



## ILO-UNHCR Cooperation Towards Comprehensive Solutions for Afghan Displacement

### **RESEARCH STUDY ON AFGHAN DEPORTEES FROM IRAN**

*August 2008*



*This report is funded by the European Union*



**Contacts:**

**Eric Davin**

Partner

[edavin@altaiconsulting.com](mailto:edavin@altaiconsulting.com)

Street 4, Qala-e Fatullah

Kabul, Afghanistan

[www.altaiconsulting.com](http://www.altaiconsulting.com)

**Nassim Majidi**

Project Manager

[nmajidi@altaiconsulting.com](mailto:nmajidi@altaiconsulting.com)

*The views reflected in this study do not necessarily reflect the views of the European Commission.*

## Table of Contents

<b>1. Introduction .....</b>	<b>2</b>
1.1 Objectives of the Study .....	2
1.2 Structure of the report.....	4
1.3 Research Methodology .....	4
<b>2. Population movements between Afghanistan and Iran.....</b>	<b>12</b>
2.1 A long history of migration to Iran .....	12
2.2 Iranian government policies towards Afghans: from open door to restrictive policies .....	14
2.3 Deportation reports and statistics 2007-2008 .....	15
2.4 Major vulnerable groups .....	16
<b>3. Afghan deportees from Iran: Single adult males .....</b>	<b>18</b>
3.1 Demographic profile.....	18
3.2 Labour and employment.....	20
3.3 Migration patterns.....	27
3.4 Return to Afghanistan .....	36
3.5 Summary of key findings on single adult males .....	40
<b>4. Conclusions.....</b>	<b>42</b>
4.1 Comparative review of the population of deportees from Iran .....	42
4.2 Driving forces of migration.....	45
4.3 Vulnerabilities.....	50
4.4 Migration and development.....	57
<b>5. Areas of opportunity.....</b>	<b>60</b>
5.1 Domestic issues: prevention and long term re-integration package .....	60
5.2 Legal issues: creating opportunities for regular labour migration .....	62
5.3 Human rights: relieving the pain.....	64
5.4 Further research areas .....	65
<b>6. References .....</b>	<b>67</b>
<b>7. Annex 1: Afghan deportees from Iran: Heads of households .....</b>	<b>68</b>
<b>8. Annex 2: Case studies of Afghan deportees from Iran .....</b>	<b>92</b>

## 1. Introduction

---

### 1.1 Objectives of the Study

#### **Background**

The situation of Afghans in neighboring countries remains one of the world's largest and most longstanding refugee and displacement problems. Despite the significant returns of Afghans to their homeland since 2002<sup>1</sup>, an estimated 920,000 documented Afghans<sup>2</sup> and one million undocumented Afghans remain in Iran today. This population is composed of registered and undocumented refugees, mainly families who left to Iran at the onset of conflict in Afghanistan, and single adult males who continue to migrate to Iran clandestinely in the search of economic opportunities. The current migration flow from Afghanistan to Iran is predominantly composed of these migrant workers.

Single individuals move back and forth between Afghanistan and Iran, a movement that is unlikely to end as it is a key livelihoods strategy for populations in Afghanistan (AREU 2005). Afghan families benefit from remittances sent from family members who migrate to Iran for work purposes, a trend which continues even in the face of restrictive measures taken by the Iranian government. Dissuasive measures have not succeeded in curbing irregular migration. Adult males persist on crossing the border clandestinely, relying on a thriving smuggling system, on transnational networks of relatives and friends settled in Iran and on an informal labour market in Iran, mainly in the construction sector.

The Government of Iran has long insisted on repatriation as the preferred solution for the large number of undocumented Afghans residing in the country. The legal and operational framework elaborated since 2002 seeks to provide a solution for the voluntary repatriation of the refugee population through a series of tripartite agreements between the governments of Iran and Afghanistan and the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR). The large population of single and migrant workers in irregular status falls outside of the scope of these negotiations on voluntary repatriation. As a result, and in accordance with principles of Iranian law, the government of Iran has relied on forced repatriation in response to the clandestine flow of migrant workers. A massive wave of deportation of Afghans in irregular status reached its peak in April 2007, resulting in an unexpected humanitarian and political crisis. The vast majority (est. 98%) of this deportation flow is still comprised of single adult males.

Deportations of Afghans from Iran are not a new phenomenon but the numbers in table 1 and table 2 point to the unprecedented level of forcible returns witnessed in 2007. Among the 363,369 deportees that year, the majority was comprised of single adult males (327,480), followed by 5,104 families (approximately 35,000 people), and 682 unaccompanied minors. The month of April 2007 alone saw 4,670 persons including women and children deported in a day, which resulted in an acute humanitarian situation that caught the Government of Afghanistan and the international community unprepared.

As illustrated in table 2 below, the statistics for 2008 show a significant decrease in the numbers of deported families as compared to the previous year. The numbers are still higher than the reported figures on forcible returns of families from the years 2002 to 2006, reflecting the irregular status of former refugee families who either (1) failed to register upon arrival in Iran because they did not deem it necessary in the migration context in which they arrived in Iran in the 1980s and 1990s, (2) defaulted by not taking part in the official registration exercise (Amayesh, see Box 1) set up by the Government of

---

<sup>1</sup> According to UNHCR border crossing statistics as of 9 August 2008, a total of 992,138 spontaneous returns have been recorded since 2002.

<sup>2</sup> According to government statistics and a November 2005 registration initiative undertaken by the government of Iran, an estimated 920,000 registered Afghans were living in Iran as of May 2006. This figure only includes officially registered Afghan refugees.

Iran thus losing their legal status or (3) ignored a government directive issued in 2005 which instructed Afghan families to move out of the Iranian province of Sistan Baluchistan and relocate to pre-assigned settlements, a failure of which would conduct to deportation to the country of origin (No Go Area policy, see Box 2). Case studies 1 and 8 (Annex 2) illustrate the loss of legal status of certain Afghan families who, because of a lack of financial resources or a lack of understanding of the necessity to maintain a legal status, found themselves living in Iran irregularly. The quantitative data collected also highlights the forced return of families living irregularly in the Sistan Baluchistan area following the official No Go Area policy implemented by the Government of Iran (Annex 1).

The deportation numbers provided in table 2 illustrate the predominance of single migrant workers (est. 98%) in the deportation flows from Iran to Afghanistan. The numbers of deported families are in effect very small as a proportion of the whole deportee population.

Table 1. Border crossing statistics, forcible returns 2002-2008 (as of 30 August 2008)

Location	Forcible returns							
	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	Total
<b>Zaranj</b>	15,901	15,586	35,830	65,561	82,072	208,844	156,701	590,495
<b>Islam Qala</b>	26,459	28,311	43,580	30,284	64,315	154,525	73,631	421,105
<b>Total</b>	<b>42,360</b>	<b>53,897</b>	<b>79,410</b>	<b>95,845</b>	<b>146,387</b>	<b>363,369</b>	<b>230,332</b>	<b>1,011,600</b>

Source: UNHCR 2008

Table 2. Proportion of family groups and single individuals deported in 2002-2008 (as of 30 August 2008)

Profile	Forcible returns							
	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	Total
<b>Families</b>	225	128	163	85	97	5,104	1,156	6,958
<b>Individuals</b>	41,365	53,386	78,736	95,360	145,934	328,275	225,107	968,063
<b>Total</b>	<b>42,360</b>	<b>53,897</b>	<b>79,410</b>	<b>95,845</b>	<b>146,387</b>	<b>363,369</b>	<b>230,332</b>	<b>1,011,600</b>

Source: UNHCR 2008

### Project

In the context of border crossings recorded since April 2007, the International Labour Organization (ILO) has commissioned Altai Consulting to conduct a research study to generate information on the profile and characteristics of the deportee population with a clear focus on single adult males. This study is part of the overall ILO-UNHCR "Cooperation towards comprehensive solution for Afghan displacement" project launched in May 2004 and is funded by the European Union.

The broad objective of this research is to generate hitherto unavailable information through primary surveys and other methodology on the recent wave of Afghan deportees from Iran. The first priority is one of identification. The pattern of cross-border movements that indicates the ongoing and cyclical nature of migration has blurred the lines between "refugees" and "voluntary" migrants (AREU 2005). What are the differences and similarities between those who have gone to Iran mainly as refugees and those who have migrated there motivated primarily by economic factors – to seek employment? This study provides empirical data to illustrate the transit, living and working conditions of two specific groups of Afghans deported from Iran: family groups, referred to as "undocumented refugees", and single adult males referred to as "migrant workers". This identification will be explained in this report and will draw attention on a specific migratory phenomenon: the migration flow of Afghans under irregular conditions and for economic purposes to Iran.

The second level of this survey is policy-oriented. What are the policy implications of these findings? This study will provide empirical data on the irregular labour migration flow from Afghanistan to Iran for policy

makers to create a conducive environment within Afghanistan to encourage migrants, especially single adult men, to stay in their home country and to develop a framework that best responds to their needs.

The ultimate aim is to facilitate the efforts of the governments of Afghanistan and Iran to respond to irregular migration and to develop an effective and comprehensive management of population movements. The information will also be useful to all other stakeholders including international agencies and non-governmental organizations whose mandates address particular characteristics of this migration flow, either from a labour and economic angle or from a migration standpoint. The end goal of this study is to show that the flow of deportees from Iran represents an underlying labour migration issue rather than a refugee migration issue. The different stakeholders have to be aware of this essential characteristic in order to develop effective policies.

## **1.2 Structure of the report**

Chapter 1 introduces the objectives of the study and the research methodology used to collect and analyze information from the field. Chapter 2 provides an overview of population movements between Afghanistan and Iran and a context to the migration flows between the two countries. Chapter 3 details the main data collected through our field research on single adult males deported from Iran. This chapter covers different trends, from their demographic profile, to labour and employment issues, migration patterns and experiences returning to Afghanistan. A summary of the key findings on single adult males is provided at the end of the chapter and is followed by overall conclusions in chapter 4. A comparative review of the two main groups of deportees – single adult males and heads of households deported from Iran – is introduced in this chapter to outline the major characteristics of each group and to distinguish two different phenomena within the deportee population (migrant workers in irregular status vs. undocumented refugees). Chapter 4 also takes into consideration the supply and demand sides of the irregular migration flow to Iran, namely the network of smugglers and employers. Chapter 5 presents the policy and program recommendations based on the analysis of the data and the major conclusions of the study.

Finally, two annex chapters are included at the end of the report. Annex 1 details the demographic, labour, economic and migration profiles of families deported from Iran through interviews with heads of households and Annex 2 provides an illustration of deportees through a set of 20 case studies carried out in Kabul and Herat in the spring of 2008.

## **1.3 Research Methodology**

### ***1.3.1 Identification of the survey population***

The target population for this study covers two categories of deportees from Iran:

1. Single adult males:  
This term is used to refer to "**migrant workers in irregular status**": undocumented Afghan men travelling to Iran, legally or clandestinely, to undertake unauthorized employment while their families remain in Afghanistan. This category includes unaccompanied minors, referring to children and adolescents under 18 years of age who are not accompanied by an adult or separated from their families during the deportation process.
2. Families/heads of households:  
Family groups identified as "**undocumented refugees**" who left Afghanistan in distinct waves during the various historical stages of migration between the two countries (see section 2.1) but who failed to acquire or maintain regular status while in Iran. This study focuses specifically on these undocumented refugees who were deported as family groups for being undocumented,

traveling outside their place of residence or for not respecting the legal requirements of the “No Go Area” policy implemented by the Government of Iran from 2001 onwards.

The available framework of humanitarian efforts currently focuses on providing assistance to returnees and deportees identified either as vulnerable families or extremely vulnerable individuals (EVIs). This study extends its scope to look at the phenomenon of deported single adult males who are not identified as EVIs and who are therefore not assisted following their deportation.

A socio-demographic profile of these two sub-groups will be provided in chapter 3 and in Annex 1 to serve two purposes: (a) provide information on Afghan migrant workers in irregular status living in Iran, (b) identify nuances within the deportee population by analyzing the different reasons for migration, experiences in Iran and conditions of deportation of Afghans and (c) develop a response to address the flow of migration from Afghanistan to Iran.

### ***1.3.2 Sampling methodology: Phases of return and research locations***

The pool of Afghan deportees under consideration was divided into three phases of their return covering four provinces to account for their variety of experiences and migration stories.

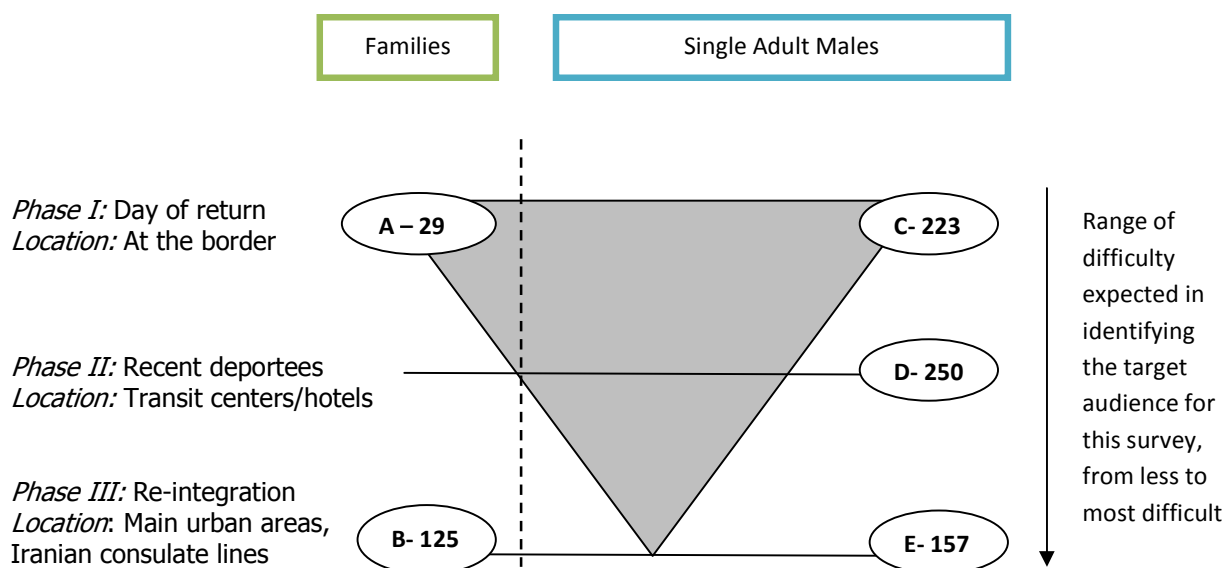
#### **Relevance of the phases of return and research locations**

The research methodology adopted by this study is based on three phases, representing the same weight with respectively 32.1% (Phase I), 31.9% (Phase II) and 36.0% (Phase III) of the overall population surveyed. The provinces chosen are the ones most immediately affected by the massive deportation flows since 2007, namely the three provinces bordering Iran – Herat, Farah and Nimroz – and the capital city, Kabul.

This breakdown was designed to show the diversity of experiences of the two subgroups detailed above, i.e. family groups and single adult males, and to better analyze the reasons for their migration, their transit to and from Iran and their living and working conditions in Iran.

#### **Sampling methodology**

Conventional methods of sampling could not be used as there is no available registration data or tracking method for undocumented Afghans deported from Iran. In order to include a representative sample of the various types of deportee profiles, the alternative method developed for this study is based on a random sampling at the locations relevant to three migration phases. Following this approach, the sample of 784 respondents surveyed in this survey can be considered as representative of the general population of deportees in 2008. Despite efforts to target a wide range of deportees, limitations were acknowledged based on the unpredictability of the deportation flow. Special attention was therefore given to qualitative tools discussed in this chapter.



### Stages of return

As confirmed by key informant interviews and preliminary field trips, deportee clusters were identified at the following three stages:

#### Phase I / Interviews on the day of return to Afghanistan

Border crossing points at Islam Qala and Zaranj

Afghans are deported daily from Iran through two official crossing points: (1) the Dogharoun-Islam Qala border in the province of Herat and (2) the Milak-Zaranj crossing point in the province of Nimroz. These two crossing points offer a natural cluster of deportees.

The deportation figures for 2007 show a higher rate of deportations through the Milak-Zaranj border (5,000 families and 174,000 single adult males) than through Islam Qala (126 families and roughly 154,000 single adult males). This trend has been confirmed by statistics available since January 2008, as illustrated in the table below, thus allowing our team to determine the appropriate breakdown of interviews per location. The sampling in each location was structured on the basis of 5 interviews per day and per interviewer.

Table 3. Border crossing statistics, Forcible returns 2008 (as of 30 August 2008)

Location	Family groups		Singles	
	Families	Individuals	Adult	UAM
<b>Zaranj</b>	1,010	4,582	151,957	162
<b>Islam Qala</b>	146	643	72,501	487
<b>Total</b>	1,156	5,225	224,458	649

Source: UNHCR 2008

Phase II / Interviews within one month of the deportation date: deportees "in transition"  
Transit centers and hotels in urban areas in Herat and Zaranj

Phase II of this survey refers to the temporary situation of deportees who are in a transition phase in the immediate aftermath of their forced return to Afghanistan. At this stage, certain categories of deportees receive emergency assistance consisting of short term shelter, food, health services and cash grants given at transit centers in Herat (Ansar camp) and Nimroz (Makeshift camp) by the UNHCR and implementing partners. Due to the low numbers of families deported and assisted during the timeframe of the field work, and to respect issues of representativeness of sampling methods, the family portion of this study was reviewed and centered on phases I and III only.

Interviews in this second phase were therefore conducted entirely with single adult males. A list of hotels in Herat and Zaranj offer a cluster of single adult males who have just been expelled from Iran and are now temporarily staying in these cities before moving on to their final destination. Since single adult males, who are not identified as EVIs, are not assisted, they are to be found in these locations within days of their deportation. Our interviewer teams were dispatched daily to different hotels in Herat and Zaranj with a set quota of interviews per location.

Phase III / Interviews taking place after a month from the date of deportation  
Returnee neighborhoods and work places  
Herat, Farah, Nimroz and Kabul

Phase III covers the re-integration phase of deportees starting from one month to a couple of years following their deportation. The category of deportees being assisted (families and EVIs) is given a cash grant to return to their province of origin. It is estimated that overall 70% of families return to their province of origin, while the remaining 30% stay in the Western provinces of Herat, Farah and Nimroz (UNHCR 2008). All three capitals of these provinces contain clusters of families who have been deported over the past year. Once deportees have joined main urban areas, and after some time has elapsed from the date of their deportation, they are more difficult to locate. Preliminary fieldwork allowed us to identify clusters for families and single adult males.

- Families were located in 6 clusters in Herat and Zaranj, and 8 clusters in Farah,
- Single adult males were located in Herat, Kabul and Zaranj, at the lines outside of the Iranian consulates, in settlements and in main city squares where daily work is found.

In addition, some deportees and households, mainly those deported from Tehran and Mashhad, show a preference for going to Kabul even if it is not their place of origin, followed by the city of Herat. These cities offer comparatively better economic opportunities for deportees and are perceived to be more secure. They therefore offer sizeable clusters of deportees intending to re-integrate Afghan society.



## Location and research sites

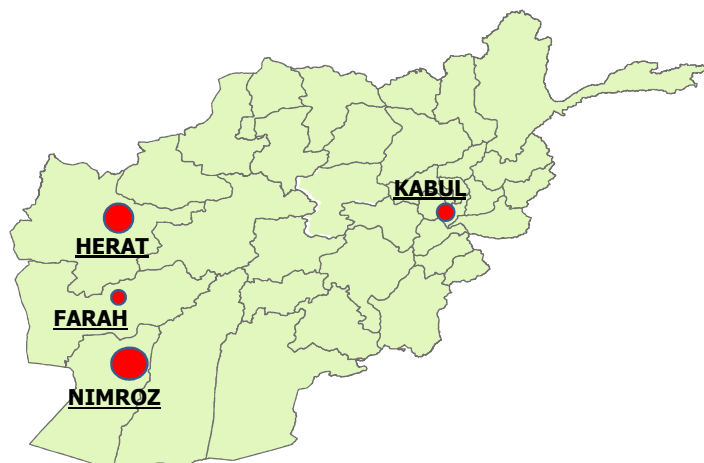


Table 4. Distribution of qualitative and quantitative interviews

	Quantitative interviews	Profiles	Case studies	Focus groups
Nimroz	352	15	-	1
Herat	251	15	15	3
Kabul	131	10	5	1
Farah	50	10	-	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>784</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>6</b>

Based on the prevalence of the target population in the provinces of Herat, Farah, Nimroz and Kabul, a mapping of these four provinces served as a basis for identifying the blocks of concentration of deportee populations corresponding to each of the three phases detailed above.

Taking into account this initial mapping, the expertise of a team of national consultants and interviewers and the availability of data, a minimum of 8 cluster areas was selected for each city as the basis of our sampling methodology. Each interviewer was responsible for a specific area and carried out interviews based on a random sampling of deportees within the area.

An overview of these areas is available below.

For Herat: 10 locations:

- West of Herat: Dogharoun-Islam Qala border, Jabrail camp, Al Mahdi camp, Khatam Anbaya camp, Maslagh camp
- East of Herat: Pol Pashtoun
- North of Herat: Ansar camp
- South of Herat: Shohada camp
- Centre of Herat: Darawaze Malik, Badmorghan

For Nimroz: 8 locations:

- West of Zaranj: Milak border
- East of Zaranj: Haji Yar Mohammad village, Sia Chashmak village, Make shift camp, Mohajer abad village
- North of Zaranj: Haji Kamran village
- South of Zaranj: Masoumabad village
- Centre of Zaranj: Jade Simetry-e Helmand

For Farah: 8 locations:

- West of Farah city: Karimabad, Qala-e Mohammad, Mohajir Abad Sangy
- East of Farah city: Qala-e Zaman, Mohajir Abad Gurji
- North of Farah city: Qala-e Behbod
- South of Farah city: Qala-e Shora, Chaharbagh.

For Kabul: 13 locations:

- West of Kabul: Deh Afghanan, Shahre naw
- East of Kabul: Kampani, Dashte Barchi, Qala-e Shoda, Kote sangi
- North of Kabul: Qala-e Fatullah, Taimani, Wazirabad, Khair Khana
- South of Kabul: Darulaman, Karte se, Karte chahar

### **1.3.3 Quantitative fieldwork**

#### Survey Instruments

The main survey instruments used were two extensive structured and close-ended questionnaires lasting between 45 minutes to an hour: one for single adult males (122 questions) and one for heads of households of deported families (130 questions). The questionnaires were organized taking into account the chronology of migration and deportation of each respondent. Questions were developed to obtain facts and perceptions on the respondent's:

1. Socio-demographic profile,
2. Socio-economic background before migration,
3. Conditions of clandestine or legal travel to Iran,
4. Work and living conditions in Iran,
5. Conditions of arrest and deportation from Iran,
6. Conditions upon return to Afghanistan.

#### Duration of survey

The interviews were conducted over the course of 3 weeks of field work in April and May 2008. A team of 11 interviewers administered 784 questionnaires in the locations and according to the migration phases detailed above. A complete distribution of these interviews is included in table 5.

#### Breakdown of quantitative interviews

Table 5. Distribution of quantitative interviews

Province	Families			Single adult males			Total
	Phase I	Phase II*	Phase III	Phase I	Phase II	Phase III	
<b>Nimroz</b>	29	-	50	123	150	-	352
<b>Herat</b>	-	-	25	100	100	26	251
<b>Kabul</b>	-	-	-	-	-	131	131
<b>Farah</b>	-	-	50	-	-	-	50
<b>Total</b>	29	-	125	223	250	157	<b>784</b>

*\* Due to the low numbers of families deported and assisted during the timeframe of the field work, and to respect issues of representativeness of sampling methods, the family portion of this study was reviewed and centered on phases I and III only.*

As a result of the lower number of families deported in 2008 and of the focus of this study on single adult males, 80.4% of the respondents were single adult males (630 individuals) and 19.6% were families (154 heads of households). To mirror the reality of deportations from Iran, the majority of interviews were held by order of importance in Nimroz, Herat, Kabul and Farah.

### **1.3.4 Qualitative fieldwork**

Qualitative field work was completed to support the data collected in the quantitative survey, giving an in-depth look at specific situations and coping strategies of deportees. The data was collected through three main tools: profiles, case studies and focus group discussions.

#### **Collection of profiles**

Two national consultants were assigned to compile a set of 50 profiles of Afghan deportees from Iran, in the provinces of Herat, Farah, Nimroz and Kabul. We define profiles as semi-case studies, consisting of 30 open-ended questions and lasting on average 1.5-2 hours per respondent.

To respect the balance of quantitative interviews and of the migration flows of forcible returns from Iran, the following profiles were completed as follows:

- i. Nimroz: 15 profiles with single adult males in all phases of return,
- ii. Herat: 15 profiles with single adult males in all phases of return,
- iii. Kabul: 10 profiles with single adult males and heads of households in phase III,
- iv. Farah: 10 profiles with single adult males and heads of households in phase III.

#### **Case studies**

The international consultant in charge of the project was responsible for 20 case studies with single adult males and families in Herat and Kabul. They consisted of in-depth/unstructured interviews of the respondent as well as shorter interviews with relatives. This exercise was completed by observations and documentation made available by the respondent on his/her situation in Iran, in Afghanistan and in transit between the two countries. Case studies were also administered for different categories of EVIs, mainly single females (case study 9, p.95) and unaccompanied minors (case studies 19 and 20, p.106-107). Summaries of these case studies are available as an annex to the report (Annex 2, p.87).

The distribution of case studies corresponds to the focus of the study on single adult males:

- i. Herat: 15 case studies:
  - o 12 with single adult males in phases II and III,
  - o 3 with families in phase III.
- ii. Kabul: 5 case studies:
  - o 4 with single adult males in phase III,
  - o 1 with a family in phase III.

#### **Focus group discussions**

Focus group discussions were held with deportees in all four provinces:

- i. 3 focus groups in Herat:
  - o 2 with single adult males, Phase II
  - o 1 with single adult males, Phase III;

- ii. 1 focus group with single adult males, Phase II, Nimroz;
- iii. 1 focus group with single adult males, Phase III, Farah;
- iv. 1 focus group with single adult males, Phase III, in Kabul.

**Phone interviews in Afghanistan and in Iran**

In an effort to gain a better perspective on the demand and supply side of the irregular flow of migration, 10 Iranian employers and smugglers who work with irregular Afghan migrants were interviewed over the phone.

- i. The Iranian employers were located in the provinces of Esfahan, Fars and Tehran,
- ii. The smugglers were located in Logar, Nimroz and Ghazni in Afghanistan, as well as in Khorasan in Iran.

## 2. Population movements between Afghanistan and Iran

### 2.1 A long history of migration to Iran

A common language and religion, as well as an economically strong and secure neighboring Iran have, since the 1960s, made Iran a preferred destination for Afghans seeking better economic opportunities and refuge from conflict. The migration history between the two countries is old and is being resorted to as a solution to unemployment, drought and conflict. The table below shows the gap in economic development between the two neighboring countries and the incentive and pull factor the Iranian economy represents for the Afghan labor force.

Table 6. Statistics on the economies of Iran and Afghanistan

	Afghanistan	Comparative review	Iran
<b>GDP</b>	8.842 billion (2007 est.)	<i>X 33.3</i>	\$294.1 billion (2007 est.)
<b>GDP per capita</b>	\$1,000 (2007)	<i>X 10.6</i>	\$10,600 (2007)
<b>Population below poverty line</b>	53% (2003)	<i>÷ 2.9</i>	18% (2007 est.)
<b>Unemployment</b>	40% (2005)	<i>÷ 3.3</i>	12% (2007, IRI)
<b>Revenue</b>	\$715 million	<i>X 89.5</i>	\$64 billion (2007)

Source: CIA, The World Factbook

**1979 – 1989.** In the late 1970s and throughout the 1980s, networks of Afghans already established in Iran facilitated the exodus of refugees escaping the Soviet invasion. Between 1980 and 1989, as a direct cause of the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan, a massive influx of 2.9 million Afghans was recorded into Iran. Iran's early refugee policy was described as "open door", welcoming and taking responsibility for this refugee population. Permits and identity cards were given to Afghans granting them refugee status, access to social services, permits to work and a set of limited freedoms in Iran. During the 1980s, Afghans were filling the gap of a diminished Iranian workforce due to the war against Iraq. By 1990, an estimated 3 million Afghans were living in Iran and 3.3 million in Pakistan, creating the world's largest refugee crisis.

**1990 – 1993.** With the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan and the fall of Najibullah's communist regime in 1992, Iranian refugee policy shifted to emphasize repatriation. A Tripartite Agreement signed by the governments of Iran and Afghanistan and the UNHCR regulated a large-scale process of repatriation over two years.

**1994 – 2001.** Internal warfare between the mujahedeen and the advent of the Taliban marked a renewed phase of war and conflict in Afghanistan. This in turn led to a second migration phase of Afghans seeking safety and work in Iran starting in 1994. The government of Iran did not grant this population refugee status resulting in the clandestine and non-official entry of hundreds of thousands of Afghans into Iran. With increased border monitoring by the Iranian authorities, a new phenomenon thrived during this period: a network of smugglers specializing in the irregular migration of Afghans to Iran.

**2001.** With the fall of the Taliban regime and the installation of a new Transitional Authority in Kabul, emphasis was again put on the repatriation of Afghans to their country. The governments of Iran and Afghanistan and the UNHCR signed a Tripartite Repatriation Agreement in 2002 to encourage a process of voluntary returns. Although the process of repatriation was slower than for Afghans living in Pakistan, this agreement facilitated the voluntary return of 833,000 Afghans up to April 2006 (AREU 2006).

According to government statistics obtained from a registration initiative in November 2005, there were approximately 920,000 registered Afghans in Iran as of May 2006. This figure does not include the undocumented migrant workers and other Afghans who are living in Iran. The government of Iran estimates their number to be close to one million, although there is no reliable estimate for the number of undocumented Afghans in Iran.

### **Box 1. Amayesh registration**

The Amayesh project was implemented by the Iranian government to identify regional and infrastructure potentials to accommodate refugees in Iran. This registration exercise was led for a second time by the government of Iran and the UNHCR in 2001, under the name of AMAYESH II, with the aim to ascertain the number of Afghans living in Iran. Afghans registered under this process were initially entitled to basic health and educational services provided by the government of Iran. Whereas in the past refugees received subsidized services, the government of Iran has been implementing measures forcing Afghans to pay for these resources (education, health, food rations). This reached a peak in February 2004 with the loss of school fee exemptions and increased health care premiums. In early 2005, nominal taxes were also declared for Afghans.<sup>3</sup> This trend is suspected to continue in the coming year.

A study conducted by ILO-UNHCR in October 2006<sup>4</sup> showed that "very few Afghans have been granted the status of refugees and given the right of settlement in Iran. Even those who arrived as refugees in the early 1980s have only temporary stay permits. The reservations made by the Government of Iran on the 1951 Convention of Refugees and the Associated Protocol of 1967, and the policies followed by the government for much of the period 1980 to 1992, effectively restricted Afghans to low skilled occupations. In recent years, increasing restrictions have been imposed on Afghans and those employing them.."

The current registration results show that the majority of those still living in Iran are from the Northern Region (27.3%) particularly refugees from Samangan, Faryab, Balkh and Badkshshan Provinces, the Central Region (23.3%) particularly refugees from Parwan, Kabul, and Ghazni Provinces and the Western Region (14.0%) mainly refugees from Herat and Farah Provinces. The next highest populations of Afghans living in Iran are from the Southern Region (7.8%) mainly refugees from Kandahar and Uruzgan Provinces and Central Highland region (6.7%) mainly refugees from Bamyan Province. Refugees whose place of origin is the Eastern (1.4%) and Southeastern Regions (0.6%) are the minorities among the Afghan refugees currently living in Iran. It is worth to bear in mind that almost over 640,000 Afghan refugees aging 0-24 registered may have been born in Iran (based on AMAYESH II data). (UNHCR 2008)

Afghans not on the Amayesh registration list are subject to deportation. The government of Iran holds that the deportees are immigrants with irregular status and that it is therefore the sovereign and legal right of Iran to send them back to Afghanistan. *NB: The Amayesh list is updated regularly. At the time the field work was conducted, the application process for the Amayesh III was under way. Afghans must re-register with the Iranian authorities in order to remain in the country legally.*

<sup>3</sup> *Afghan refugees: current status and future prospects.* CRS Report for Congress, Congressional Research Service, January 26, 2007.

<sup>4</sup> *Afghan households in Iran: Profile and impact.* International Migration Programme, ILO Geneva, October 2006.

## 2.2 Iranian government policies towards Afghans: from open door to restrictive policies

**1979 – 1992.** The Iranian government issued “blue cards” for Afghans indicating their status as refugees and granting them indefinite permission to stay in Iran legally. Until 1995, blue card holders had access to social services (health care, free primary and secondary education) and subsidized food but were prevented from owning their own businesses. Their employment was restricted to low-wage, manual labour.

**1992.** First official repatriation programme with the creation of the Tripartite Agreement with the government of Afghanistan and the UNHCR.

**1993.** The Iranian government issued over 500,000 temporary registration cards to undocumented and newly arrived Afghans. These were declared invalid in 1996.

**1995.** The government issued laissez-passer documents for travels out of Iran. At this time, the government also began to cut down on the benefits given to Afghan refugees, limiting their access to health care and education. The same year, the government announced that all Afghan refugees had to leave Iran and ended repatriation efforts by closing off the border with Taliban-ruled Afghanistan.

**1998.** Renewed repatriation framework coordinated jointly with the UNHCR, while the government of Iran simultaneously began a deportation campaign of Afghans living in Iran in irregular status.

**2000.** In April 2000, the government of Iran passed a law requiring all foreigners not in possession of a work permit to leave Iran by March 2001. The legislation also established the Foreign Nationals Executive Co-ordination Council (FNECC) to deal with the “arrival, settlement, deportation, expulsion, training, employment, health and medical treatment of foreigners” (AREU 2005).

**2001.** In June, by a decree from the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, employers hiring workers in irregular status were from then on subjected to heavy fines and imprisonment. The Iranian authorities started confiscating the work permit of groups of Afghan workers and shutting down small business hiring Afghan workers. Afghans with legal papers were limited to only 16 categories of mostly manual work.

### **Box 2. No-Go Area Policy**

In September 2007, the government of Iran adopted a by-law on the “Determination of Areas restricted for the Movement and Stay of Foreign Nationals in Border areas of the Country”, marking the legal implementation of the “**No-Go Area Policy**”. On security grounds, districts bordering Afghanistan and Pakistan were classified as restricted zones for all foreign residents. The by-law was amended in 2002, 2004 and 2007, to include new locations: Kuzestan, bordering Iraq, cities in Golestan, East Azerbaijan and most recently the province of Sistan-Balouchistan which alone puts at risk as many as 80,000 legal Afghan refugees residing in the district for over 20 years. The same decree comprised a number of districts in west and central Iran with a small refugee population, such as Yasouj and Hamedan. The total number of potentially affected refugees is estimated at 120,000 (UNHCR 2007).

**2002.** The government in Iran and Afghanistan and the UNHCR signed the Tripartite Repatriation Agreement in April to plan for the return of 400,000 refugees from Iran during the first year, with a similar estimate for 2003 and 2004.

**2003.** Confronted with a low level of voluntary returns to Iran and with the realization that Afghans prefer to stay in Iran for its higher level of development, the Iranian authorities announced a series of measures intended to push for a more substantial level of repatriation of Afghans in 2004. A series of eleven articles were adopted under Article 138 of the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran and

referred to as "Regulations on accelerating repatriation of Afghan nationals". These articles take measures to: (i) prevent the unauthorised employment of Afghan nationals by taking legal action against Iranian employers, (ii) promote the return of Afghan nationals to Afghanistan through the main broadcasting organization and (iii) prohibit Afghans in irregular status in Iran to rent accommodations, have access to administrative services, participate in social, political or cultural groups, open bank accounts and benefit from insurance services. Overall, by raising the cost of living for Afghans, introducing fees for the extension of ID cards and for enrolment in schools, increasing the cost of health insurance and the rate of nominal taxation, a campaign was launched to induce the departure of Afghans and justify the deportations of those residing and working in Iran without authorization.

**2005.** A second extension of the Tripartite Agreement was signed in June in Herat, for the period up to March 2006. It was estimated that some 200,000 Afghan refugee would be voluntarily repatriated during this time. The agreement underlined the voluntary nature of the repatriation operation and ensured the provision of basic support and assistance during the process including transportation, medical facilities and customs procedures.

**2006.** In March, the government of Iran agreed to extend its agreement with the UNHCR and the government of Afghanistan for the voluntary repatriation of Afghan refugees up until March 2007.

