

Query response a-7218 of 27 April 2010

**Afghanistan: General return and re-integration prospects for Afghans who were born or have been living in Iran or Pakistan for extended periods of time**

This response was commissioned by the UNHCR Status Determination and Protection Information Section. Views expressed in the response are not necessarily those of UNHCR.

This response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to ACCORD within time constraints and in accordance with ACCORD's methodological standards and the *Common EU Guidelines for processing Country of Origin Information (COI)*.

This response is not, and does not purport to be, conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim to refugee status, asylum or other form of international protection.

Please read in full all documents referred to.

Non-English language information is comprehensively summarised in English. Original language quotations are provided for reference.

The Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit (AREU) published a report in July 2009 drawing on experiences of young Afghan returnees from Pakistan and Iran (including second-generation Afghans with no prior experience in Afghanistan). The report refers to returnees' prospects of accessing labour and education, economic aspects, as well as ways of being perceived by other Afghans, highlighting also the situation of women. The report observes that return and reintegration prospects are generally low for refugees with fewer social networks, lower economic status and lack of land outside Afghanistan:

"Returnees are usually considered less economically vulnerable than those who remained in Afghanistan throughout the conflict years, because of the education and skills that many were able to acquire, as well as the savings some were able to accrue. However, from the point of view of returnees (particularly those of the second generation), repatriation is often accompanied by a complex mix of stresses and emotional struggles, brought on by leaving the place they knew best. Returning may have meant that their experience of being a non citizen of the country, regardless of the degree of familiarity there, was simply repeated when they returned to their 'homeland'; their psychosocial vulnerability (the feeling of 'non-belonging,' marginality or helplessness) may have been the same or worse than in the place of refuge." (AREU, July 2009, p. 1-2)

"In general, it could be said that for those refugees with fewer social networks, lower economic status and lack of land remaining outside Afghanistan, the prospect of voluntary return and successful reintegration is low." (AREU, July 2009, p. 34)

### "7.3 The external environment—social acceptance or rejection. [...]

#### Social rejection of returnees

Around a quarter of returnee respondents, mostly from Iran but some from Pakistan, spoke of their experiences (or recounted those of their family or friends) of being socially ostracised by fellow Afghans on the basis of having returned from other countries. The respondents who spoke of these incidents were primarily single, educated and female. Returnee women are relatively easily identified by what they wear, and their appearance and behaviour can be at odds with local cultural expectations and social codes. These returnees are clearly 'outsiders' and make easy targets for harassment by their peers—both male and female. In particular, where second-generation refugees have been highly integrated into the Pakistani or Iranian way of life, and cannot do, or do not know, what is 'normal' for Afghans, they may be perceived with contempt as 'spoiled,' 'loafers' or 'not Afghan.' By and large, there appears to be a general negative attitude shown towards some returnees, who are seen by some of those who remained in Afghanistan to have abandoned their country, fled war and enjoyed a prosperous life in exile. One of the reasons linked to such experiences was fear related to competition for resources. The second generation, who are likely to be in a better socioeconomic position than those who remained, are sometimes seen as undesirable intruders by their country fellows whose 'territory' in education, work, property ownership and social status is threatened by the large-scale return of refugees. In addition, there seems to exist some stereotypical perceptions toward girls and women who came back to Afghanistan and were exposed to other worlds as tending to be 'freer' in the eyes of some 'remainees'. This is linked to the general perceptions of Afghans towards Pakistani and Iranian women. [...]

#### Unequal treatment in the Afghan context

[...] For second-generation refugees, encountering discrimination based on various sectarian lines (ethnic, religious and political) is felt even more intensely than by first-generation refugees or Afghans who had prior experience in Afghanistan and were more aware of this reality.

[...] For returned second-generation Afghan refugees looking for employment, especially those unfamiliar with the local environment, their lack of networks in their new environment is a formidable obstacle. Some familiarity with the job situation in the new context is critical, even when returnees have had the experience of self-employment or acquiring skills during exile. To be successfully self-employed, some kind of guarantee, connections with a partner, capital or a combination of these is needed, particularly for economically vulnerable groups with fewer connections. Notably, respondents who were relatively wealthy and had strong extended family networks did not mention serious concerns about employment.

