abdul Ghafoor, director of Afghanistan Migrants Advice and Support Organisation (AMASO), Kabul, told Asylos in May 2017 that it was easy to recognise a person who had been to Europe by their clothes or haircut³⁴.

5.2.2 The December 2017 EASO report stated:

‘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”

³² EASO, ‘[Individuals targeted under societal and legal norms](#)’, (pages 99-100), December 2017

³³ EASO, ‘[Individuals targeted under societal and legal norms](#)’, (page 100), December 2017

³⁴ Asylos, ‘[Situation of young male “Westernised” returnees to Kabul](#)’, (page 90), August 2017

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.’³⁵

5.2.3 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.’³⁶

5.2.4 The EASO report added:

‘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.’³⁷

5.2.5 Citing a range of sources, a query response by the EASO on Afghans perceived as ‘Westernised’, dated September 2020, noted:

‘While abroad, returnees may have been exposed to a more liberal environment that could make integration in Afghanistan more difficult. Rejection by the family and society could be triggered by “speaking with an accent, engaging into conversation when not talked to, dressing differently, going to the gym, using skype to speak to friends abroad”, as reported by Asylos in their August 2017 study on returnees from Western countries to Kabul. Other reasons include a different haircut and style of dress, relaxed position towards religion or consumption of alcohol. Friederike Stahlmann, a social scientist and an Afghan expert from Germany, stated in an expert opinion [dated 2018] for a German court, in support of an asylum case, that in Afghanistan, all returnees from Europe are suspected that they have adapted themselves to the [informal translation] “European culture and lifestyle” while abroad. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) indicated that the returnees can be seen with suspicion by both, local communities and state authorities.’³⁸

5.2.6 An Austrian Centre for Country of Origin & Asylum Research and Documentation (ACCORD) report, which referred to the perception of

³⁵ EASO, ‘[Individuals targeted under societal and legal norms](#)’, (page 101), December 2017

³⁶ EASO, ‘[Individuals targeted under societal and legal norms](#)’, (page 102), December 2017

³⁷ EASO, ‘[Individuals targeted under societal and legal norms](#)’, (pages 103-104), December 2017

³⁸ EASO, ‘[COI Query Response](#)’ (page 3) 2 September 2020

returnees from Europe, dated June 2020, cited social scientist and Afghan expert Friederike Stahlmann (informal translation by [DeepL Translator](#)):

‘Friederike Stahlmann mentions in the context of the ACCORD online event of May 2020 the danger for returnees of being perceived as “westernised” and thus as infidels. In Afghanistan, the word “gharbzadeh” is commonly used for “westernised”. This describes changes in appearance, behaviour, everyday rules and other social rules. This habitus, this change is something that the person in question cannot simply on command. It is striking how people who are deported from Western countries are immediately recognisable.’³⁹

- 5.2.7 The September 2020 EASO query response provided an informal translation of other comments made by Friederike Stahlmann, regarding returnees from Western countries, taken from a 2018 report:

“[...] the expected misconduct also includes extramarital relationships, consumption of pork, alcohol and drugs, as well as all possible forms of apostasy – from neglecting religious duties such as regular prayer, through various forms of blasphemy, to conversion to Christianity or atheism. Asylum seekers in particular are suspected of having converted because there is an increasingly widespread rumor in Afghanistan that European countries allegedly only grant protection to Christians”.

‘Stahlmann noted that deportations of Afghans from Europe are widely covered in the media and deportees are often identified by their full name what makes their return to the country publicly known. And, according to Stahlmann, the longer time the deportees have spent abroad, the more difficult will it be for them to hide the changes in their behaviour and looks and to fit in.’⁴⁰

- 5.2.8 The EASO query response also noted ‘According to the [2017] Danish Refugee Council (DRC), “[t]he risk of being suspected [of having spent time abroad] is greater the longer you have been outside Afghanistan and the further away you have been”.’⁴¹

- 5.2.9 The June 2020 ACCORD report, cited Noah Coburn, a Bennington College (Vermont, US) social and cultural anthropologist with a focus on Afghanistan (informal translation by [DeepL Translator](#)), ‘Noah Coburn, in his June 2020 briefing, responds to the question of whether Afghan returnees face mistrust due to a perceived “Westernisation” that this certainly does not affect all returnees, as there are so many Afghans who were once refugees. However, it does happen with some regularity and particularly affects Shia Hazara, who are already perceived by many as not being “real Muslims”.’⁴²

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5.3 Attitudes towards returnees in general and from Western countries

- 5.3.1 When asked by Asylös how returnees from Europe were perceived, Abdul Ghafoor, director of AMASO, stated that social acceptance depended on the

³⁹ ACCORD, ‘[Afghanistan: Apostasie, Blasphemie, Konversion...](#)’ (page 18), 15 June 2020

⁴⁰ EASO, ‘[COI Query Response](#)’ (page 4), 2 September 2020

⁴¹ EASO, ‘[COI Query Response](#)’ (page 4), 2 September 2020

⁴² ACCORD, ‘[Afghanistan: Apostasie, Blasphemie, Konversion...](#)’ (pages 17 and 23), 15 June 2020

society in which a returnee lived, noting that social acceptance in Kabul, for example, might be easier. Mr Ghafoor said that sometimes returnees were excluded from society due to a perceived westernised lifestyle or due to religious issues, such as conversion to Christianity⁴³.