**2007.** Following the Nowrooz (Persian New Year) holidays in Afghanistan and Iran, the government of Iran started a massive deportation campaign of single adult males and family groups, reaching a total of 363,369 deportations in 2007. This created a political and humanitarian crisis which continued through the winter of 2007 and 2008.

### 2.3 Deportation reports and statistics 2007-2008

The breakdown of deportations since 2002 is presented in table 7. As the numbers indicate, undocumented single adult males have steadily and increasingly been subject to arrest and deportation and remain the most vulnerable to the policies of the government of Iran. However, a more dramatic increase is the rate of deportation of families. This is a phenomenon that has taken new and unprecedented proportions as a result of the No-Go Area policy.

These trends continue in 2008. Although a degree lower than in 2007, the numbers recorded by the UNHCR already indicate a higher rate of deportations in 2008 than in any year preceding 2007. Pressures and measures taken by the international community and the government of Afghanistan have so far avoided another humanitarian crisis but the numbers of deportations, especially of single adult males, continue to pose a humanitarian and economic challenge.

Table 7. Deportation statistics 2002–2008, family groups and single adult males (as of 30 August 2008)

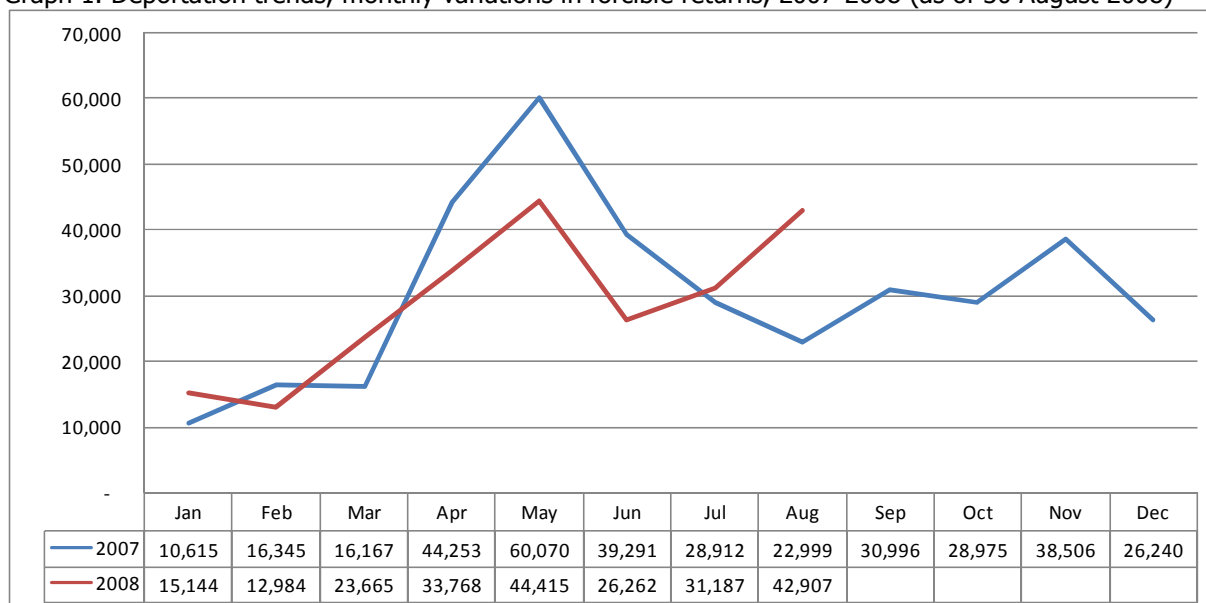
Year	Family groups				Singles						Grand total
	Families	Individuals			Males			Females			
		Male	Female	Total	Adult	UAM	Total	Adult	UAM	Total	
2002	225	790	205	995	40,709	595	41,304	48	13	61	<b>42,360</b>
2003	128	288	223	511	52,184	1,176	53,360	16	10	26	<b>53,897</b>
2004	163	327	347	674	78,327	365	78,692	37	7	44	<b>79,410</b>
2005	85	212	273	485	95,054	280	95,334	24	2	26	<b>95,845</b>
2006	97	255	198	453	145,426	482	145,908	26	0	26	<b>146,387</b>
<b>2007</b>	<b>5,104</b>	<b>15,691</b>	<b>19,503</b>	<b>35,194</b>	<b>327,480</b>	<b>679</b>	<b>328,159</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>363,369</b>
2008	1,156	2,540	2,685	5,225	224,438	649	225,087	20	0	20	<b>230,332</b>
Total	6,958	20,103	23,434	43,537	963,618	4,226	967,844	184	35	219	<b>1,011,600</b>

Source: UNHCR 2008



A detailed look at the monthly statistics of deportations in 2007 and 2008 (graph 1) shows that the current trend is less extreme than the one witnessed a year ago, but far from negligible. In both years, a notable increase can be seen following the Nowrooz holiday (Persian New Year, March 20-21) in Iran. The trend in 2008 has been a continuous monthly increase, which a pessimistic outlook on the progression of these numbers during the summer months ahead.

Graph 1. Deportation trends, monthly variations in forcible returns, 2007-2008 (as of 30 August 2008)



Source: UNHCR 2008

## 2.4 Priority areas of intervention and assistance

As a response to the deportation trends highlighted above, the UNHCR and its implementing partners developed a **joint action plan** approved by the Government of Afghanistan which serves as a framework for identifying priority areas for intervention and assistance for the population of deportees. This action plan is divided into two phases of assistance: the response at the border (immediate protection and humanitarian effort) and the re-integration phase (long term approach).

This plan is aimed at designing a response framework for Extremely Vulnerable Individuals (EVIs) and deported families. The objective is twofold: (1) an immediate/effective protection by developing a humanitarian response at point zero. This includes an immediate follow up over 72 hours. The actors in this stage are the UNHCR, IOM, DoRR, AIHRC and CHA. This phase also includes the provision of support to families who are unable to immediately return to their province due to land issues or protection and security issues; (2) a longer term approach based on reintegration assistance through the promotion of a sustainable conditions for the families and their communities. The goal in this stage is to design projects to benefit the local and returnee community and to create a 'pull' factor on the Afghan side. Given the economic nature of the migration flow, implementing partners should include not only IOM but also ILO and the government of Afghanistan, as will be detailed later in the recommendations section of the report.

The target population which falls under the joint action plan consists of the major vulnerable groups:

- All deported families (whether documented or undocumented),
- All individuals claiming to have been Amayesh card holders,
- All extremely vulnerable individuals (EVIs),
- Spontaneous returnees fitting the EVI criteria.

The criteria for determining the individuals who fall under the EVI category are based on the UNHCR standards outlined in the "Extremely Vulnerable Individuals (EVI) Guidelines". These are defined as people who may be: in a life threatening situation, unable to help themselves, lacking family and community support or suffering from physical or mental trauma.

There are broadly three categories of vulnerable individuals according to this definition:

- i. Physical vulnerability: Persons who may be handicapped, blind, chronically ill or drug addicts.
- ii. Psychological and mental vulnerability: This includes survivors of sexual and gender-based violence, torture or traumatic stress. Mentally vulnerable persons include those who suffer from a mental illness such as schizophrenia or bi-polar disease.
- iii. Social vulnerability: Persons who do not have the support of their family or community; they are generally very poor, without assets and cannot help themselves.

In practical terms, upon screening deportees at the border on the day of their return to Afghanistan, the assistance community, whether the DoRR, UNHCR or other NGO, identifies 11 potential categories and registers individuals according to the UNHCR standard vulnerability codes:

1. Single Females (SF),
2. Single Parents (SP),
3. Unaccompanied Elderly (UE),
4. Unaccompanied Minors (UAM),
5. Physically disabled (PD),
6. Mentally Ill (MI),
7. Chronically Ill (CI),
8. Poor Families (PF),
9. Drug Addicts (DA),
10. Medical Cases (MC),
11. Special Cases (SC).

The goal of the screening is to identify people belonging to these categories of EVIs. Single adult males are assisted if they belong to one of these categories but, as this study shows, their vulnerabilities are of a different kind, as discussed in section 4.3 of this report. Their needs are a consequence of their overall economic situation and their irregular status in Iran, and do not represent extreme types of vulnerabilities as identified by the assistance community.

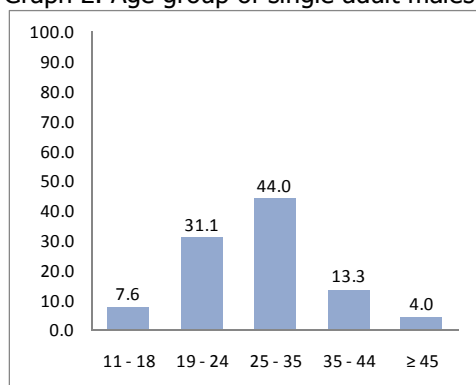
### 3. Afghan deportees from Iran: Single Adult Males

#### 3.1 Demographic profile

##### *Age groups*

**The surveyed population is young with the highest percentage of single adult males (44.0%) falling in the 25-35 years age group** as illustrated in graph 2. Out of the 630 single adult males interviewed in Kabul, Herat, Nimroz and Farah, ages range from 12 to 58, with a median age of 28.

Graph 2. Age group of single adult males at the time of interview (%)



##### *Age and marital status at the time of migration*

In line with the focus of this study on recent waves of deportations, 78.4% of the single adult males interviewed were deported in 2008, 20.6% in 2007 and the remaining 1.0% prior to 2007. At the time of their most recent migration to Iran, 56.1% of all men interviewed were married, 34.8% single and 8.9% engaged. The highest percentage of single and engaged individuals falls in the 19-25 age group.

##### *Province of origin and ethnic group*

**Respondents originate from 32 different provinces in Afghanistan**, showing the ethnic and geographic variety and reflecting the long established links and networks among the Afghan population living in Iran. The migration flow is not restricted to populations with a common religion or language with Iran, as it includes populations from almost all regions, ethnicities and religious groups in Afghanistan.

The ten most represented provinces are: Herat (13.5%), Kabul (7.1%), Ghor (6.0%), Takhar (5.9%), Bamiyan (5.6%), Ghazni (5.6%), Wardak (5.6%), Faryab (5.4%), Balkh (5.1%) and Daikundi (5.1%). 36.4% are Tajik, 27.7% Hazara, 19.6% Pashto, 12.1% Uzbek, 0.3% Turkmen and 4.0% identify themselves as mainly Baluch or Arab.

##### *Level of education*

**69.7% are illiterate.** Out of the 30.3% of literate men surveyed, 46.6% have completed primary school, 33.0% lower secondary school, 12.0% higher secondary school and 6.3% religious studies. As supported by the qualitative field work, the majority of the population interviewed has a low level of education. Economic pressures often push the members of the family who have income generating potential, mainly young men, to stop their studies in favour of a paid activity.

##### *Household situation*

**52.4% of the respondents are heads of their household but only 20.6% of the total number of interviewees currently lives with his family. 49.2% of the respondents are the sole breadwinners of their household.** This means that the majority of single adult males deported are away from their homes and families but that they live with the pressure of supporting them and providing

for their needs. This is heightened by the fact that 49.2% of the households of these men only count on one source of income, putting a big responsibility on the deportee to cover expenses for an average of eight people. In 38.1% of the cases studied, 2 people are working; in 9.2% of cases 3 people are working and in 3.6% four or more people are working.

#### *Minors*

**14% of the interviewee pool indicates being under the age of 18 at the time of migration. 65% of these minors went to Iran alone while only 35% were accompanied by a male relative.** This is often the result of internal domestic crises forcing the family to send their oldest son, even if under age, to seek employment in Iran, as illustrated in case study 20 (p.107, Annex 2). The category of "unaccompanied minors" is considered as a vulnerable group based on guidelines developed by the UNHCR and applied at the border by the agency or its implementing partners in providing assistance. This phenomenon highlights not only the depth of the phenomenon of irregular migration but also underlines the occurrence of child labour within the category of migrant workers to Iran. These children are more vulnerable to risks encountered along the way, such as lack of food, water and theft as detailed in case studies summarized in Annex 2 of this report. The issue of child trafficking, a possible danger these minors are exposed to, was not tackled in our interviews.

"I am the oldest of the family since my father passed away last year. There was no one else in the family to earn a living. We are eight members in my family: my mother, one younger brother and five sisters. My uncle and my mother decided that I had to take responsibility for the family and go to Iran to find work. "

- Sayed Ali, 11 year old boy from Daikundi. He entered Iran for the first time on April 6, 2008 and was arrested on April 26, 2008 on his way to Bandar Abbas.

#### Number of entries, deportations and voluntary returns with exit permits: Cyclical migration

Until 2007, the Government of Iran issued exit permits for irregular Afghan migrants wishing to leave Iran and return to Afghanistan. Through this process, people with irregular status were officially entitled and authorized to leave the country. This procedure facilitated what is referred to in this section as "voluntary returns with exit permits" - not to be confused with the voluntary repatriation operations for refugees. *NB: The exit permit channel for irregular migrants no longer exists.*

**The data in table 8 shows that the number of voluntary returns with exit permits and the number of deportations increase with the number of entries and time spent in Iran. This propensity for multiple entries and returns (whether voluntary or forcible) reflects the cyclical nature of the migration of single adult males who spend a number of years in Iran. The goal is therefore not to settle down in Iran. These men take the risk of going back and forth between the two countries, one which is home to their family and the other which provides them with the revenue needed to support the family.**

#### Frequency of entries:

- 40.3% of the men interviewed report having entered Iran once,
- 34.3% twice,
- 16.0% three times,
- 5.9% four times, and
- 3.5% over five times.

#### Frequency of voluntary returns with exit permits:

- 25.7% declare having left Iran out of their own will once,
- 11.1% twice,

- 3.7% three times, and
- 1.8% four times or more.

Frequency of deportations:

- 77.0% of the men surveyed indicate having been deported once,
- 18.4% twice,
- 3.2% three times,
- 1.6% four times or more.

Table 8. Proportion of deportations by number of entries (%)

Frequency of entries	Frequency of deportations					Total
	1	2	3	4	5+	
1	100.0	-	-	-	-	40.3
2	68.5	31.5	-	-	-	34.3
3	56.4	31.7	11.9	-	-	16.0
4	46.0	32.4	10.8	10.8	-	5.9
5+	40.9	18.2	18.2	9.1	13.6	3.5
Total	77.0	18.4	3.2	1.0	0.6	100.0

For e.g.: 3.5% of the population interviewed entered Iran 5 or more times. Out of this group, 40.9% reported having been deported once, 18.2% twice, 18.2% three times, 9.1% 4 times and 13.6% were deported 5 or more times.

**When asked to respond to the following question "Do you go back and forth between Iran and Afghanistan?", 59.8% responded positively.** There are two phenomena explaining this cyclical migration: first, many irregular migrants were arrested on their way to their final destination and attempt to re-enter Iran within days and weeks of their last deportation; secondly, many others have spent years working in Iran and come back home for short periods of time to visit and check on their families before returning to their work in Iran.

"I have been to Iran six times. Every time, I worked from one to two years then came back during the winter months, when there is typically less work in Iran, to visit my family. As soon as our savings would be gone, I would go back to Iran until I made enough money to support my family. This is the first time I was arrested and deported."

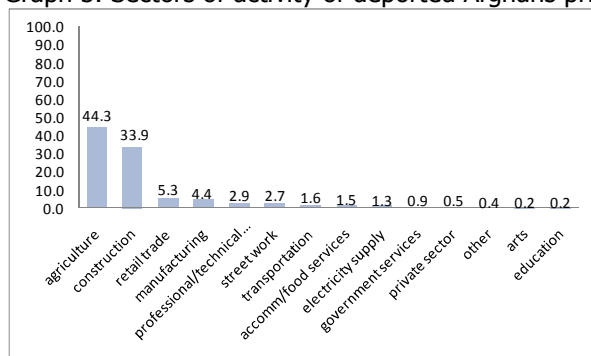
- Asil Mohammad, 42, illiterate male from Herat who has lived overall 12 years in Iran. He last entered Iran in January 2006 and was deported in May 2007.

## 3.2 Labour and employment

### 3.2.1 Employment situation before migration: Afghanistan

**Prior to migration, 12.9% of the population interviewed was unemployed. The range of sectors of activity defers from the period following deportation.** 44.3% used to work in the agricultural sector, 33.9% in construction, and others in retail trade, manufacturing, professional and technical service activities and street work (graph 3).

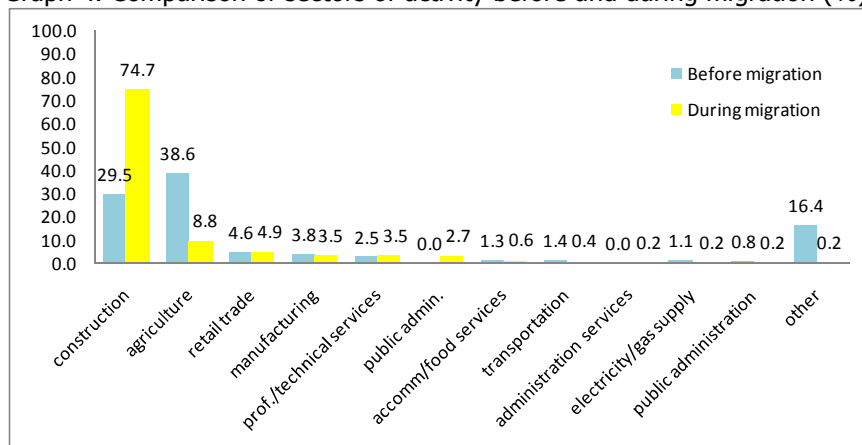
Graph 3. Sectors of activity of deported Afghans prior to migration to Iran (%)



### 3.2.2 Employment situation during migration: Iran

**The sectors of activity of Afghans in Iran explain the pattern of employment after deportation.** Whereas before migration, the highest percentage of respondents worked in agriculture, this sector plays a minimal role upon their return to Afghanistan, to the benefit of the construction sector. This is due to the fact that during their migration in Iran, 74.7% worked in the construction sector and 8.8% in agriculture.

Graph 4. Comparison of sectors of activity before and during migration (%)

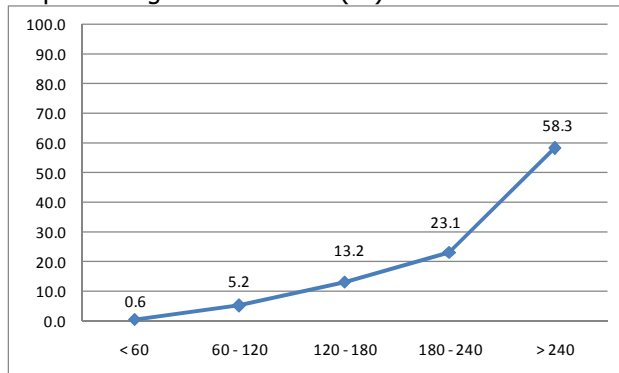


**The wages recorded during the migration period in Iran are on average 4 times higher than the wages earned by the same individuals upon their forced return to Afghanistan.**

In the period of migration in Iran, the mean wage was reported to fall just under USD 323 a month, with a minimum of USD 54 a month and a maximum of USD 2,268 a month. The graph below shows the upward curve of the wages of Afghan single adult males working in Iran illustrating the favourable economic opportunities available in Iran.

One common phenomenon recorded among men who have lived several years in Iran is the evolution of their wages over time. One of the incentives of working in Iran is not only the ease with which Afghans can expect to find jobs, but the evolution of their salaries as illustrated below.

Graph 5. Wage levels in Iran (%)



"The first time I went to Iran, I worked in a shoe factory. Since I did not have any skills, I was paid very little, at a rate of 1,200 toman a day. The other times, I worked in construction, and as I learned more skills, I earned 5,000 toman a day."

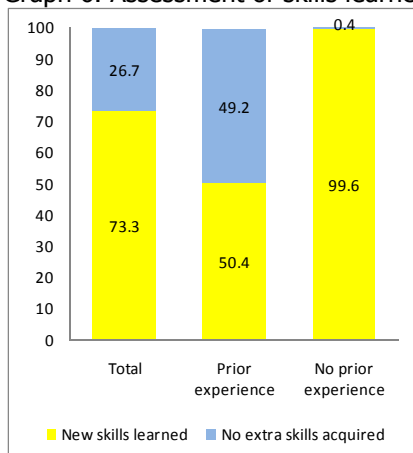
- Asil Mohammad, 42, illiterate male from Herat who lived in Iran for 12 years with 6 clandestine entries and 1 deportation to date.

Assessment of skill set and benefits of working in Iran

**When asked the following question, "Did you have experience working in this field before your migration?", 53.9% of the men interviewed responded positively.** This indicates that a small majority relocated to Iran in the same industry they had worked in previously. The expectation would then be for them to do the same work in Iran as in Afghanistan but their experience and assessment of their own skills paint a different picture since 50.4% declare having learned new skills or developed better skills in their line of work. This assessment is naturally higher among the population who entered a new industry in Iran, with an overwhelming 99.6% having acquired a new skill thanks to their migration.

All in all, **73.3% of the respondents agree to say that they have benefited from their experience in Iran to learn a new skill with only 26.7% of them who do not consider having added to their skill set** (graph 6).

Graph 6. Assessment of skills learned in Iran (%)



The industries which rank highest in terms of skills learned are the following:

- Construction with 73.3%,
- Agriculture with 8.7%,
- Manufacturing 4.2%,
- Professional and technical service activities 4.2%,
- Wholesale and retail trade 4.2%.

The majority of the men working in construction in Iran learned a skill and made the transition from low skilled to skilled work. 52.8% of the respondents in the construction sector learned masonry, a professional and marketable skill that they did not possess before living in Iran. Most of the workers in construction are daily labourers who learn the basic skills needed in construction work: assisting the mason and other skilled workers by making cement and laying bricks.

In agriculture, 50% of the respondents also claim to have developed new skills mainly by learning about innovative methods of farming, gardening and of caring for animals which increased their output and maximized their resources.

In manufacturing, the prevalence of machine work learned in factory settings is a new addition that workers were not acquainted to in an Afghan context where factories are scarce.

#### Assessment of the availability of work in Iran

**The population interviewed spent on average 11 days in Iran before securing their first employment. Almost all, 96.1% of respondents, secured an employment within a month of their arrival in Iran.** The majority spent less than one week searching for employment in Iran.

How long did it take you to find employment in Iran?	
≤ 2 days	21.2%
3 - 7 days	34.3%
8 - 14 days	19.9%
15 - 21 days	13.4%
22 - 30 days	7.3%
> 30 days	3.9%
N=626	

**The most common method used to find employment is the network of personal contacts and Afghan migrants already in place. This is true of 49.8% of the interviews, while others rely on word of mouth, former employers and on an informal market place.** Very few depend on their smuggler or on local employment placement agencies.

The solid network of Afghans in place in Iran effectively enables a supply source of unauthorized Afghan labour and a demand for cheap, available and effective labour on the part of Iranian employers. It is worth noting that the cyclical migration trend is also sustained by the network of former employers who are willing to hire Afghans who have already worked for them. This pattern is illustrated in case studies 3, 4 and 11 at the end of this report (p. 89-90, 98, Annex 2).



How did you find this employment in Iran?	
Word of mouth	29.2%
Contacts prior to migration	25.5%
Network of Afghan migrants	24.3%
Former employer	8.4%
Informal market place	7.4%
Smuggler	3.3%
Local placement agency	1.9%
N=486	

### Conditions of work in Iran

#### Hours and days of work

Respondents worked on average 8 hours a day. The split in terms of number of days worked is almost even between 6 days a week (49.2%) and 7 days a week (47.5%).

#### Work conditions

40.1% perceive having had below average and difficult work conditions, 32.9% average and only 27.0% declare having worked under favourable and good conditions.

#### Living conditions

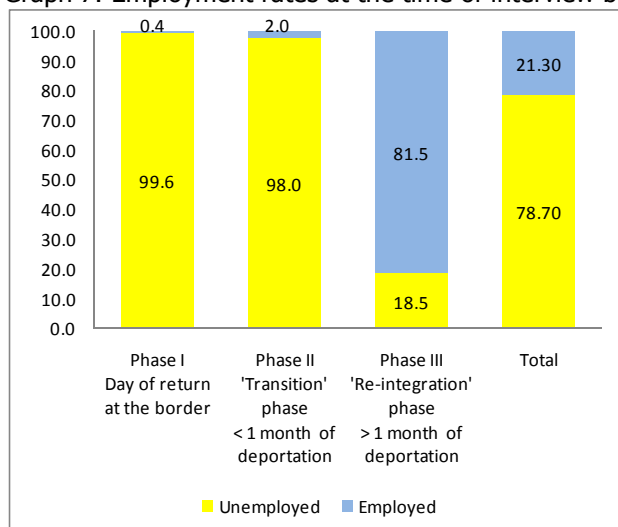
16.8% of interviewees lived on their place of work and 62.4% shared a room with other Afghan workers, with an average of 6 people sharing a room. 28.3% rank their living conditions as having been difficult and below average, 36.9% as average and 34.8% as favourable and above average.

### 3.2.3 Employment situation after deportation: Afghanistan

#### Unemployment rates and duration of job search upon return

**78.7% of the men surveyed are currently unemployed with a significant success rate among the men interviewed in their re-integration phase, more than one month following their deportation (phase III) as only 18.5% are unemployed.** The high rate of unemployment is explained by the 99.6% unemployment rate of men interviewed at the border (phase I) and the 98.0% of men interviewed in their transition phase, within a month of their deportation (phase II).

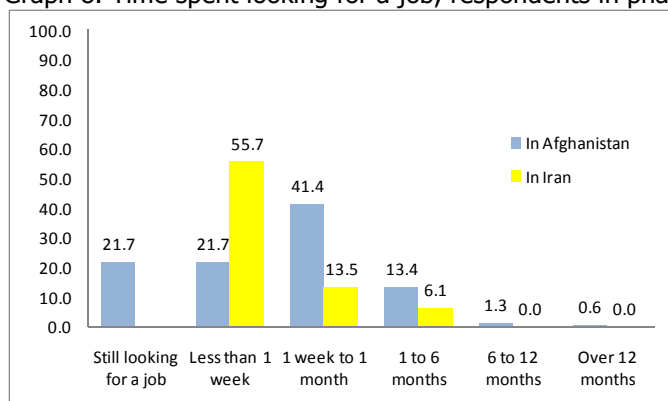
Graph 7. Employment rates at the time of interview by phase of return (%)



**63.1% of the re-integrated population interviewed in phase III was able to find employment in Afghanistan within a month.** 21.7% found employment within a week of their deportation back to Afghanistan and 41.4% between a week and one month. 21.7% are still looking for a job.

When contrasting these numbers to the same information collected on the migration period spent in Iran, it becomes clear that the Iranian economy is more easily capable to absorb this labour force and hence represents more of an incentive for a population in need of a stable and constant source of income to support its family (graph 8).

Graph 8. Time spent looking for a job, respondents in phase III (%)

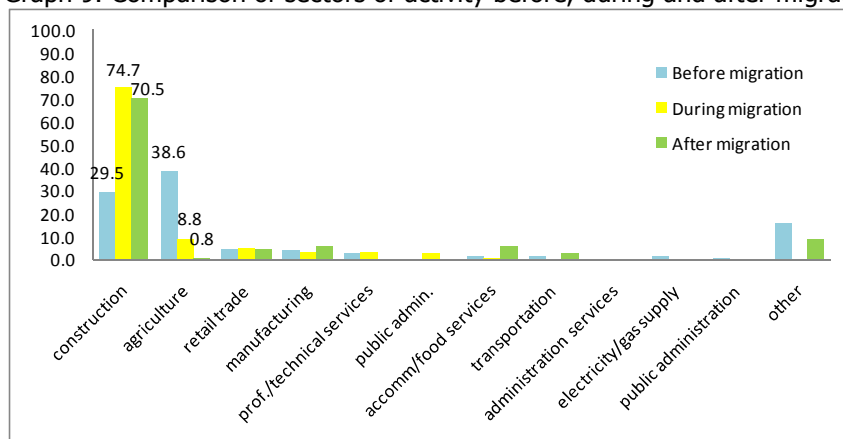


Current sectors of activity

**Among the employed respondents, 70.5% currently work in the construction sector** and the rest in the accommodation and food service activities, manufacturing, street work, transportation services, the private sector, retail trade, education.

**The comparison of activity sectors between the two stages before and after the respondents' migration to Iran shows a net increase in the rate of people working in the construction sector after having lived in Iran.** This is in part due to the location of the interviews, in urban areas rather than rural areas, and in part to the nature of the work and skills learned while in Iran. As shown in the data collected, the flow of economic migration has the effect of increasing the skill set of a population of Afghans in sectors in which they had experience but only as low skilled labour.

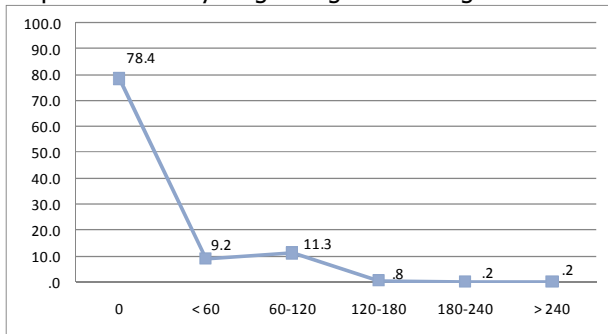
Graph 9. Comparison of sectors of activity before, during and after migration (%)



### Current wage levels

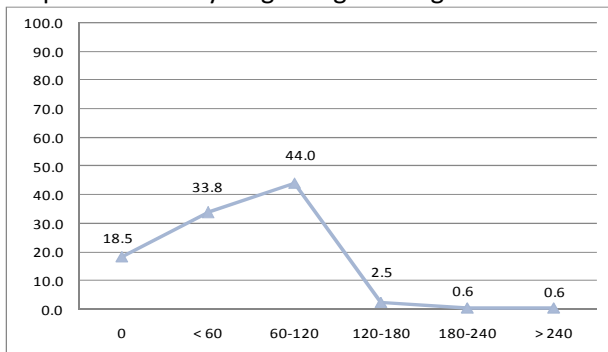
**78.4% of the interviewed men indicate having no income, while 11.3% earn a monthly wage between USD 60-120, 9.2% below 3,000 AFA USD 60, and the remaining 1.2% earn more than USD 120** (graph 10). NB: The high percentage of no income generation individuals is mainly due to the fact that 32.1% of interviews were conducted at the border with newly deported Afghans.

Graph 10. Monthly wage range of all single adult males interviewed in USD (%)



**The mean wage is just under USD 80 and the maximum wage is recorded at USD 300.** Among the respondents belonging to the group of re-integrated deportees (phase III), 52.3% earn less than USD 60 a month, with a peak of 44.0% earning between USD 60 and USD 120 a month. Only 3.7% earn more than USD 120 a month (graph 11).

Graph 11. Monthly wage range of single adult males in phase III in USD (%)



### 3.3 Migration patterns

#### 3.3.1 Reasons for migration to Iran: labour migration

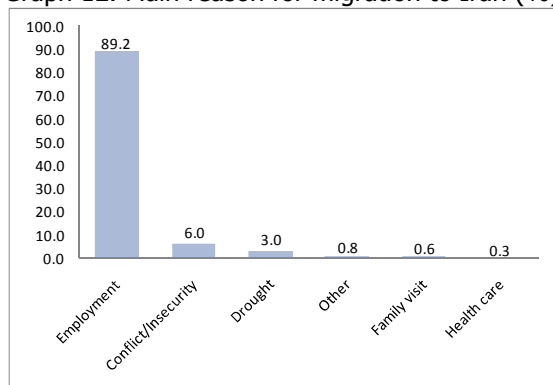
##### Financial and economic motivations of migration

82.4% of the males interviewed rank their family's financial situation before migration as below average and only 3.8% above average.

What was your family's financial status before exile?	
Very bad	18.6%
Bad	63.7%
Average	13.8%
Good	2.9%
Very good	1.0%
N=630	

**In response to the difficult financial situation facing their family, 89.2% decided to migrate to Iran based on economic reasons with the goal of finding better employment opportunities.** Out of the population of deportees who were mainly motivated by employment purposes, 52.7% migrated to Iran in 2007, 32.8% in 2008, 23.7% between 2002 and 2006 and 1.0% prior to 2001.

Graph 12. Main reason for migration to Iran (%)



**These figures indicate that the migration pattern witnessed is indeed one of labour migration, whereby the single adult males interviewed chose to relocate to Iran rather than stay in Afghanistan in order to support their families and have a financially viable situation.** In an attempt to justify the reasons why they perceived their financial situation as compromised in Afghanistan, the following reasons were provided:

- 98.0% said that there were no viable employment opportunities for them in Afghanistan,
- 70.8% were discouraged by the low wages on the Afghan labour market.

##### Iran: preferred destination for economic opportunities

To cope with the structural problems of the Afghan economic environment, respondents chose Iran as their preferred destination and according to the following criteria:

Why did you choose Iran as your destination?	
Economic opportunities	92.5%
Wage differentials	56.0%
Cultural and linguistic similarities	51.1%
Network of relatives and friends	38.3%
More freedom in Iran	4.1%
Other	1.4%
N=630	

Further supporting the economic roots of migration for single adult males, when asked where they would prefer to live given equal economic opportunities, 98.9% unequivocally said Afghanistan.

### **3.3.2 Method of migration: irregular migration**

#### Clandestine migration and smuggling networks

**91.1% of the males interviewed migrated to Iran clandestinely, of which 79.1% with the help of a smuggler**, 17.2% on their own based on their knowledge of the itinerary through previous migrations, and 3.6% by relying on the knowledge of other Afghan migrants who had been to Iran in previous years.

#### *Smuggler fees*

**The average cost of a smuggler is equivalent to USD 361** with a minimum of USD 40 and a maximum of USD 2,160. Overall, 74.2% of respondents paid more than USD 250 to finance their migration to Iran. The differential in price levels is a result of: the date of deportation, with prices increasing over the years with higher risks of arrest in Iran; the final destination sought, with northern destinations such as Tehran costing more than destinations closer to the Afghan border such as Mashhad, Shiraz or Esfahan.

How much did you pay the smuggler? (USD)	
≤ 100	8.0%
101 - 250	17.8%
251 - 400	36.3%
401 - 500	23.3%
> 500	14.6%
N=438	

#### *Method of payment of smuggler fees*

**The majority of men interviewed indebted themselves among their relatives and friends, either prior to their migration or upon arrival in Iran, to pay for the smuggler fees.** 44.6% of respondents paid the smuggler in cash from their savings or by borrowing from friends and relatives, 23.4% paid the smuggler in installments by working in Iran, 19.0% mainly borrowed from their friends and relatives upon arrival in Iran, and in 13.0% of cases reported, the total sum was taken from their paycheck when in Iran.

#### *Services provided by the smuggler*

92.1% of smugglers provided transportation, 55.6% shelter and housing along the way and only 50.3% provided food and water. Fake papers, employment opportunities or other contacts in Iran were not among the services provided in significant proportions.

#### *"Re-entry package"*

**22.1% of the men interviewed declare having been arrested on the way to their final destination in Iran and that they will attempt to re-enter Iran with the same smuggler**

**within a matter of days.** The higher numbers of deportation in deportation statistics have to take into consideration the rate of back and forth entries and exits of individuals. The restrictions and high rate of arrests by the Iranian authorities have not resulted in lesser entries. On the contrary, smugglers offer their travellers **"re-entry packages"** by which they commit to taking the travellers to Iran up to 3 times for the same price and each time within days of the last deportation date. The tactics used by smugglers have evolved over time. The different systems adopted by the smugglers will be discussed in chapter 5 of this report.

"I went alone to Nimroz where was introduced to a smuggler. I agreed to pay him 170,000 toman. I entered Iran once but got caught in Yazd. I spent one night in Nimroz and left again the next day with the same smuggler. This time we were arrested between Zahedan and Zabul. Again, I spent one night in Nimroz and went back the next morning. The third time worked and after ten days I arrived in Tehran."

- Ali Reza, 24, illiterate male from Ghor who has lived overall 7 years in Iran with three entries and three deportations to date, the last deportation being on April 7, 2008.

#### *Conditions of migration and perceived dangers*

On average, the irregular migration trip to Iran lasted 10.5 days. 32.1% report having spent less than 5 days on the road while 49.4% travelled between 6 to 15 days, 11.9% between 16 and 21 days, and 6.4% more than 3 weeks.

With heightened risks of arrest on Iranian soil, travels are increasingly done at night, by foot and for long hours in mountainous and desert areas. Days are spent in hiding, waiting for the roads to be secure to travel again at night.

"The smuggler took us through mountainous areas at night; during the day he hid us in caves. The few times we traveled by car, we were laying on top of each other to avoid being seen by the police. When we arrived in Iran we had to hide in a Baluch's home before we were able to go to Esfahan."