Similarly, a sense of marginalisation caused by bribery and *wasita* (relations to powerful people) associated with accessing education and work opportunities was often raised as an issue by respondents in this study. Corruption in the context of school exams, university

entrance exams and scholarships was reported by educated respondents; they said that only those who had power and money could access more favourable opportunities. Given that many refugees found it difficult to secure satisfactory work during their time in Pakistan or Iran, this apparently—and unexpectedly—unequal situation in their homeland often left them feeling despondent. [...] If a returnee was a socially respectable person in the community (e.g. in a position of influence, religiously devout, or able to bring benefit to others), he or she was less likely to face harassment.” (AREU, July 2009, p. 41-42)

#### “7.4 Personal fulfilment

##### Conflict with Afghan values and social norms

[...] Women reported more profound emotional difficulties on return to Afghanistan because of the stricter social norms and expectations of their behaviour there, an outcome similar to other existing studies observed in the return decision-making. The new situations they faced were generally quite different from those they experienced in Pakistan and Iran. Women’s reduced mobility in Afghanistan—subject to issues of security, social norms and availability of facilities (e.g. unreliable public transportation)—exemplifies the unfavourable environment for many women upon return.” (AREU, July 2009, p. 44)

According to a senior adviser at the Afghan Ministry of Refugees and Repatriation (MoRR) quoted in a December 2009 report by the Integrated Regional Information Network (IRIN), deteriorating security has increasingly hindered refugees’ repatriation and inhibited the government’s ability to implement reintegration programmes for returnees. The director of the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) in Afghanistan stated that further obstacles are the lack of livelihood opportunities in Afghanistan, landlessness and low levels of basic services, especially education. Both UNHCR and MoRR stated that tens of thousands of returnee families had received land and assistance to build their houses over the past years, however, IRIN reports that some refugees referred to the land distribution scheme as being highly bureaucratic, corrupt and ineffective and that some have complained that the designated settlements were lacking basic services and located in remote areas with few or no jobs:

“‘Worsening security in Afghanistan has been the biggest challenge which has increasingly hindered refugees’ repatriation,’ Noor Mohammad Haidari, senior adviser at the Ministry of Refugees and Repatriation (MoRR), told IRIN. Insecurity in large swathes of the country has impeded reconstruction and development projects and has inhibited the government’s ability to implement reintegration programmes for returnees, he said. Other obstacles are the lack of livelihood opportunities in Afghanistan, landlessness and low levels of basic services, especially education, Charlotte Esther Olsen, director of the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) in Afghanistan, told IRIN. The inability of aid agencies to access many provinces and assist returnees is a contributory factor, aid workers say. Housing is another major challenge for many Afghan refugees.

[...] Both UNHCR and MoRR said tens of thousands of returnee families had received land and assistance to build their houses over the past few years. ‘We have distributed land plots to over 100,000 households in townships which are designated for returnees across the country,’ said Haidari of the MoRR. UNHCR said it had helped build 190,000 housing

units for returnees since 2002 and would assist 10,000 families to build their houses in 2010. However, some refugees said the land distribution scheme was highly bureaucratic, corrupt and ineffective.

Lack of basic services in the designated townships has also disappointed many returnees. Some have complained that the settlements were located in deserts and/or far away from urban centres, where there were few, if any, jobs." (IRIN, 29 December 2009)

A December 2009 report by the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC) mentions that according to the MoRR, Afghanistan is unable to accept further returnees from Iran or Pakistan, due to limited economic opportunities and the government's inability to provide basic services and infrastructure. The report states that assistance provided by UNHCR is limited to registered returnees:

"According to the Ministry of Refugees and Repatriation (MoRR), Afghanistan is unable to accept more returnees from Iran or Pakistan, for there are limited economic opportunities and the government is unable to provide basic services and infrastructure." (AIHRC, December 2009, p. 21)

"Many returnees who were able to socially reintegrate returned to Afghanistan in the first few years after the fall of Taliban regime. They were either trained or had acquired sufficient capital outside Afghanistan to ensure successful living after returning. The recently returned people, however, face more problems, given their miserable economic condition.<sup>30</sup> The continuous inflow of refugees has added to inadequate servicing of people in the country since Afghanistan is unable to provide adequate livelihood options for its existing population. According to the MoRR, Afghanistan lacks capacity to assist more returnees. Primitive and insufficient basic services and infrastructure exist only in urban centres and rarely in rural areas and homeless refugees are a concern, for they join the queue of the urban poor. To address this issue, the government of Afghanistan designed a land allocation scheme, which has itself become a problem due to its shortcomings and inadequate infrastructure. The Afghan government lacks capacity to help returnees and assistance offered by UNHCR is limited only to registered returnees who form a small category of all Afghans who are in migration or return or are deported. The HRFM data indicates that only 48.1% of returnees have been assisted during repatriation and 48.6% have repatriated on their own or have been deported, in which case no specific assistance (except little transportation allowance) has been rendered to them." (AIHRC, December 2009, p. 23)

The Norwegian Refugee Council's Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC) mentions in its profile on IDPs dated April 2010 that returnees and deportees from Pakistan or Iran face lack of access to land, jobs and basic social services, forcing them into secondary displacement, frequently to urban areas:

"Apart from civilians forced to flee the ongoing conflict or local disputes over resources or access to land, refugee returnees and deportees from Pakistan or Iran come back to a bleak situation. Lack of access to land, jobs and basic social services force some into secondary displacement, often to urban areas." (IDMC, 15 April 2010, p. 4-5)