5.3.2 The December 2017 EASO report cited the contrasting views on how returnees were perceived by their families and society:

‘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”.⁴⁴

5.3.3 The same report also 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.’⁴⁵

5.3.4 The December 2017 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 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

⁴³ Asylos, [‘Situation of young male “Westernised” returnees to Kabul’](#), (page 90), August 2017

⁴⁴ EASO, [‘Individuals targeted under societal and legal norms’](#), (page 102), December 2017

⁴⁵ EASO, [‘Individuals targeted under societal and legal norms’](#), (page 96), December 2017

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.⁴⁶

5.3.5 The December 2017 EASO report cited Liza Schuster, sociologist at City University of London, in regard to returnees from Europe:

‘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 self censor, 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 [Dasht]-e Barchi, in west Kabul, within individual families, a person may have individuals with strongly conservative views about notions of “Westernisation”.⁴⁷

5.3.6 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 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...⁴⁸

5.3.7 In a 2018 report assessing the impact on children returning from Europe to Afghanistan, Save The Children recognised some of the challenges in identifying child returnees from Europe. The assessment was based on interviews with 57 individual child returnees, 24 parents or guardians and 30 key informants in Afghanistan, with additional interviews carried out with Afghan children, families and professionals supporting them in Norway and

⁴⁶ EASO, ‘[Individuals targeted under societal and legal norms](#)’, (page 102), December 2017

⁴⁷ EASO, ‘[Individuals targeted under societal and legal norms](#)’, (page 100), December 2017

⁴⁸ EASO, ‘[Individuals targeted under societal and legal norms](#)’, (page 103), December 2017

Sweden⁴⁹. The report noted ‘The fear of stigma or risks associated with being known to have lived abroad means that child returnees from Europe may try to avoid being identified as such.’⁵⁰ The report added that the returnees ‘... were aware of the stigma that comes with having spent time abroad, and of questions they would be exposed to around their religious beliefs and practices.’⁵¹

5.3.8 In January 2018, Oxfam published its findings of its field research on returnees, conducted in Herat, Kabul, Kunduz and Nangarhar, noting ‘Discrimination against returnees by the host communities was perceived as almost non-existent, although it may arise in some communities where returnees do not have any relationships with the local people or form their own groups. In some cases there is distrust because the local communities do not know exactly who these people are, and may treat them differently – as they would with other outsiders.’⁵²

5.3.9 The Oxfam research report noted, in regard to returnees to Kabul: ‘Similar to the other three provinces [Herat, Kunduz and Nangarhar], there are no reports of major tensions with the host communities. However, people in the surrounding communities interviewed for this research did express a general sense of fear of the returnees, for example fear of crime, drug addiction and disease. They also perceive the returnees as a source of pressure on the job market and local wages. Some returnees report that, in the beginning, the host communities were suspicious and not welcoming, but this has become better over time.’⁵³

5.3.10 A report of an April 2019 fact-finding mission (FFM) to Kabul on the conditions for returnees by the Finnish Immigration Service’s Country Information Service, who consulted a range of sources, noted:

‘The concept of returning is a part of life in Afghanistan, as approximately 40 per cent of Afghans have been forced to leave their country at some point in their lives. There have been no reports of community tensions related to returns rising in Kabul or other parts of the country, in general. The number of returnees in Kabul is much lower than in border provinces, like Herat, Kandahar and Nangarhar, where thousands of people are coming back a day, whereas in Kabul it can be only what the airport can accommodate, which is some hundreds, and many people are going onwards to the provinces.’⁵⁴

5.3.11 The 2019 Finnish FFM report added:

‘UNHCR noted that many people who have returned from Europe have faced discrimination because they are accused of doing things that are seen immoral in Afghanistan and because they were in a non-Muslim country. These can be simple things, such as a different haircut or the way they dress. This makes them easy to be recognized.