- Mohammad Atiq, 30, high school graduate from Logar who spent one year in Iran, 2006-2007.

The duration of their trip was one pressure which was heightened by the dangers faced along the way. Although not easily reported, many also travelled with the constant fear of getting arrested or shot at by the Iranian police.

What dangers did you face along the way?	
Lack of food and water	52.9%
Verbal abuse	39.5%
Physical abuse	21.9%
Theft	13.1%
Other	6.5%
Drug smuggling	0.5%
N=630	

"I was very scared of theft but also of death. There were two other children my age who died of hunger and thirst. We had to leave their bodies and continue our way. There was not enough water or food for all of us. There was a constant danger of theft, thirst and of getting lost, especially since I didn't know my way around and because I was alone."

- Ali Mohammad, 14, unaccompanied minor from Daikundi deported on April 11, 2008.

How would you define your travel conditions?	
Very difficult	51.4%
Difficult	34.6%
Average	6.1%
Good	6.5%
Very good	1.4%
N=627	

#### *Unaccompanied migration*

The men interviewed travelled to Iran alone for employment. When asked why they chose to travel alone, without the company of a relative, 75.2% pointed to the difficult travel conditions and the higher chances of entering Iran if alone; 58.7% mentioned not being able to afford to bring family members along with them due to the increasing costs of smugglers; and 48.4% preferred to go to Iran alone to be able to focus on finding employment and a decent wage to send back home to their family.

“Friends of mine had told me of tragic incidents happening to families who tried to illegally enter Iran. Many mentioned stories of women and children being abducted on the way and physically abused. That is why I decided to go to Iran alone, without my wife and son who stayed behind in Kabul.”

- Mohammad Ibrahim, 35, illiterate man from Kabul, head of a household of 7. He spent 4 years in Iran starting in 2003 and was deported in March 2007.

#### *Crossing point*

65.0% of the respondents who travelled clandestinely, crossed the border into Iran from Nimroz, 21.4% went through the Pakistan-Iran border at Teftan, and 13.6% through the Islam Qala border in the North. This has been corroborated by qualitative field work done with smugglers who indicate that the longer Nimroz border is the more porous and easiest access point to Iran.

### **3.3.3 Period of migration spent in Iran**

#### Temporary migration and intention to stay

##### *Overall time spent in Iran*

**The average number of years spent in Iran is approximately 3.5 years.** 64.1% have spent 3 years or less in Iran in Iran, 16.2% between 3 and 5 years, 11.3% between 5 and 10 years and 8.4% more than 10 years.

##### *Duration of last stay in Iran*

**The majority of respondents (51.1%) spent 6 months or less on their last trip to Iran.** This is due to the fact that many irregular migrants are now arrested on the way to their final destination, taken to a deportation center and deported within days. 22.1% fall in this category as they indicate having spent less than one month in Iran: among this group 39.5% were deported within ten days of their arrival in Iran, 55.1% between 11 and 20 days and 5.4% between three weeks to a month.

##### *Intention to stay in Iran*

**The intention for 74.4% of respondents was to spend less than 5 years in Iran and only 2.9% of the respondents planned to settle in Iran for good. The mindset is one of temporary and targeted migration to fulfill a specific financial goal.** This is not a population that wants to settle down permanently in Iran, but one which prefers temporary and cyclical migration.

How long did you intend to stay in Iran? (Year)	
0 - 5	74.4%
5 - 10	16.0%
10 - 20	5.5%
>20	4.2%
N=630	

#### *Legal status in Iran*

As an indication of the precarious status of Afghan migrant workers in Iran, 86.3% did not have any sort of legal paper or documentation while in Iran. Overall, out of the 630 respondents surveyed, there were 24 cases with valid visas, 14 with an Amayesh 1 card, 9 with an Amayesh 2 card, 11 with a Blue card and 6 with a special ID card.

"I had no papers in Iran. I never bothered to get an Amayesh 1 card because at that time there were not many deportations so it did not seem relevant. Then, when I wanted to apply for an Amayesh 2 card, I was told that you had to have the first Amayesh 1 card. I regretted my initial decision."

- Abbas, 36, high school graduate from Ghor who lived 11 years with his family in Iran. He was deported in May 2007.

#### *Province of residence in Iran*

The highest rate of Afghan migrant workers surveyed are found in the provinces of Tehran (32.3%), Esfahan (20.8%), Fars (10.3%), Kerman (9.8%) and Yazd (6.5%), which are home to the biggest and most economically active cities in Iran, namely Tehran, Esfahan, Shiraz, Kerman and Yazd.

In the Tehran area, the main clusters of Afghan migrants were found in Tehran, Varamin and Karaj; in the province of Esfahan, the clusters are Esfahan, Kashan, Khomeini Shahr and Najafabad; in Fars, the population is concentrated in Shiraz and its immediate surroundings; in Kerman, the main cities harboring Afghan migrants are Kerman, Rafsanjan and Bam; and in Yazd, the population is concentrated in the capital city of the province, Yazd, and its immediate surroundings.

Where did you live in Iran? (Province)	
Tehran	32.3%
Esfahan	20.8%
Fars	10.3%
Kerman	9.8%
Yazd	6.5%
Qom	4.2%
Sistan and Baluchistan	4.1%
Qazvin	3.7%
Khorasan	3.1%
Hormozgan	2.6%
Other	2.6%
N=542	

#### *Role of support networks in Iran*

**The two main determinants relevant to the choice of the province and city destination in Iran are (1) the perception of employment opportunities and (2) the role of support networks.** 90.0% selected their residency based on the job opportunities available and 65.3% based on the presence of friends and families on location. The easy access (9.0%) and religious and ethnic ties (6.6%) only play a marginal role in the decision making process.



"I lived in Mashhad because most Afghans from Herat settle down there because they have friends and relatives in this city. Since it is closer to the border than other main cities of Iran, it is easier to go back and forth so I felt more comfortable living there. Once I had been there, it was easier to just return there on every trip back to Iran."

- Asil Mohammad, 42, illiterate male from Herat who had lived 12 years in Iran, with 6 clandestine entries and 1 deportation in May 2007.

A support network for families in Afghanistan through a high level of remittances

The level of savings and remittances sent back to Afghanistan are an indication of the weight of this labour migration for the families and communities staying behind in Afghanistan.

*Remittances and savings*

Of the population of Afghans who reached their final destination and worked in Iran, **60.6% sent money back to their families in Afghanistan**. Rare were those sending this money back on a monthly basis (13.8%); 86.2% of respondents sent their money back every few months (3-4 months).

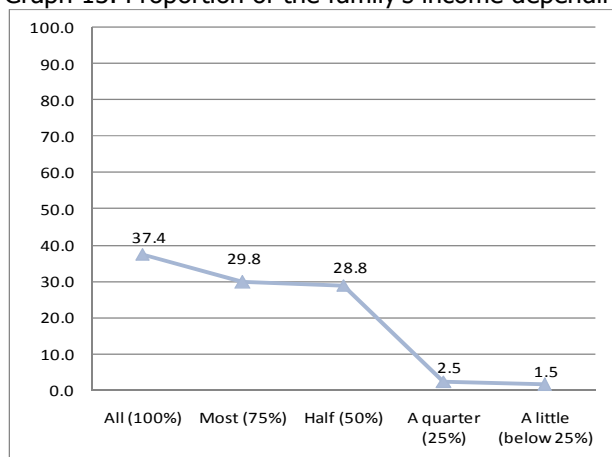
**The level of remittances on average was equal to USD 208 a month**, with a low at USD 22 and a high at USD 972. On average, **67.0% of the wages earned was sent back to Afghanistan**.

**The level of savings on average was equal to USD 228 a month**, with a low at USD 10.8 and a high at USD 2,700. On average, **71.1% of the wages earned was set aside as savings**.

*Dependency of households on the income sent from Iran*

**37.4% of households in Afghanistan depended entirely (100%) on the flow of money sent from Iran as their sole source of income; in 29.8% of cases this cash flow represented three quarters of their income; in 28.8% of cases half of their income; and in 4.0% of cases less than a quarter of their income** (graph 13).

Graph 13. Proportion of the family's income depending on remittances sent from Iran, (%)



*Limitations*

11.2% of respondents declare setting no savings aside and 32.3% that they did not send any money back to Afghanistan.

### Difficulties of life in Iran

All respondents were asked to rank the three most significant difficulties they faced in Iran. In order of importance, the following obstacles were given:

What were the main difficulties of life in Iran?	
Fear of arrest	65.2%
Pressure of living in hiding	43.4%
Racism	29.8%
Poor treatment by the Iranian authorities	22.5%
N=630	

The lack of access to certain basic services heightened the above mentioned difficulties:

Which services did you not have access to in Iran?	
Recreational activities	96.1%
Education	95.5%
Health care	87.2%
Housing	85.3%
N=630	

### Perceptions during migration in Iran

Interviewees have a negative perception of a return to Afghanistan, identifying a high risk of failure as the most likely outcome of return. Almost half (47.5%) of the respondents indicate having had some knowledge on the conditions of return of other Afghans in their situation. Most of them had a negative perception of a potential return: 43.5% said other Afghans faced great difficulties upon their return, 26.3% noted a high risk of economic and financial failure linked to a return to Afghanistan and only 19.2% acknowledged a satisfactory return.

When asked to rank three main reasons preventing the respondent from returning voluntarily to Afghanistan, the following reasons were ranked as the most important:

Why did you not return to Afghanistan voluntarily?	
Shortage of jobs	74.9%
Minimum level of savings needed	45.4%
Lack of basic goods and services	17.8%
Insecurity	16.4%
Political instability	13.2%
N=630	

### ***3.3.4 Arrest and deportation process***

#### Conditions of arrest

*Location of arrest:* The frequency of arrests was highest in Tehran (27.6%), followed by Esfahan (19.5%), Kerman (12.9%), Shiraz (8.3%), Yazd (8.1%), Zahedan (4.8%) followed by Qom (3%), Bandar Abbas (3%), Qazvin (2.7%), Mashhad (2.2%), Zabul (1.4%), Bam (1.1%) and the remaining (5.4%) were split between Karaj, Kashan and Sistan Baluchistan.

*Reason for and lack of notification of arrest:* 81.9% of the respondents were arrested in the street or at their workplace for being undocumented. **73.8% of respondents reported not having been given prior notification of arrest, resulting in the absence of time to collect their belongings, material assets and money.**

*Documentation presented at time of arrest:* 93.8% did not have any valid papers at the time of their deportation, but the remaining 6.2% claim that they presented valid documentation to the authorities arresting them. Upon examination, it was revealed that in 33.3% of these cases, the respondent had shown an expired visa. An alleged 28.2% of respondents mentioned presenting valid documentation, whether an Amayesh 2 card or Amayesh 3 application, that was torn or ignored by the police (38.5%).

"I was in Shiraz, at my workplace. The police in uniform came and arrested 6 of us. This had not been the first time they had come to bother us, but this time they arrested me although I showed them all my legal papers and work permit. The other 5 people also had legal papers."

- Ghader, 23, high school graduate who was born in Iran and lived there his whole life. He was deported on April 22, 2008.

#### Conditions of detention

The following detention centers are the main locations where Afghans migrants interviewed were taken after their arrest: 24.5% Sang Sefid (Mashhad), 15.3% Varamin (Tehran), 14.6% Danesgha (Esfahan), 14.3% Kerman, 11.1% Tale Sia (Kerman), 6.5% Yazd. The remaining interviewees were split between the Zahedan, Askarabad/Tehran and Shiraz detention centers.

53.4% were detained for 4 to 10 days before being deported, 35.1% less than 3 days and 11.5% more than 10 days. **The qualitative data indicates that some people stayed in the detention centers for a month or two, sometimes more, as they were unable to pay for their transportation back to Afghanistan.** According to testimonies collected, officers in charge do not deport men who cannot pay for the cost of their deportation. Sometimes they are asked to do manual labour at the detention center to pay their way out, or they have to rely on the generosity of other Afghans held at the same location. Officers require detainees to beg for money from other detainees.

At the detention center:

- **An alleged 83.1% did not have the right to make a phone call to their relatives or friends** in order to let them know of their situation or request for money to be sent to them;
- **A reported 46.4% of respondents also complained of physical abuse and intimidation techniques** by the officials in charge, and
- **15.3% claimed to have their belongings stolen or confiscated from them** by the authorities.

#### Conditions of deportation

When asked to give an assessment of the conditions of their deportation, **69.2% allegedly recall a difficult deportation process, 19.4% average conditions and only 11.4% satisfactory conditions.** Their personal assessment of the treatment received from the Iranian authorities mirrors these proportions, **with 75.9% who claim to have received bad or very bad treatment, 15.1% average and only 9.0% reporting a satisfactory treatment during deportation.**

52.4% of respondents were in transit from 2 to 5 days before arriving on Afghan soil; 45.7% were deported within a day of their departure from the detention center. 51.0% were deported through the Islam Qala border and 49.0% through the Nimroz border, although our qualitative field work has also

given us information on instances of deportations through non official crossing points, an issue to keep in mind in terms for accurate cross border statistics.

“Since they were trying to deport more people, they had to be subtle and not get caught by other authorities. Although we were an hour away from Islam Qala, the soldiers decided to take us a more discreet route and through an unofficial border. I am not sure exactly where we arrived but it took us 4 hours to walk to the city of Zaranj. I did not have any idea of the location of that entry point but I followed other Afghans who knew their way to Zaranj.”

- Mohammad Ibrahim, 35, illiterate male from Kabul who lived 4 years in Iran and was deported in March 2007.

### Specific problems of deportation

What were the main difficulties of your deportation?	
Verbal abuse	57.0%
Physical abuse	39.8%
Non receipt of wages	38.3%
Loss of assets	34.1%
Family separation	15.7%
Health problems	10.0%
N=630	

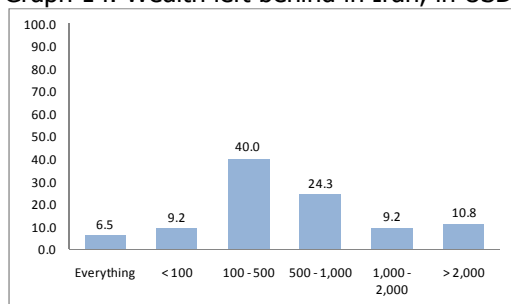
### Cost of deportation and financial loss

Only 12 people out of the 630 interviewed said that they did not have to pay any money for their deportation. The remaining, **98.1% of all respondents, paid for the cost of their deportation back to Afghanistan** in the buses and vehicles arranged by the Iranian government. The average cost of deportation is USD 37.50, with a maximum at USD 400 and a minimum at USD 1.30.

#### Additional costs of deportation: wages and assets left behind in Iran:

51.6% of respondents left behind wages or material assets in Iran. We asked them to evaluate the worth of the wealth they have still remaining in Iran. **The average wealth per person left behind was estimated at USD 1,503. The most vulnerable were the 6.5% who had left their entire life, overall money, material assets and family behind in Iran. 20.0% left more than USD 1,000, of which 10.8% left more than USD 2,000 (graph 14).**

Graph 14. Wealth left behind in Iran, in USD (%)



### Family separation

17.7% of respondents have been deported but their family (wife and children) are still living in Iran without any information on their whereabouts and whether they will be deported as well.

"I lived in Qom and worked in construction. After two years, I got married to an Iranian woman and I now have a 2-year old son. They are both still in Iran. I have been here for a month waiting for them to get here."

- Ali Reza, 24, illiterate male from Ghor who lived 7 years in Iran, with 3 clandestine entries and 3 deportations to date. The last time he was deported was on April 7, 2008.

## 3.4 Return to Afghanistan

### Assessment of support provided upon arrival at the border

89.4% of the men interviewed reported not going through any screening or registration at the border when they arrived in Afghanistan. This information was reported by the deportees interviewed but is nuanced by our qualitative field work. Case studies conducted by our team indicate a level of confusion experienced by deportees upon arrival at the border. They are screened before they step down from the bus but the process is not clear to them as they are not sure if they are being questioned by Iranian or Afghan officials, hence distorting their answers at the time of the interview. This level of confusion is understandable given the conditions of deportation.

On this note, insofar as the screening mechanism is designed to identify extremely vulnerable individuals, the UNHCR views that its system has worked efficiently. The UNHCR is confident that its monitoring and registration systems at the border have captured most EVI cases, as the target was not designed to identify needs among single adult male deportees. The fact that they may have initial needs does not necessarily make them vulnerable and hence deserving of assistance.

According to our quantitative field work, of the 10.9% who were registered, 7.3% of the cases were handled by Afghan authorities, 2.9% by the UNHCR and 0.5% by NGOs working at the border. 94.9% did not receive any type of short term or emergency assistance, whether food, shelter, transportation, financial support or counseling. Emergency assistance was provided to a marginal percentage of the population surveyed thus indicating that single adult males deported did not qualify as extremely vulnerable individuals (EVIs) according to UNHCR standards.

What type of assistance did you receive upon arrival in Afghanistan? (%)	
Transportation	3.8%
Food	3.5%
Shelter	3.0%
Financial support	2.7%
Counseling	0.6%
N=630	

### Assessment of needs upon arrival at the border

Whereas only 5.1% of the men interviewed received assistance upon return, the majority had needs that were not met by any support programs. Interviewees were asked to rank their first and second most important needs upon their arrival at the border in Afghanistan.

The most immediate needs were ranked as follows:

What were your most immediate needs upon your return?	
Short term assistance (food, shelter etc.)	84.8%
Help in finding employment	53.3%
Vocational training	25.6%
N=630	

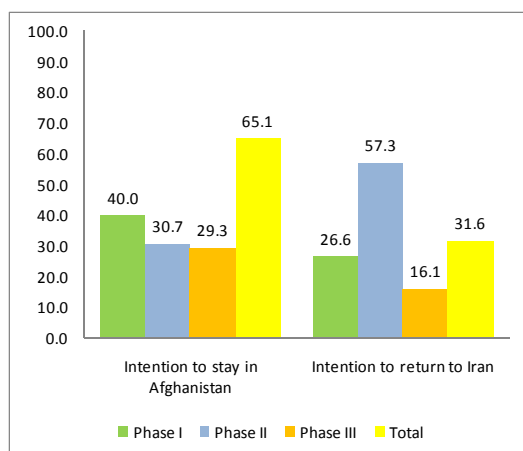
The interviewees were most concerned by difficulties related to their precarious economic situation, their lack of assets in Afghanistan and their concern on how to pay for their transportation back home:

What were the main difficulties you faced upon your return?	
Unemployment	82.2%
Poverty	56.2%
Lack of money for transportation	41.4%
Lack of assets	18.4%
N=630	

#### Intention to stay in Afghanistan or return to Iran

**65.1% of respondents intend to stay in Afghanistan, 31.6% plan a return to Iran and 3.3% remain undecided.** Of those wanting to stay in Iran, the highest percentage were the men interviewed at the border (40.0%, phase I), a consequence of their difficult deportation process and the recent nature of their experience in Iran. Of those intending to return back to Iran, the highest rate was recorded in the responses of men in phase II (57.3%), a stage at which the decision making process takes place.

Graph 15. Intention to stay in Afghanistan or return to Iran by phase of interview (%)



Although most respondents would prefer to stay in their own country, and attempt to re-integrate Afghan society, they are often confronted with problems that force them to return to Iran.

“I was deported a year ago. One month after my deportation, I brought my family with me to Kabul, hoping to find a job with a suitable wage. After a few months of being unemployed, I decided to go back to Iran and to leave my wife and son with my in laws.”

- Mohammad Atiq, 30, high school graduate from Logar who spent 3 years in Iran, with 2 clandestine entries and 1 deportation.

**Among those who plan to return to Iran, 77.6% are motivated by economic reasons and with the goal of finding employment that can provide for their families' needs, 51.6% because of the assets and money they have left behind in Iran, 28.3% to reunite with their family and relatives in Iran and 7.8% are now more used to the way of life in Iran.**

Planning to return to Iran: method of migration foreseen

**73.1% of those planning to go back to Iran will rely on illegal means**, either through a smuggler (37.0%) or by their own means, having learned the ways of entering Iran on their previous migration trips (36.1%). Only 25.6% will opt for legal means, by applying for a passport and visa from one of the Iranian consulates in Afghanistan.

**If the following options were readily available and provided that they had the financial means to afford them, 52.2% would prefer going back to Iran with a work permit and 41.7% with any other type of valid visa. Only 5.6% would still rely on a smuggler and illegal means of entry into Iran.**

"The main reason why people do not resort to a legal entry in Iran is because the cost of visas is too high, most people are not able to afford it in cash and in advance. The second reason is because it takes months before one can obtain a visa, and then, it expires within three months. If a visa lasted one or two years, then it would be worth the money, the wait and the efforts."

- Abdul Ghoudous, 28, high school graduate from Logar who spent 5 years in Iran, with 3 clandestine entries and 1 deportation to date on April 24,2008.

Perceptions of life in Afghanistan after deportation

*Assessment of living conditions*

**The majority of respondents are in a precarious living situation.** Mostly represented by men in phase I, just deported from Iran and interviewed at the border, 19.6% do not have any accommodation or shelter plans in Afghanistan. They will head to the closest cities, Herat or Zaranj, and stay temporarily in hotels before finding an alternative. 47.7% of the respondents are living in a guest house or hotel at the time of interview. Only 18.6% lived with their families at the time of the interview in rental apartments, while 11.9% are living with other deportees.

Where do you currently live?	
Hotel/ guest house	47.7%
No accommodation	19.6%
With family in rental apartment	18.6%
Shared room with other deportees	11.9%
Refugee camp	2.2%
N=630	

**The perceptions of their current living situation is reflective of this precarious situation: 43.8% consider their living situation to have gotten worse than before their migration to Iran, mentioning for some a complete breakdown in their condition.**

How is your living situation now as compared to before your migration?	
Complete breakdown	1.3%
Worse	42.5%
Same	16.8%
Improved some	38.7%
Improved greatly	0.8%
N=629	

#### Assessment of financial situation

**The respondents' perceptions of their financial situation mirror that of their living situation. 45.9% of those interviewed consider their financial situation to have gotten worse than before their migration.**

How is your financial situation now as compared to before your migration?	
Complete breakdown	2.2%
Worse	43.7%
Same	14.9%
Improved some	38.3%
Improved greatly	1.0%
N=630	

"At first, our situation was good thanks to the money I had been able to send from Iran. It has now been a year since I was deported and all our savings are gone. We are back to being poor."

- Jallil Ahmad, 22, illiterate male from Herat who lived 7 years in Mashhad. He entered Iran clandestinely once and was deported in April 2007.

#### Assessment of challenges ahead

As mentioned earlier, the main concerns of these men are economic in nature and highlight their distress in terms of finding a reliable source of income and employment. Among the challenges facing these men, they have ranked the following in order of importance:

What are the main challenges ahead in your life?	
Unemployment	78.4%
Poverty	68.4%
Loss of assets	35.9%
Family separation	27.9%
Lack of housing	23.7%
Lack of food	14.8%
N=630, multiple answers	

#### Assessment of the impact of migration

When asked to highlight the positive impact of migration on their lives, **55.6% say that their migration to Iran has had no positive impact on them.** They do not mention improvement in skills, gain in material assets, better financial or living situations. **They have a mainly negative perception of their migration, focusing on two factors: 53.7% because of their loss of assets and money during deportation and 52.2% because of debts incurred resulting in a significant financial loss.**

Interviewees gave a positive response to previous questions on the skills they learned and the income they generated in Iran and sent to Afghanistan thanks to their migration. However, at the end of the day,



they are disappointed by their experience and give an overall negative feedback. Psychological factors such as the poor treatment received during arrest and deportation and the difficult working and living conditions inherent to an irregular status in Iran are the main factors explaining these perceptions.

### **3.5 Summary of key findings on single adult males**

The data presented in this section provides the following highlights on the situation of single adult males who have been deported from Iran in recent waves (mainly 2007 and 2008).

- 1) **The migration of Afghan single adult males to Iran fits the definition of a temporary and cyclical labour migration among young adult males.**
  - The average number of years spent in Iran is of 3.5 years,
  - The majority, 51.1%, of respondents spent 6 months or less in Iran on their last trip,
  - The intention of 74.4% of the men interviewed is to stay 5 years or less in Iran in order to save enough money to support their families back in Afghanistan.
  
- 2) **The reason for their migration is of an economic nature and with the goal of finding a better paid employment in Iran.**
  - 82.3% rank their family's financial situation before migration as below average and 89.2% decided to migrate to Iran based on economic reasons.
  - 92.5% of respondents perceive better employment opportunities in Iran, 56.0% more advantageous wage differentials as compared to employment opportunities in Afghanistan.
  - 49.2% of them are the sole breadwinners of their families and 52.4% are the heads of their households in Afghanistan.
  
- 3) **The monthly wage levels are 4 times higher in Iran (mean of USD 323) than in Afghanistan (mean under USD 80). Overall, 73.3% have benefited from their professional experience in Iran to learn a new skill.**
  - Migration has an impact on the labour force, benefiting the construction sector. Before migration, 44.3% worked in agriculture and 33.9% in construction. Upon return from Iran, 70.5% found employment in the construction sector, mirroring the activity rate in this sector during migration in Iran (74.8%).
  
- 4) **Irregular migration is the most widespread method of entry into Iran for 91.1% of respondents, of which 79.1% resort to the help of a smuggler.**
  - The average cost of a smuggler is of USD 361 which is equivalent to a month's worth of work in Iran, as the mean wage recorded is USD 323. Migrants borrow this money from their relatives and can therefore expect to pay them back in a month's time.
  - This is cheaper than relying on obtaining visas that are too costly, take too long to be delivered and expire after 3 months. A visa costs altogether USD 640 per person, with the following breakdown: visa fees of USD 60, passport fee of USD 180, round trip ticket to Iran worth USD 500 from Kabul to Tehran.
  
- 5) **The support network of friends and relatives living in Iran is a key factor in the decision making process of the men interviewed.**
  - 65.3% choose their city of residence based on the existence of this network and 49.0% rely on it to find their first employment upon arrival in Iran.
  - They are in turn themselves a support network for their families in Afghanistan as they send back 67.0% of their monthly wage in the form of remittances.

- 6) **Deportees report having been subject to difficult conditions during their arrest, detention and deportation, highlighting potential instances of human rights abuses.**
  - 69.2% had a difficult deportation experience, with 75.9% receiving bad or very bad treatment from the Iranian authorities.
  
- 7) **Deportation represents an economic and personal loss with:**
  - 51.6% of respondents having left behind wages, money or material assets in Iran of an estimated value of USD 1,503, and
  - 17.7% of respondents having been separated from their families.
  
- 8) **The majority of single adult males did not receive assistance upon arrival at the border thus indicating that their condition did not qualify them as extremely vulnerable individuals (EVIs) according to UNHCR standards.**
  - Vulnerability screening and needs are two separate issues. 84.8% of single adult males expressed the need for immediate assistance (water, food, shelter and transportation).
  
- 9) **The precarious nature of the living situation of these deportees highlights a vulnerability to be taken into account in support programs:**
  - 47.7% live in a guesthouse or hotel, 19.6% do not have any accommodation waiting for them, and
  - 43.7% consider their living situation to have gotten worse than before their migration.
  
- 10) **Deportation worsens the financial situation of Afghan men:**
  - 53.7% say they have lost assets and money due to their sudden arrest and deportation and,
  - 52.2% have incurred debts resulting in a significant financial loss.

## 4. Conclusions

### 4.1 Comparative review of the population of deportees from Iran

	Single adult males	Heads of households
<b>1. Demographic profile</b>		
Age now (years)	Mostly under 35	Mostly above 45
Age at migration (years)	Majority between 19-25	Majority above 25
Marital status	34.8% single	5.2% single
Province of origin	32 provinces represented	3 Western provinces
Household situation	Majority head of household and sole breadwinner	Majority head of household and sole breadwinner
<b>2. Migration patterns</b>		
Number of entries	40.3% 1 entry; 59.7% 2-12	79.2% 1 entry; 20.8% 2-6
Number of voluntary returns	57.9% none, 42.1% 1-8	81.2% none; 18.8% 1-8
Number of deportations	77.0% 1; 23.0% 1-7	96.8% 1; 3.2% 1-3
Date of migration to Iran	Avg. 2006	Avg. 1992
Method of migration	91.1% irregular; 79.1% smuggler	100.0% irregular; 17.0% smuggler
Reason of migration	Economic	Security
Conditions of migration	86.0% difficult	64.2% difficult
Time spent in Iran (years)	Avg. 3.5	Avg. 16
Intention to stay in Iran	Temporary	Permanent
Remittances	39.4% none; avg. USD 208	95.5% none; avg. USD 52
<b>3. Labour and employment</b>		
Wage levels in Iran	Avg. USD 323	Avg. USD 185
Skills learned in Iran	73.3%	22.7%
Availability of work in Iran	Avg. 11 days	Avg. 2 months
Social networks	49.0% method of job search	34.9% method of job search
Unemployment rate in Afghanistan	78.7% overall; 18.5% phase III	57.8% overall; 48.8% phase III
Wage levels in Afghanistan	Avg. USD 80	Avg. USD 108
Availability of work in Afghanistan	63.1% < 1 month	19.2% < 1 month
<b>4. Reintegration in Afghanistan</b>		
Screening at border	10.6%	67.3%
Support received upon arrival	5.1%	38.3%
Needs upon arrival	83.8% short term assistance	85.7% short term assistance
Intention to stay in Afghanistan	65.1%	81.8%
Intention to return to Iran	Economic	Economic
Living situation	43.8% worse	27.9% worse
Financial situation	45.9% worse	46.8% worse
Perception of challenges	68.4% poverty	63.6% poverty
Impact of migration	55.6% negative	70.8% better in Iran

This comparative review is based on the data collected from the two groups of deportees: single adult males and heads of households. The data for the first group was presented in chapter 3 as single adult males are the main focus of the present study. A detailed presentation and analysis of the data for heads of households is provided in Annex 1.

As the data above highlights, the population of Afghan deportees from Iran represents two very distinct groups: single adult males, defined as migrant workers in irregular status, and family groups referred to here as undocumented refugees. Several characteristics distinguish these two subgroups, including their demographic and economic profiles as well as their migration and reintegration patterns. The table above illustrates this comparative review of which the most important traits are detailed below:

- I. **Age groups:** Migrant workers are mostly young men who leave Afghanistan to find work between the ages of 19 and 25 at an age when they are best adapted to handle the difficulties of migration and of living conditions in Iran. They are stronger and fit for the difficult and labour intensive jobs in the construction sector and more flexible to undertake a migration on their own as 34.8% of them are single. This is in contrast to heads of households who left to Iran with their families and lived there as undocumented refugees.
- II. **Temporary vs. permanent migration:** The migration patterns of these two subgroups also highlight different experiences. Single adult males illustrate a cyclical and temporary migration flow, as respondents stay on average 3.5 years in Iran. They enter Iran typically more than once, with a significant trend of temporary returns. This is justified by a willingness to undertake regular family visits in response to the seasonal shifts and the lower demand for low skilled labour during the winter in Iran. Case study 3 illustrates this cyclical migration with a total of 7 legal and illegal entries into Iran, whereas case study 13 is included as an example of the seasonal employment trends (Annex 2). Families on the other hand left Afghanistan to settle in Iran permanently as documented by the duration of their stay. Previous studies highlight the weak links of Afghan households with their country of origin, "with only 15 per cent of Afghan persons visiting Afghanistan during their stay. The observed pattern was that the longer staying residents were less willing to return."<sup>5</sup> They lived in Iran on average 16 years, settling down with their children, of whom many are born in Iran but do not have the same rights as Iranian children to education and other services. The position of Afghan children and their lack of education in Iran is a sensitive issue as it affects their prospects for future employment in Afghanistan (ILO 2006). The stated intention of families is to stay in Iran for either for good or for the long run, typically an additional 20 years or more.
- III. **Methods and reasons of migration:** The years since 2001 have marked a shift in the methods of migration with the rise of a human smuggling network. This shadow business became necessary once employment considerations began to outweigh conflict and insecurity issues and when the government of Iran began adopting stricter restrictions to the entry of Afghans. The majority of heads of households surveyed documented their time of migration to the two major waves of refugee seeking exodus, between 1979-1989 and 1994-2001, periods during which the flight of Afghans from Iran did not necessitate the support of smugglers, as the main priority was not to avoid immigration authorities but to escape from conflict. The different root causes of migration of these groups have led to different methods of migration, one relying heavily on smugglers (single adult males) while the other less (families).
  - *Categories of irregular migrants: clandestine and legal entries into Iran*  
Irregular migrants comprise two categories of persons: those who arrive clandestinely (91.1% of single adult males) and those who arrive legally through a valid visa and overstay the period for which their visas are valid (8.9% of single adult males). The

---

<sup>5</sup> *Afghan households in Iran: Profile and impact*. International Migration Programme, ILO Geneva, October 2006.

situation of families surveyed is different: entire family groups who left Afghanistan to escape conflict did so at a time when legal pathways were not available to them. All of the families interviewed declare entering Iran clandestinely but were given entry by the Iranian authorities as refugees and in the context of an open door policy.

- *Dissuasive measures fail to address irregular migration*

As shown in the findings of this study and previous studies (ILO 2006), and as learned from international experiences, **an important policy implication is the role played by restrictive border management policies in favouring the development of and reliance on a network of smugglers with consequences on security, law and the protection of migrants.**<sup>6</sup>

- IV. **Economic impact of migration:** The majority of single adult males migrated alone to Iran with the goal of earning higher salaries and sending remittances back to their families. These remittances most often constitute the sole source of income of families in Afghanistan. On average, respondents sent USD 208 a month. Heads of households showed the opposite tendency, with a marginal level of remittances and savings. This is corroborated by previous studies on the profile of Afghans living in Iran (AREU 2005, ILO 2006): "despite their long stay in Iran, Afghans households exist on a day to day basis, largely on the margins of society and the economy. Analysis of their wage levels, expenditure, and insecure employment suggests that building up financial savings and resources for a sustainable return is difficult. [...] Only 7% of households reported sending money home echoing the findings of other recent research. This is attributable to the high cost of daily life, low wages (and consequently modest savings), and their having migrated with families leaving no immediate relatives behind."<sup>7</sup> The low remittances in the case of households can be attributed to the spending of their income on normal costs of life and on the tenuous relationship with Afghanistan after more than 20 years living abroad. These trends show the two distinct economic weights of these populations: that of migrant workers supporting the Afghan economy and development process, with a remittance flow estimated at 6% of the Afghan GDP, while migrant families' income is spent in Iran (see section 5.4.1 for details).
- V. **Income generating potential:** Single adult males who migrate to Iran earn on average USD 323 whereas their wage levels upon return from Iran do not exceed on average USD 80: this represents a 75% loss in their wages. They were able to find employment in Iran within 11 days of their arrival in the country, as opposed to the lack of availability of work in Afghanistan since 18.5% of the re-integrated population (phase III) was unemployed at the time of the interview. The potential for these single adult males to succeed financially is clearly higher in Iran than in Afghanistan. On the other hand, heads of households of deported families gained less than migrant workers in Iran and experience a smaller loss in their wage levels. The average wage in Iran was on average of USD 185 compared to an average of USD 108 in Afghanistan, thus representing a 41.6% loss in the wage levels. Their unemployment rate is higher with 48.8% of the re-integrated deportees being unemployed in Afghanistan. In both cases, the economic situation was more favorable for migrants in Iran but the economic loss is less significant for migrant families than single adult males.
- VI. **Acquiring new skills from migration:** The attractiveness of the Iranian labour market for single adult males is seen in the higher wage levels obtained but also in the increase in their marketable skills. These migrant workers benefit from a specific training in skills that is not available for them in Afghanistan. This allows them to earn higher salaries in Iran, it enables them to expect a quicker evolution in their wage levels as illustrated in case study 4 (p.90, Annex 2) and it prepares them for better re-integration prospects, provided the right economic

<sup>6</sup> *Afghan households in Iran: Profile and impact*. International Migration Programme, ILO Geneva, October 2006.

<sup>7</sup> *Afghan households in Iran: Profile and impact*. International Migration Programme, ILO Geneva, October 2006.

environment in Afghanistan. This is supported by previous studies on the construction sector in Afghanistan which showed that these skills are highly valued on the Afghan construction market.<sup>8</sup> Families who migrated to Iran primarily for security reasons do not display the same wage levels or skill sets. As such they return to Afghanistan facing higher unemployment rates and lengthier periods before successfully finding employment.

The distinctions between the two groups, and the set of challenges inherent in each group, require different responses. An effective migration management response should aim to minimize the costs of deportation and enhance the opportunities of re-integration in Afghanistan for both groups by taking into account these specificities. This will allow to downplay the tendency for deportees, especially migrant workers, to return to Iran and consequently to expose themselves to vulnerabilities (detailed in section 4.3).

