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COI QUERY RESPONSE - AFGHANISTAN - INFORMATION ON TREATMENT OF RETURNEES

In December 2023 the *European Union Agency for Asylum (EUAA)* mentioned that: “According to an international analyst, the Taliban have minimal background information on returning individuals. The source stated that, upon return, individuals sometimes have been given travel money to reach their homes, and may be lectured by a *mullah* on the dangers of leaving. Overall, the source found the Taliban 'lenient' in their handling of returnees. The source gave the example of a young man who cut the Taliban flag and draped his shoulders with the Republic flag in a video that went viral; the Taliban still took him back.”¹

The same report notes that: “TOLONews further reported that returnees were facing severe economic challenges and unemployment.”²

“Local media Kabul Now reported on individual cases of low-ranking military officials being detained, disappeared or killed after returning. The same source reported that some high-ranking military officials had received a 'warm reception' by Taliban officials upon their return, whilst others had received a 'cold welcome' or were living in fear and uncertainty.”³

The *United Nations in December 2023* reported that: “Responding to the announced forced returns of undocumented Afghans from Pakistan, on 26 October the Taliban leader established the de facto High Commission for Returnees, led by de facto Deputy Prime Minister Hanafi and including 31 high-ranking de facto officials, to address the challenges related to Afghan returnees. In less than a week, the de facto authorities set up most of the decreed structures and launched an "all-of-government" approach to address the mass returns from Pakistan. The response plan also designated 12 subcommittees to deal with a range of related issues, including transport, health, education, employment, land and shelter. The de facto Ministry of Defence has been playing a central role in the response by transporting returnees to their provinces of origin. Besides registration, medical

¹ European Union Agency for Asylum (EUAA) (5 December 2023) EUAA COI Report - Afghanistan: Country Focus [4. Treatment of certain profiles and groups of the population]

² ibid

³ ibid

care and the issuance of national identity cards, the de facto authorities also provided cash grants to returnee families.”⁴

A report issued by the *European Union Agency for Asylum (EUAA)* in November 2023 states that: “Sources interviewed by Afghanistan International claimed that the Taliban Intelligence service had set up check points near the Torkham passport office and customs office, where they arrested and taken to unknown locations some former government military personnel returning from Pakistan or any other individuals they identified as suspects.”⁵

This report further mentioned that: “Some returnees told SAMAA news that the Taliban mistreated them and ‘took away cash and mobile phones from their relatives.”⁶

Afghan Witness (AW) in November 2023 mentioned that: “Food distribution also appears to be scarce and provided in an ad-hoc manner. Though the Ministry of Refugees shared pictures of Taliban members providing food and cash to returnees, these posts mention groups of 25-30 recipients and provide no indication of large-scale organised efforts to provide these essentials to the hundreds of thousands of Afghans returning to the country.”⁷

The *Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR)* in September 2023 points out that: “...the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees has reported that there are specific risks for returnees from Europe that can be attributed to their stay in Europe or other non-Muslim countries as such. The authorities and security forces see them as traitors for leaving their home country and consider them as apostates or converts. The Taliban movement also perceives the returnees as apostates and traitors.”⁸

Another document from the *Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR)* in September 2023 mentioned that: “Between March and June 2023, the International Organization for Migration recorded 110 cases of forced marriages, including 75 among children who had recently returned. In 15 incidents, undocumented returnees had sold their children to maintain their livelihood or to pay for illegal migration to Iran (Islamic Republic of) and Pakistan.”⁹

In June 2023 the *US Department of State Trafficking in Persons Report* notes that: “Former members of the Afghan National Security Forces and others associated with the pre-August 2021 government, internally displaced persons, forced deportees, voluntary refugee returnees, undocumented migrants, and refugees were at a high risk of exploitation.” [...] ¹⁰

The *United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA)* in April 2023 states that: “The WoAA 2022 shows the shelter needs of recent returnees are high, with 85 per cent of households needing shelter repairs; while 82 per cent of households are using inadequate heating

⁴ United Nations (1 December 2023) The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security: Report of the Secretary-General (December 2023), p.3

⁵ European Union Agency for Asylum (EUAA) (30 November 2023) EUAA COI Query - Afghanistan: Situation of Afghan returnees from Pakistan amid the campaign linked to the Illegal Foreigners Repatriation Plan, p.3

⁶ ibid

⁷ Afghan Witness (AW) (29 November 2023) Taliban response to Pakistan expulsion of refugees: support announced, but poor conditions reported

⁸ Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) (12 September 2023) Committee against Torture: Decision adopted concerning communication No. 1016/2020 (Risk to life and of torture in case of deportation to Afghanistan), p.3

⁹ Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) (1 September 2023) Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Afghanistan (September 2023)

¹⁰ US Department of State (15 June 2023) Trafficking in Persons Report 2023: Afghanistan, p.4

sources for winter; and some 70 per cent require basic household items. Indicators from the WASH sectors also highlight deteriorating living conditions for the returnee population group since 2021. Fifteen per cent of recent returnee households reported that the accessed water sources are inadequate (unprotected spring or surface water), the highest of any displaced population group. Additionally, the proportion of recent returnee households reporting they do not own soap grew from 18 per cent in the 2021 WoAA to 29 per cent in the 2022 WoAA.”¹¹

The report further notes that: “While recent returnees appear less affected than other population groups by protection incidents with the lowest share of households reporting a member experiencing a protection incident in the three months prior to data collection (16 per cent compared with 21 per cent of all households), all children living in vulnerable households returning from the cross border as undocumented migrants or returnees are at risk of violence, abuse, and exploitation. Regarding health, the WoAA results suggest that returnees face increasing difficulties in accessing health services. Nearly one quarter (23 percent) of recent returnee households reported having to travel one hour or more to access the nearest healthcare facility, a proportion higher than that of other displaced population groups and a threefold increase when compared with 2021 figures (7 per cent).”¹²

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¹¹ United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) (26 April 2023) *Afghanistan Humanitarian Response Plan: 2022 End-Year Monitoring Report of Financing, Achievements and Response Challenges [Part I: Overview]*

¹² *ibid*

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