⁴⁹ Save The Children, [‘From Europe to Afghanistan’](#) (page 9), 2018

⁵⁰ Save The Children, [‘From Europe to Afghanistan’](#) (page 18), 2018

⁵¹ Save The Children, [‘From Europe to Afghanistan’](#) (page 34), 2018

⁵² Oxfam, [‘Returning to Fragility’](#) (page 18), January 2018

⁵³ Oxfam, [‘Returning to Fragility’](#) (page 23), January 2018

⁵⁴ Finnish Immigration Service, [‘Afghanistan: Fact-Finding Mission...’](#) (page 20), 19 October 2020

‘Another issue with returns from Europe is that the returnees are perceived as wealthy and people think that they are just trying to take advantage of the support provided by the international community. Those coming back from Iran and Pakistan, who form the majority of returnees, do not have to deal with similar accusations.’⁵⁵

- 5.3.12 The June 2020 ACCORD report cited Melissa Kerr Chiovenda, lecturer in anthropology at the College of Spiritual and Spiritual Science Social Sciences from Zayed University in Abu Dhabi, who told ACCORD in an email dated 2 June 2020:

‘[M]any Afghans who return from the West certainly are viewed with suspicion, and the degree to which they experience this depends upon where they are from and their social class. (ie someone from Kabul would have an easier time than someone from Jalalabad, someone from an educated class that has sent a lot of people to study in the West would have an easier time than someone who was a farmer). A lot of this has to do with fear about possible conversion. This level of suspicion can, among certain areas, even be elevated when someone has simply spent time with foreigners. People in certain areas of Afghanistan who spend extended time with foreigners may be chastised by their communities, so you can imagine that in such places, the effect is even worse for those who have spent time in the West.’⁵⁶

- 5.3.13 Although referring to returnees from Iran, a report by Samuel Hall dated February 2021 noted:

‘... both parents and children interviewed frequently highlight the happiness families feel when their child returns to them alive and healthy, but also the anger and stress that surfaces after this initial reunification, especially given the financial stress that ensues upon a child’s return. This financial stress is exacerbated by the fact that debt to smugglers, as well as for basic costs of living, is a common concern. Families borrow money to send their children to Iran; when a child is deported before he has been able to work off this debt or return the dividends to his families the debt remains to be repaid.’⁵⁷

See also [Mistreatment or targeting of returnees](#).

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5.4 Perceived Christian converts

- 5.4.1 For information on Christian converts, see the Norwegian Country of Origin Information Centre, Landinfo, report ‘[Afghanistan: The situation of Christian converts](#)’, 7 April 2021.

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5.5 Stigma and perceptions of failure

- 5.5.1 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

⁵⁵ Finnish Immigration Service, ‘[Afghanistan: Fact-Finding Mission...](#)’ (page 20), 19 October 2020

⁵⁶ ACCORD, ‘[Afghanistan: Apostasie, Blasphemie, Konversion...](#)’ (page 27), 15 June 2020

⁵⁷ Samuel Hall, ‘[Coming back to Afghanistan](#)’ (page 21), 24 February 2021

Afghanistan: financial difficulties, having to move out of Kabul, and inability to live with family members⁵⁸. 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.'⁵⁹

- 5.5.2 The August 2017 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 deported⁶⁰. The aforementioned article noted that young people deported to Afghanistan with signs of cultural change, for example, clothing, behaviour, and accent, were sometimes seen by family and community as 'contaminated'⁶¹. The stigma of 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 family⁶².
- 5.5.3 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.'⁶³
- 5.5.4 According to a July 2015 Peace Research Institute Oslo (PRIO) Policy Brief, based on research in Afghanistan with returnees from Norway and the United Kingdom, 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 migration⁶⁴.
- 5.5.5 Abdul Ghafoor, director of AMASO, interviewed in May 2017 by Asylos, said that some returnees did not want to tell their families they had been deported due to feelings of failure and because deportation carried a huge stigma⁶⁵. UK-based scholar with extensive research experience in Afghanistan, Dr Anicee Van Engeland, told Asylos in June 2017 '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.'⁶⁶
- 5.5.6 In July 2018 Seefar, a social enterprise mission working with vulnerable people⁶⁷, published the results of a survey of 250 male Afghan nationals between the ages of 15 and 34 who had returned to Afghanistan from abroad (47.2% from Europe) within the past 2 years. The survey found

⁵⁸ RSN, '[After Return: Documenting the experiences of young people ...](#)' (page 18), April 2016,

⁵⁹ RSN, '[After Return: Documenting the experiences of young people ...](#)' (page 22), April 2016,

⁶⁰ Asylos, '[Situation of young male "Westernised" returnees to Kabul](#)', (page 34), August 2017

⁶¹ Asylos, '[Situation of young male "Westernised" returnees to Kabul](#)', (page 35), August 2017

⁶² Asylos, '[Situation of young male "Westernised" returnees to Kabul](#)', (page 35), August 2017

⁶³ Asylos, '[Situation of young male "Westernised" returnees to Kabul](#)', (page 34), August 2017

⁶⁴ PRIO, '[Can Afghans reintegrate after assisted return from Europe](#)', July 2015,

⁶⁵ Asylos, '[Situation of young male "Westernised" returnees to Kabul](#)', (page 90), August 2017

⁶⁶ Asylos, '[Situation of young male "Westernised" returnees to Kabul](#)', (page 97), August 2017