## **4.2 Driving forces of migration**

The history of migration between Iran and Afghanistan and the nature of the data collected show the existence of several “push” and “pull” factors. These have led to a significant population of Afghans to migrate to and live in Iran irregularly: 86.3% of single adult males and 47.4% of families surveyed in this study reported not having had regular status during their stay in Iran. The remainder entered Iran legally but lost status throughout the years, resulting in a lack of proper residency and work authorizations.

The choice of the country of destination indicates a correlation between the perceived benefits of migration and the regional, economic and cultural role played by Iran. The factors causing Afghans to leave their country of origin differ according to whether the migrant is a labour migrant or a migrant seeking refuge and asylum. There are however some natural overlaps on the factors leading Afghans to choose Iran as their country of destination, as detailed below.

### **4.2.1 “Push” factors**

- Migrant workers

In response to the less than average financial situation of the majority of the respondents’ families and a high unemployment rate, single adult males decide to migrate to Iran with the main goal of finding employment and to generate an income to sustain their families in Afghanistan. With this aim, all of the 630 single adult males interviewed chose to migrate alone to Iran, leaving their families behind. This decision is motivated by (1) a will to focus on an income generating activity in Iran, (2) a will to protect women and children in the family from the dangers and risks of clandestine migration and (3) to maximize the amount of savings and remittances to be sent back to Afghanistan.

The factors forcing them to take this decision are linked to the incapacity of the Afghan economy to absorb its labour force. 87.0% of respondents said that there were no viable employment opportunities for them in Afghanistan and 62.9% pointed to the wage differentials between Afghanistan and Iran.

- Undocumented refugees

In line with the two main exodus waves of Afghans to Iran, most families interviewed left between 1979 and 1989 and between 1994 and 2001. An overall majority of the families surveyed left during periods when Afghanistan was in the midst of occupation and conflict that threatened their livelihoods.

This is supported by the respondents’ justification of their pattern of migration: 66.9% said they left Afghanistan primarily based on security considerations. They all travelled with their family to Iran as it

---

<sup>8</sup> Study of the construction market (focus on skills and labour issues), Altai Consulting for USAID CDP, 2007.

they could not leave their family members behind due to the worsening insecurity and conflict in their country of origin.

### **Limitations of the Afghan labour market**

Comparing wage levels, unemployment rates, duration of time spent finding employment and availability of work between the two countries, the attractiveness of the Iranian economy and the limitations of the Afghan economy are highlighted explaining the inevitable and one-sided labour migration flows and the difficulties encountered in the re-integration phase of deportees in their home country.

#### *Wage differentials & unemployment rates*

The wage levels of single adult males are 4 times lower in Afghanistan than in Iran. Upon their forced return, both groups experience a sharp decrease in their wage levels and higher unemployment rates.

All of the single adult males interviewed were employed in Iran in contrast with the 63.1% of those re-integrated in Afghanistan following their deportation. The same trend is noted in the data collected among heads of households of deported families: 99.4% were employed in Iran, with only 1 case of an unemployed head of household, as opposed to the majority being unemployed upon return.

#### *Length of time spent finding employment*

Migrant workers spent on average 6 days before securing their first employment in Iran, with an almost absolute rate of success of single adult males securing employment within a month of their arrival in Iran. Back in Afghanistan, the re-integration efforts on the Afghan labour market were less successful for the same population as 36.9% spent more than one month finding employment.

### **4.2.2 "Pull" factors**

- Migrant workers

Iran was chosen as the preferred country of destination for its presence in the region as the most economically developed country. Single adult males based their reasoning on the perceived attributes of the Iranian economy referring to better employment opportunities in Iran and to advantageous wage differentials. Their knowledge of the labour market conditions in Iran are shaped by the long history of migration between the two countries and the presence of a solid network of friends and relatives throughout Iran.

- Undocumented refugees

Although family groups left Afghanistan mainly due to conflict and insecurity, the factors leading them to choose Iran over other countries are economic as well: 64.9% of the families mention better employment opportunities in Iran and 44.2% more advantageous wage differentials. The 'open door' policy of the government of Iran, as well as the easy access that Iran represents for populations living mainly in the Western provinces, are also incentives leading to the migration of families to Iran.

### **The informal labour market in Iran**

The migration flow of Afghans to Iran is a response to the demand on the part of employers in the Iranian labour market. Afghans know, through a transnational network of friends and relatives established in Iran, that employment will be readily available for them upon arrival in Iran.

Despite high levels of unemployment in Iran, the Iranian informal labour market relies on migrant workers who accept to work with low wages and are known to be hard and reliable workers. The proportion of Afghan workers is low as they represent less than 2% of the overall labour force in Iran

(ILO 2006). These Afghan workers mostly work in manufacturing and construction which are characterized by a high degree of informal activity. The unemployment rate of irregular Afghan migrants illustrated in this study is much lower than that of Iranian workers. The Afghan migrant's work pattern is first and foremost a survival strategy in the informal sector "whereas Iranians can afford to wait for better jobs in the formal sector including public sector employment. [...] It is therefore difficult to establish whether Afghan workers are displacing Iranian labour. In the establishments survey, the Afghan share in the total work force is 47% and smaller enterprises in the informal sector may prefer to hire them. But overall they form less than 2% of the total labour force in Iran and are unlikely to displace national workers. They also may be concentrated in sub-sectors which are unattractive to national workers."<sup>9</sup> Nonetheless, Iranian workers have negative feelings about irregular Afghan migrants because they provide a flexible, cheap and highly productive source of labour which is preferred by Iranian employers, as shown in our qualitative field work.

The portrait of the Iranian employer detailed below has been chosen for the representativeness of his views among the pool of Iranian employers interviewed. The information below derives from the information given to our team by Iranian employers hiring Afghan workers in Iran. Of specific importance are the points outlined below and mentioned by all employers interviewed:

- The seasonal nature of the migrant's work,
- The role played by the network of Afghans in Iran as a link between the demand and supply of labour on the informal labour market,
- The natural preference of Iranian employers to hire Afghan workers over Iranian workers,
- The readiness of Afghan workers to take on jobs that Iranian workers would not do<sup>10</sup>, working overtime when needed, with lower salaries and without any contractual agreement protecting them from exploitative measures,
- The readiness of employers to accommodate and help migrant workers in irregular status who get arrested and deported, by committing to sending them back their money and if possible talking to the authorities,
- The increase in fines imposed on employers which have led them to hire less irregular workers,
- The pressure exerted on the government by an Iranian labour force which considers that irregular Afghan migrant workers "steal their jobs", lower their wages and lead to higher unemployment rates,
- The measures of deportation and system of fines put forward by the government as a response to these pressures,
- The overall precarious conditions of Afghan workers in Iran.

**Box 3. Portrait of an Iranian employer  
Esfahan, Iran**

I rent buildings to do construction work in rural areas, between Shiraz and Esfahan. Most of the work is done by Afghan employees and mainly consists of low skilled labour such as carrying bricks, stones and cement loads. They are paid between 7,500 and 15,000 toman/day (USD 8 – 16) depending on the work. They are all paid monthly but we accommodate temporary workers who sometimes ask to be paid on a weekly basis.

There are altogether 15 Afghan workers in my company today; they used to be 35 but as a result of fines we had to decrease the number of Afghan workers and hire more Iranian workers. We only took this

<sup>9</sup> *Afghan households in Iran: Profile and impact*. International Migration Programme, ILO Geneva, October 2006.

<sup>10</sup> This is corroborated by the findings of ILO 2006 : "The survey did not generate any evidence that Afghan workers are displacing Iranian labour. Afghans appear to be concentrated in sub-sectors and working under conditions which are unattractive to Iranians. Further research is required to determine the impact, if any, on wage levels of local workers."



decision because we were not given a choice. In the past year, 18 of my employees were deported: some had entered Iran clandestinely, others had had regular status but had lost their papers throughout the years. I was sanctioned 30,000 toman per worker (\$32). This fine has even increased over the past year.

We hire migrant workers in irregular status through the network of Afghan employees. I like to work with Afghans because they work very well, they are hard working and responsible people, and I will continue working with them. I am very satisfied with their work: they do everything they are asked to do and work overtime. Even those who are not skilled first work as trainees and quickly learn to do a good job. Some of them are heads of households of families who arrived in Iran about 10-15 years ago; others arrived within the past 5 years and are younger, single men for the most part.

They face many problems and constantly live in fear. They accept to do the jobs that Iranians would not accept to do, at lower salaries and with less expectations. They are not given contracts and are working at the whim of the employer. For these reasons, it is easier for me to work with Afghans than Iranians. They live a difficult life: they cannot travel alone, they do not have access to certain basic services, and they lack freedom. Even if they are legal, they have to ask for permission to travel.

They stay closely in touch with their families in Afghanistan and go back once a year, during the winter. They see that the situation back home has not improved and come back here to work. They see no future in Afghanistan today.

If they get arrested, I arrange for giving their remaining wages to friends or relatives, or to send it back to them in Afghanistan. If I have the time, I will go to the detention center and try to free them. They know they can call me anytime and that I will send them their money. In general, there is not much else I can do if they are irregular migrants as I am also in danger as an employer and I have to remain discreet for the sake of my other Afghan workers.

Iran has problems of inflation and unemployment. But if we didn't have Afghan workers here to help us and make our business successful, then our own situation and the economic situation of the country would be made worse. The government is under pressure because of the unemployment rate and the lobbying of the Iranian workers. They have been forced to act on this issue and for now, the main solution put forward is to expel Afghan workers to benefit the Iranian labour force.

The government has to find a better solution for these Afghans. They could at least protect them and not bother them, just let them do their work and have a calm and decent life like Iranians. The Afghans I have met say that there is no work in Afghanistan so they come here out of pure economic necessity. They choose Iran because of the similarity in cultures, language and religion. These people are our guests, our neighbors. They have been through a lot to come here, we should treat them well.

These characteristics are corroborated by the findings of previous studies such the **ILO 2006 study on the profile of Afghan households in Iran**<sup>11</sup> which singled out hard work, flexibility, reliability and cost advantages (wages and product prices) as the main reasons for preferring Afghan workers. This study also showed that there is no social protection for Afghan workers as the majority does not have written employment contracts or benefits such as sick leave. The exclusion from the formal sector is largely responsible for this situation and results in the fact that, despite their long stay, Afghan households live on the margin of the Iranian society and economy.

---

<sup>11</sup> *Afghan households in Iran: Profile and impact*. International Migration Programme, ILO Geneva, October 2006.

### 4.2.3 Social and cultural factors

- Migrant workers

Having ranked economic opportunities as the main attributes of their choice to migrate to Iran, single adult males also based their decision on cultural and linguistic similarities with Afghanistan and on the existence of established networks of Afghans, mainly relatives and friends, in Iran.

These factors are important but come in only third after the “push” and “pull” factors mentioned above. The single adult males surveyed in this study originate from 32 provinces throughout Afghanistan covering a wide range of ethnic, cultural and linguistic subgroups of the Afghan population. Some of them have historically had a closer cultural proximity to Iran – this is the case of the Hazara, who adopted the Shii doctrine of Islam, and the Tajiks, both of whom are Persian peoples. On the other hand, Pashtun, Uzbek, Turkmen or Baluch populations of Afghanistan do not share the same cultural affinities with Iran. Nevertheless, all groups resort to an irregular form of labour migration to Iran.

- Undocumented refugees

Socio-cultural attributes play a greater role in the decision making process of family groups with the majority of them choosing Iran based on the existence of established networks of relatives and friends in Iran and on the cultural and linguistic similarities between the two countries.

The cultural factor plays a role but in this category as well should not be overstated. The high numbers of interviewees belonging to the Baluch group raise an important consideration in the migration flow of refugees: the geographic proximity and facility of access play a greater role for them than in the case of migrant workers. This is supported by the data collected: 74.1% of them originate from one of the three bordering provinces with Afghanistan, namely Herat, Farah and Nimroz.

#### **Transnational social networks**

Most Afghan households and migrant workers settle in cities and neighbourhoods where relatives and friends reside, depending on them to make the transition to their new lives in Iran. An illustration of this trend is provided in case study 14 (p.101, Annex 2). To take the province of Tehran as an example, the most densely populated Afghan areas are to be found in Varamin and Karaj. The destination chosen is highly influenced by the presence of this social network which provides first assistance upon arrival: to pay the smuggler, provide shelter and arrange for introductions in the informal labour market (refer to case study 10, p.96, Annex 2). Once this is done, the migrant worker then transitions to his new life, often living on his place of work or sharing an apartment with other migrant workers.

More than half of single adult males select the province of destination in Iran based on the presence of family and friends. They also relied on their social network, more than any other method, to find their first employment in Iran and to pay for the smuggler fee, either through personal contacts prior to leaving Afghanistan or through the existing networks in place in Iran.

Relatives and friends become a source of credit (to pay the smuggler), of solidarity (providing shelter and food in the first days), of information, local expertise and labour market connections (they make the initial introduction to Iranian employers). This is corroborated by previous studies (AREU 2005) which find that “Afghans’ social networks in Iran function as sources of solidarity, credit, information on culture and practice in Iran, contacts with the labour market, and providers of initial accommodation as well as social and emotional support.”<sup>12</sup>

---

<sup>12</sup> *Transnational networks: Recognizing a regional reality*, Elca Stigter and Alessandro Monsutti, AREU, April 2005.

These functions of the transnational social network serve as a “much-needed protection from incorporation into smugglers’ exploitative networks”<sup>13</sup> and guarantee the continuation of the labour migration flow from Afghanistan, despite the restrictive measures enforced by the government of Iran.

### **Conclusion: the weight of economic and human security disparities**

The logic of migration of Afghan migrant workers to Iran is guided by basic rules of international labour migration: Afghanistan has a high demand for employment that cannot be provided for locally. As a practical response, the individuals surveyed shift their supply of labour to the regional economic giant, in this case Iran. The economic disparity, in wage differentials and unemployment rates, between the two countries explains the inevitable migration flow of single adult males to Iran.

In the case of family groups, a disparity in human security levels between the two countries, identified by the absence of peace and security, the prevalence of human rights violations and the lack of democratic institutions in Afghanistan at the time of migration, is the factor explaining the different waves of families migrating to Iran to seek refuge. The economic factor in the decision making process is present because of a causal link between insecurity and poverty but is only second in the logic of migration of these families.

In both cases, the social and cultural links to Iran play an important role specifically through the existence of established inter-country networks based on family, friends, culture and history which naturally make Iran a component of the livelihoods strategy of many Afghans.

### **4.3 Vulnerabilities**

The joint action plan developed by the UNHCR for deportees, implemented by partner agencies and approved by the Government of Afghanistan, targets specific segments (families and EVIs) of the deportee population in providing emergency and longer term assistance. **The clandestine movement of single adult males from Afghanistan to Iran being first and foremost a labour migration issue, the needs and vulnerabilities of this group will have to be addressed outside of this mandate.** The data collected in this study highlights vulnerabilities directly linked to the general economic situation of migrant workers in irregular status.

**The population of deportees under review presents a very different profile from the waves and profiles of returnees analyzed in previous studies.** A report conducted by Altai Consulting for ILO-UNHCR in 2006<sup>14</sup> focusing on the integration of returnees on the Afghan labour market found that returnees were able to reintegrate in all sectors of activity, and at all levels of the social ladder, from casual labour workers, to skilled workers in traditional sectors, government employees and teachers, small business owners, managers in traditional sectors and new sectors. In addition, the data collected in this study showed that returnee workers interviewed in enterprises consider they have an overall better professional situation than before exile and have an overall optimistic outlook on their future.

**This section aims at identifying new vulnerabilities to be kept in mind in assessing the need for a response mechanism to counter the irregular flow of Afghan migrants to Iran.** It is recommended that these classifications be used in the assistance to deportees and future migrants, whether regular or irregular migrants. Irregular migrants are to be considered a vulnerable group given the conditions of their transit, living and working conditions in Iran and in Afghanistan. Specific illustrations of the vulnerabilities they face in their migration process have been outlined in the previous chapter and will be analyzed in the section below.

---

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> *Integration of Returnees in the Afghan Labor Market*, Altai Consulting for ILO-UNHCR, August 2006.

## Exploitation and forced labour

The present study did not look at issues of human trafficking, exploitation or forced labour. As illustrated in the ILO 2005 report on *A Global Alliance Against Forced Labour*, "migrants from Afghanistan appear to have been less subject to highly exploitative bonded labour situations. This may be in part because they avoid high degrees of indebtedness, and also because support networks function effectively in the villages where they are located."<sup>15</sup>

The issue of bonded or forced labour was not part of the interview questionnaires and was therefore not reflected in the data collected. One reason, as pointed out previously, may be the strong role played by the network of relatives and friends in Iran which surveyed as a support system and coping mechanism, thus protecting migrant workers from exploitative and abusive practices.

However, it is important to note that migrant workers in irregular status are not entitled to labour rights in Iran. Employers rely on them for their cheap labour, which requires of them to provide less services in return. The lack of written contractual agreements between the employers and the migrant worker puts the latter in a position where he is more likely to be vulnerable and subject to exploitation.

### 4.3.1 Physical and psychological vulnerability caused by tightened legal control at borders and abusive practices: Transit from Afghanistan to Iran

**The activities of traffickers and smugglers have greatly increased over the past years in response to the restrictive policies of the Government of Iran and the unattainable costs of legal options to entry.** A collateral result is the rise in the dangers facing migrants during illegal travel and transport, growing exponentially over the years and as a response to the growing deportation waves.

Migration to Iran is an essential livelihoods strategy for a population that cannot find employment or opportunities to participate in the Afghan economy. Afghans continue to enter but are forced to rely on human smugglers even in the face of restrictive approaches adopted by the Government of Iran.

79.6% of the single adult males relied on a smuggler to enter Iran at an average cost of USD 361. The prices increase with the time and exponentially with the higher risks of arrest in Iran. The majority of men interviewed (63.6%) indebted themselves among their relatives and friends to pay for the smuggler fees as their financial situation did not allow them to provide for such an amount in cash and in advance. They pay the amount upon arrival to the final destination in Iran. If they are arrested on the way, as was the case for 22.1% of the men interviewed, the smuggler finances the cost of deportation and offers them a "re-entry package" by which the smuggler commits himself to three attempts at the same initial rate.

#### A thriving private business: Smuggling

*"States' policies in promoting immigration restrictions and reducing opportunities for regular migration have not been effective in preventing migration. Rather they have created a market for irregular migration, often as organized serious crime, through trafficking and smuggling of people."*<sup>16</sup>

This statement describes the current situation whereby the Government of Iran has adopted migration management policies which were initially supposed to fight against the irregular flow of migration to Iran, but which have instead resulted in the creation of opportunities for smugglers to draw benefits from the labour migration process. Economic necessity being the main factor pushing this irregular migration, it is

---

<sup>15</sup> *A Global Alliance Against Forced Labour*, p.34. Report of the Director General, International Labour Conference, 93<sup>rd</sup> session 2005, International Labour Office (ILO), Geneva.

<sup>16</sup> Report of Experts Group on Trafficking in Human Beings, European Commission, Brussels, 2004.

unlikely to come to an end until further development of the Afghan economy. As such, side businesses have thrived and attempts by both governments have so far failed in curbing the irregular flow of migration.

	Cost per person (USD)	Average cost (USD)
Visa	60	
Passport	180	
Round trip ticket to Iran from Kabul to Tehran	500	
<b>Total cost of legal option</b>	<b>740</b>	<b>Total smuggler fee 361</b>

More than two thirds of the respondents relied on the services of a smuggler as they could not afford a legal solution. A visa costs USD 60, a passport USD 180, a mandatory round trip ticket to Iran USD 500, which brings the visa application and costs to USD 740 for a temporary visa valid only 3 months. **This is twice as expensive as the average smuggler fee and the cost benefit analysis further favors the option of clandestine migration.** Potential migrants do not see the benefit of paying for a visa with a limited validity period and often cannot afford it as they do not have the cash to pay for it in advance. The advantage of a smuggler is the fact that the migrant pays the fee upon arrival in Iran, not ahead of time, and can reimburse his debts after a month or two of working in Iran.

*"In the face of rising barriers to cross border labour mobility, the growth of irregular migration, and trafficking and smuggling of human beings constitute major challenges to protection of human and labour rights."<sup>17</sup> – ILO Multilateral Framework on Migration.*

Irregular migration exposes Afghans to serious dangers putting their lives at risk. The conditions are threats to the well being of these populations as illustrated below.

- Walking on average 10.5 days through mountains and deserts,
- Lack of food and water,
- Physical abuse,
- Captivity and forced labour,
- Theft,
- Fear of arrest and death.

The conditions of travel are extremely difficult for all individuals and especially for children and unaccompanied minors who report life threatening experiences. A poignant example is given in case study 19, where a 14 year old boy reports the death of two minors traveling alongside with him during the transit to Iran (p. 106, Annex 2).

**Box 4. Portrait of an Afghan smuggler  
Logar, Afghanistan**

I am originally from Logar and have been working as a smuggler for over two decades. After living and working in Iran for years, I had made contacts all over the country and in Afghanistan. I realized that this network of friends would become the local knowledge and the local money supply I needed to start working as a smuggler. I started 20 years ago with 100 Afghans and 80 passengers.

I provide for transportation, food, shelter and a guarantee of arrival at the final destination. To make sure that I get paid at the end of the journey, I keep one person of the family with me at the guest house, as a captive, until I receive the money. I have a guard who locks the person or sends him to work so that he can start earning the money he owes me. When the money is collected, they transfer it to my bank account in Shiraz and the migrant is released and free to go.

<sup>17</sup> ILO Multilateral Framework on Labour Migration, International Labour Organization, Geneva, 2006.

I mainly take people from my own province who I know through friends and relatives. I choose people whose social networks I am familiar with so that I can get paid as soon as we arrive in Iran. Most of them are around 25 years of age and come from Ghazni, Hazarajat, Bamyan, Balkh and Logar. In Logar for instance, the main problem pushing these migrants to go to Iran is a lack of employment. They cannot afford a legal solution: a visa now costs 25,000 Afghanis (about USD 500). So they have to go through smugglers like myself which costs them less: 400,000 toman per person (USD 432). The prices keep going up as a result of the policies of the government of Iran and the constant demand on the Afghan side for people to enter Iran. A year ago, I asked for 200,000 toman (USD 185), 2 months ago it was 300,000 toman (USD 324). People are forced to pay but the advantage is that they pay me upon arrival by borrowing from friends and families in Iran. They get indebted over this cost. If they don't have any money, I make them work for me until they pay back what they owe.

If passengers get caught on the way, as it often happens now, we help them return to Iran up to three times. In most cases, smugglers like me have contacts with the police and are able to bribe low level ranks at the border and in police stations. If not, we pay for the deportation cost and take them back within days of their deportation to Iran.

I now travel in groups of about 30 people. I usually go through Nimroz, where we stay one or two nights before going through the river, always by foot and at night. Then we stop in Zabol, at a specific guesthouse where I know Baluch smugglers who have the knowledge of the Iranian side. Based on the Baluch's preliminary fieldwork, we plan the next phases. If there are any risks on the road, we stay put for a few days. Once I arrive in Zabol, I take a Peugeot with my employees and head to the police station. I have contacts there: I tell them how many people are travelling and pay them by the number of vehicles we will have in total. It costs about 600,000 toman (USD 65) per vehicle.

The same pattern is repeated in another major city of Sistan and Baluchistan, where the passengers stay in a guesthouse while I go talk to the officers in the police station. We have contracts with guesthouses along the way. We tell them in advance how many people there will be and then wire them the money as we never carry big sums of money with us. If superiors are around at the police stations, then we are forced to travel by foot and at night, to avoid the police stations and checkpoints.

My itinerary has changed with time: I used to go through Pakistan and Teftan and take travellers to a guesthouse in Rafsanjan, Kerman. Then I started entering Iran through Nimroz and arriving in IranShahr, Sistan and Baluchistan. The preferred itinerary today is through Nimroz to Zabol and Zahedan, then onto Shiraz, Esfahan and other provinces. I no longer go through Pakistan because the police guard the border. I could bribe them but then it would mean I would have to bribe the Pakistani police once, then the Iranian police. It would end up costing me too much so I prefer to go through Nimroz and only pay bribes once. I never go through Islam Qala as the Iranians have made it very difficult to go through the North.

Sometimes we are forced to spend entire days and nights under a bridge because of constant police shifts on the road. Sometimes we don't have any food or water for 5 days. One of my passengers once died because of hunger and thirst. A new danger now is also of getting shot at by the Iranian police. They are not authorized by the government of Iran to shoot at irregular migrants who try to escape. There are also a lot of thieves along the way who not only steal from you but harm you physically.

I try to protect the travellers by accompanying them all the way to Shiraz. But the majority of smugglers now handle everything from Afghanistan, by phone, relying on a network of team members in Iran to take the travellers to their final destination. They are scared of getting caught by the police so they leave the Afghan migrants to the hands of Baluch smugglers, which is dangerous and risky for the travellers.

I am ashamed to be doing this job but the pay is good. I charge 400,000 toman per person (USD 432) of which half is spent and the other half (USD 216) comes back to me. In one year, and given the current unemployment levels in Afghanistan, I got once a month with a group of thirty people. After paying my employees, my monthly wage equals about USD 4,500.

#### **4.3.2 Physical and psychological vulnerability caused by detention and deportation: Transit from Iran to Afghanistan**

One source of physical and psychological vulnerability results from the criminalization and detention practices used by the Iranian authorities. The particular techniques of migration management used by the government of Iran include imprisonment, lengthy detention stays and specific pressures exerted on the detainee during detention and deportation.

Imprisonment is often used as an instrument for migration control in Iran as highlighted in case studies 2 (p.88) and 9 (p.95, Annex 2). The legal framework in Iran subjects any Afghan recognized guilty of a crime to service a prison term and to be immediately deported upon his release. Such a case was reported in two of our case studies, including in the particular case of a 16 year old girl who served a term at a minor's facility and was deported alone to Islam Qala. She has no relatives in Afghanistan as she was born in Iran where her family resides. Identified as an EVI, she is now being taken care of by a local NGO in Herat (case study 9, p.95, Annex 2).

Undocumented and irregular migrants can be kept in detention and in prison with fewer guarantees and rights than others and with significant discretionary powers exercised by immigration authorities. The majority of single adult males were detained from 4 to 10 days before being deported. Then followed a period of transit before arrival on Afghan soil, usually between 2 to 5 days.

Families are subject to a smoother deportation process as they do not have to be subject to the detention mandatory for all single adult males. As such, they are more often given the time to collect their assets and then are deported straight to the border, without having to stop at a detention center.

#### **Box 5. Conditions at detention centers in Iran**

The most widespread instances of human rights abuses take place at detention centers where detainees are kept in very high numbers, from 1,000 to 5,000 people, for days on end. Those with money can pay to make a phone call, buy food and water and pay for their release and deportation within a couple of days from their detention. Money is alleged to be the only vehicle for proper treatment in these centers. Most interviewees report being restricted to the basic minimum as they did not have access to any money following their arrest.

The majority of detainees allegedly encountered the following problems during their detention:

- No phone calls allowed to relatives, employers or friends,
- Lack of food and water,
- Poor quality and little quantity of food when given,
- Physical and verbal abuse,
- No medical treatment,
- Lack of hygiene: no access to bathrooms or showers.

The worse treatments reportedly took place at the Varamin (Tehran), Tale Sia (Kerman) and Sang Sefid (Khorasan) detention centers.

**Box 6. Conditions of deportation from Iran to Afghanistan:  
An example of psychological and economic pressure exerted on deportees**

Case studies and profiles conducted in Herat highlight the diverse forms of practices to which Afghans were exposed to during their deportation process. The anecdote below was reported on several occasions during our fieldwork.

It was reported that, on the way from Tale Sia to the northern border of Islam Qala, buses of deportees are stopped in a village by the Iranian authorities for lunch. They are told that the food is being provided to them for free by the United Nations. At the end of their meal, whether they have eaten or not, they are forced to pay approximately 3,000 toman each. If they do not have the money to pay, they are forced to beg from others or are severely beaten up.

According to the information collected, the Iranian soldiers have an agreement with the restaurant owners and do not intervene to defend the deportees. Most of the interviewees did not know the exact location of the restaurant but some indicated that it is located in the town of Taybod. Case studies 1, 10 and 12 are provided as anecdotal evidence at the end of the report (Annex 2).

#### **4.3.3 Financial vulnerability: Arrival in Afghanistan**

Overall, the single adult males interviewed were not given any prior notification of arrest. They were arrested either in the street or at their workplace for being undocumented and were taken straight to a police station or detention center. They were not given the opportunity to collect their clothing, belonging material assets or money, leaving behind on average USD 1,503 in Iran. In most cases, they did not have the right to make a phone call from the detention center to ask for their relatives or friends to send them money and a minority also experienced theft and confiscation of belongings at the detention centers.

The cost of deportation back to Afghanistan has to be paid by the detainee as required by the government of Iran. It costs on average USD 37,50 per person. The qualitative data collected indicates that some deportees are forced to stay in detention centers for a month or two, sometimes more, as they are unable to pay for their transportation back to Afghanistan. They are sometimes forced to work at the detention center to pay their way out.

In cases where the detainees had been arrested with money on them or had managed to have a relative bring them money at the detention center, they spent it all to pay for decent food, water, phone calls and to lend important sums to deportees with no money. The Iranian authorities in charge of deportees also stop them at a restaurant on the way to the Afghan border where the remainder of their wealth is often spent.

They arrive in Afghanistan with few resources, unable to pay for their transportation to the nearest urban center, be it Herat or Zaranj in the context of this study. They depend on the generosity of other Afghans and on the network of hotel owners who take responsibility for providing them with shelter, food and transportation in exchange for a guarantee of payment from their relatives in their province of origin.

**Box 7. Alternative assistance methods: Networks of hotels in Herat and Zaranj**

At one of the hotels in Herat, the owner explained that there are 70 deportees staying at his hotel at the time of the interview. They are for the most part single adult males recently deported from Iran. He takes money from those who have some; as for others, he arranges to get the money back from other cities and provinces, as he has a network of hotels in main urban areas that can keep track of the location of these deportees. He obtains reimbursement upon the return of the deportee to his family.



Most of the hotels in Herat, he explains, are organized by provinces in Afghanistan such as the Daikundi hotel, Balkh hotel, Hazarajat hotel, among others, which respectively host populations from Daikundi, Mazar and Bamyan.

The system is organized by provinces so that the hotel owner can readily locate the deportee's family through local connections and obtain a guarantee of payment. The hotel owners pay for shelter, food and transportation back to the province of origin. Some deportees just spend one night; others stay longer in the hope of receiving wages left behind in Iran from their employer.

These hotels are the first stop on the way of deportees, between their arrival on Afghan soil and the next phase of their migration. These men are 'in transition' and are provided with short term assistance by hotel owners specializing in this clientele.

#### **4.3.4 Long term vulnerabilities: Re-integration in Afghanistan**

None of the respondents interviewed in this survey chose to return to Afghanistan out of their own will. All of the single adult males and all but 14.3% of the families surveyed were arrested and deported back to Afghanistan. In the situation of the families who left without being subjugated to arrest, their departure was triggered by pressures and fear exerted on them by the Iranian authorities.

##### *Negative perceptions of a permanent return to Afghanistan*

The lack of voluntary return is in part due to the negative perceptions of both groups regarding an eventual return to Afghanistan. The influence of Afghans returning home has affected their perceptions and their decision making process. Single adult males expect great difficulties upon return to Afghanistan, highlighting the risk of economic and financial failure. Among the heads of household interviewed, the majority fear short and long term difficulties and claim not to know about voluntary repatriation opportunities.

##### *Failures of re-integration*

Single adult males return to a precarious living condition in Afghanistan with little access to shelter and transiting through hotels, far from their families. Their financial situation is often worse than before their migration because of the negative impact of and financial loss of deportation. This pushes almost one third of them to intend to go back to Iran. The inclination to return to Iran can also be caused by the failure of voluntary return (case studies 6, p.92 and 15, p.102, Annex 2) or the difficulties in readjusting to life in Afghanistan after years of living in Iran. The latter is often seen in the case of young men who lived formative years of their lives in Iran, as illustrated in case study 12 (p.99, Annex 2), or men who can no longer adapt to the lack of infrastructure and basic services in their place of origin in Afghanistan (case study 1, p.87, Annex 2).

The minority group within deported families who plans to go back to Iran also based its decision on the lack of employment, the lack of access to capital and assets.

##### *Lack of emergency assistance*

The government of Afghanistan, the UNHCR and partner organizations have assigned staff to the borders of Islam Qala and Milak-Nimroz to assist EVIs among the population of deportees. The first step is therefore one of screening, the second one of registration and assistance. Populations categorized as EVIs are given short term assistance (up to 72 hours) in the two camps of Ansar and Makeshift and provided with a cash grant to pay for their transportation back to their province of origin. A card is also provided and entitles them to request a package of food and non food items in six distribution centers in the country. They can claim this package only once with the goal of helping them re-integrate back in their lives in Afghanistan.

Specific questions were asked of interviewees to assess the rate of screening and assistance provided to them on the Afghan sides of the border. The majority of single adult males and a significant group of heads of households of deported families claimed not to have been screened by the authorities. One factor to keep in mind is the overall confusion of deportees at the border which blurs their understanding of the screening process upon arrival.

As a result, and given the specific criteria of assistance, almost none of the single adult males received any assistance whereas they concurred in their need for emergency assistance upon their arrival: water, food, shelter and transportation. Their re-integration process starts off with other difficulties as well: our study records complaints of family separation, of the need to collect belongings and assets left behind in Iran, of the lack of housing and food. Poverty and unemployment remain the major challenges to their re-integration in Afghanistan.

Similarly, the majority of deported families did not receive assistance whereas they ranked emergency assistance as their most immediate need and the need for housing as their second most immediate need. Families have, for the most part, lived in Iran for more than a decade and are forced to come back to a situation where they face a lack of capital and assets, be it land or housing. They have a difficult time re-adjusting to life in Afghanistan, as they and their children got used to life in Iran. The majority of the children are unhappy to be back in Afghanistan as the majority feels that Iran, the country where they were born and raised, is their home. These families, who had left Afghanistan due to conflict, come back to an unfavourable security situation. They view insecurity, poverty and unemployment as the major challenges to their livelihood, as illustrated in case study 8 (p.95, Annex 2).

## 4.4 Migration and development

### 4.4.1 Remittances: a major livelihoods strategy for Afghan families

*"Through their labour, migrant workers contribute to growth and development in their countries of employment. Countries of origin greatly benefit from their remittances and the skills acquired during their migration experience. Yet, the migration process also poses serious challenges. Many migrant workers, especially low skilled workers, experience serious abuse and exploitation."* – ILO Multilateral Framework on Labour Migration.<sup>18</sup>

There are costs and benefits to migration for the migrants and their communities. Some of the costs create vulnerabilities detailed above, namely through the risks of irregular migration but also through the lack of rights, access to health, education and other services and through precarious living and working conditions. On the benefits side, Afghan migrants have the opportunity to accumulate wealth and skills in Iran that would not be available for them in their own country. Migrant workers send their gains through official and unofficial channels to their families in Afghanistan as they work in a context where their skills can be employed more productively and for greater reward. Remittances are known to be the most significant financial transfer to developing countries<sup>19</sup> and global remittance flows far exceed the flow of aid. In this sense, remittances have the potential to reduce poverty and enhance development on the national level. At the household level, remittances can be a major, if not the only, source of income.

Of the population of single adult males surveyed, 60.6% sent money back to their families in Afghanistan every few months, as illustrated in case study 16, a single adult male who sent back 75% of his wage to his family on a 2 to 3 month basis (p.103, Annex 2).

---

<sup>18</sup> ILO Multilateral Framework on Labour Migration, International Labour Organization, Geneva, 2006.

<sup>19</sup> In 2004, remittance flows to developing countries reached \$ 100 billion. However, these statistics are likely to significantly understate true remittances, as a large share is believed to flow through informal channels. World Bank.

**The average per person is estimated at USD 208 a month, equivalent to an annual rate of remittances of USD 2,496 per person. Multiplying this number by the reported 60.6% of the sample studied and the 328,175 single adult males deported in 2007, the estimated rate of remittances lost due to the deportation of this population in 2007 reaches about USD 500 million. The level of remittances lost in the 2007 deportation flow can therefore be estimated at approximately 6% of the national GDP of Afghanistan. This is equal to the economic share of the telecommunications market in Afghanistan.**

The level of remittances reported constitutes 67.0% of the wages earned by the migrant workers living in Iran. The dependency of the households on this source of income is significant with the highest numbers of families depending entirely on remittances as their sole source of income.

#### **4.4.2 Impact of migration: Transfer of skills**

Afghan households benefit from resources remitted by the relative who moved away but they also have to gain, upon their return, of the new skills and ideas acquired in Iran. The return migration of people with new and improved skills is a beneficial impact that can serve to participate in development efforts, if given the proper infrastructure and economic opportunities to put the skills to good use. The temporary migration of Afghan workers can enable migrants to learn new skills that will positively affect the migrant's community upon return, provided with the right environment.

The data collected shows that migrant workers have benefited from their migration to learn new skills and improve on existing ones. The impact on the labour market in Afghanistan marks a significant increase of workers in the construction sector.

##### *Shift in sectoral labour trends*

A comparison of activity sectors before and after migration show a net increase in the rate of people working in the construction sector after having lived in Iran. This trend is noted both for single adult males and heads of households of migrant families.

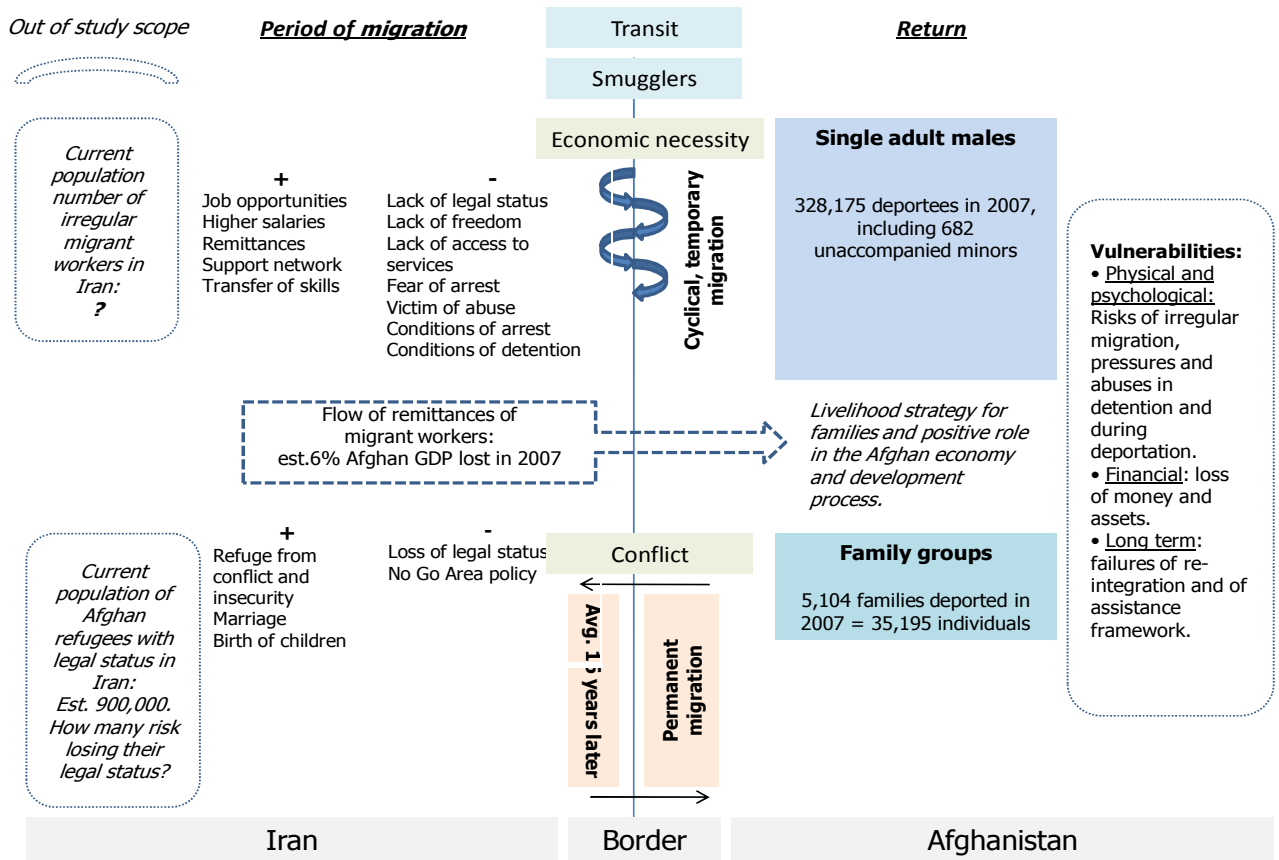
Most single adult males benefited from their experience in Iran to learn a new skill. This includes workers who started in a new industry as well as migrants who had prior experience working in a given sector. This shows not only a significant rate of new skills learned but also an improvement of skills due to a more conducive economic environment and infrastructure in place in Iran.

The industries which rank the highest in terms of skills learned by migrant workers are the construction industry, agriculture, manufacturing, professional and technical service activities and wholesale and retail trade.

##### *Transition from low skilled to skilled labour*

Looking specifically at the construction sector, migrant workers made the transition from low skilled to skilled work with the majority of respondents indicating having learned masonry, a professional and marketable skills that they did not possess before living in Iran. In the agriculture sector, 1 out of 2 respondents developed new skills through innovative methods of farming, gardening and husbandry which increased their output and maximized their resources. In the manufacturing sector, workers were introduced to factory and machine work which they were not acquainted with in Afghanistan. The problem upon return is the inability to use these acquired skills because of the scarcity of factories and manufacturing work to be done in Afghanistan, as illustrated in case study 7 (p.93, Annex 2).

## 4.5 The overall picture: key areas of study



## 5. Areas of opportunity

---

Despite the difficulties faced in the different stages of the migration process, labour migration remains a way of life and a key livelihoods strategy for many Afghans (AREU 2005). After a long history of migration, it has now become a highly organized and irregular migration flow with the existence of transnational networks, shadow businesses and a well established demand for migrant workers on the Iranian informal labour market. Beyond the lives of individuals and families, the significant flow of remittances plays a crucial role in the development process of a country in reconstruction.

**The current migration flow between Afghanistan and Iran is a labour migration issue, not a refugee issue. Restrictive migration policies implemented by the Government of Iran have unintentionally nurtured the development of a network of smugglers on both sides of the border, supplying clandestine solutions to migration and resulting in a significant revenue loss for both states.** This phenomenon needs to be addressed through a dedicated effort on the part of the Government of Afghanistan to show its commitment to combating irregular migration and its willingness to gain the confidence of the Government of Iran. The emphasis has to be on a well-coordinated action plan initiated by the Government of Afghanistan that will integrate economic, legal and human rights considerations in a **comprehensive migration management strategy**. This concept has been promoted by IOM in the past and should build on existing migration projects and programmes by ILO, UNHCR and IOM, alongside bilateral negotiations between the governments of Afghanistan and Iran.

The immediate responsibility rests on the Government of Afghanistan to prevent irregular migration and to promote the long term re-integration of migrants at home. To support this domestic agenda, and to reflect the regional and national labour market trends, immigration laws should be revised on the basis of bilateral negotiations between the governments of Afghanistan and Iran. Bilateral negotiations can provide a legal framework that will effectively curb irregular migration. However, progress towards negotiating such an accord will be slow until the Government of Afghanistan demonstrates it is making a concerted effort to discourage irregular movements. The domestic action plan and the legal framework therefore go hand in hand.

The areas of opportunity outlined below have to be taken as an overall package which, if met, will help to address and fight against a clandestine movement and in turn, diminish the vulnerabilities identified among this population. As such, this section also provides suggestions for ways to strengthen the assistance framework in Afghanistan. With this holistic approach based on domestic, legal and humanitarian objectives, this section offers areas of actions and opportunities for problem solving. Our main consideration is for feasibility: the point being not to provide an expert opinion on all issues addressed in this study but to highlight areas which contain room for improvement.

### 5.1 Domestic issues: Prevention and long term re-integration package

*The Government of Afghanistan should remind its citizens of their responsibility to respect Iranian migration laws and of the risks and consequences of irregular migration. Prevention mechanisms have to be put in place to raise awareness and knowledge on issues of migration as a means to curb clandestine movements to Iran. These efforts should be supplemented by the development of specific programmes and training opportunities in provinces and districts contributing significantly to the labour migrant outflow. The first five areas of action detailed below will serve to gain the confidence of the Government of Iran as a prerequisite for bilateral negotiations (section 5.2).*

The 'push' and 'pull' factors, including the socio-cultural context between Iran and Afghanistan, have led to a recent wave of economic migration that has overrun issues of insecurity and conflict. As is typical of

international migration, the stronger Iranian economy attracts a flow of migration of young, single adult males looking West of Afghanistan for economic opportunities that will allow them to support their families. Labour migration has become a key source of livelihoods for many families and represents, on the national level, an important support for the development process of the country.

It is each Afghan citizen's obligation to respect the laws of its country and it is the responsibility of the government to ensure that its citizens are aware of this fact. The following set of recommendations therefore targets awareness building among the Afghan population.

- I. **Our first recommendation is to build the knowledge among Afghans of their civic responsibilities.** Afghan citizens have to be given a sense of civic duty, knowledge of the provisions of law and of the penalties associated with unlawful actions.
  - *Example:* National public information campaigns should be organized by the government of Afghanistan, and with international technical assistance, to raise awareness of:
    - i. The legal requirements enshrined in the constitution namely article 39 which emphasizes the right of Afghans to travel abroad and return home in accordance with the provisions of law; and of
    - ii. The territorial integrity and sovereignty of the Afghan and Iranian states.
- II. **Our second recommendation is to discourage future and potential migrants in the different stages of migration by raising awareness of the risks involved in clandestine migration.** This can be achieved through the dissemination of information on the dangers of irregular migration.
  - a. *Example:* National public information campaigns can be organized in Afghanistan, through a collaborative effort between the government of Afghanistan, UN agencies and NGOs with the support of communications experts, to help raise awareness of the socio-economic, psychological and physical vulnerabilities caused by irregular migration in an effort to weigh in on the decision making process of future migrants.
- III. **Our third recommendation is to use re-integration efforts as a means to prevent further irregular migration. Integration programs on the Afghan labour market can be used and expanded to target potential migrant workers.** Successful programs to date have facilitated voluntary return opportunities for families living in Iran by focusing on the provision of vocational training programs to increase the success rate of re-integration.<sup>20</sup> A notable success has been achieved by HELP, an NGO based in Iran and Afghanistan, which works closely with families by arranging for their voluntary repatriation and providing them with 6-month vocational training courses in Herat, as illustrated in case study 17 (Annex 2).
  - a. *Example:* A quarter of the migrant workers in irregular status interviewed in this study expressed interest in enrolling in vocational training courses to increase their marketable skills and improve their chances for a successful re-integration process. Expanding current programs to include single adult males can be an effective incentive to stay in Afghanistan and not return to Iran clandestinely.
  - b. *Examples of such existing programs to be looked at for potential collaboration and linkages are*<sup>21</sup>: Employment Service Centers (ILO – Agef), NSDP (National Skills Development program) and other vocational training programs, USAID CDP (Capacity

---

<sup>20</sup> This is the case of Help, an international NGO based both in Iran and in Afghanistan, whose aim is to inform and assist families to return to Afghanistan where they are taken in charge in vocational training programs, provided with accommodation, food and child care, over a period of six months (Annex 1).

<sup>21</sup> For a review of integration programs on the Afghan labour market, refer to the report conducted by Altai Consulting for ILO in August 2006: *Integration of Returnees in the Afghan Labor Market*.

Building Program) with a specific focus on construction companies who are willing to recruit skilled workers.

- c. *Example:* Clusters of single deportees are found in hotels in Herat and Zaranj. A network of hotels equipped with employment information centers can be an effective outlet for information dissemination and communications campaign to reach a population 'in transition' and helping towards a sustainable re-integration process.
- d. *Example:* The ILO-UNHCR project has been providing support to the MOLSAMD for promoting temporary migration opportunities for Afghans. Similarly, the creation of decent work opportunities at home should, in the long term, be a part of the prevention and retention strategy in Afghanistan.

**IV. Our fourth recommendation is to develop public works programmes that discourage irregular movements in provinces and districts contributing significantly to the irregular migration outflow. Labour intensive public works programme should be built to absorb the excess supply of labour from certain provinces and in specific sectors of activity such as the construction sector, in which deportees have acquired marketable skills.** By boosting support for job creation domestically, incentives will be lessened to migrate to Iran in search of employment opportunities.

- a. *Example:* The Government of Afghanistan can commission a labour intensive public works programme in the province of Nimroz to help towards building an effective canal system. This will curb irregular migration in the province which represents the main migration point to Iran.
- b. *Example:* Focus should be given to rebuilding the physical infrastructure most visible in primary and secondary urban areas of the country. Municipal public works programmes should be built in the main urban areas of Afghanistan. The Ministry of Public Works can be the ministry in charge of contracting road works, improvements of water supply, solid waste management and other infrastructure related projects. The provision of these services will improve the living standards of people who will more capable of engaging in income generating activities triggering community level economic and social development. Such projects have been initiated in Afghanistan by the World Bank and UN-Habitat

**V. Our fifth recommendation is to build the capacity of the police and judicial systems of the Afghan government to regulate cross-border movements.**

- a. *Example:* Training programs should be offered to government officials, police and judges so that they can monitor, report and prosecute cases of irregular cross border movements. A special focus should be given to border police activities, reporting mechanisms and tightened border controls. This can be achieved through the relevant ministries of the government of Afghanistan with the technical support of international agencies such as the International Organization for Migration (IOM).

## **5.2 Legal issues: creating opportunities for regular labour migration**

*The elements which fall under this category span a long term course: they can prove to be effective in the coming year depending on the political will invested in this area. The issue is one of labour migration, not of refugee migration. An effective legal response has to be developed through bilateral negotiations between the governments of Iran and Afghanistan.*

**Coercive measures such as detention and deportation and the lack of viable legal options have failed to diminish the flow of irregular Afghan workers to Iran. This study has shown that there is a reported backlash to coercive measures and an increased reliance on clandestine solutions and networks.**

**This is accompanied by a significant revenue loss for the governments of Iran and Afghanistan as migrants opt for irregular entry options instead of applying for visas for legal travel to Iran.** The vast majority (91.1%) of this study's single adult males entered Iran clandestinely, for the most part (79.1%) relying on a smuggler. Based on the deportation figures of 2007 (328,175 single adult males) as a representative scale of the number of irregular migrants entering Iran, the average amount paid to smugglers (USD 361) and the average cost of a legal pathway to Iran (USD 740), the following calculations can be made:

- **The overall amount spent by migrants on smugglers in one year can be estimated at approximately USD 94 million<sup>22</sup>, and**
- **The estimation of the revenue lost by the Government of Iran to clandestine solutions for entry into Iran exceeds USD 221 million<sup>23</sup>.**

The states, especially Iran, also incur costs because of border management, detention and deportation processes. The migrants lose earnings, investment service costs such as smuggler fees, and families and communities back home lose vital support in the form of remittances.

The recommendations detailed below will have to be implemented concurrently in order to give legal solutions a chance to succeed as a viable solution and migration management strategy.

- VI. In this light, **our sixth recommendation is to expand the avenues for regular labour migration through bilateral negotiations between the governments of Iran and Afghanistan.** The base problem today is the lack of a legal framework in which Afghans can live and work temporarily in Iran. The priority of these talks should fall on the creation of legal solutions such as temporary and seasonal work permits in particular sectors of activity, such as the construction sector, benefiting both the Iranian and Afghan economies. Efforts to develop workable temporary migration programmes for the employment of foreign workers should continue, as highlighted as essential in previous studies to address irregular cross-border movements and the security and protection problems associated with them (ILO 2006).
- a. The decision of migrant workers to opt for an irregular migration highlights key issues to be tackled through political negotiations between the governments of Iran and Afghanistan: (1) the cost of legal options with the visa process today costing almost twice as much as the average smuggler fee per person, (2) the challenge of treasury as potential migrants often do not possess the cash required to be paid in advance for the visa process, (3) the duration of obtention and the waiting period inherent in the legal framework of migration, (4) the limited validity of available visas which do not authorize employment and expire after 3 months.
  - b. *Example:* The governments of Iran and Afghanistan will need to agree on a temporary visa policy that will be accessible and affordable for potential migrations and which will deter them from relying on clandestine migration to Iran. As an example, the creation of seasonal work permits at lower rates, matching that of smuggler fees around USD 300, and available for a longer period of 8 to 9 months, corresponding to the labour demand outside of the winter period.
  - c. *Example:* The government of Afghanistan needs to focus on improving the transparency of administrative processes and ensure an easier access of passports to its citizens through formal outlets, without having to resort to bribes or to the black market.

---

<sup>22</sup> This figure was derived from the following calculation: (deportee population of single adult males in 2007\*percentage of single adult males relying on a smuggler)\*per person cost of a smuggler.

<sup>23</sup> This figure was derived from the following calculation: (deportee population of single adult males in 2007\*percentage of single adult males traveling clandestinely to Iran)\*per person cost of a legal entry into Iran.



- VII. **Our seventh recommendation is to intensify measures at the border to detect and identify abusive migration practices.**
- a. *Example:* The relevant agencies of the government of Afghanistan, with the technical support of international organizations, can focus on providing border police with the proper training to ensure fair border practices aimed at diminishing incentives for bribes and corruption. Reporting mechanisms and systems of sanctions have to be developed within each country to fight abusive practices by government and police officials.
- VIII. **Our eighth recommendation follows from the previous one and advises to enforce legislation and systems of sanctions against the thriving network of smugglers inside Afghanistan,** a trend that has been ever increasing since 2001. This will allow to curb the clandestine movements from Afghanistan and to protect the safety of vulnerable groups of migrants.

### 5.3 Human rights: relieving the pain

*The vulnerabilities inherent in the irregular status of migrants and in the arrest and deportation process can be alleviated without condoning the clandestine nature of the migration flow. Humanitarian and human rights considerations need to be respected for all deported persons.*

- IX. Every state has the sovereign right to deport undocumented and unauthorized populations within its territory. Without questioning the right to resort to deportation, **our ninth recommendation is to improve the process of detention and deportation to respect the rights of all individuals taken into custody.**
- a. *Example:* Respect for the rights of detainees can be put in practice by the Iranian authorities by acknowledging and providing (1) the right to collect assets and money prior to deportation, (2) decent quantities and quality of food and water at detention centers, (3) the right to contact relatives, friends and consular services upon arrest, (4) the freedom from long term detention without representation and (5) the freedom from the financial pressure of paying the cost of deportation.
- X. **Our tenth recommendation is to provide immediate assistance to single adult males deported at the border in Afghanistan to ensure a successful re-integration process.** It is the policy call of the Government of Afghanistan to decide whether to assist deported migrant workers with immediate needs. Such a policy should be linked to public works programme in migrants' provinces of origin.
- a. *Example:* The Government of Afghanistan can improve the screening and registration process at the border to include all categories of deportees, based on new sets of vulnerabilities such as the ones detailed in this study.
- b. *Example:* The assistance provided by the Government of Afghanistan should require of migrants to return to their province of origin and join public service works that will benefit their communities and provide an incentive for them to remain in Afghanistan permanently, thus diminishing the rates of clandestine return to Iran.
- XI. **Our eleventh recommendation calls on the strengthening of the joint action plan and in particular its re-integration phase.** The aim is to develop the absorption capacity in areas of return and to promote the self reliance and equity of deportees. It will require a policy decision by agencies mandated to address migration and labour issues to successfully promote the re-integration of the majority population of deportees.
- a. **The migration process highlighted in the population of deportees being first and foremost a labour migration issue, the International Labour Organization (ILO) should join efforts and provide its funding and expertise to the inter-**

**agency action plan and to the Government of Afghanistan.** One of the areas of assistance should be the creation of public works programmes as discussed in recommendation IV.

- b. *Example:* The ILO has a role to play in developing programmes to supplement emergency assistance efforts provided by the UNHCR and implementing partners. These efforts can be coupled with counselling services, vocational training opportunities and programs focusing on matching skills with Afghan labour market needs to support the successful re-integration of Afghan deportees.

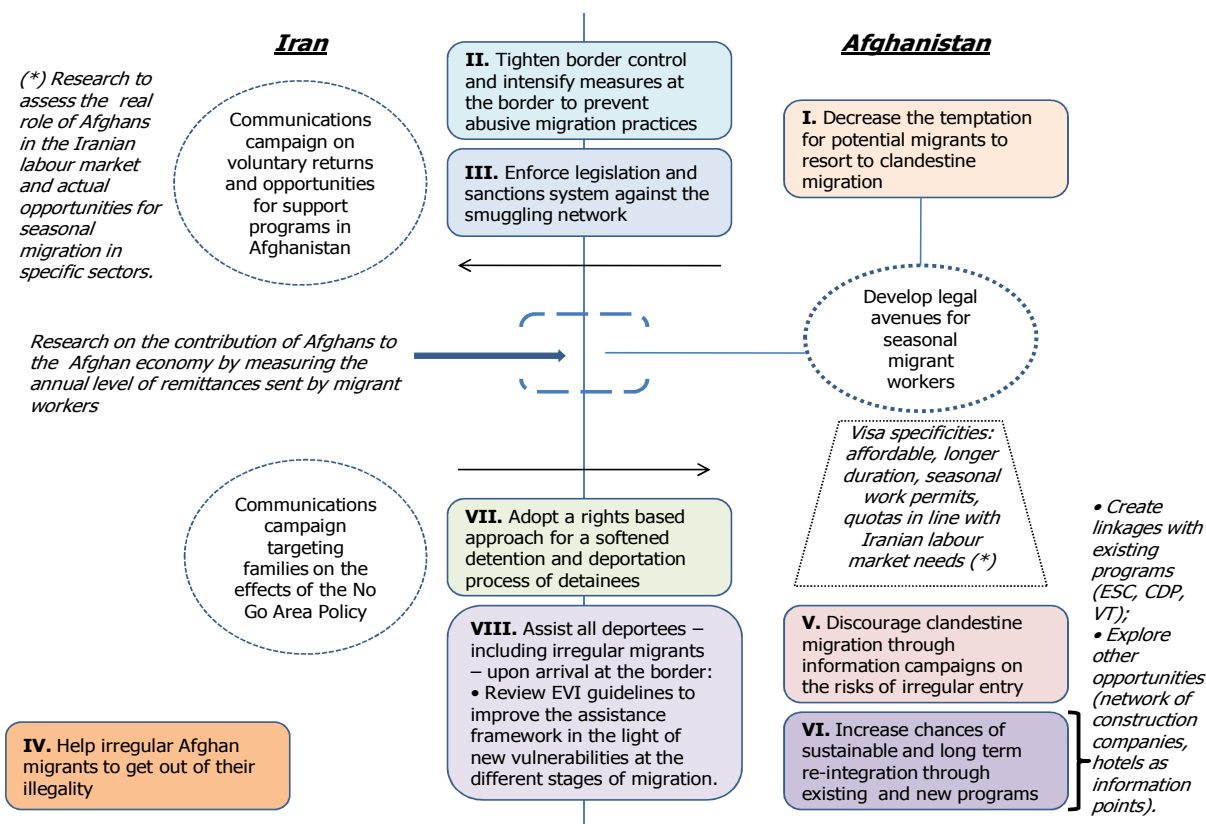
## 5.4 Further research areas

The present study is mainly a survey report which needs to be followed up by more in-depth analysis on key issues. The donor community can increase the feasibility of these recommendations and the potential for areas of action by commissioning studies on:

- The contribution of Afghan workers to the Iranian economy;
- The labour market needs of the Iranian and Afghan economies and the real opportunities available for seasonal labour migration responding to an actual demand in specific sectors of the Iranian labour market;
- The profiles of Afghan returnees in phase III, the skills transferred and coping mechanisms;
- The contribution of Afghan migrant workers to the Afghan economy and development process, by finding a measure for the level of annual remittances and a documentation of the methods used to send remittances;
- The existence of forced labour, exploitation and human trafficking in cross-border movements between Afghanistan and Iran;
- The review of vulnerability criteria and humanitarian issues involved in current deportations.

*Other data to be explored:* There are no exact figures to date on certain key data such as the number of Afghans applying for visas at the different Iranian consulates in Afghanistan and the number of visa released by the Iranian authorities to Afghans every year. The embassy and consulate of Iran in Kabul were contacted in the context of this study to obtain this information but the Altai team's request was turned down by officials in charge of the consular services.

## 5.5 The overall picture: a comprehensive migration management strategy



### Concluding remarks

An isolationist approach to the irregular migration flow between Iran and Afghanistan will fail and increase instances of human rights abuses, create new vulnerabilities and hamper the development of the Iranian and Afghan economies. The aim is to improve dialogue and cooperation between the two countries with the participation of United Nations agencies concerned with this labour and migration issue, namely the UNHCR, ILO and IOM. This multi-sectoral approach and tools for a comprehensive migration management strategy will have to include international and national organizations around an improved framework of assistance that will strive to take account of all returnees and deportees, whether in regular or irregular status in Iran.

## **REFERENCES**

**ALTAI (2006).** Integration of Returnees in the Afghan Labour Market commissioned by ILO and UNHCR, Kabul.

**ALTAI (2007).** Labor Market and Capacity Building Assessment commissioned by USAID Capacity Development Program, Kabul.

**AREU (2005a).** Transnational Networks: Recognizing a Regional Reality. Briefing note by Elca Stigter and Alessandro Monsutti. Kabul.

**AREU (2005b).** Return to Afghanistan? A Study of Afghans Living in Mashad, Islamic Republic of Iran, Case Study Series. Kabul, by Mohammad Jalal Abbasi-Shavazi, Diana Glazebrook, Gholamreza Jamshidiha, Hossein Mahmoudian and Rasoul Sadeghi, Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Tehran.

**AREU (2005c).** Return to Afghanistan? A Study of Afghans Living in Tehran, Case Study Series. Kabul, by Mohammad Jalal Abbasi-Shavazi, Diana Glazebrook, Gholamreza Jamshidiha, Hossein Mahmoudian and Rasoul Sadeghi, Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Tehran.

**CRS (2007).** Afghan Refugees: Current Status and Future Prospects. Report for Congress by Rhoda Margesson, Foreign Affairs, Defense and Trade Division.

**EC (2004).** Report of Experts Group on Trafficking in Human Beings. Directorate General Justice, Freedom and Security, Brussels.

**ILO (2005).** A Global Alliance Against Forced Labour. Report of the Director General, International Labour Conference, 93<sup>rd</sup> session, International Labour Organization, Geneva.

**ILO (2006a).** Afghan Households in Iran: Profile and Impact, by Piyasiri Wickramasekara, Jag Sehgal, Farhad Mehran, Ladan Noroozi and Saeid Eisazadeh. International Migration Programme, International Labour Organization, Geneva.

**ILO (2006b).** Multilateral Framework on Labour Migration. International Labour Organization, Geneva.

**PRIO (2004).** Afghan Refugees in Iran, by Arne Strand, Astri Suhrke and Kristian Berg Harpviken. International Peace Institute, Oslo.

**UNHCR (2008).** Contingency Plan: Mass Deportation of Afghan Nationals from Iran. Internal working document of the Agencies which are members of the Western Inter-Agency Task Force for IDPS and Returnees vulnerable deported families from Iran.

# ILO-UNHCR Cooperation Towards Comprehensive Solutions for Afghan Displacement

## RESEARCH STUDY ON AFGHAN DEPORTEES FROM IRAN

**Annex 1:**  
**Afghan deportees from Iran:**  
**Interviews with heads of deported households**  
Location: Farah, Herat, Nimroz and Kabul



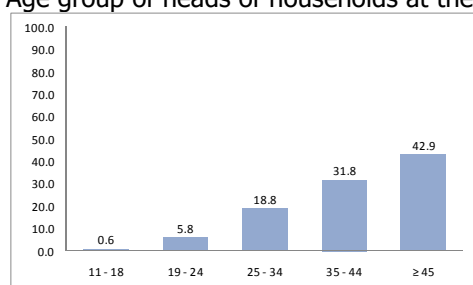
## Afghan deportees from Iran: Heads of households of deported families

### Demographic profile

#### Age groups

**The highest percentage (42.9%) of heads of household surveyed falls in the 45+ age group.** Out of the 154 interviewed in Farah, Herat and Nimroz, interviewees' ages range from 18 to 80, with a median age of 43.

Age group of heads of households at the time of interview (%)



#### Gender and marital status

**90.3% of interviewees are men and 9.7% are women**, all being at the time of the interview the heads of their household. 87.7% of them are married, 5.8% widows/widowers, 5.2% single and 1.3% engaged.

The 15 women interviewed were in charge of their household based on one of the following reasons: either their husband had passed away, he had stayed behind or returned to Iran. Deportation has had for these women the effect of changing their roles and responsibilities within their family and society.

"I am living in one of my relatives' house with my 6 children and without paying rent. The monthly expense for our family is about 5,000 Afghanis which is paid for by my son in law. My husband went back to Iran to try to earn money as he did not find any work in Farah."

- Shirin, 45, mother of 6 who lived in Iran for 18 years and was deported in 2007.

#### Province of origin and ethnic group

**The pool of interviewees predominantly originates from the three Western provinces of Afghanistan where the interviews were held, namely Farah (37.7%), Nimroz (29.9%) and Herat (6.5%).**

This is explained by the fact that 81.2% of the interviews were held with re-integrated families (phase III) and 12.8% with families at the borders of Islam Qala and Milak-Zaranj (phase I). The geographic distribution therefore reflects the location where interviews were held for this portion of the study, namely Farah, Nimroz and Herat. The group interviewed at the border is geographically more diverse: 20.7% originate from Farah, 17.2% from Helmand, 10.3% from Baghlan and 6.9% respectively for Herat, Nimroz, Takhar and Kunduz.

The majority of the families interviewed is Pashto (35.7%), 16.9% Tajik, 13.6% Hazara, 3.9% Uzbek, 2.0% Turkmen and 27.9% self identify as Baluch or Arab.

*Level of education*

**76.6% are illiterate.** There are 36 cases of literate heads of household of which 14 had completed lower secondary school courses, 9 had attended religious school, 8 primary school, 2 university and 3 had enrolled in vocational training and specific skills related courses.

*Household situation*

All of the respondents are heads of their household and 98.1% are currently living or accompanied by their family. **59.1% of the respondents are the sole breadwinners of their household.** For the remaining 40.9% of the cases studied, the total of income earning individuals in one household consisted of either two (22.7%), three (8.4%) or four or more people (3.8%).

The financial responsibility falling on the head of household is heightened by the fact that the average number of household members is of 8 people, of which on average 2 are under the age of 6. Overall, 66.8% of interviewees report between 6 to 8 people in their household; 24.7% between 9 to 11 people; 11.7% between 3 to 5 people; 5.8% above 12 people and 1.9% 2 people or less.

Number of entries, deportations and voluntary returns

**The numbers below show the tendency of the vast majority of families to enter Iran once (79.2%), without ever leaving their country of exile voluntarily (81.2%) and with only one deportation to date (96.8%). These statistics, favouring single entries and deportations, illustrate a low rate of cyclical migration among Afghan families.**

When asked if they have a tendency of going back and forth between Iran and Afghanistan, only 9.7% of interviewees responded positively. The vast majority, 90.3%, stayed in Iran without ever returning to Afghanistan for the entire duration of their exile.

Frequency of entries:

- 79.2% report having entered Iran once,
- 14.9% twice,
- 3.9% three times,
- 1.2% five times or more.

Frequency of voluntary returns:

- 81.2% never left Iran voluntarily,
- 13.0% declare having left Iran out of their own will once,
- 3.9% twice,
- 1.8% three times or more.

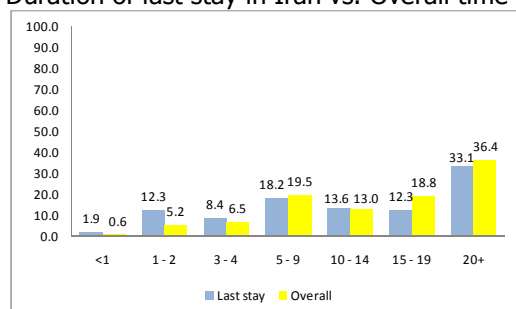
Frequency of deportations:

- 96.8% indicate having been deported once,
- 1.9% twice,
- 1.3% three times.

Time spent in Iran: actual and intended

**Comparing the overall number of years spent in Iran and the number of years spent in Iran during the last migration trip, the data collected supports the non cyclical nature of the migration of Afghan families to Iran.**

### Duration of last stay in Iran vs. Overall time spent in Iran (%)



On average, families spent 16 years living in Iran with the highest percentage (36.4%) spending 20 or more years in Iran. Had they not been deported, 56.5% were planning to spend the rest of their lives in Iran, 3.8% over 20 years and 18.8% from 10 to 20 additional years. This further indicates the permanent and non-cyclical nature of Afghan families' migration to Iran.

What is the overall time you spent in Iran? (Years)	
20+	36.4 %
5 - 9	19.5 %
15 - 19	18.8 %
10 - 14	13.0 %
3 - 4	6.5 %
1 - 2	5.2 %
<1	0.6 %
N=154	

What was the intended duration of your stay in Iran? (Years)	
≥ 20	60.4 %
10 - 19	18.8 %
5 - 9	14.3 %
< 5	6.5 %
N=154	

### Date of deportation: most recent waves of deportations

In line with the focus of this study on recent waves of deportations, 68.2% of the population interviewed was deported in 2007, 26.0% in 2008, and 5.8% prior to 2007. The deportations were highest during the months of May (42.2%), June (14.3%), July (8.4%), August and September (6.5% each). This is due to the usual acceleration in the rhythm of deportations following the Persian New Year and holidays of the end of March.

## Labour and employment

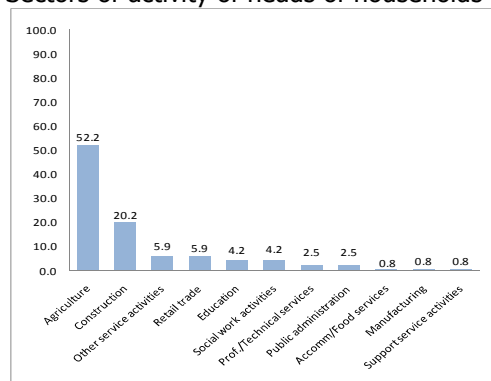
### *Employment situation before migration: Afghanistan*

#### Employment levels and sectors of activity prior to migration

**Prior to migrating to Iran, 22.7% of the population interviewed was unemployed. The two most represented sectors of activity were the agricultural sector (52.2%) and the construction sector (20.2%).**



### Sectors of activity of heads of households prior to migration to Iran (%)



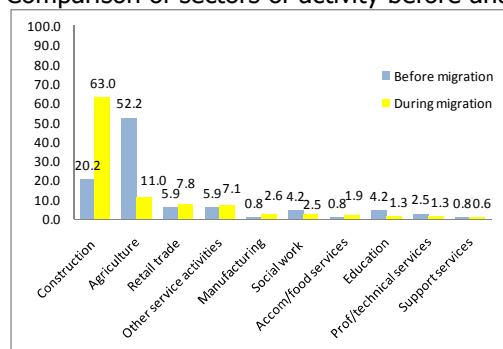
### Employment situation during migration: Iran

#### Employment levels and sectors of activity during migration in Iran

**99.4% of all respondents had been employed while in Iran. Only 1 person out of 154 was unemployed during exile in Iran. The working population was heavily concentrated in the construction sector and only secondly in agriculture.**

**The distribution in terms of activity sectors illustrates a significant shift between these two sectors during the two phases before and during migration.** The most notable shift is between the agricultural and construction sectors: while living in Iran 63.0% worked in construction (as opposed to 20.2% prior to migration) and 11.0% in agriculture (as opposed to 52.2% prior to migration). This is corroborated by the ILO 2006 study which states that "only one third of the Afghan workers remained in the same sector as their previous employment in Afghanistan. While 50 per cent were employed in agriculture in Afghanistan, only 13% remained in the sector in Iran. The other marked change is in the construction sector which saw a rise from 5% in Afghanistan to 30% in Iran."<sup>24</sup>

#### Comparison of sectors of activity before and during migration (%)

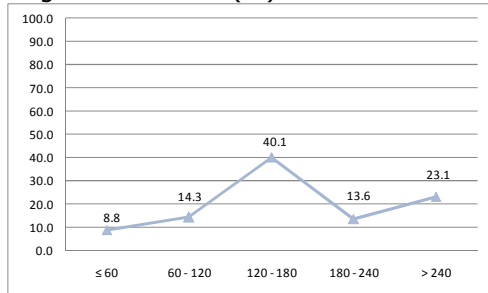


#### Wage levels during migration in Iran

**The mean wage in Iran is reported at approximately USD 185 a month with a minimum at USD 11 a month and a maximum at USD 486 a month.** This constitutes a 41.6% increase in comparison to the wage levels available in Afghanistan after deportation.