⁶⁷ Seefar, '[About us](#)' no date

'Many returnees from Europe reported feeling shame for returning back to Afghanistan, which they viewed as a failure... Respondents returned from Europe also expressed feelings of regret for wasting money and time on migrating.'⁶⁸

- 5.5.7 Referring to reports dated between 2018 and 2020, the September 2020 EASO query response reported similar attitudes towards returnees:

'To be returned to Afghanistan without a secured status in Europe is seen as failure, whether it is voluntary or forced. If someone returns without money and presents for the family members, it is associated with "stigma of failure". According a study published by the Mixed Migration Centre (MMC) in January 2019, "[w]hile direct family tend to be welcoming, there is evidence that deportees are viewed negatively in their communities and there is stigma around those who migrated irregularly to Europe." Some Afghans believe that returnees must have committed crime abroad and that caused their deportation.'⁶⁹

- 5.5.8 According to the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) and the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC), cited in the 2019 Finnish FFM report:

'Generally returning from Europe is seen more as a failure than return from Iran or Pakistan. Most of the returnees have problems with their family because the family has sold all their resources to send their family member all the way to Europe. If this fails, the family cannot pay their debts. Returnees may feel humiliated because they could not secure a permit in Europe and the family has lost their assets. That is why the returnees are not fully accepted and welcomed by their families.'⁷⁰

- 5.5.9 Deutsche Welle (DW), reported in July 2020 that 'Afghan society for the most part believes that "only criminals are sent back from Europe." Those who return are seen as failures who have brought disgrace upon their families.'⁷¹

- 5.5.10 A joint study by the Vienna Institute for International Dialogue and Cooperation (VIDC) and the Afghanistan Development and Peace Research Organization (ADPRO) of 16 Afghan men returned from Austria to Afghanistan between 2016 and 2020, noted:

'Economically, many of the respondents were situated in a worse situation than prior to their flight to Austria. They were unable to establish themselves economically in Austria, due to the restricted work rights during the lengthy asylum procedure. They were, thus, forced to return empty-handed. The findings of the interviews reveal that, in their absence, the returnees lost their social network and their local communities completely changed. Stigmatization was also the most difficult social and psychological phenomenon among returnees. They were labelled as "losers", "criminals" or "Westernized". Life in Austria damaged the relationships between the returnees and their local communities. The latter being suspicious of the

⁶⁸ Seefar, '[Examining Return and Reintegration in Afghanistan](#)' (page 30), July 2018

⁶⁹ EASO, '[COI Query Response](#)' (page 5), 2 September 2020

⁷⁰ Finnish Immigration Service, '[Afghanistan: Fact-Finding Mission...](#)' (page 20), 19 October 2020

⁷¹ DW, '[Austria forces Afghan refugees back to face war and terror](#)', 12 July 2020

returnees' return and accusing them of bringing a foreign culture, of converting to Christianity and of attempting to convert people to Christianity.⁷²

See also Mistreatment or targeting of returnees – [By family and society](#).

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5.6 Position of women and girls

- 5.6.1 The 2018 Save The Children report noted some of the challenges faced by girls over boys. 'For girls, a lack of freedom, violence against women, social pressure, and limited ability to protect themselves from harassment. Girls returning to Afghanistan face an additional burden, made heavier by the years they spent in countries where their rights were more respected.'⁷³
- 5.6.2 The September 2020 EASO query response noted there was limited information on women and girls who were seen as 'Westernised', adding 'Sources indicate that [the] majority of returnees to Afghanistan are men and that it would be difficult for a single Afghan woman to leave the country in the first place.'⁷⁴
- 5.6.3 The 2019 Finnish FFM report indicated that women and couples could be targeted by their families, particularly in cases where they were considered to be in an 'unacceptable relationship' or had married without the families agreement⁷⁵.
- 5.6.4 The September 2020 EASO query response stated:
- '[A] Report by the Dutch government dated March 2019 indicates that social position of women is better in the Shia communities of Afghanistan. Hazara women are reportedly enjoying more freedom than women of other ethnic groups in the country. The situation of women and girls in urban and rural areas also differs. In the major urban centers such as Kabul, Mazar-e Sharif and Herat, women can move alone in the public space without a male companion if they [sic] family agreed to that.
- 'During an online event organised by the ACCORD in May 2020, F. Stahlmann noted that many Afghan girls and women have themselves limited their movement in the public as they were afraid that someone could take picture of them and publish them online and that these could be seen in Afghanistan. In 2018, Stahlmann reported of cases of young women who were allowed by their families to work and study, but this was forbidden as soon as they have noticed changes in their behaviour influenced by these new freedoms.
- 'Referring to the concept of "male honour", an Afghan sociologist explained to the BBC News that "[t]he harshest and toughest men are the most respected and honourable men in society. If the female members of their family are liberal, they are considered promiscuous and dishonourable." In some areas of the country, female clothing was subjected to the

⁷² VIDC, '[From Austria to Afghanistan](#)' (page 5), January 2021

⁷³ Save The Children, '[From Europe to Afghanistan](#)' (page 45), 2018

⁷⁴ EASO, '[COI Query Response](#)' (pages 6-7), 2 September 2020

⁷⁵ Finnish Immigration Service, '[Afghanistan: Fact-Finding Mission...](#)' (page 22), 19 October 2020

“conservative social mores” and sometimes enforced by the Taliban and religious leaders.’⁷⁶

5.6.5 The response also noted

‘In March 2019, Dutch government released a report that indicates that women seen as Westernised “are at risk of being targeted by AGEs.” The report further states that: “Afghan women who have lived in Western countries for a long time, been educated there and come to cities such as Kabul, Herat or Mazar-e Sharif are more likely than local women to find work, for example at an international organisation.” In Kabul, “tens of thousands” of women now reportedly work outside of their homes. [However], Women participating in public life as, for example, civil servants, lawyers or teachers, can be seen as “immoral” by segments of society.’⁷⁷

5.6.6 The September 2020 EASO query response further noted:

‘The January 2019 MMC study reported that female child returnees have to face social pressure, harassment and violence after their return to Afghanistan.

‘In March 2020, it was reported that the Taliban “will protect women's rights, but only if they don't violate Islam or Afghan values, suggesting it will curtail some of the fragile freedoms gained by women in the past two decades.” Already in February 2019, it was reported that Taliban was to allow women to work and study, as long as “cultural and religious codes” are maintained, indicating rejection of Western clothes.

‘The Afghan Women's Educational Center (AWEC) is providing literacy and tailoring classes for returnee women in Kabul, according to Oxfam [in 2018].’⁷⁸

5.6.7 The 2019 Finnish FFM report indicated that, when it came to personal issues, such as women or young couples escaping families as their relationship was considered unacceptable, the police were not able and not interested in dealing with such personal cases⁷⁹.

5.6.8 [Banners promoting women dress code spark backlash – Afghanistan Times](#)

5.6.9 For general information the situation for women and girls, see the [Country Policy and Information Note on Afghanistan: Women fearing gender-based violence](#).

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Section 5 updated: 21 April 2021

6. Mistreatment or targeting of returnees

6.1 By the Afghan authorities

6.1.1 When asked how returnees from Europe were perceived by the Afghan authorities, Dr Anicee Van Engeland told Asylos in June 2017 that ‘There is therefore very little sympathy for returnees. It is often expressed through

⁷⁶ EASO, ‘[COI Query Response](#)’ (page 7), 2 September 2020

⁷⁷ EASO, ‘[COI Query Response](#)’ (page 8), 2 September 2020

⁷⁸ EASO, ‘[COI Query Response](#)’ (pages 8-9), 2 September 2020

⁷⁹ Finnish Immigration Service, ‘[Afghanistan: Fact-Finding Mission...](#)’ (page 22), 19 October 2020

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.⁸⁰

- 6.1.2 Without giving further detail, a November 2019 report by the Afghanistan Human Rights and Democracy Organization (AHRDO), drawn from interviews undertaken in 2018 with 50 Afghan returnees and deportees from European countries, noted that some deportees had faced harassment by border police at Kabul airport⁸¹.
- 6.1.3 An ongoing study of returnees by Friederike Stahlmann noted that, of 547 men who were deported from Germany between December 2016 and April 2019, 'information' on 55 of them was documented as of July 2019. Stahlmann stated that, where possible, standardised questionnaires were completed and interviews conducted with returnees or contact persons (generally friends and relatives in Germany with an interest in the survival of the returnee)⁸². However, the study went on to note that, since a significant number of deportees leave the country again, only the experiences of 31 men, who had been in Afghanistan for at least 2 months, were considered for the study. It was not clear from the methodology how many interviews were conducted, what questions were asked, who the interviews were with (deportee or contact person), or when or where the study took place⁸³.
- 6.1.4 According to the 2019 Stahlmann study, security forces and officials regularly accused Afghan returnees of having betrayed their country by fleeing, or that they were infidels or converts. Several deportees reported that state actors insulted them or threatened them with violence. Some deportees reported that security forces at the airport questioned whether they were Afghans, on the basis that Afghans are expected to defend their country instead of seeking safety abroad. Four deportees also reported that they were denied an ID-card (tazkira) on the basis that they had fled to Germany⁸⁴.
- 6.1.5 The DFAT report on June 2019 noted '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...'⁸⁵

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6.2 By family and society

- 6.2.1 In its concluding observations, Save The Children noted in its 2018 report: '... the case studies in Afghanistan – as well as the discussions with children in Sweden and Norway – reveal that stigmatisation due to perceived "westernisation" is a very real fear. While having spent time abroad does not