<sup>24</sup> Afghan households in Iran: Profile and impact. International Migration Programme, ILO Geneva, October 2006.

Wage levels in Iran (%)

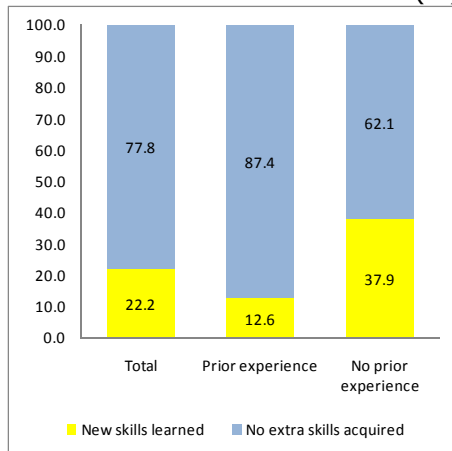


Assessment of skill set and benefits of working in Iran

**When comparing the sectors of activities before and during migration, 62.1% of the population interviewed declares having had some prior experience in the field of work chosen in Iran. Overall, whether having had prior experience or starting in a new industry, only 22.7% of the respondents benefited from their experience in Iran to learn a new skill. The vast majority, 77.3%, does not consider having acquired new skills.**

Of those 62.1% who had prior experience in a given industry, only a minority (12,6%) declares having learned new skills or developed better skills in the same line of work. The population who entered a new industry marked a higher rate of skills learned with 37.9% indicating having acquired a new skill while in Iran.

Assessment of skills learned in Iran (%)



The industries which rank highest in terms of skills learned are the following:

- Construction with 29.4%,
- Agriculture with 23.5%,
- Wholesale and retail trade with 23.5%,
- Professional and technical service activities 17.7%.

Assessment of the availability of work in Iran

**The population interviewed spent on average almost 2 months in Iran before securing a first employment opportunity.**

The majority, 67.5% spent one month or more looking for employment, with the most significant proportion – 30.4% - spending just one month. The remaining 32.5% spent less than one month in search of an employment in Iran.

How long did it take you to find employment in Iran?	
≤ 1 week	13.3 %
1 - 2 weeks	7.9 %
2 - 4 weeks	11.3 %
1 month	30.4 %
1 - 3 months	15.9 %
≥ 3 months	21.2 %
N=151	

**The most common method used by Afghan families migrating to Iran to find employment is to rely on the network of Afghan migrants already in place in Iran.** This is true of 34.9% of the interviews, while others rely on word of mouth, on contacts made prior to the migration, on the informal market place and on themselves or close relatives. Smugglers do not play a role in the integration and job placement of families in Iran.

How did you find this employment in Iran?	
Network of Afghan migrants	34.9 %
Word of mouth	18.4 %
Contacts prior to migration	14.5 %
Informal market place	13.8 %
Other	13.8%
Smuggler	4.6 %
N=152	

### Conditions of work in Iran

#### *Hours and days of work*

Respondents worked on average 8 hours a day with 23.4% working more than 8 hours a day. The maximum was recorded at 14 hours a day (2.6%). The split in terms of number of days worked is almost even between 6 days a week (49.2%) and 7 days a week (47.5%).

#### *Work conditions*

32.1% perceive having had below average and difficult work conditions, 28.1% average and the majority, 52.9%, declares having worked under good and favourable conditions.

#### *Living conditions*

16.8% of interviewees lived on their place of work and 62.4% shared a room with other Afghan workers, with an average of 6 people sharing a room. 22.7% rank their living conditions as having been difficult and below average, 29.5% as average and 28.2% as favourable and above average.

## Employment situation after deportation: Afghanistan

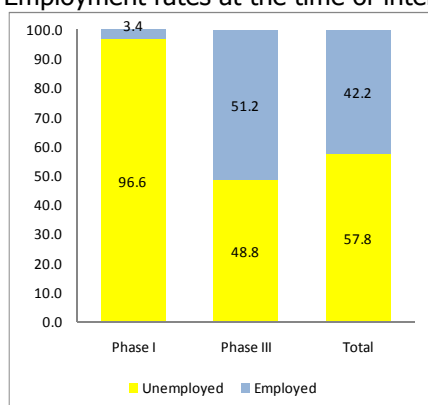
### Current unemployment rates and obstacles to a successful re-integration

**The statistics on unemployment rates (57.8%) and duration of time spent looking for employment in Afghanistan (54.4% still searching for employment) highlight the difficulties encountered in the re-integration efforts of families looking to settle back in their lives and for whom the chances of successfully finding a stable source of income and employment are close to 1 out of 2.**

#### *High unemployment rates*

The rate of unemployment of the respondents at the time of interview was reported at 57.8%. Of the 125 interviewees in the third phase of our methodology, 48.8% were unemployed and a slim majority of 51.2% was employed.

Employment rates at the time of interview by phase of return (%)



#### *Lengthy job search*

The economic obstacles to re-integration are hardened by the fact that 54.4% of the population interviewed in phase III is still looking for a job although 60.8% of them belong to the groups of deportees who returned in the years 2007, 2006 or 2005. Among this group we count daily workers who have an unstable source of income as they work on average 10 days to 2 weeks a month, depending on the local market and need for a labour force.

It took 20.8% of them 1 to 6 months to find employment following their deportation, 16.8% between 1 week to 1 month, 4.8% between 6 months to 1 year, 2.4% less than 1 week and 0.8% over 1 year.

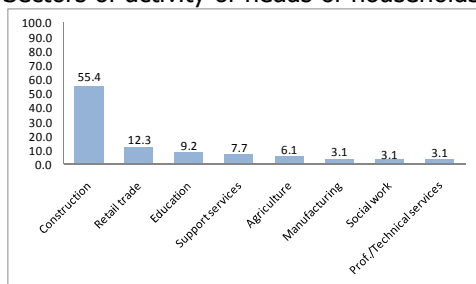
How long after your return did you find employment? Phase III	
Still looking for a job	54.4 %
1 to 6 months	20.8 %
1 week to 1 month	16.8 %
6 to 12 months	4.8 %
Less than 1 week	2.4 %
Over 12 months	0.8 %
N=125	

Current activity sectors among the active population

Among the employed respondents, 55.4% currently work in the construction sector, 12.3% in retail trade, 9.2% in education, 7.7% in support service activities, 6.1% in agriculture and the rest in manufacturing, social work and professional and technical service activities.

This is in part due to the location of the interviews, in urban areas rather than rural areas, and in part to the nature of the work and skills learned while in Iran. As shown in the data collected, the flow of labour migration has the effect of increasing the skill set of a population of Afghans in sectors in which they had experience but only as low skilled labour.

Sectors of activity of heads of households deported from Iran (%)

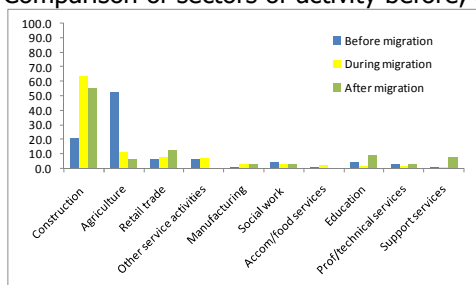


“I am now a painter in Herat. I learned this skill in Iran and earned a good wage from it. Here, I paint a room for 500 Afghanis. In one day I can paint up to 2 houses. It is an easy job with a good wage, better than being a farmer in Ghor.”

- Oghlamabbas, 36, high school graduate, originally a farmer from Ghor, he is now working in construction in Herat. He spent 11 years in Iran from 1996 to 2007.

**The comparison of activity sectors between the two stages before and after the respondents’ migration to Iran confirms the trend of activity adopted during the migration period. The net increase of people working in the construction sector and the decrease in the weight of the agricultural sector are sustained in the period following deportation.**

Comparison of sectors of activity before, during and after migration (%)

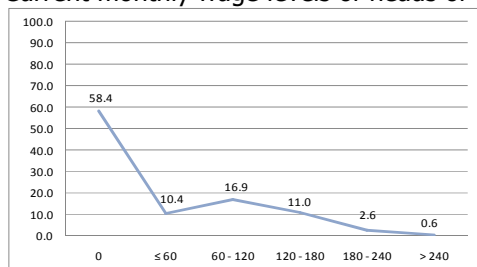


Current wage levels

**The wage levels of deportees who are currently employed are significantly lower upon their return to Afghanistan than during their working years in Iran. Whereas the mean wage in Iran was reported at USD 185 a month, the monthly wage average upon return to Afghanistan drops down to USD 108 a month.**

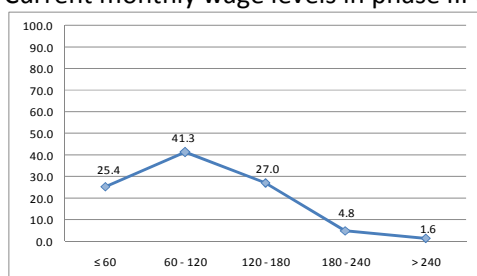
58.4% of the population interviewed declares not having any source of income while the mean wage is of USD 108 with a low at USD 11 and a maximum at USD 300.

Current monthly wage levels of heads of households interviewed (USD)



Looking specifically at the employed respondents belonging to the group of re-integrated deportees (phase III), the data shows that 25.4% earn less than USD 60 a month, with a peak of 41.3% earning between USD 60 and USD 120 a month.

Current monthly wage levels in phase III (USD)



## Migration patterns

### Reasons for migration to Iran

Interlinkages: Conflict, insecurity and economic necessity

**When asked for the main reason for their migration to Iran, 66.9% left Afghanistan based on security considerations and in response to the conflicts raging in Afghanistan from the 1970s onwards.** Only 26.0% decided to leave for economic reasons. Although the root cause is insecurity, as confirmed by the time bound flows of the interviewees departures to Iran, economic necessity is also a component of the decision making process. Conflict and poverty are interdependent, with insecurity being given as the main cause of the poor financial status of the households interviewed.

What was the main reason for your migration? (%)	
Conflict and insecurity	66.9%
Employment	26.0%
Drought	3.2%
Other	3.2%
Family visit	0.6%
N=154	

“The insecurity and lack of financial stability was the main hardship of our lives during the communist regime in Afghanistan. Conflict and war prevented me from having a permanent source of income and at the time the governments made the young generation join the army. ”

- Jalil, 42, High school graduate who lived in Iran for 20 years and was deported in 2006. He has now settled back in his original province of Farah.

39.2% of the population interviewed ranked the household’s financial situation before migration as below average and only 13.1% above average.

What was your family's financial status before exile?	
Very bad	5.2 %
Bad	34 %
Average	47.7 %
Good	12.4 %
Very good	0.7 %
N=153	

#### *Date of migration to Iran*

The trend of migration as a response to war and insecurity is supported by the data collected on the year of migration of each respondent and his/her family:

- 44.2% left between 1978 and 1989 during the first wave of exodus of Afghans to Iran,
- 9.1% between 1990 and 1993, a diminished rate of migration due to the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan,
- 23.4% between 1994 and 2001 with a renewed phase of war and conflict in Afghanistan as a result of internal warfare between the mujahedeen and the advent of the Taliban,
- 23.3% between 2001 and 2007.

Furthermore, respondents all travelled with their family to Iran as 68.2% claimed that they could not leave their families behind and 59.7% because of the worsening security conditions in Afghanistan.

#### Iran: preferred destination for economic opportunities

#### **Although conflict and insecurity were the main triggers for migration, the choice of moving to Iran was made based on the perceived economic opportunities available**

The data below shows the strong economic component of the decision making process of Afghan households migrating to Iran. This is further supported by the fact that, if given the same employment opportunities in Iran as in Afghanistan today, knowing the improved security conditions in their own country, 98.1% of respondents would choose to stay in Afghanistan.

Why did you choose Iran as your destination?	
Economic opportunities	64.9 %
Network of relatives and friends	52.6 %
Wage differentials	44.2 %
Cultural and linguistic similarities	44.2 %
Easiest to access	17.5 %
Other	3.3 %
N=154	

## Method of migration: irregular migration

### Irregular migration of all families to Iran, marginal role played by smugglers

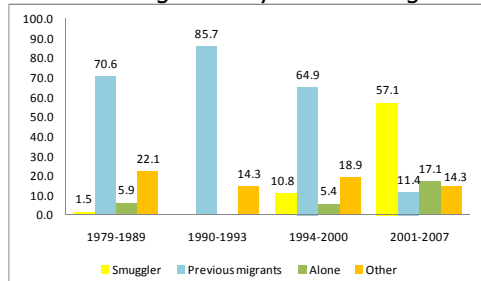
**100% of the respondents interviewed migrated to Iran clandestinely.** The irregular nature of the migration for all respondents is due to the timing of their migration at a time when conflict and war did not enable Afghans to resort to administrative and legal processes for migration. There was no other choice during those years than to enter Iran clandestinely, although the Iranian government welcomed these migrants, especially during the first exodus wave, between 1979 and 1989.

**Only 17.0% of families chose to enter Iran with the help of a smuggler. The majority of them (55.8%) preferred alternative methods of migration** mainly through the help of other migrants, 19.0% with their relatives and 8.2% based on their own knowledge of the itinerary.

The fact that a small minority of families chose to rely on smugglers has to do with the context of migration in the 1980s and 1990s where most of the migration to Iran was as a result of the attempts of Afghans to flee conflict at home. The main concern was not to go unnoticed by the Iranian authorities but to make it to a safe haven in Iran, as allowed by the government of Iran during the early waves of migration.

Out of the 17.0% of families who crossed the border with a smuggler, more than half of them migrated since 2001; other waves of migration, mainly dominated by security reasons, were led not by smugglers but by previous migrants who knew their way to Iran. These trends show the rise of a shadow business, that of human smuggling, taking considerable proportions from the year 2001 onwards. **Coercive and dissuasive measures generate the thriving of smuggling as a means to migrate clandestinely to Iran.**

Method of migration by wave of migration (%)



“My family and I went to Iran illegally but not with a smuggler. It was much easier back then and not at all as risky to cross the border so I did not need to pay anyone to take me there. We just followed the flow of other Afghans migrating to Iran.”

- Nazar Mohammad, 45, high school graduate originally from Nimroz. He lived 24 years in Iran, from 1983 to May 2007, and has since settled back in Zaranj.

### *Smuggler fees*

The average cost of a smuggler reported by heads of households in this survey is equivalent to approximately USD 732 with a minimum of USD 162 and a maximum of USD 3,024, a sum spent to pay the migration of the entire family (graph X). The differential in price levels is a result of: the date of deportation, with prices increasing over the years with higher risks of arrest in Iran; the final destination sought, with northern destinations such as Tehran costing more than destinations closer to the Afghan border such as Mashhad, Shiraz or Esfahan.



How much did you pay the smuggler? (USD)	
101 - 250	26.9%
251 - 400	11.5%
401 - 500	15.4%
> 500	46.2%
N=26	

#### *Method of payment of smuggler fees*

Of the 25 cases of families who entered Iran with the help of a smuggler, 13 of them paid the final sum in installments from their paycheck once in Iran, 7 paid in advance with their own savings or by borrowing the money from relatives and friends and 4 paid in installments before and during exile.

#### *Conditions of migration and perceived dangers*

On average, the irregular migration trip to Iran lasted 4 days. 85.1% report having spent less than 5 days on the road, 10.4% travelled between 6 to 15 days, 1.9% between 16 and 21 days, and 2.6% more than 3 weeks. With heightened risks of arrest on Iranian soil, travels are increasingly done at night, by foot and for long hours in mountainous and desert areas. Days are spent in hiding, waiting for the roads to be secure to travel again at night.

42.9% of the respondents do not report facing any dangers on their migration trip to Iran. Out of the majority - 57.1% - who did face problems, 40.3% first ranked the lack of food and water, 33.8% the risk of verbal abuse, 17.6% of family separation, and 13.6% of physical abuse. Only 3.2% mentioned theft as a perceived danger.

How would you define your travel conditions to Iran?	
Very difficult	12.3%
Difficult	51.9%
Average	22.1%
Good	11.0%
Very good	2.6%
N=154	

*Crossing point:* 45.5% of the respondents entered Iran through the border at Nimroz and 7.1% through Islam Qala. The greatest proportion of them (47.4%) entered Iran through other crossing points. The most popular entry points for these families were through the Shaghali border of Farah and through the Pakistan-Iran border.

#### ***Period of migration spent in Iran***

##### Long term exile and intention to stay in Iran

#### *Overall time spent in Iran*

**The average number of years spent in Iran is approximately 16 years. 36.4% of families spent more than 20 years in Iran, 31.8% between 10 and 20 years, 19.5% between 5 and 10 years and 12.3% spent less than 5 years in Iran.**

#### *Intention to stay in Iran*

**56.5% of all families wanted to settle down for good and spend the rest of their lives in Iran.**

The intention for the remaining of them was medium term with 29.9% of respondents intending to stay between 5 to 10 years, 7.1% more than 10 years and 6.5% below 5 years.

*Legal status in Iran*

**As an indication of the precarious status of Afghan families in Iran, 47.4% did not have any legal paper or documentation while in Iran.** Overall, out of the 154 respondents surveyed, 43 families held a blue card or registration slip, 22 had an Amayesh 2 card, 5 had an Amayesh 1 card, 8 had serial numbers and 3 had valid visas.

The qualitative field work sheds light on the issue by identifying three tendencies regarding the legal status of families. (1) Some families who first arrived in Iran in the 1980s, in a hospitable and welcoming climate, did not see the need to apply for the Amayesh cards in 2001 as they had not needed them before. Once the government of Iran started targeting them for deportation, they had no legal documents to justify their stay in Iran. (2) Other families had been able to pay for the Amayesh 1 but either could not afford or did not respect the administrative process of the Amayesh 2 card renewal process and thereby lost their legal status. (3) A third group of families explain not having known about the Amayesh cards and having stayed in Iran either with a registration slip that was given to them upon entry or with a visa they had used to enter Iran. Not possessing an Amayesh card, they were considered in irregular status and hence deported.

*Province of residence in Iran*

**74.0% of all families interviewed lived in the province of Sistan and Baluchistan in Iran;** 11.7% lived in Tehran and 3.9% in Khorassan. According to UNHCR data, the province of Sistan and Baluchistan is home to the highest numbers of Afghan families. Since it has been categorized by the government of Iran as one of the provinces belonging to the No Go Area policy for foreigners, the Afghan population in that area has become increasingly vulnerable to pressure and harassment by authorities to return to Afghanistan.

Where did you live in Iran? (Province)	
Sistan and Baluchistan	74.0%
Tehran	11.7%
Khorassan	3.9%
Mahalat	2.6%
Esfahan	2.0%
Kerman	1.3%
Qom	1.3%
Fars	0.7%
Gilan	0.7%
Golestan	0.6%
Mazandaran	0.6%
South Khorassan	0.6%
N=154	

*Role of support networks in Iran*

**The three main determinants relevant to the choice of the province and city destination in Iran are (1) the role of support networks.** 77.9% of respondents chose their location because of the presence of friends and relatives there, **(2) the perception of employment opportunities** (59.1%) and **(3) the easy access from Afghanistan** for 52.6% of respondents, which explains why Sistan and Baluchistan is the most populated province in our interviewee pool.

Lack of remittances and low levels of savings

**95.5% of respondents did not send any money back to Afghanistan for the main reason that they had migrated with their family and did not have immediate relatives left in Afghanistan.** The interviewees explained that their low levels of savings and continued insecurity in Afghanistan made it such that either they had no money to send back to relatives in Afghanistan or they could so as there were no secure methods available to send this money to them.

**The lack of remittances is supported by the marginal level of savings with 64.6% of respondents indicating not saving any portion of their wages while in Iran.** Among the remaining 35.4%, the average level of savings is of USD 52 per month, with a low at USD 5 and a high at USD 216.

"I was unemployed but my son was working 8 hours a day, 6 days a week, and earning 10,000 toman a day. We had to pay 60,000 toman of rent each month and had to feed 7 people. We spent the entire 300,000 toman that my son earned every month and did not save any of his income."

- Sherali, 54, illiterate man from Farah who spent 5 years in Iran from 2002 to 2007 with his family of 7, including 3 children.

#### *Difficulties of life in Iran*

All respondents were asked to rank the three most significant difficulties they faced in Iran. In order of importance, the following obstacles were given:

- 41.6% lived with the constant fear of arrest and of the police,
- 22.1% were victims of the poor treatment by the Iranian authorities,
- 17.5% lived with the pressure of living in hiding.

The lack of access to certain basic services heightened the above mentioned difficulties:

- 99.4% did not have access to recreational activities as they were forced to live in hiding,
- 73.4% lacked proper health services, and
- 71.4% could not afford their own housing and lived in rental houses.

On a more positive note, and in comparison with the provision of these services in Afghanistan:

- 99.4% had electricity at home and
- 97.4% had water at home.

#### *Positive assessment of living conditions while in Iran*

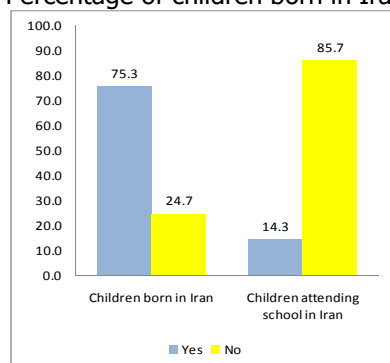
**75.3% of respondents were satisfied with their living conditions in Iran and only 24.7% ranked their living experience as average or difficult.**

How would you describe your living conditions in Iran?	
Difficult	5.20%
Average	19.50%
Good	72.10%
Very good	3.20%
N=154	

#### *Rates of marriage and births in Iran*

An indicator useful to assess the extent to which these migrants' lives were settled in Iran is whether they got married and had children born in Iran. The data collected shows that 45.5% of all respondents were married in Iran and 75.3% had children there. However, only 14.3% of children were enrolled in the Iranian school system. Since most families did not obtain regular status while in Iran, as detailed previously, they could not legally enroll their children in schools.

### Percentage of children born in Iran and enrolled in public schools



### Perceptions of return to Afghanistan

**Interviewees either had a negative perception of a return to Afghanistan while in Iran or were uncertain as to the possible outcome of a return.** 55.2% of the heads of households interviewed associated a return with short term and longer terms difficulties. 39.0% had no insight as to how their life back in Afghanistan could be for them.

When asked to rank three main reasons preventing the respondent from returning voluntarily to Afghanistan, the following reasons were ranked as the most important:

- 66.9% first mentioned the shortage of jobs in Afghanistan,
- 40.9% the enduring insecurity in Afghanistan, and
- 25.3% pointed to the lack of access to land or housing.

Most of the families interviewed did not return voluntarily to Afghanistan mainly because they were at loss as to how to go about arranging for their return and for a stable life. **70.1% were not aware of any voluntary repatriation opportunities by the United Nations or non-governmental organizations.** This information was given by the respondents themselves but has to be weighed against the availability of information by the government of Iran through different media outlets such as the radio and television. It can therefore be questioned to what extent they were unaware of the repatriation opportunities offered to them. In any event, this high figure indicates a potential area of improvement for informational campaigns targeting this population of refugees.

### *Arrest and deportation process*

#### Conditions of arrest

**Out of the 154 cases interviewed, 22 individuals (14.3%) reported not having been arrested or deported from Iran but that there were forced to leave the country as they feared for their lives.**

#### *Location of arrest*

The frequency of arrests was highest in main urban areas of Sistan and Baluchistan province, with 50.6% of arrests in Zabul and 12.3% in Zahedan. Tehran came in third with 11.0% of all arrests. They referred to constant harassment by the police which led them to eventually leave unwillingly Iran and return to Afghanistan.

#### *Family separation*

Only 6.5% of the respondents said that they were separated from their family at the time of arrest and deportation; 7.8% were arrested before their families at their work place and the vast majority, 85.7% were arrested and deported with their family.

#### *Reason for and lack of notification of arrest*

**In 45.5% of cases, no one had given the respondent any prior notification of arrest, allegedly leaving families no time to collect their belongings, material assets or money. Overall however, respondents and their families were given on average 7 days before their final deportation. That allowed families to collect their financial and material belongings and not be subjected to the separation from any family members.**

“When I got arrested, I called my family to let them know to sell everything we owned. Since my wife and children did not have to spend any time at the detention center, they sold our belongings and took all the cash we had. After one week, they arrived in Afghanistan with all our wealth.”

- Oghlamabbas, 36, high school graduate originally from Ghor and now living in Herat. He lived 11 years in Iran from 1996 to 2007.

**26.6% were allegedly not given any reason for their arrest.** 42.4% of the respondents were arrested in the street or at their workplace for being undocumented, 12.3% had authorizations and cards that had expired at the time of their arrest.

#### *Documentation presented at time of arrest*

66.2% did not have any valid papers at the time of their deportation, but the remaining 33.8% claim that they presented valid documentation to the authorities arresting them. Upon examination, it was validated that 31 were cases of families with a valid blue card, 2 were cases of families with Amayesh 1 cards and 2 others were cases of families with green cards.

#### Conditions of detention

**Most families did not have to spend any time at a detention center as 67.5% reported being taken straight to the border without having to endure any detention time.** Of the remaining cases, the heads of household were arrested and held at the Sang Sefid, Alqaderia/Zahedan and Varamin detention centers.

“The Iranian police took us straight to the border. My husband was at work when they arrested and deported us. All of our belongings were transported onto a car and to the border. My husband is not here yet, I am still waiting for him to be deported as well, but I have not had any news from him since his arrest.”

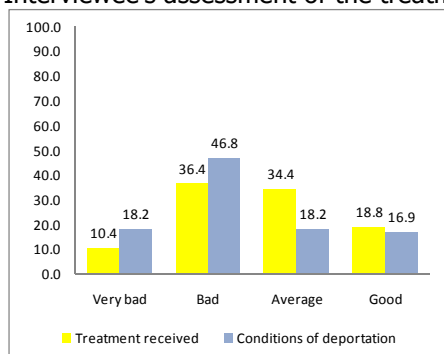
- Shahesta, 25, female, she has lived 18 years in Iran and has 4 children. She was deported in May 2008 and is now waiting in Zaranj at some relatives' house for her husband.

At the detention center, 87.2% did not have the right to make a phone call to their relatives or friends in order to let them know of their situation or request for money to be sent to them; 44.2% complained of physical and verbal abuse by the officials in charge of the detention centers and 3.9% had their belongings stolen or confiscated from them by the authorities.

### Conditions of deportation

The respondents reported a very negative personal account of their condition of deportation mainly due to what the majority defines as bad or very bad treatment received from the Iranian authorities (physical and verbal abuse, lack of basic services etc.) When asked to give an assessment of the conditions of their deportation, 65.0% report a difficult deportation process and 46.8% bad treatment from the Iranian authorities.

#### Interviewee's assessment of the treatment received from the Iranian authorities (%)



### Specific problems of deportation

What were the main difficulties of your deportation?	
Loss of assets	42.2%
Verbal abuse	28.6%
Health problems	27.9%
Family separation	24.7%
Non receipts of wages	20.1%
Physical abuse	4.5%
N=154	

### Cost of deportation and financial loss

Only 1.9% of cases, that is 3 out of 154, reported not having to pay for their deportation. The remaining, 98.1% of all respondents, had to pay for the cost their deportation back to Afghanistan at an average cost of USD 177 per family, with a minimum at USD 2 and a maximum recorded at USD 1.080.

#### Additional costs of deportation: wages and assets left behind in Iran:

35.7% of respondents have left behind wages or material assets in Iran. We asked them to evaluate the worth of the wealth they have still remaining in Iran. The average wealth per person left behind was estimated at USD 1,354 with a maximum at USD 7,560.

How much money did you leave behind in Iran? (USD)	
< 100	1.8%
100 - 500	21.8%
500 - 1,000	29.1%
1,000 - 2,000	27.3%
> 2,000	20.0%
N=154	

*Family separation*

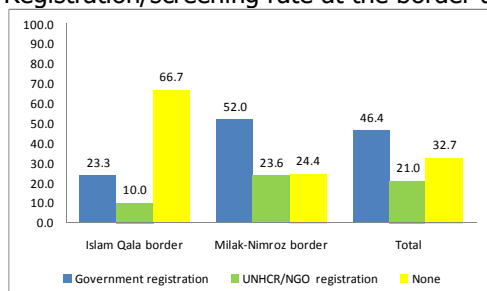
30.5% of respondents have been deported but their family (wife and children) remain behind in Iran.

**Return to Afghanistan**

Assessment of support provided upon arrival at the border

**32.7% of the population interviewed did not go through any screening or registration at the border upon arrival in Afghanistan.** This is especially true of families deported through Islam Qala (66.7%). The rate of screening and registration at the Milak-Nimroz border is higher at 75.6%.

Registration/screening rate at the border upon arrival in Afghanistan (%)



**61.7% of the families did not receive any type of short term or emergency assistance upon arrival at the border whether food, shelter, transportation, financial support or counseling.** Of the remaining 38.3% who were assisted, the majority were taken care of by the UN/NGO offices at the borders of Islam Qala and Milak-Zaranj.

From whom did you receive assistance upon your arrival at the border?	
UN / NGO	74.6%
Local support network	20.3%
Government	5.1%
N=154	

Emergency assistance was provided to a small percentage of the population surveyed mainly in the form of short term assistance such as food and shelter, as well as cash grants.

What type of assistance did you receive upon arrival in Afghanistan?	
Food / Shelter	29.2%
Cash grant	22.1%
Other	6.5%
Housing	3.9%
Transportation	3.2%
Counseling	2.6%
Children's education	1.3%

*Extremely Vulnerable Individuals (EVIs)*

19.0% of the families were given EVI status with 18.3% categorized as poor families and 1 family which was registered as a "special case".

Assessment of needs upon arrival at the border

**Whereas only 29.2% of the families deported received short term assistance in the form of food and shelter, 85.7% of the interviewees singled this out as their most immediate need upon arrival at the border. The second most important need was for housing, as expressed by 82.7% of the families interviewed. Only 13 families out of 154 that is 8.4% considered employment opportunities and job placements as one of their immediate needs.**

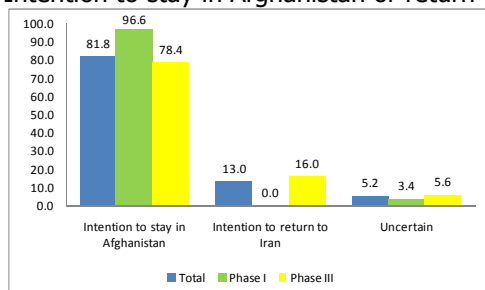
The interviewee pool was therefore mostly concerned with immediate assistance relating to their family's basic needs and comfort level, with the provision of food and housing as being the two main preoccupations of the heads of household.

What were the main difficulties you faced upon your return?	
Unemployment	80.5%
Poverty	61.7%
Insecurity	56.5%
Lack of assets	45.5%
Adjustment to life	16.2%
N=154	

Intention to stay in Afghanistan or return to Iran

**Overall, 81.8% of the respondents intend to stay in Afghanistan, 13.0% plan to go back to Iran and 5.2% remain uncertain about their future.** None of the families interviewed in phase I, at the border, wanted to go back to Iran while the response was more contrasted for phase III interviewees.

Intention to stay in Afghanistan or return to Iran by phase of interview (%)



**The 13.0% represented 20 families who are now intending to go back to Iran. A closer look to their situation indicates that they are planning to return to Iran out of economic necessity.** 70.0% of these heads of these households are currently unemployed. They were all deported between April to October of 2007, in other words from 1 year to 6 months prior to the interview. They attempted to settle down in Afghanistan but were unable to create favorable conditions for themselves, as shown by their unemployment rate. 50.0% of them have been back for a year now, as they were mainly deported in April 2007 and have not seen their situation improve. That is the reason pushing them today to migrate back to Iran.

8 respondents altogether reported being uncertain about their future plans. Out of these, 7 were in phase III, having been deported between April and December of 2007. 4 out of these 7 heads of households defined their unemployment as the main reason why s/he contemplated going back to Iran.

**Among those who plan to return to Iran, 75.0% want to return to collect material belongings and assets left behind and 67.9% based on economic reasons and to find**



**employment.** 7.1% mentioned being now used to the ways of life in Iran, and 3.6% to reunite with their family members.

*Planning to return to Iran: method of migration foreseen*

**71.4% of those planning to go back to Iran will rely on a legal solution, by applying for a visa**, while 17.9% intend to go back clandestinely on their own and 10.7% with a smuggler.

**If the following options were readily available and provided that they had the financial means to afford them, 52.6% would prefer going back to Iran with a work permit** and 39.0% with any other type of valid visa. Only 0.6% would still rely on a smuggler and irregular means of entry into Iran, with the remaining 7.8% stating that they would never want to go back to Iran. The leaning towards a legal migration option is also related to the difficult experiences of single adult males interviewed during their transit, detention and deportation process, as illustrated in case study 18 (p.105, Annex 2).

Perceptions of life in Afghanistan after deportation

*Assessment of family members*

**When asked about the perception of children of the deported families, the overall assessment was that the majority, 62.5%, are unhappy to be now living in Afghanistan.** 53.5% claim that they feel that Iran is their home, as many were born and raised there until their deportation. 20.2% are overall satisfied and happy to be back either because they did not have a positive experience living in Iran or because they like their new surroundings and home. 16.7% of them said they did not feel either happy or unhappy, but rather neutral about this change.

*Assessment of living conditions*

**The personal assessment of the interviewees is that for the most part, 46.8%, their situation has improved to some extent compared to their living situation before exile.** However, men interviewed in the qualitative field work also report that these improvements are often short lived and not sustainable given the lack of employment opportunities in Afghanistan. An example of this trend is given in case study 5 (p.92, Annex 2) where the interviewee reports that all savings were used within a year of his return to Afghanistan.

How is your living situation now as compared to before your migration?	
Worse	27.9%
Same	24.7%
Improved some	46.8%
Improved greatly	0.6%
N=154	

47.4% of the respondents live in a rental house with their family, 18.8% live in a refugee camp, 10.4% share a room with other migrants and their family members, 9.7% live at someone else's house be it a relative, neighbor or friend, 8.4% own their house and 2.6% were able to build a house on government land.

*Assessment of financial situation*

**The respondents' perception of their financial situation after deportation is less positive than that of their living situation. 46.8% consider their financial status to have gotten worse.**

How is your financial situation now as compared to before your migration?	
Complete breakdown	0.6%
Worse	46.8%
Same	24.0%
Improved some	27.3%
Improved greatly	1.3%
N=154	

#### Assessment of challenges ahead

**The main concerns of the respondents are economic in nature and highlight their distress in terms of finding a reliable source of income and employment. Among the challenges facing this group, the following have been ranked in order of importance:**

What are the main challenges in your life?	
Unemployment	82.5%
Poverty	63.6%
Lack of housing	61.7%
Insecurity	41.6%
Lack of food	37.7%
Problems of adjustment	23.4%
Assets left in Iran	12.3%
Family separation	2.6%
Other	1.9%
Lack of support system	0.6%
N=154	

#### Assessment of the impact of migration

**When asked to highlight the positive impact of migration on their lives, 70.8% say they enjoyed a better living situation during exile and 46.1% a better financial situation. 40.9% were able to gain material assets and 16.2% improved their professional skills.**

18.8% consider that exile had no positive impact on their family.

**The negative impact of deportation is mainly focused on economic terms:** 61.0% incurred a financial loss and got indebted because of their deportation, 48.1% lost assets and 41.6% lost importance family ties.

**Their outlook to the future is divided with 48.7% foreseeing a worsening situation,** including 17.5% nearing a complete breakdown. The remaining consider that their situation has and will remain the same as before their exile while 29.9% expect some degree of improvement.

### Summary of key findings on deported families

The data presented in this section provides the following highlights on the situation of single adult males who have been deported from Iran in recent waves (mainly 2007 and 2008).

- 1) **The migration pattern of Afghan families to Iran is not cyclical and privileges a longer term, if not permanent, preference for settling down in Iran.** This population stands out for having entered Iran only once (79.2%), with a lack of voluntary returns (81.2%) and only one deportation to date (96.8%).

- This is supported by the fact that 36.4% of them have already spent more than 20 years living in Iran and 56.5% of the households intended to spend their entire lives in Iran.
- 2) **The primary reason for the migration of Afghan families to Iran is in response to the waves of conflict and increased insecurity in the country.**
  - This is interrelated with economic considerations as 64.9% of interviewees chose Iran because it offered them better economic and employment opportunities.
- 3) **The impact of migration and exile on the labour distribution of these households is significant and reflects market demand, with the distribution changing in favor of the construction sector against the agricultural sector.** Before their migration, 52.2% of interviewees worked as farmers in the agricultural sector while 20.2% worked in construction. They are now showing the reverse trend with 55.4% of them being currently employed as labourers in the construction sector and only 6.1% in the agricultural sector.
  - The wage differentials are also significant with an average wage of USD 182 in Iran compared to USD 108 in Afghanistan. 57.8% of the population interviewed is currently unemployed compared to a rate of 0.6% unemployment in Iran.
- 4) **Only 4.5% of the population interviewed showed a tendency for sending remittances to Afghanistan.**
  - This can be justified by the fact that the immediate dependants had accompanied the head of household to Iran and that the income earned was spent entirely on the family.
  - 64.6% of interviewees were not able to set aside any savings while in Iran.
- 5) **All 154 cases interviewed entered Iran clandestinely but only 17.0% with the help of a smuggler.** This is due to the historical context and waves of migration in the 1980s, the Iranian government's less restrictive policies and the lower dangers and risks involved in the migration.
- 6) **45.5% of all respondents were married in Iran and 75.3% had children there.**
  - Only 14.3% of children were enrolled in the Iranian school system since 47.4% of families did not have legal status while in Iran.
- 7) **Most of the families (74.0%) lived in the Sistan and Baluchistan province of Iran. 14.3% were not arrested but left Iran due to the increasing pressure and harassment from the Iranian authorities as a result of the No Go Area Policy.**
  - 67.5% were taken straight to the border and did not have to spend any time in a detention center and had on average 7 days to collect their belongings before returning to Afghanistan.
- 8) **Upon arrival at the border, 32.7% were not registered at the border by the Afghan authorities, UNHCR or NGO staff.**
  - This is especially true of the process at Islam Qala, with 66.7% of undocumented families,
  - The implementation rate was notably higher at the Milak-Nimroz border with a 75.6% rate of registration of families.
- 9) Having been forced to return, **81.8% intend to stay in Afghanistan. Only 13.0% of the interviewees are planning to go back to Iran motivated by economic necessity.**
  - 82.5% are concerned by the risks of unemployment and,
  - 63.6% consider poverty as a serious challenge to their livelihood.

**10) The respondents provided a very positive assessment of their migration to Iran:**

- 70.8% enjoyed a better living situation during their exile,
- 46.1% from a better financial situation,
- 40.9% gained material assets and,
- 16.2% improved their professional skills.
- They have a much more negative assessment of their deportation and an overall bleak vision of their future. 48.7% of foresee a worse future for themselves and their families.

# ILO-UNHCR Cooperation Towards Comprehensive Solutions for Afghan Displacement

## RESEARCH STUDY ON AFGHAN DEPORTEES FROM IRAN

### **Annex 2:** **Case studies of Afghan deportees from Iran** Location: Herat and Kabul



<b>Profile</b>	<b>Interview Phase</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Sex</b>	<b>Education</b>	<b>Marital status</b>	<b>No. of years in Iran</b>	<b>No. of entries/ deportations</b>	<b>Job in Iran</b>	<b>Job at time of interview</b>
Case study 1: Family	Phase III	62	M	Illiterate	Married, 8 HH members	25 years	1 / 1, deported August 2007	Gardening	Street seller
Case study 2: Single Adult Male	Phase II	31	M	Grade 8	Married, 6 HH members	18 years	2 / 2, deported April 2008	Construction worker	Unemployed
Case study 3: Single Adult Male	Phase II	46	M	Illiterate	Single	11 years	7 / 3, deported April 2008	Factory worker	Unemployed
Case study 4: Single Adult Male	Phase II	26	M	Grade 8	Single	12 years	2 / 1, deported March 2008	Construction worker	Construction worker
Case study 5: Single Adult Male	Phase III	23	M	Grade 4	Single	12 years	1 / 1, deported April 2007	Factory worker	Construction worker
Case study 6: Single Adult Male	Phase II	19	M	Grade 5	Single	16 years	2 / 2, deported April 2008	N/A	Street seller
Case study 7: Single Adult Male	Phase III	51	M	Religious education	Married, 7 HH members	12 years	2 / 1, deported in 2007	Well digger	Unemployed
Case study 8: Family	Phase III	65	M	Illiterate	Married, 10 HH members	14 years	1 / 1, deported October 2007	Factory worker	Unemployed
Case study 9: Single Female	Phase III	16	F	Grade 4	Single	15 years	0 / 1, deported April 2007	N/A	Unemployed
Case study 10: Single Adult Male	Phase II	26	M	Religious education	Single	6 years	1 / 1, deported April 2008	Gardener	Unemployed
Case study 11:	Phase II	27	M	Grade 8	Married, 3 HH members	9 years	3 / 3, deported April 2008	Factory worker	Unemployed

Single Adult Male									
Case study 12: Single Adult Male	Phase III	22	M	Illiterate	Single	7 years	1 / 1, deported January 2008	Factory worker	Street seller
Case study 13: Single adult male	Phase II	40	M	Grade 5	Single	10 years	4 / 2, deported April 2008	Brick factory worker	Unemployed
Case study 14: Single Adult Male	Phase III	35	M	Illiterate	Married, 4 HH members	4 years	1 / 1, deported March 2007	Construction and factory work	Daily worker
Case study 15: Single Adult Male	Phase III	30	M	Grade 12	Married, 3 HH members	9 years	3 / 3, deported September 2007	Guard	Daily worker
Case study 16: Single Adult Male	Phase III	40	M	Grade 12	Married, 6 HH members	7 years	1 / 1, deported April 2007	Construction worker	Daily worker
Case study 17: Family	Phase II	N/A	F	Illiterate	Married, 5 HH members	2 years	1 / 0, voluntary return	Construction worker	Vocational training with HELP
Case study 18: Single Adult Male	Phase III	30	M	Grade 12	Married, 10 HH members	1 year	2 / 2, deported April 2007	Construction work	Night guard
Case study 19: UAM	Phase II	14	M	Illiterate	Single	2 days	1 / 1, deported April 2008	N/A	Hotel staff
Case study 20: UAM	Phase II	11	M	Grade 2	Single	10 days	1 / 1, deported April 2008	N/A	N/A – transit center

*\* Case studies are presented into groups according to the length of residence in Iran and the category of deportee: single adult male, head of household, unaccompanied minor (UAM)/EVI. \*\* Exchange rate: 1,000 Toman = approx. \$US1.08 (June 2008)*

## **OVER 20 YEARS OF RESIDENCE IN IRAN**

### **HEAD OF HOUSEHOLD - FAMILY**

**Case study 1** *"I went to Iran with my family because of the continued conflict and insecurity in Afghanistan. We chose to go to Iran because of the proximity, cultural and linguistic affinities, but also because it is easier to find a job there than in Pakistan or Afghanistan."*

This 62-year old man from Daikundi took his family in 1982 to Quetta, Pakistan, where he put a smuggler in charge of taking them to Tehran through Teftan and Zahedan. It took them 40 days to arrive to Tehran, at a rate of 14,000 toman per person. It was not difficult entering Iran at that time as the Khomeini government welcomed Afghans who were seeking refuge from the war in Iran.

One week after arriving in Iran, at the age of 36, he found a job as a gardener, which he kept for the next 26 years. He learned skills related to nurturing flowers and plants. In 1999, he received a green card, a special identity card for Afghan refugees. He did not know about Amayesh cards. He and his family were in regular status in Iran until the day when he was not able to apply for the red card. Their status therefore became irregular over the last two years they were in Iran.

His wage started at 3,300 toman in 1982, gradually increasing to 50,000 toman a month. His wage was low compared to what Afghans made in the construction sector but it was enough to cover his family's expenses including their 1,500 toman/month rent. He could not do any of the hard labor like others because he was not fit for it.

He was arrested twice by the police in 2007 but was able to pay for his release on both counts, respectively paying 20,000 and 50,000 toman. He was finally arrested again in 2008 and this third time was not able to bribe the officials. He was arrested in Tehran at night, when he was out in the street to buy his family groceries. He was approached by plainclothes officers who started a conversation with him, then handcuffed him. They sent him to the Askarabad detention center where he stayed for 4 nights. About 1,000 people were held there, and the situation was tense, as he explains "just imagine the dirt and the insecurity when you have 1,000 people, most of them with no money, living on one place."

His wife was brought to the center on the day of their deportation. The transportation to the border cost 7,000 toman per person. "On the way to Islam Qala, everyone on the bus was asked to step down and enter for lunch. We were told that the food was provided to us for free by the United Nations. Once we finished our lunch, the hotel owners charged us each 3,000 toman for the food. I had no money since I had not yet received my month's worth of wage and had spent the little my wife had been able to bring with her on the transportation cost. Other Afghans who had more money than us accepted to pay for our food." In addition to a month's worth of wage, he has a few checks left behind in Iran, amounting to 700,000 toman altogether.

There was no screening or registration process once they arrived in Afghanistan. He joined some acquaintances and took a car to the Jabrail camp in Herat, where he has been living with his wife since August 2007, the date of his deportation. His economic situation is the same now as it had been before he left for Iran. He has found no job that matches his gardening skill so for now he sells vegetables in the street. He does not have a stable source of income and makes about 100 Afghanis a day in the streets. This is not enough to pay for their living expenses, their debts (1,000 Afghanis) and to face the inflation. 1 bag of flour now costs 400 Afghanis.



He is ashamed to go back to his province of origin and has problems readjusting to his old life. "My brother is still in our home province of Daikundi but I do not want to go back there. There are no jobs and no prospects. Besides, I was 36 when I left for Iran and now I am 62. How can I go back after all these years? I do not know how I would be able to readjust to that life. I cannot live that life all over again, with no infrastructure, no electricity or water. We got used to a different lifestyle in Iran."

## **11 TO 20 YEARS OF RESIDENCE IN IRAN**

### **SINGLE ADULT MALES**

**Case study 2** *"My most immediate need now is to find a way to get back to Iran and to be reunited with my wife and two children."*

This is the case of a 31-year old man, originally from Uruzgan, who first left to Iran in 1990 as a result of the insecurity and conflict in the country. He was interviewed on April 27, 2008 in a hotel in Herat, as he had been deported one day earlier from Iran. Over the course of 18 years that he lived in Iran, he entered the country legally twice and was deported twice. He got married while in Iran, with an Afghan woman with residency papers in Iran, and has two children, all of whom are now still in Iran.

He first left to Iran at the age of 13 as a result of the increasing conflict and insecurity in Uruzgan. "After I spoke with my father, we both decided that my younger brothers could stay and help him with the farm and that I was old enough to go to Iran to pursue my studies and strive for a better life out there." At the time, the Iranian government welcomed Afghan refugees due to the deteriorating security situation. He entered the country legally with the goal of studying in the city of Qom. He had stopped his schooling in the 8<sup>th</sup> grade and wanted to attend a religious school for the advantage that all expenses, including shelter and food, would be paid for. Once he arrived in Qom, he was told that he could not enroll without completing one year at the regular school system. Since he could not afford this option, he started working.

He lived the life of a typical Afghan migrant, first living with relatives and working in the construction sector. He saw his wage gradually increase from 270,000 toman a month to 370,000 toman a month. He had entered Iran legally, at a time when Afghans were welcome to find refuge in Iran. Although he had papers at the time which he showed to the police, he was arrested and deported through the Nimroz border in 1999, at the age of 22. "I tried to go home but I was arrested in Farah by the Taleban and spent 3 months in one of their prisons. When I got out, I joined Massoud's army in Nimroz."

Following a period of fighting against the Taleban, for which he was imprisoned, he was injured and taken by the United Nations to Iran for medical treatment. His second entry into Iran in 2000 was again legal, although he extended his stay after his release from the hospital to find work in Iran. He married an Afghan woman with whom he has 2 children. All of them, including his in-laws, have Iranian residency cards. He has applied more than once but has been denied residency every time. "I was told that the Iranian parliament was debating on the status of people like me who are married to Afghans with regular status residing in Iran. At the time I had a pink card given to me by the government. I had never heard of an Amayesh card."

He continued working and earning 300,000 toman a month to support his family in Iran but did not send any money back to his family in Afghanistan. He continued his life for 4 years until his second arrest and deportation. He was charged guilty of a crime for which he claims to be innocent. The reliability of the verdict can be questioned, hinting to a propensity to blame Afghans for crimes and other problems in Iran, as a means to deport them back to Afghanistan. By law, Afghans who are imprisoned

are immediately deported upon their release from prison.. After three years in prison, he was deported through the Dogharun-Islam Qala border, with one goal in mind: to re-unite with his family.

"I had no money once I arrived at the border in Afghanistan, having spent all my money on food at the detention center and to pay for my transportation back to the border." He had 30,000 toman that his family had brought to him at the detention center. He spent it all in the one week he spent at the detention center. "If you did not have any money to buy food, you had to face a very difficult situation, nearing extreme hunger and thirst." Upon arrival in Afghanistan, he received no assistance. He was registered by the authorities and was told to proceed.

He knows that he is not yet in a situation to bring his family to Afghanistan. He will try to build his life here and if not, he will go back to Iran himself to be with his wife and children. "Right now, I have nothing to offer them; I have no real skills. I learned how to drive while in Iran and gained some knowledge about cars and mechanics. I will see if I can find work in my province of origin; if not, I will go back to Iran to re-unite with my family."

**Case study 3** *"I will be going back until I succeed in settling down again in Iran. I am more indebted now because it costs more and more every time to enter Iran illegally, as it has become more risky. I will pay back my debts once I have a decent work. I could go with a regular passport but that's really beyond what I can afford and the Iranians are no longer giving enough visas for it to be a viable option."*

A 46-year old single and illiterate man from Herat, he has entered Iran 7 times since 1982, returning to Afghanistan voluntarily 4 times and having been deported 3 times, the last time being in April 2008. His first migration in 1982 was both for security and economic reasons. "At the age of 20, I decided on my own to go to Iran, as it was my responsibility as the oldest son of the family to help out my father. It was for both economic and security reasons. We had no other source of income for my family and I did not want to go to the army to fight against the Russians." The Iranian authorities at the time gave him a green card authorizing him to live and work in Mazandaran, where he found employment ten days after his arrival. He spent 4 years there, working first as a gardener then as a factory worker, and sending two thirds of his wage home to his family. In 1987, he came back to Afghanistan voluntarily for a visit, which lasted a year during which he was not able to find a decent job.

In 1988, he decided to go back to Mazandaran and to work in the same factory, which he did for 5 years. As noted in other experiences of migrants who travelled back and forth between Iran and Afghanistan, he came back to see his family during the winter time. "I stayed for 5 years in this company then came back to Afghanistan again during the winter time to see my family. Combined with the money I had sent them from Iran, I had enough money to cover my family's expenses and so I decided to stay in Afghanistan for a couple of years. Our family's situation was already better off thanks to my work in Iran over the years."

As he could no longer depend on his savings, he had to return to Iran in 1995. He took on the same job with the same employer. In 2002, he received a refugee card from the United Nations which he used for 1 year and 3 months. He then decided to return based on the assistance he could receive from the United Nations, of which he learned about through the government-owned media in Iran. "The UN said they would help us if we decided to go back to Afghanistan voluntarily. They said they would buy Afghans food and non food items and also provide transportation and cash grants. That convinced me to go back to Afghanistan in 2003. I stayed home for 6 months, but not being able to find any work, I decided to return to Iran."

Unlike in Afghanistan, "It was very easy to find employment in Iran in a matter of hours and days. I could not go back on my own like I did every other time because I had been told by other

Afghans that the situation was getting tougher on the Iranian side of the border. I paid 150,000 toman to a smuggler to take me to Bam, through the Shaghali border in Nimroz.”

As a result of the earthquake in 2003, there was a lot of work to be done in Bam. A man from Mashhad hired him and other Afghans to do work on construction sites. “One day, the police came to our work place when our employer was not around. We had no papers and we were not allowed to take anything with us. I had worth 60,000 toman in belongings and 100,000 toman in wage left behind.” He says that he and his coworkers were taken to the Bam police station where they were 130 people in a 4-meter room, for 3 nights with no food.

“They would send five of us to the bathroom at the same time, with beatings and torture. I was not allowed to raise my voice; if I did, they would beat me. It was also very hot and I was constantly hungry. The others got very sick. After 3 nights, they took 200 of us to the Kerman detention center for 2 days. There, we were all teased and made fun of by the guards. They treated us like puppets, making us do silly tricks as if we were animals. I had 40,000 toman worth of money at the start. They took 9,000 toman for transportation and 3,000 for every meal. All the prices were doubled. Water was scarce; we were given 1 glass for 2 people.”

Upon arrival in Afghanistan, he gave all the details relating to human rights abuses to the UN and AIHRC staff at the Islam Qala border. During the interview, this man focused on the treatment and abuses he faced during his detention. He was clearly very traumatized and bothered by this experience. Still, he decided to return to Iran again, illegally, in April 2008. He found a smuggler in Nimroz who charged him 320,000 toman to enter Iran. As in many cases of irregular migration, a smuggler based in Nimroz passes on a group of travelers to Baluch people on the Iranian side. We have received many accounts of theft directly caused by the Baluch men. “We left Zabol at night, walking 24 hours in the mountains until we arrived in Zahedan, near Tale Sia. There were thieves along the way. We were 80. I had about 20,000 toman and 1,500 Afghanis. They took 10,000 toman from me. One person got stolen 1,100,000 toman. Altogether the Baluch forcefully collected 5,000,000 toman from us.”

“We walked for 8 hours in the mountains, saw dead bodies along the way. We stayed the night in the mountains. The Baluch who was supposed to take us further had told us to wait there. There were 600 of us. There was no sign of the Baluch for two days. We had nothing: no food or water. Finally after 2 nights, he came back and took us.” Their truck was stopped at a checkpoint in the city of Naeen, Kerman. The police asked to look inside and saw a hundred Afghans without papers in the back of the truck. Everyone was arrested and taken to the police station.

Five days following his deportation, he attempted going back again, causing him to reach 16,000 Afghanis (\$320) in debt although he never made it further than Yazd with a fake passport which cost him 500,000 toman. The police in Yazd inspected his passport and arrested him, beating him up all night before registering him and the other Afghans of the group at the detention center.

He is now in Herat, living with relatives and borrowing money from them. He is still planning to find a solution to go back to Iran, at the risk of getting more indebted. He cannot afford to obtain a passport and a visa, so he will continue trying to enter Iran illegally. He knows he needs to find work to repay his debts. The only solution he sees is to go to Iran.

**Case study 4** *“My wage greatly increased over time. I learned to work as a mason and my daily wage went from 2,000 to 10,000 toman. I spent 30% of my income and sent back the remaining 70% to my family in Afghanistan.”*

This is a 26-year old single man from Herat spent altogether 12 years in Iran, with a first migration in 1995 and a second one in 2000. He came back to Afghanistan voluntarily but his second exit was forced, having been deported on March 29, 2008.

He was 13 years old in 1995 when his father had to stop working due to his poor health. He was the only male in a family of 8, which counted his father, mother and 5 sisters. After getting sick, his father asked his son to leave to Iran to find work in Tehran, where his cousins were living and working. In 1995, it cost 60,000 toman to enter Iran from the Shaghali border of Nimroz, an unofficial border crossing point near Milak.

He stayed in Iran from 1995 to 1999, working in the construction sector for a daily wage of 400 toman. He worked 8 hour days and lived at his workplace, the location changing every few months as he would start working on new buildings. The only expense he had to pay was food. "Out of the 400 toman I earned every day, that is 12,000 toman a month, I spent 3,000 toman and sent the rest, 9,000 toman a month to my family in Afghanistan." His level of remittances therefore reached 75% of his wage. His family depended entirely on his income as his father was in the hospital, which meant this man was the only breadwinner of a family where costs had increased due to the poor health of one of their members.

In 1999, he decided to go back to Afghanistan to see his father, whose health was deteriorating. At the time, travel between the two countries was less regulated, the Iranian government being more open to receiving and helping Afghan migrants, whether in regular or irregular status. He was unemployed during the entire year he spent in Afghanistan. "We had a lot of debts incurred by my father during his illness. It took me 5 years to repay all of our debts. I had no other choice but to go back to Iran."

He left to Iran for a second time in 2000, with the same smuggler. In 1995, he had been charged 60,000 toman. In 2000, the rate for the same smuggler was 150,000 toman. The cost had increased and the difficulties as well. They were caught by the police in Bam. The smuggler succeeded in bribing the officials, which increased the fee to 200,000 toman per person.

As in many cases, he returned to his old employer in Tehran. He notes that his wage greatly increased over time and that he learned a valuable skill as a mason. His wage went from 2,000 to 10,000 toman a day, sending back 70% of his income to his family in Afghanistan, until he was arrested in 2007. "The difficult part of my arrest and deportation is that I still have 1,000,000 toman left in Iran since I had not received my wage for a year. After my arrest, I was sent to prison for one year during which I could not get my money back from my employer nor send any money to my family. They had no news from me. They got more indebted but my father, feeling a bit better, started working again as I later found out. It was a big source of stress and pressure for me."

Back in Afghanistan, he started working for about 2 weeks every month as a daily construction worker. He never got married because he could not afford it. The experience of prison and of the treatment by the Iranian authorities left a big mark on him. He now says, "I will not go back to Iran, it has gotten too difficult. I prefer to stay here, even if I have to beg for money. Being in exile was positive because it allowed my family to live more comfortable. But the negative aspects were not few: prison, lack of medical treatment and long term damages to my health caused by excessive beatings and physical pain inflicted on me by the Iranian authorities."

**Case study 5** *"I could see that my family was doing better thanks to the money that I had been sending them during my time in Iran. My brother was not sending any money, so once I got back, we quickly went back to being poor."*

This 23-year old man was born in Mashhad, Iran in 1985, his family originally migrating to Iran from the province of Ghor in Afghanistan. His family of 8 lived in Mashhad until he was 11 years old. His father worked as a well digger, his brother as a mason and he went to school. They had a refugee card but decided to return voluntarily to Afghanistan in 1994, with the help of the United Nations to pay for the transportation to the border and a package of food and non food items.

They lived in Herat because they did not have the money to return to Ghor. The Taleban then came to power, for which they had to leave to Pakistan. It was cheaper at that time to go to Pakistan (80,000 toman) than to Iran (2,000,000 toman) for 8 people. They spent 4 years in Quetta, where he worked on the street with an income of 80 Afghanis a day. When the Taliban were deposed, they went back to Herat. He was mostly unemployed during that time, at best making 150 Afghanis as a daily worker, which he could do at most two weeks out of the month.

He did not have the money to pay for a passport (11,000 Afghanis) and a visa (1,500 Afghanis), although the rates were then cheap compared to now. He decided to leave illegally to Iran to find a job and send money back home. He paid a smuggler 150,000 toman, for which he worked 3 months in Iran to repay the debt. They mostly walked at nights, hiding from the police during the day, fearing arrest but also death.

He went back to Mashhad through the Shaghali border of Nimroz. His brother was then living in Tehran but his sister and brother in law were in Mashhad. He got a room in a plastic factory where he worked from 7am to 5pm. His wage was 15,000 toman a day, of which he spent 5,000 toman and saved the other two thirds to send back to Afghanistan every two months.

He got arrested at his workplace with 2 other Afghans. He had a valid, government authorized letter that cost him 300,000 toman and that was still valid for another 3 months at the time of his arrest. The authorities ignored it and tore the letter. He was taken to the police station then to the Sang Sefid detention center, with no money on him. He was able to make a phone call from the detention center to his sister who brought him 55,000 toman, of which 25,000 toman were given to the police as a fee for the phone call. He spent another 20,000 toman at the detention center on food alone. The prices there were double the regular market prices: if a cake cost 100 toman at the bazaar, it cost 200 there.

"There were about 2,000 people at the detention center. We had daily portions of food, 3 times a day, but mostly just bread and bad rice. They bothered us a lot, locked us in rooms, we couldn't just go to the bathroom without being tortured. We had no room to sleep. It was dirty, it smelled bad....I was able to wash myself twice in 20 days. I was still in my work clothes since I had not been allowed to take anything with me."

Now that he is back in Herat, his life is worse than before his migration because of inflation. Asked about his skills, he says that "I didn't learn anything valuable, just unskilled factory work. I cannot even have the same job here, there are no factories in the area." After a month, he started working in construction, arranging bricks, stones, bringing cement to the mason for ten days at a rate of 150 Afghanis a day. He lives with his family.

At first, he saw the improvements in his family's condition thanks to the money he had been able to send them from Iran. But now that he is back, having been deported in April 2007, a year ago, all their savings are gone and they are back to being poor. His vision of the future is very bleak. "I don't have any money to get married and start my own life. I see myself getting stuck in this situation with no signs of any evolution in Afghanistan."

**Case study 6** *"In my neighbourhood, there are about 20 families who came back from Iran voluntarily. One of the heads of households has been unemployed for about a year now. The young ones like me have to go back to Iran to support the rest of the family. Our future is uncertain, and it's worse for us, the younger generation."*

Born in Iran, this 19-year old man spent 16 years living in Iran. His family migrated there because of the insecurity in Afghanistan in 1985. Him and 4 of his siblings were born in Iran and attended public school as they had refugee status. They lived in Varamin, Tehran for 16 years where his

father had a mobile shop with a monthly wage of 400,000 toman. Their monthly expenses including rent reached 100,000 toman. They saved the rest and sent it to his uncle in Afghanistan so that he could build a house for them in Herat, preparing for their eventual return. They had a good economic situation in Iran. As he says, "we didn't lack anything. Our life was good, no one bothered us, we had good relations with others in the neighbourhood and we never felt we lacked any freedom."

At the age of 16, in 2004, his family decided to voluntarily return to Afghanistan. "My family said that we had to go back to our country now that it was freed from war and conflict. We took the bus to Tehran and the United Nations paid for our transportation to Islam Qala. We sold everything we owned; we had cars, motorcycles and furniture. We took our money and left Iran."

At first, for about a year living in Herat, they had a good life thanks to the house they had been able to build and the savings they brought back from Iran. Then, after a year, their savings were gone and their situation got worse. He took on the same job as his father in Iran, selling pots and ceramics in the street, but here he only could make about 200 Afghanis per day, which was not enough to support his family of 8. "Other men in our neighbourhood were in the same situation, some have been unemployed for over a year now. This is how life is here, there are no opportunities."

After three years of living in this difficult situation, he decided to go back to Iran, at the age of 18. In February 2008, he went with a smuggler in Iran but got arrested on the way. He tried again a week prior to the interview, at the end of April 2008, both times crossing the border through Nimroz and ready to pay 500,000 toman for the smuggler fees. "I could not get a passport because it cost about 70,000 Afghans with a visa on the black market. If you give \$700, you can get a passport straight away, but who can afford it?"

He will go back a third time. "I need to borrow money so that I can go back. I will not stay in Afghanistan, unless I can find the same types of jobs here. I have no particular skills but I know I can learn when I get to Iran. There are a lot of factories and employers who hire Afghans like me. I know other people in my family who want to go back but for now, I will go, make some money and they might come later. In my area there are about 20 families who came back from Iran like us. One of the heads of these households is still unemployed after a year. The young ones like me have to go to support the rest of the family. Our future is uncertain, and it's worse for us, the younger generation."

#### HEAD OF HOUSEHOLD - FAMILY

**Case study 7** *"I learned skills in Iran relating to gardening and trade but I did not find any jobs related to my skills once I got back. Now I am a guard at an office."*

A 51-year old man, head of a family of 8 living in Herat, he is originally from Kabul. His family owned a hotel in Kabul where they continuously interacted with smugglers and travellers who went to Iran. When the Russians came to Afghanistan in 1979, their hotel was destroyed but he was never able to find an alternative source of income. In 1985, at the age of 28, he decided to take his family to Iran through the Islam Qala border. It cost 2,000 per person, for a 3 day and night trip by foot to Mashhad. At the time, he was travelling with his wife and two children. "We had a 50% chance of theft, but the dangers and risks were minimal then compared to the increasing difficulties seen by Afghans today."

He starting working in 1985 as a gardener in Tehran, with a monthly wage of 2,500 toman a month, spending about 1,000 a month and saving about 700,000 toman a year. There would be no rent to pay, as it was provided by the employer, free of charge. At the time, he had a green card given by the government which granted him refugee status.

In 1992, he decided to come back to Afghanistan with his wife, voluntarily, as the Russians had been ousted by the Mujahideen. He received assistance from the United Nations in the form of food items

and transportation to the border. Upon arrival, he spent 5 months at the Ansar Camp with his wife and children, 4 of which were born in Iran. He had 40,000 toman of savings from his work in Iran which he used to buy some land. The timing was bad: the Taleban arrived and they had to leave, as they were being accused of being spies for the Iranian government.

"The Taleban had killed a few people in the Jabrail camp. We were scared to get caught and killed as well. We had to escape. We knew the way. We left from the Shaghali border of Nimroz." They went back to Tehran, where he started working as a well digger for 12 hours a day, in very difficult working conditions. He had a monthly wage of 250,000 toman, of which he spent 60% and saved the remaining 40%. His children all went to Afghan run schools, as they had no papers for them to go to regular schools. This second time he was not able to get a legal status for his family. He did not even know about Amayesh cards.

After 5 years of living in Iran, he finally got arrested in 2007, in Varamin, Tehran. He spent 2 nights in the Askarabad detention center. "No Muslim should see this detention center: it's full of smoke, dirt, trash, human trash...1,000 people altogether. There is sometimes not even any space to sleep." His wife and children join him on the day of the deportation. It cost 12,000 toman per person to get to the border. On the way, they stopped in Taybod for a UN run mine awareness course which lasted an hour and during which they were given bread and water.

"On this side of the border, we had no interaction with the government or anyone else. My children were 12, 14, 16 and 18 and I also had my wife with me." Although qualifying for assistance, they were not approached by anyone for help at the border. "My life was better before going to Iran; there are really no jobs to be found now. I will also not go back to my province because life there has probably changed and I no longer know it." For now, he has borrowed money from the Barak association, a Bangladeshi microfinance association, to pay for fixing his house with proper walls and a roof. He received a loan of 30,000 Afghans that he has to reimburse at a weekly rate of 900 Afghans. He has not been able to honour these conditions over the past three weeks.

***Case study 8*** "We had papers and refugee status when we arrived in Iran. Then we never renewed the card, but even if we had, they would have torn them apart at the time of our arrest. The difficulties now for Afghans in Iran are political."

This family of 10 people, now living in Kabul after being deported in November 2007, lived for 14 years in Iran. They left during the time of the Taleban, in 1995, because of the insecurity and poverty. They had no house of their own and the father's store got burned down during the war. They had lost a son at the time of the Russians; they did not want to risk their other children's lives. A brother-in-law lived in Tehran and worked in the construction sector. He convinced them to join him.

In Tehran, the mother explains that "we all worked, men and women, in the fields of Shabdolazim to sell vegetables and fruits. At the beginning, the women would receive 700 toman a day and men 1,200 toman a day. Then our children started growing up and worked in a plastic factory. Their wages were of 150,000 toman a month. If they did overtime, as they often worked days and nights, they would get 300,000 toman a month. We had four of our children working in this factory. All our income was spent every month, only a little was saved. At the time of our deportation, we had been able to save about 3,000,000 toman."

They were happy with their life in Iran where they lived in a village with other Afghans. They had two houses with electricity, gas and water. Their children went to unofficial Afghan schools in Tehran as they were not allowed in the public schools. After 3.5 years, the police came to the village and arrested all the Pakistanis living there. Then again, 3 years later they came and arrested 40 Afghan families living in the area. They had a few hours to gather their belongings before being deported.

They never wanted to come back voluntarily because they have nothing to go back to in Afghanistan: no relatives, no house or land, no employment prospect. "With nothing to call our own in Afghanistan, the small assistance given by the United Nations would have not made any difference at all. We had also heard from others who had gone back that the situation in Afghanistan would not allow us to have a decent life."

They had to pay 80,000 toman for the transportation cost to the border, and an extra 25,000 toman for food, as they were stopped for lunch on the way to the border. Once they arrived, they were not registered and did not benefit from any assistance. The entire trip from Iran to Kabul cost the family 1,500,000 toman. They still had another 2,000,000 toman which has been sustaining them these past 6 months. They are now selling all their belongings and furniture to have some extra cash.

The only work the men in the family know how to do is factory work. "With no electricity in this town, how can there be factories for us to work here?" They are all unemployed, except for certain days when they have been able to work in construction or on the street, for 150 Afghanis a day. They have no source of income and their rent costs them 2,500 Afghanis a month. They are looking to move to a cheaper place. They know they will soon run out of the savings they brought back from Iran and may have to stop sending their children to school, forcing them to work in the street.

"We are in our 60s, we cannot go back to Iran at our age. One of our sons lost his hand in the factory where he worked in Iran. He wants to go back because the factory director had told him that they will give him an allowance every month if he came back and provide him with an easy side job. He will send us money from there."

Two of their children were born in Iran. The oldest son is now 25 years old, married with 2 children. He used to make 300,000 toman a month in the factory in Iran. Now he works in the street, selling anything he can, but he never makes more than 200 Afghanis a day, less than his monthly expenses of 7,000 Afghanis. During the winter he could not work, spending all his savings. He will accompany his younger brother to Iran after the summer.

#### SINGLE FEMALE - EVI

**Case study 9** *"I have been living at the Voice of Women Organization shelter for about a year now. I am happy here but I want to go back to Iran to be with my family."*

This is the case of a single female and unaccompanied minor registered as an EVI by the CHA at the point of entry at Islam Qala and who was sent to the Voice of Women Organization in Herat, which holds a women's shelter facility for women at risk. This young woman of 16-years of age was born in Iran in 1991 and was forced to quit school in the 4<sup>th</sup> grade and start working at the age of 9 because of economic necessity. She used to work in a factory with her brother, as her father did not have a constant source of income and her mother had left their home. "I used to work from 7am to 4pm, 6 days a week, in a factory with my younger brother who was 7 at the time. It was very difficult for me because I was the only woman in the factory, the other 5 people were all men; they were not nice to me."

She liked her life in Iran for the freedom that it offered her. She and her brother had a monthly wage of 28,000 toman each. Her father worked as a guard in a building, which meant they did not need to pay rent. They were still poor and could not afford applying for the Amayesh 2 costs as they could not pay the necessary fees. Her family therefore lost its legal status.

When she turned 14, her father left for a pilgrimage in Karbala and did not come back. Under the influence of a friend, she left home and got into some trouble for which she had to serve a five month term at a correctional facility for minors. The Iranian policy of deportation of released prisoners applied in her case as well, although she was a single female, underage, unaccompanied with her family in Iran.



She went to the judge to ask to be reunited with her family but the judge refused, saying that she could not be trusted to go home. "He would not change his mind even though I told him that I had no family in Afghanistan and that my only family was in Iran. The problem was that since they were all illegal, the judge did not seem to care about us."

She was taken to the Varamin detention center, where there were other single women, including some under 18. She was not allowed any phone calls and three days later, she was deported alone, without being able to contact her relatives. Upon arrival in Afghanistan, she was registered at the border and sent to the Voice of Women Organization for shelter and food. She has been living there for a year now, as no one has been able to locate her family. She says she does not have a phone number or address. In the meantime, all her expenses are being taken care of and she is taking vocational training courses offered by the NGO. She is learning tailoring and beauty skills and is allowed to have an income of her own by selling her clothes. She is happy but would prefer to go back to Iran. She is ashamed of seeing and says she can no longer speak to him.

A social worker from the Voice of Women Organization said that there are a lot of cases of single females being deported from Iran, whether Afghans or Iranians. There is one category of women who are arrested on the street because of their irregular status and immediately deported, leaving their family behind. There is a second category, which is predominant, of women who are put to prison and then automatically deported by the police after they have finished their sentence. This is the way the Iranian authorities deal with what they call criminals.

## 1 TO 10 YEARS OF RESIDENCE IN IRAN

### SINGLE ADULT MALES

**Case study 10** *"I had received news from my friends that Iran provided a guarantee of employment and of a better future."*

He is a 26 year old single male from the province of Badakhshan who spent 6 years in Iran as a migrant worker in irregular status. He left for Iran illegally with a smuggler at the age of 20 in 2001 to find work and earn a living for his family of 12 people. The hardships of a previous migration with his family to Pakistan and the lack of employment opportunities in Afghanistan drove him to go to Iran on his own. "When we came back from Pakistan, we had no house or belongings left in Afghanistan. At first we lived in tents, slowly setting up a structure for a house to have enough shelter for 12 people. I worked a little at that time, mostly temporary daily jobs in the construction sector, but nothing permanent. The income my brother and I generated was barely enough to feed the family. I looked for jobs as much as possible in Afghanistan but did not find any stable source of income."

The lack of credit and cash forced him to opt for an irregular migration, the advantage of a smuggler being the payment upon successful arrival in Iran. "I did not have the cash to be able to afford a legal entry into Iran. The smuggler could be paid upon arrival, which provided me with an incentive to go to Iran since I knew I would be able to pay back my debts within a few months of working in Iran." Their itinerary took them from Badakhshan to Zahedan through the Pakistani border of Band Bolo within 15 days. "We spent nights in the mountains mostly, often waiting for the situation on the road to be secure. There was a constant fear of the police, of arrest, theft and even shootings and killings."