⁸⁰ Asylos, '[Situation of young male "Westernised" returnees to Kabul](#)', (page 97), August 2017

⁸¹ AHRDO, '[Deportation to Afghanistan...](#)' (pages 8 and 19), November 2019

⁸² Stahlmann, F, '[Studie zum Verbleib und zu den Erfahrungen abgeschobener Afghanen](#)' (pages 3 to 4), September 2019 (translation on request)

⁸³ Stahlmann, F, '[Studie zum Verbleib und zu den Erfahrungen abgeschobener Afghanen](#)' (page 4), September 2019 (translation on request)

⁸⁴ Stahlmann, F, '[Studie zum Verbleib und zu den Erfahrungen abgeschobener Afghanen](#)' (page 6), September 2019 (translation on request)

⁸⁵ DFAT, '[Country Information Report Afghanistan](#)' (paragraph 5.41), 27 June 2019

always imply a risk of specific targeting, the risks faced by returning children are worsened by the fact that, in some cases, the threats that led families and individuals to go abroad, such as targeting by insurgent groups or fear of kidnapping, remain upon return.⁸⁶

- 6.2.2 Without elaborating further, the Save The Children 2018 report noted ‘Ten out of the 53 children [returned from Europe] who completed questionnaires stated that someone had “attempted to recruit them to fight in combat, commit acts of violence, or otherwise engage with armed groups”.⁸⁷
- 6.2.3 For information on recruitment by state and non-state armed groups, see the [Country Policy and Information Note on Afghanistan: Unaccompanied children](#).
- 6.2.4 The 2015 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’ credentials⁸⁸.
- 6.2.5 The 2018 Seefar survey found ‘There was clear stigma – perceived, experienced, or both – around migrating irregularly to Europe, making it more difficult for returnees to reintegrate. In interviews, returnees said they received negative treatment or exclusion because they migrated specifically to Europe or Turkey and returned.’⁸⁹ The survey indicated that debt accumulated in financing migration to Europe attributed to the negative attitudes returnees experienced by community and family members⁹⁰.
See also [Stigma and perceptions of failure](#).
- 6.2.6 The September 2020 EASO query response noted:
‘... sources reported on an increased risk of kidnapping because of a perceived wealth accumulated while abroad.
‘A [2019] article by Deutsche Welle (DW) also indicated that returnees from Europe may be seen as wealthy and that could put their lives in danger. A supposed success could be assumed because of a variety of reasons, including having a new smartphone or a laptop. Referring to a variety of sources, Stahlmann concluded [in 2018] that returnees and their families are exposed to the risk of daily criminality and criminal networks that think that they could make a huge profit through blackmailing and kidnapping of the returnees because of the assumed immense prosperity in Europe.

⁸⁶ Save The Children, ‘[From Europe to Afghanistan](#)’ (page 51), 2018

⁸⁷ Save The Children, ‘[From Europe to Afghanistan](#)’ (page 10), 2018

⁸⁸ PRIO, ‘[Can Afghans reintegrate after assisted return from Europe](#)’, July 2015,

⁸⁹ Seefar, ‘[Examining Return and Reintegration in Afghanistan](#)’ (page 32), July 2018

⁹⁰ Seefar, ‘[Examining Return and Reintegration in Afghanistan](#)’ (pages 32 to 33), July 2018

'... The MMC study has found that the returnees "may be disproportionately targeted in intercommunal violence and robbery because of a lack of local connections".'⁹¹

See also [By anti-government elements \(AGEs\)](#).

- 6.2.7 A 2019 article by Amnesty International, Germany, cited in the September 2020 EASO report, noted '... many returnees to Afghanistan fear being targeted on suspicion that they behaved in an unIslamic way while abroad, including drinking alcohol and meeting with women.'⁹²
- 6.2.8 According to the 2019 Stahlmann study, 28 of the 31 returnees had been 'affected by violence.'⁹³ The study noted that around 8 of the 31 returnees had experienced violence from the general population on account of 'western traits' or their past in Germany⁹⁴. Stahlmann indicated that experiences of violence were withheld or downplayed by respondents⁹⁵.
- 6.2.9 The June 2020 ACCORD report also cited Friederike Stahlmann who, in May 2020, said (informal translation by [DeepL Translator](#)) there was danger from one's own family. The ACCORD report stated that, according to Stahlmann:
- 'The social changes noticed in the person concerned would often also violate religious expectations. This is seen as apostasy and the person is categorised as an unbeliever, which in turn is very dangerous. There is also danger from the neighbourhood. The politically motivated attacks due to Westernisation that she [Stahlmann] had heard about in Kabul had almost all come from the neighbourhood, including in the large Hazara neighbourhood of Dasht-e-Barchi, which is not known for being particularly conservative. The head of the small non-governmental organisation AMASO, which counsels deportees, had to move his private residence, the office of the NGO and a room rented for emergencies several times because of death threats from the neighbourhood. These threats were linked to accusations of being unbelievers, Christians and apostates.'⁹⁶
- 6.2.10 The Asia Foundation's 2019 survey of Afghan returnees asked 4,073 returnees and 3,971 host community members residing in Kandahar, Herat, Balkh, Nangarhar and Kabul about their perceptions and experiences of returnee integration⁹⁷. The survey found 56.2% of returnees who responded felt discriminated against because of their language or way of speaking⁹⁸. Although it was not clear from where these respondents had returned, more