The smuggler kept him in Shiraz, releasing him when his friends lent him the full amount. "I had agreed to pay the smuggler 170,000 toman. He provided us with transportation, shelter and food along the way." His friends took him to Qazni and arranged for him to start working. With the availability of jobs and higher salaries in Iran, he was able to repay his debts after just two months of work. He saw his wage increase tenfold by changing sectors of activity while in Iran, from 30,000 toman a month as a

gardener to 300,000 toman a month as a night guard in the construction sector. His living conditions also improved. Having access to this income, he decided to stay in longer originally planned, with a total of 7 years instead of the initial three.

He learned marketable skills in gardening but not in the construction sector where he worked as a night guard. He spent 40% of his wage and sent the rest, 60%, to his family. "I was paid on a monthly basis and housing was free of charge since I had been given a room in the building where I worked. I worked 7 days a week, from 1am to 5pm. Overall, I spent 120,000 toman per month on food and transportation and saved the rest, 180,000 toman, every month to send back to my family in Afghanistan. I also sent money to my younger brother who attended religious school."

Life was difficult in Iran because of his irregular status and of the poor behavior of Iranian workers who saw their jobs threatened by the influx of Afghan workers. "The most difficult aspect of my life in Iran was being far from home and my family. I lived with the constant fear that comes with being a migrant with irregular status in Iran. Employers were always good to me but other Iranian workers, who were competing for the same jobs, blamed us Afghan workers for taking away what was theirs. I was often beaten up and insulted by them, on the street or at work."

He was arrested on the street then taken to a police station and to the Sang Sefid detention center in Khorassan, where money can buy everything, from food, to water and release from custody. He arrived with no money, in the same clothes as he was arrested in, as he had not been able to return home or to his employer to collect his belongings and wage. "I spent 8 days at Sang Sefid with about 1,300 people living and sleeping in the same place. I did not receive any food or water, except for times when I was able to pay for it. We were not even allowed to go to the bathroom or wash ourselves. I had 7,000 toman stolen from me by the authorities and I suffered from verbal abuse, in the form of insults and other dirty comments."

"On the day of my deportation, there were 4 buses traveling together. 80% of the people on board were irregular migrants, the rest were families. Two people died on the way due to illness for which they received no treatment at the detention center and for which they were not allowed to see any doctors." The police charged him 5,500 toman to pay for his transportation to Islam Qala. On the way from the detention center to the border, they were told that a meal was being offered to them by the United Nations at a restaurant in Taybod. Once the meal was over, they were asked to pay 2,000 toman each. Those, like him, who did not have money were beaten up until others lent them the money. Out of 35 people, there were only 5 who had the money to pay for the rest.

Upon arrival at the border, his most immediate needs were for transportation and food. He joined a car of deportees to the city of Herat. He still has 1,300,000 toman of wages in Iran, equivalent to \$1,400, which he is waiting for his employer to send to him in Herat. In the meantime he is depending on the generosity and hospitality of friends and the owner of the hotel where he has now been staying for two weeks. He is accustomed to the mode of life and work prevalent in Iran and has had a difficult time finding ways to get out of his precarious situation in Afghanistan.

**Case study 11** *"I will most certainly go back to Iran. The same economic problems still exist in Afghanistan; I heard it from other deportees who have returned to Ghazni. Unemployment and inflation are everywhere in Afghanistan."*

This is a 27-year old man from Ghazni who has spent 9 years in Iran, counting two illegal entries, one legal entry with a valid visa and three deportations resulting from his irregular status during this timeframe. He first left in 1996, at the age of 15, then again in 2001 and the last time in February 2008. He was deported for the last time on April 27, 2008, on the morning of the interview, held at a hotel run by a man from Ghazni who accepted to give him shelter and food at no cost.

His motivation was economic, initially caused by internal domestic crises, his father being ill and no longer able to work. He had to stop attending school in the 8<sup>th</sup> grade to earn a living. External shocks and drought prevented him from continuing his agricultural work and his hopes for a stable source of income in Afghanistan. "I was 15 at the time when my uncle sat me down and told my brother and me that we had to go with him to Iran to find work."

As other migrants of the time, they went on their own to Quetta, Pakistan and found a smuggler to take them to Iran. The cost was equivalent to a month's worth of work in Iran. Their goal was to join their relatives in Esfahan, benefiting from an established network to find a job. After receiving proper training in a stone factory, he started earning 200,000 toman a month, sending 90% back to his family in Afghanistan in installments, every three months. "My family depended entirely on this revenue especially since my older brother got married in Iran and had to take care of his own family."

His life in Iran during those 4 years was limited in terms of movement and freedom. "I rarely used to leave my workplace and I avoided venturing out in the city." As is often the case with irregular migrants, he was arrested on a Friday during one of his rare outings in 2000. His brother was able to stay in Iran with enough savings to apply for an Amayesh card in 2001, granting him regular status in Iran.

Back in Afghanistan, he was unable to find a job. After 4 months of unemployment in Ghazni, he returned again to Iran, this time paying for a passport and a visa at a cost of \$240. This granted him a legal entry into Iran but once his visa expired, "I did not have the money to renew my visa, since I would have had to pay another 10,000 toman for just one extra month of validity."

His second stay in Iran, which lasted 5 years, allowed him to save the money needed to arrange for his wedding in Afghanistan. As with other Afghans interviewed in this study, economic migration is a way for young single males to finance their marriage. "I had approximately 5,000 USD in savings which I used in full to get married. My wife moved in with us and shortly after, we had a daughter who is now two years old. With the added pressure of an extended family, and still no stable source of income, I decided to return to Iran." This third trip, organized illegally through a smuggler, was arranged for February 2008.

He went back to his employer in Esfahan, benefiting from the professional relationships he had put in place on his previous stays in Iran. The task at hand was difficult for him, as he had to cut stones weighing between 150 and 180 kilos. "This is the type of work that no one wants to do because it is extremely tiring and painful. Afghans in Iran do it because we have no other choice and we desperately need the money." The working conditions were tough but his wage increased to 400,000 toman (\$432) a month, of which he sent 95% to his family.

The details of his third arrest and deportation shed light on the conditions under which Afghan deportees are detained and treated. "I was arrested at my work place by policemen in uniform. I was not allowed to get any money or to change my clothes. I was arrested and detained in the same work clothes that I had arriving in Afghanistan. At the detention center, we received one piece of bread per day, with some rice that no one could possibly eat. We had access to water, but there were no clean bathrooms that we could use. The covers were so dirty we could not use them at night. There is a mandatory doctor's fee of 1,000 toman. If you do not have the money to pay for it, you cannot leave the detention center." As many others, he was also stopped on the way back to the border where he was forced to pay 3,000 toman for a lunch that he had been told would be free.

He arrived in Afghanistan with no money left and his wage remaining in Iran. With all these difficulties, he will go back to Iran, the unemployment and inflation levels in Afghanistan not leaving him any other choice. For now he is benefiting from the hotel owner's generosity, as they originate from the same province, and a loan he got from him of 600 Afghani to return to Ghazni. "It is better for my family if I go back to Iran because they need the money: my family is getting bigger, with children, the elderly

are getting sick. We face new problems every day. I am not afraid. They say that they will arrest you if you come back again to Iran but it never happens, I have been deported three times already. I know a lot of people who get deported and leave immediately the next day to go back. We have no other choice but to try again."

**Case study 12** *"We all want to go back to Iran, but we cannot pay for the passport and visa costs. I cannot use the skills I learned in Iran here because there are no opportunities here."*

This is the story of a 22-year old man who left with his family to Mashhad, Iran at the age of 15. He lived in Iran for 7 years before being deported in January 2008. Before their migration, his father did not earn enough as a street salesman selling ice cream to support his family of 9 who then lived in Herat. His daily income never exceeded 200 Afghanis, which was not enough to pay the rent alone. The men of the family decided to pay for two passports and religious visas valid for one month. Once in Iran they renewed these visas for another two months. With their passports in hand, they went to Mashhad where they had relatives.

It was decided that they would all leave and join her brother in law's family in Mashhad. As in other migrant cases, the network of relatives is an incentive for migration as it facilitates the transition to a new life.

When he started working, he moved to his workplace, where he lived for five years, happy with his living situation and only complaining about the difficult nature of his work. He earned 350,000 toman then gradually reached 600,000 toman a month mainly due to overtime. It was hard work but it allowed him to increase his wage substantially and learn a new skill as a factory worker. As in stories heard from other Afghan workers in Iran, they often have to handle the most difficult and painful jobs. "The difficulty was the nature of the work that was draining and exhausting, because I had to work in high temperatures, near ovens, with chemicals, and heavy loads to carry."

He rarely went out, but on one occasion, when he was asked to accompany his cousin to his house, he was arrested by the police and taken to the Sefid Sang detention center. His situation was made easier when his family brought him some cash to last him during his deportation. But the situation he saw at the detention center showed him the fate of those with no money. "There were 5,000 people at the Sang Sefid detention center. Some had been there for 4-5 months. I had been lucky enough to call my brother in law from the car, on our way to the police station, to let him know what had happened. He brought me 300,000 toman to the detention center which I used up entirely."

His family was separated at the time because women were deported faster, as they were not required to stay at the detention center. He explains this by the very poor conditions. "There were bathrooms but they never cleaned them. There was nowhere for us to take a shower. Beatings and insults were common. There were a lot of sick people. I still remember one of them: a sick boy, under 18, who kept screaming and complaining. The police said to his face that they could not care less if he died. He was not allowed to see a doctor or to receive any kind of medication."

Since he had enough money, he paid for his transportation (3,000 toman) to the border after just 2 days. On the way, he also got stopped at Taybod at the restaurant where he was asked to pay 3,000 toman for a food that he had been told would be free. He paid for himself and a few other people who had no money on them.

He had enough upon arrival to get back home, with his family having arrived there a few days ahead of him. His main concern now is the lack of employment. He took on the same job his father did before exile: selling ice creams on the street. Their situation is on the whole better now than before exile mainly because of the accumulated savings, about \$1,000, that his father was able to bring back from Iran. He worries that he will not be able to make a life for himself in Afghanistan, because of the lack of

employment and of freedom, and that it will prevent him from getting married and having his own family. He feels that he is now of no service to himself or his family.

He intends to go back to Iran and make a life for himself. It has been a common theme noted by our interviewers to meet youngsters who spent key years of their life in Iran to have a difficult time readjusting to life in Afghanistan. With the hardships of being an irregular migrant in Iran, it has become their life, one they got used to very young and developed as young adults. The concept of independence and freedom is one they learned to live with in Iran and that they miss when they are back in Afghanistan, especially to a less comfortable and poorer lifestyle. "I got used to living in Iran, I have nothing to do here. Right now, I am no good to anyone."

**Case study 13** *"I kept a routine on all my trips to Iran: I would work 9 months out of the year in Iran and spend the 3 months of the winter with my family in Afghanistan."*

This is the case of a 40-year old man from Herat who has been travelling back and forth to Iran since 1989, counting multiple entries and two deportations, the last one being on April 28, 2008. As a common trend in many of the interviews conducted for this study, this man comes from a family of 10 where, because of an internal domestic crisis – his father being ill and unemployed, he had to leave school in the 5<sup>th</sup> grade and start working. Not being able to find employment in Afghanistan, not being able to pay the rent, he and his brother decided at the age of 20 to go to Iran.

In 1989, he paid 100,000 toman for a smuggler to take him to Kashan. It took him two months to repay his debts. He worked in a brick factory from 1am to 6pm, 18 hour days, for a daily wage of approximately 1,000 toman. He would send back 40% of his income back to Afghanistan on a 2 to 3 month basis. Because brick factories close during the winter, he decided to go back to Afghanistan voluntarily in 1990 to see his family. This trend started a routine over the next five years, by which he would travel back and forth between the two countries, spending 9 months out of the year working in Iran and 3 months with his family in Afghanistan.

In 2000 the political situation had changed. "The Khomeini period was over. I had to get a passport with a 3-month visa due to the fear of arrests. I started going there legally for about 3 years, heading back home every few months to renew my visa." At that time, he paid \$240 for a passport and \$30 for a 3-month visa for religious purposes. To make the back and forth easier, he moved to Mashhad to be closer to the border. The price of visas has increased today and he can no longer afford to pay the fees. "They request about 700,000 toman (\$756) now for visas, how can I pay for this?"

Not being to afford a legal entry into Iran, he returned to the illegal route in 2007. He continued working in brick factories. His daily wage in Iran reached 10,000 toman. Out of this 300,000 toman of monthly wage, he spent only 20,000 toman, sending the rest, about 280,000 toman or 93% of his wages, to his family in Afghanistan. His living situation had also changed. "Life had become more difficult than in the past in Iran, mainly because of inflation and the higher prices of gas, wheat and rice. I had no freedom of movement because of my irregular status. I also got sick while I was there and did not receive proper treatment."

After 18 months, he was arrested by the army and deported, spending 15 days at the Sang Sefid detention center. "We were tortured everyday with wires and pipes. We were given food once a day. I sold my personal belongings to be able to afford basic necessities. I could not use the bathroom, which was always too dirty. Whenever we went to the bathroom or the showers, the police would come behind to bother us." It cost him 2,000 toman to pay for his transportation to Islam Qala.

In 1990, he had paid the smuggler 100,000 toman. In 2007, the rate had increased to 200,000 toman. In 2008, the rate had doubled to 400,000 toman. The rates have increased as the danger and the restrictions on the Iranian side have increased. It still took him only 2 months to repay his debts. "Now

you can pay up to 800,000 toman (\$864) for a smuggler to take you through Herat. Nimroz is more dangerous but cheaper and you travel with smugglers from Zabol. It is more expensive to go through Herat although there are clear advantages. Although I am myself from Herat, I always go through Nimroz because it is cheaper.”

Since 2007, he has been deported twice. This has cost him money every time, as he has had to depend on smugglers more often over these past two years, spending less time in Iran to make up for the money spent. He has debts equivalent to \$150. For this reason he says that, “if I find a way, I will go back to Iran, no matter the dangers and risks involved. I have no other choice; I am too poor to live here with the current living costs. Oil was 500 Afghanis, now it has tripled to 1,500 Afghanis. Four kilos of wheat used to cost 3 Afghanis, now it’s 130 Afghanis.”

“I cannot find work here that matches my skills. There are no brick factories that would pay wages equivalent to what I earned in Iran. Apart from that, I have no other skills. If you work in Iran with the goal of learning a skill, then you have to work as a trainee first, which means you compromise on your wage level. If you are primarily motivated by economic reasons, you are forced to do the most difficult type of work, often unskilled labor, which no one else wants to do and which does not teach you any skills.”

**Case study 14** *“When I first arrived, I was pleased to see my family’s situation. Now it is worse because I have not been able to fulfill their needs. Last year it was better because I worked about 20 days a month but this New Year (since March 2008) has been more difficult for everyone I know: there is less work and life has become more costly in Afghanistan because of inflation.”*

A 35-year old man from Kabul who spent 4 years in Iran without his family was deported in mid-March 2007, and has since tried to settle back in Kabul’s Chargalae Wasirabad area, making efforts to re-integrate there. After a year and 2 months, he now believes he has no other choice than to go back to Iran.

In 2002, he had initially hoped to find work in Quetta, Pakistan where he lived for 6 months. Not being successful to establish himself there, he decided to go to Iran. He could not purchase a passport because he did not have the money to pay in advance for it. At the time, it cost about 120,000 toman for a passport and a visa. Since friends of his had told him about incidents happening to families who tried to illegally enter Iran, with stories of women and children being abducted on the way. He therefore decided to go to Iran alone, without his wife and son.

In Quetta, he met a smuggler who took him through Teftan, Zahedan and Kerman up to Tehran for 180,000 toman. At every stop, his group of 65 people was passed on to a different Baluch person responsible to take them along. It took them 3 days and night to arrive in Tehran, mostly traveling at night and sleeping during the day. “When I arrived in Tehran, the smuggler had me call my family for them to bring the total amount in cash. I then had to work for a year to be able to repay back my family.”

“I decided to go to Tehran because I had relatives and friends there who helped me find a job in just one week.” His relatives had migrated to Iran in 1999 because of economic necessity and were very happy about the move. They arranged for him to work for the same employer, in construction, in Tehran and Karaj. He always lived in the same building where he worked during the day. After 2 years he moved to Esfahan, where he also had relatives.

He learned to make cement, prepare bricks and later learned tile work and masonry. His daily wage increased accordingly, from 1,800 to 3,000 toman. He would spend 20% of his income and send the other 80% to his family on a 3 month basis. “I had no skills when I arrived in Iran. In Tehran, I

learned construction skills and in Esfahan factory work. In Esfahan, you find a lot of factories, less construction work. It just took me a month in Esfahan to learn from my relatives how to do the work, which consisted of weaving." He worked 12 hour days, spending the night at the same location, He never went out because of the fear of getting caught. Not once did he return to Afghanistan to see his family. This lifestyle put pressure on him psychologically. The machines and the constant noise in the factory were stressful, so after two years of doing this work in Esfahan, he decided to go back to Tehran. He got arrested on the road by the police.

"I could not even hope, while in Iran, to regularize my status. According to the law of Iran, if you have not entered the country legally, then the Ministry of Labor will not accept your request for papers, even if your employer tries to help you."

He was first taken to the Qom detention center then to Sang Sefid in Mashhad. "The difficulties of this experience were that we were treated like prisoners, we could not move, everything around us was dirty. The Qom detention center was better than Sang Sefid which was worse because it was very dirty, ridden with smells and sick people all around. It is like a factory that was set up for animals, an entire salon filled with people and no bathroom facility that works. Imagine the extent of it. Many people were sick but received no help or treatment. There was no doctor. The ones who were sick were deported like the rest of us, and if they died along the way, they were buried there. There was no kindness from the soldiers. No organization, UN or human rights agency came to visit this detention center to see our situation."

When asked through which border he entered Afghanistan, he explained that the bus did not go through paved roads but through plains and deserted areas to avoid being seen by any organization. "Since they were trying to deport more people, they had to be more subtle about it and not get caught by other authorities. Although we were an hour away from Islam Qala, the soldiers decided to take us a more discreet route and through an unofficial border. I am not sure exactly where we arrived but it took us 4 hours to walk to the city of Zaranj. I did not have any idea of the location of that entry point but I followed other Afghans who knew their way to Zaranj."

He had 400,000 toman when he got arrested in Iran. He spent about 50,000 during the arrest and deportation period for food and transportation, then 70,000 toman from Zaranj to Kabul. When he arrived, he says that he "noticed that my family's situation had improved as compared to before my migration. There was a difference in their clothes, as well as the furniture and carpets in the house. Food was never lacking either." Over this past year, he has been able to work on average 10 days out of the year, with an average income of 5,000 Afghanis. They pay 3,000 rent, and have had a second child, so it has been difficult for him to make ends meet, especially during the winter time.

"My goal is to go back to Iran alone again with a smuggler. I still do not have any money to get a passport and visa. The mandatory airline tickets cost 2,400 Afghanis alone." He says he will go back to Esfahan where salaries in factories are higher.

**Case study 15** *"I have been to Iran illegally 3 times since 1997. I returned once voluntarily and was deported twice, the last time being in September 2007. I tried to make a life for myself here, even asking my wife to start working as well. But if I cannot find a better job before the winter, I will go back to Iran again to work."*

Originally from Wardak province, this 30-year old man first left to Iran in 1997, then again in 2003 and 2005, spending overall 9 years in Iran. In 2002, at the age of 24, he had heard that the United Nations assisted Afghans who wanted to return to Afghanistan. "The Iranian authorities encouraged Afghans to go back, saying that there would be jobs for us there as well. I received a card from the UNHCR and a \$10 cash grant from Islam Qala to Kabul, in addition for the transportation to Islam Qala. With this card I was able to retrieve some non food items and some things that would help me establish

a proper shelter." With this in hand, he returned to Wardak and moved his family to Kabul in the hopes of a better situation. Not being able to find a work that would pay for their living expenses, he went back to Iran after just six months.

He took loans to pay for a passport (1,000 Afghanis) and a visa (\$30) to enter Iran legally. He went back to Tehran and to the same employer in the construction sector. He was able to get his previous wage of 3,000 toman a day, working 8 hours day, 7 days a week. He had incurred the paperwork expenses because he was hoping that the Ministry of Labour in Iran would grant him a work permit. His employer tried to help but they were asking 2,000,000 toman for a work permit for one person.

Two years later, he was arrested by the police and taken to Islam Qala. The police confiscated his passport and did not let him get his belongings or remaining wages (150,000 toman) from his employer. He arrived in Herat and decided to go back straight to Iran, this time illegally since his passport had been taken away from him. He paid 300,000 toman and passed through Quetta and Teftan to Iran. "I wanted to get back the money my old employer owed me and start a new job, which I did. I went back to Tehran but got a job as a guard for Iranians who owned a villa and some land in Damavand. I was paid 180,000 toman a month, paid no rent, and just had to cover my food expenses. The employers only visited once a week or once a month, the rest of the time was very easy for me as I just needed to keep an eye on the property. I sent all my wages to my family every three months."

During the month of Ramadan, he went to visit from friends in Tehran. He got arrested at a bus terminal and taken to Sang Sefid. He arrived at the Islam Qala border and headed straight to the "Kabul Hotel" in Herat, where he met connections of his from his town, Bissut, who lent him the money to go back to his family in Kabul.

"Back in Kabul, I worked in construction, infrequently and with a low wage, about 200 Afghanis a day. I asked my wife to start working. She weaves carpets at home with my 11-year old son." It takes about 3 months to weave one carpet, with an income of 1,600 Afghanis on average every month. This is still not enough to make ends meet. "If I cannot find a better job before the winter, I will go back to Iran. My family's situation was better when I lived there, especially given the increases in the cost of wheat and oil."

**Case study 16** *"I was a shopkeeper before I went to Iran. Now I have skills in construction as a mason so I can make more money but the main problem is finding a job. I only find work 20 days out of the month on average, which is not enough to pay for our rent and living expenses."*

This 40-year old man is the head of a household of 6 people, including 3 teenagers. He graduated from high school and started working as a shopkeeper in Kabul but because of security and mainly economic problems decided to leave his family and go to Iran alone to find work. He left in 2000, paying a smuggler 120,000 toman to reach Tehran through the border in Nimroz.

He went to Qazvin province where he had friends who had a job ready for him as soon as he arrived. He worked on a construction site, first doing unskilled work for a wage of 250,000 toman a month. Then he learned masonry for which he was paid 400,000 toman a month. He did not have to pay for rent as he was given a room by the employer which he shared with 10 other Afghans. Out of the 400,000 toman, he spent a quarter every month and sent 250,000 toman to his family every 2 to 3 months. His only problem during that time was being far from his family.

He lived for 7 years in Iran without coming back to Afghanistan once. He was planning to stay in Iran for 2 more years, working on a new building for his employer, who had guaranteed him a higher



wage of 500,000 toman for this new job. He was planning to stay until completion of this building, then return to Afghanistan, having saved enough money to be comfortable for a couple of years.

After March 2007, the police started arresting more people. They came to his work place and because he did not have any papers, they arrested him and took him to the Varamin detention center, deporting him after 6 days there. He was not allowed to get any of his belongings or money from his room. His employer brought him his remaining wage, 300,000 toman, to the detention center.

He was deported to Afghanistan through Islam Qala in April 2007. "I tried my best to make a life for myself here again. I have learned a very valuable skill in Iran, I am now a mason, no longer just a shopkeeper. When I work, I get paid 500 Afghanis a day, which would be good if I could work every day but I rarely work more than 20 days a month." He blames it on the lack of employment here in Afghanistan, with the situation getting worse this year as compared to last year. His savings have been spent and he now says that "our economic situation is worse than before my migration in 2000. It has become too expensive to live in Kabul and the security situation is also deteriorating." In Iran on the other hand, "the living situation was good, I could work every day of the week, earn enough money for myself and my family."

"The international community has been in Afghanistan for 6 years now but the situation is worse than before I left. We want to work but there are no factories or opportunities for work. I will be going back to Iran again after the summer, I have spoken to my employer and he has told me he would hire me again and pay me 500,000 toman a month."

#### FAMILY / HELP CENTER, ANSAR CAMP

**Case study 17** *"We were contacted by the Help office in Mashhad and told about opportunities to come back home in terms of employment and housing; so we decided to return to Afghanistan voluntarily and to take on vocational training courses."*

This family of 5, with three small children under 6 years of age left for Iran in March 2006. The head of the household, aged 30, worked as a daily worker in Zendejan district, Herat, but could not find work on a regular basis. They decided to go to Iran as a family to find better economic opportunities and have a better life. They paid 500,000 toman for a smuggler to take them to Mashhad. They travelled by car, from 5pm to 12am.

They lived in Mashhad for a year then moved to Kashan for their second year. They had been told of better jobs and higher salaries in Kashan in the construction sector. His monthly wage was of 240,000 toman. They lived in a rented room which they paid 60,000 toman a month, with electricity, water and gas. They could not save any money as they spent all the man's income.

They were contacted by the Help office in Mashhad and told about opportunities to come back home, so they decided to return voluntarily. They received a letter from Mashhad to authorize them to return to Afghanistan. "We missed home and wanted to come back. We met with the Help office and they explained to us what opportunities awaited us in Afghanistan. They explained that we could take vocational training courses and benefit from free housing and food for a period of six months. They paid for our transportation to the border and took us in charge as soon as we arrived on Afghan soil." The Help office pays for the transportation to point zero, then CHA is responsible for the transportation from point zero to the Ansar Camp, Herat.

They arrived in Afghanistan early April 2008. The husband and wife are both enrolled in vocational training courses. She studies tailoring, he studies mechanics. These courses last for 6 months, all other expenses are covered by Help (food, shelter, clothes and care for their children). After six

months they graduate in the hope of setting up their own business in their district. They are then given a tool kit and a certificate to help them towards the transition.

Their courses are scheduled every day from 8am to 12pm, then again from 1.30pm to 4pm. They go back to Ansar camp for the lunch break and then back at 5pm. There is a woman at the Help center in Ansar camp who takes care of children while the mothers are away. Soon, they will have recreational activities, theater, music set up for them as well. If the children are older, Help pays for their education and all related costs and enrolls them in schools.

The interview was carried out on a Friday when the mother was home with her three children; the father was away at the bazaar to buy groceries. Mother and children all were very content with their life back in Afghanistan and with this chance that was offered to them to set up a better life here, as they prefer living in their own country than in Iran. They all seemed hopeful and had a positive outlook on their future.

**Case study 18***"As the oldest brother in my family, I have to make this compromise and go to Iran so that my brothers can get married and so that I can support my family, especially now that I have a 3-month old daughter. My father won't let them go alone to Iran."*

The oldest son in his family, this 30 year-old man from Logar first left to Iran in April 2006, at the age of 28. "I lived in Logar as the oldest in a family of 10 people. I worked daily on the street, selling whatever I could find, and making on average 3,000 AFA. My father owned a little store on the street with monthly revenue of 6,000 AFA. Our expenses amounted to 10,000 AFA, so we barely made enough to support the entire family. It was my father's decision that I should go to Iran to find work and help the family financially. I was also engaged at that time but did not have the money to get married. This is one of the reasons that really convinced me to go to Iran: so that I could finally afford to get married."

He went from Logar to Quetta, Pakistan, where he agreed to pay a smuggler 180,000 toman. There were 80 of them traveling together with 2 Baluch. They got caught in Mirkawa after having walked 14 hours through the mountains. The smuggler came to the Tale Sia detention center, paid the transportation for all 80 people back to the border. As soon as they reached the Nimroz border, they decided to go back 5 days later. They went through Nimroz this time. The travel conditions were difficult as illustrated below.

"We traveled in a bus from Zahedan to Nasratabad. The bus did not have any chairs and we were hidden in the space reserved for luggage above the seats. We traveled like that for 10 nights, hiding and only traveling at night. During the day we would hide under bridges along the way. We weren't given any food, we only had some water. One person was starving so badly that he decided to give himself in to the police. The 80 people were singles like me ranging from 15 to 30 years of age. It was very hard on everyone and many people got sick, although none of them died."

On this second trip, they were again stopped by the police but the Baluch were able to bribe the soldier with 100,000 toman to let our bus go through. In the end, it cost this man 230,000 toman to reach Esfahan, a sum he was able to pay the smuggler back after 2 months of work. Acquaintances from Wardak found him a job in Esfahan where he worked for a daily wage of 7,000 toman, 8 hours per day, including Fridays. He spent 15% of his monthly wage and saved the rest to send back to his family in Afghanistan. He would wait to have at least 300,000 toman to send to them because the smuggler would take a commission of 7,000 toman for every 100,000 toman sent. "Other Afghans had a better situation than me. For example some worked in stone factories where they got paid 25,000 toman a day. I could not take the time to learn this craft as I was under the pressure to make quick money. Others in welding would get paid 40,000 toman a day."

He was arrested two weeks after the Persian New Year of 2007 (April). His friends had told him that the police did not arrest anyone during the holiday period so he decided to go visit his friends in the city. He was arrested on the street and taken to the Esfahan detention center where he spent 5 days. Most of the other single Afghan males deported on the same bus as him attempted to go back to Iran right away. He borrowed money from a hotel owner in Herat and made his way to Logar within two days.

"When I arrived, I told my family about my difficult experiences in Iran and at the detention center, and told them that I did not intend to go back. I could tell that they were better off and this trip at least allowed me to save enough money to get married." Not being able to find employment in Logar, he decided with his father to take their family to Kabul.

They now rent 3 rooms for ten people at a rate of 10,000 Afghanis a month. His father earns about 6,000 Afghanis and he himself works as a night guard for 5,500 Afghanis a month. His younger brothers tried to work on the streets where they can at best earn 100 Afghanis a day. "Street work has gotten harder because the police now will not allow just anyone to work on the streets; they require bribes up to 200 Afghanis a day which is more than the wage of a street worker. So most people like my brothers cannot pay these bribes and therefore cannot easily work in the streets. Not only does the government not help in creating jobs, but the police make it even harder for us to survive by our own means."

He says that his life now is better than before or during his exile, but that if he loses his job, he will have to return to Iran. Only this time he will do so legally, by borrowing as much money as needed to pay for a passport and a visa. He does not want to go through the difficult experience of travelling illegally any longer.

### **A FEW DAYS IN IRAN**

#### **UNACCOMPANIED MINOR - EVI**

***Case study 19*** "Two of the other underage minors travelling with us died during the trip because of the tough conditions. We had to leave their bodies behind."

He is a 14 year old boy who was found by our interviewer team working in a travellers' hotel in Herat, near the bus terminal where deportees arrive daily from Islam Qala. He is originally from Daikundi where they are 14 people in his family. He has never attended school. With his father having passed away and his brother being the sole breadwinner for a family of 14 people, he was asked to leave his house to find a job. "I started looking for jobs at the age of 13 in Daikundi without every finding anything. My brother talked to me one day and explained that if I wanted to help the family, I had to go find work somewhere else."

Accompanied by his brother, he first went to Ghazni in the hope of finding employment there. Realizing that other provinces in Afghanistan did not offer many opportunities for someone his age, his brother asked him to join his cousins in Qom, Iran. He met other Afghans in Ghazni who were planning to travel to Nimroz. His brother gave him 1,000 Afghanis to pay for the bus to Kandahar and Nimroz, as well as the hotel costs along the way. He waited 5 days in a hotel in Nimroz until a smuggler came and took his group of 92 people to Iran. The smuggler charged 450,000 toman per person, which included the cost of transportation and for one meal a day per person.

On the way, he experienced many fears, from theft to death, as he saw two other minors in the group die of hunger and thirst. They had to leave their bodies and continue their way. "The itinerary to Iran lasted 6 days by foot and 6 hours by car. There was not enough water or food for all of us. There was a constant danger of theft, thirst and of getting lost, especially since I did not know my way around." The smuggler stayed behind in Nimroz and gave responsibility for the group to a couple of Baluch men

who led the way in Iran. Every day, upon arrival to a new location, the group would be handed over to a new Baluch. These men often stole money and material belongings from them.

In Yazd, he found himself going for two days without any food or water and, abandoned by his group, he tried to hitchhike his way to Qom. He was arrested on the side of the road by the police, 6 days and nights after having left Afghanistan. At the Esfahan detention center, he spent a week begging for money from other Afghans until he was able to pay for the 11,000 toman for the transportation to the border. "Some people I met had spent 2 months at the detention center because they had no money to leave. Their family often lived in Iran but they were not even allowed to call them. We were all given only half a meal a day and some water. There was one bathroom for 1,000 people. Out of this group, about fifteen were minors like me, from 9 to 15 years of age. I was not allowed to call my relatives in Qom. I begged for money from other people at the detention center until I had enough to pay for my deportation trip."

He remembers many instances of beatings, insults, lack of hygiene and desperation at the detention center. During the interview, he seemed clearly shaken up by these events and could not get into more details. He crossed the border on a Friday, when there was no one to register him on the Afghan side at Islam Qala. He did not receive any assistance and accompanied other natives of Ghazni to Herat. He worked for 6 days at the Daikundi hotel, from 8am to 12am, paying off his food and shelter under pressure from the hotel owners. He is now waiting to see if his family can finance his trip back home, meanwhile continuing to work. After phone calls were made for him to stay at the Ansar camp, he accepted, before getting scared and walking away. It was apparent to the interviewer team that this boy was very shaken up by his experience.

**Case study 20** *"I am the oldest of the family since my father passed away last year. My uncle and mother decided that I had to take responsibility for the family and go to Iran to find work."*

An 11-year old boy from Daikundi who was deported on April 26, 2008 and was registered to receive assistance as an unaccompanied minor by the UNHCR and CHA at the Ansar Camp in Herat. He recounts his brief experience migrating to Iran illegally and being arrested on his way to his target destination of Bandar Abbas, on the Persian Gulf coast. The decision to leave to Iran was made by his family as a solution to an internal domestic crisis following the death of the breadwinner of the family, his father. "I am the oldest of the family since my father passed away last year. He was sick and when he died, there was no one else in my family to earn a living. We are 8 members in my family: my mother, one younger brother and five sisters. My maternal uncle helped us at first but he told my mother that he could no longer take care of us. Together, they decided that I had to take the responsibility for our family and go to Iran to find work. Since I am very young, my uncle accepted to come to Iran with me and settle me down with my cousins in Bandar Abbas." His goal was to live with his cousins and work as a night guard or trainee, to learn a skill not having ever worked before.

He left with his uncle, at the age of 11, to Nimroz where they found a smuggler that would take the boy to Bandar Abbas, a port city where his cousins live, having also migrated illegally a couple of years back. The travel conditions to Iran were exhausting and challenging for the boy who suffered from hunger and thirst, feeling the risk of death along the way. "There was no water or food on the way. In one field, if we had spent another give minutes without water, we would have died. We mostly walked at night which was difficult for me. It was very hot; we were tired, hungry and thirsty. We had to walk a lot and it was hard for me to keep up with the pace of the group, as the other 31 people were all adults. The Baluch in charge did not want to stop when I felt tired. I even injured my foot because my shoes were wearing down. I was in a lot of pain during the trip."

They were 32 people travelling in the same group with the smuggler but they got arrested in Shiraz by the Iranian police. He spent 2 days and nights at the police station without any food. Not

having any money of his own, he was forced to beg and ask money from the elders in the group. The conditions at the Sang Sefid detention center were also difficult for him, he complained about the lack of space, the lack of hygiene and the small amounts of food at every meal. "We received three meals a day but this consisted only of bread and rice, in very small quantities. We had to share one portion with other people and I would rarely get enough for myself. The quality of the food was so bad that it was almost impossible to eat. There was not even enough space for people to lie down and sleep; we were about 2,500 people in the detention center. We had two hours every day, from 10am to 12pm, when we were allowed to use the bathroom. There were also a lot of sick people, and I got sick too. Everyone was smoking around us which bothered me a lot."

He was asked to pay 1,350 toman for the transportation cost to Islam Qala. As many other deportees, he was stopped on the way to Islam Qala at a restaurant where he was told he could have a free lunch offered by the UN. The owners forced them to pay 2,000 toman for the food, which caused him to beg for more money. Upon arrival at the Dogharun-Islam Qala border, the police came on the bus and took the minors aside. The CHA office registered him and sent him to the Ansar Camp. His uncle was also among the deportees, but since he did not qualify as an EVI (extremely vulnerable individual), he could not be taken in charge by the CHA. He left the boy alone, without any indication of whether he would be coming back or not. He said he had to find a job or go back to Iran. "I really do not know where he is or whether he is planning to come back to get me. I have to find a way to return home on my own now." At the time of the interview, the CHA and UNHCR staffs were trying to locate the boy's family and find a solution to reunite them.