⁹¹ EASO, '[COI Query Response](#)' (pages 6 and 9), 2 September 2020

⁹² EASO, '[COI Query Response](#)' (page 9), 2 September 2020

⁹³ Stahlmann, F, '[Studie zum Verbleib und zu den Erfahrungen abgeschobener Afghanen](#)' (page 4), September 2019 (translation on request)

⁹⁴ Stahlmann, F, '[Studie zum Verbleib und zu den Erfahrungen abgeschobener Afghanen](#)' (page 5), September 2019 (translation on request)

⁹⁵ Stahlmann, F, '[Studie zum Verbleib und zu den Erfahrungen abgeschobener Afghanen](#)' (page 7), September 2019 (translation on request)

⁹⁶ ACCORD, '[Afghanistan: Apostasie, Blasphemie, Konversion...](#)' (page 18), 15 June 2020

⁹⁷ Asia Foundation, '[A Survey of the Afghan Returnees 2019](#)' (page 19), 14 December 2020

⁹⁸ Asia Foundation, '[A Survey of the Afghan Returnees 2019](#)' (page 96), 14 December 2020

than half of returnees surveyed returned from Pakistan (58.9%), followed by Iran (33.9%), and Turkey (2.9%)⁹⁹.

- 6.2.11 In addition, 17% of host community members who reported they knew a returnee indicated the difficulties returnees had in integrating into the host community were due to differences in: language (50.2%), customs/cultures (37.5%), poverty (29.7%), accents (28.9%) and religious sects (23.8%)¹⁰⁰. According to host community members, the majority of returnees came from Pakistan (53.9%), following by Iran (35%), Turkey (5.6%) and Germany (1.7%)¹⁰¹.

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6.3 By Anti-Government Elements (AGEs)

- 6.3.1 According to the 2019 Stahlmann study:

‘The fact of having been in Europe is enough to be subject to persecution by the Taliban. Even working for western figures in Afghanistan, or simply being unwilling to cooperate with the Taliban, are sufficient grounds to be threatened with murder. But if someone risks his life several times by fleeing and then asks the “infidel occupiers” for protection, in the eyes of the Taliban he has gone over to the other side. They are accused not only of being “unbelievers” but also of “espionage” and “treachery”.’¹⁰²

- 6.3.2 The study then went on to note that around 6 of the 31 returnees had either been directly threatened by the Taliban or threatened by a third person that they would be reported to the Taliban¹⁰³. The study gave examples, noting that 2 returnees travelling to their home provinces were stopped at Taliban checkpoints because they aroused suspicion for not having a beard. They were detained and beaten as they were suspected of working for ‘infidels.’¹⁰⁴ Without providing further detail, the study noted that 2 other returnees were targeted for recruitment by the Taliban¹⁰⁵.

- 6.3.3 For information on recruitment by state and non-state armed groups, see the [Country Policy and Information Note on Afghanistan: Unaccompanied children](#).

- 6.3.4 The June 2020 ACCORD report also cited Friederike Stahlmann who, in May 2020, said (informal translation by [DeepL Translator](#)):

‘... in the large cities of Kabul, Herat, Mazar-e Sharif and Jalalabad, there was a threat of betrayal to the Taliban because of the flight to Europe. There is no need for any conspicuous behaviour, but the danger is actually also based on flight. The Taliban would demand support and expect you to pay

⁹⁹ Asia Foundation, ‘[A Survey of the Afghan Returnees 2019](#)’ (page 39), 14 December 2020

¹⁰⁰ Asia Foundation, ‘[A Survey of the Afghan Returnees 2019](#)’ (page 163), 14 December 2020

¹⁰¹ Asia Foundation, ‘[A Survey of the Afghan Returnees 2019](#)’ (page 112), 14 December 2020

¹⁰² Stahlmann, F, ‘[Studie zum Verbleib und zu den Erfahrungen abgeschobener Afghanen](#)’ (page 5), September 2019 (translation on request)

¹⁰³ Stahlmann, F, ‘[Studie zum Verbleib und zu den Erfahrungen abgeschobener Afghanen](#)’ (page 5), September 2019 (translation on request)

¹⁰⁴ Stahlmann, F, ‘[Studie zum Verbleib und zu den Erfahrungen abgeschobener Afghanen](#)’ (page 5), September 2019 (translation on request)

¹⁰⁵ Stahlmann, F, ‘[Studie zum Verbleib und zu den Erfahrungen abgeschobener Afghanen](#)’ (page 5), September 2019 (translation on request)

taxes for them, to be loyal and, if in doubt, to fight for them. [Stahlmann] has noticed a big difference between returnees from Europe and those from Iran. If you have not been opposed to the Taliban in the past, going to Iran to provide for your family is not perceived as an escape from the Taliban. But if someone risks his life several times to come to the Western countries of the “infidel occupiers”, then it is seen as a form of defection. Another accusation that can follow and also appears in threatening letters to deportees or their families is espionage.

‘The problem of returnees, however, is that they are accused of not having followed the rules in the infidel West. This means that they have to live their faith and religiously legitimised rules of everyday life in a particularly convincing way in order to refute the accusation.’¹⁰⁶

6.3.5 As noted in the 2019 Finnish FFM report:

‘It is hard to distinguish how much of the targeting faced by individuals is politically or criminally motivated or has a local dispute at the background. Middle class Afghans are targeted because they might have money. Middle class, moderately affluent Kabulis of all ethnic groups risk being targeted by criminal gangs. Politically motivated targeting can be related to the person’s former job for teachers, interpreters, international community employees and governmental workers. The information networks of the Taliban are strong even in Kabul. The targeted groups also include UN employees, human rights activists, women right’s activists, and other such groups of individuals.’¹⁰⁷

6.3.6 Citing a range of sources, an April 2020 report on the security situation in Kabul by Cedoca, the Documentation and Research Department of the Belgian Office of the Commissioner General for Refugees and Stateless Persons, and the EASO report on the security situation, dated September 2020, indicated that criminality in general had increased in Kabul, including murder, burglary, robberies and car-jacking, kidnapping and extortion, drug-related criminality and land grabbing, which affected many residents^{108 109}.

6.3.7 Reporting in the Long War Journal (LWJ), a project of the non-profit, non-partisan Foundation for Defense of Democracies (FDD), Bill Roggio reported that, in a propaganda video released in June 2020, a Taliban narrator denounced ‘deviants ... who are trained in the poisonous deviant beliefs of atheism, communism, secularism, democracy, and other satanic western and disbelieving ideologies.’¹¹⁰

6.3.8 As noted in an article by Deutsche Welle (DW) in July 2020, returnees from the West were considered by the Taliban as ‘infidels’ and ‘enemies of Islam’ who ‘deserve nothing less than death.’¹¹¹ The same article cited Ali, an ethnic Hazara, who returned to Afghanistan from Austria in 2018. He told DW that he was stopped by the Taliban outside Ghazni and, after messages

¹⁰⁶ ACCORD, ‘[Afghanistan: Apostasie, Blasphemie, Konversion...](#)’ (page 18), 15 June 2020

¹⁰⁷ Finnish Immigration Service, ‘[Afghanistan: Fact-Finding Mission...](#)’ (page 21), 19 October 2020

¹⁰⁸ Cedoca, ‘[Security situation in Kabul City](#)’ (pages 20 to 22), 8 April 2020

¹⁰⁹ EASO, ‘[Security Situation](#)’ (page 42), September 2020

¹¹⁰ LWJ, ‘[Taliban denounces “deviant beliefs,” including “satanic western...”](#)’, 10 June 2020

¹¹¹ DW, ‘[Austria forces Afghan refugees back to face war and terror](#)’, 12 July 2020

written in German were discovered on his phone, he was beaten and his phone was smashed¹¹².

- 6.3.9 For further information on persons targeted by the Taliban, see the [Country Policy and Information Note on Afghanistan: Anti-Government Elements \(AGEs\)](#).

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¹¹² DW, [‘Austria forces Afghan refugees back to face war and terror’](#), 12 July 2020

Terms of Reference

A 'Terms of Reference' (ToR) is a broad outline of what the CPIN seeks to cover. They form the basis for the [country information section](#). The Home Office's Country Policy and Information Team uses some standardised ToR, depending on the subject, and these are then adapted depending on the country concerned.

For this particular CPIN, the following topics were identified prior to drafting as relevant and on which research was undertaken:

- Returns to Afghanistan
 - Number of returns
 - Reintegration and social support networks
- Societal attitudes and treatment
 - Dress norms
 - Perception of the West
 - Behaviours and appearance deemed as 'Westernised'
 - Attitudes towards returnees in general and from Western countries
 - Stigma and perceptions of failure
 - Position for women and girls
- Mistreatment or targeting of returnees
 - By the Afghan authorities
 - By family and society
 - By anti-government elements (AGEs)

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Version control

Clearance

Below is information on when this note was cleared:

- version **2.0**
- valid from **14 June 2021**

Official – sensitive: Start of section

The information in this section has been removed as it is restricted for internal Home Office use.

Official – sensitive: End of section

Changes from last version of this note

Updated country information and assessment

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