

Children on the Move

A Report on Children of Afghan Origin
Moving to Western Countries

Kerry Boland - February 2010

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List of Acronyms

| | |
|--------|---|
| AIHRC | Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission |
| CPAN | Child Protection Action Network |
| CRC | United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) |
| EU | European Union |
| IOM | International Organization for Migration |
| NGO | Non-governmental organization |
| TDH | Terre des Hommes |
| UAM | Unaccompanied Minor |
| UASC | Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children |
| UN | United Nations |
| UNICEF | United Nations Children's Fund |
| UNHCR | United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees |
| YICC | Youth Information Contact Centres |

Acknowledgements

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Executive Summary

There has been a steep increase in the number of separated and unaccompanied children of Afghan origin applying for asylum in Europe over the past two years. Since 2007 the number of unaccompanied children from Afghanistan arriving in Norway alone has increased almost 19 fold from 89 to 1719 by the end of 2009. The number of unaccompanied children of Afghan origin arriving annually in the UK has also risen sharply from 984 in 2007 to a projected 1,750 in 2009. In 2009, 69 percent of all unaccompanied children registered in Norway and 50 percent in the UK were from Afghanistan.

This study is a small snapshot of individual stories of children of Afghan origin on the move to western countries. The study focuses on the stories of 20 unaccompanied children of Afghan origin who have applied for asylum in Norway and the UK, improving our understanding of the circumstances of children on the move from Afghanistan to selected western countries. Within Afghanistan, five deported children and three families with a child on the move in a western country were also interviewed. Most of the respondents did not see a future for themselves in Afghanistan or neighbouring countries.

The limitations of this study are acknowledged. The deteriorating security situation in Afghanistan in the latter part of 2009 reduced the time available and access to different categories of children on the move¹. It is possible that the study sample represents the more skilled and well cared for children, those who have been registered with the relevant authorities in western countries and does not typify the majority of children on the move in host countries. The study findings present only a partial picture of the problem of children on the move, and point to the need to obtain more comprehensive information in order to respond to the protection needs of children on the move who are not registered with relevant authorities and have not sought asylum in western countries. The same applies in Afghanistan where further research is needed to respond to the needs of children who are deported or planning to become children on the move.

The aim of this study is to assist UNICEF in mapping an initial picture of the 'Children on the Move' population. Insights from the case studies provided here will assist in planning interventions that are in the best interests of children on the move and inform further research needs. Additional research and understanding is necessary to guide practical interventions that will improve child protection mechanisms for these children. Governments and UN agencies need to develop a better knowledge of the problem.

*I have taken the journey,
I have adapted to their culture,
there are a lot of facilities,
and they tell me to look forward -
I cannot go back to my village -
I am a different person now.*

There are strong push and pull factors at play, resulting in a significant increase in children of Afghan origin on the move to western countries. The situation in Afghanistan continues to be characterized as one of an intensifying armed conflict accompanied by serious and widespread targeted human rights violations. Children are reportedly being killed, exploited and ill-treated in ever-increasing numbers as the violence across the country worsens. The ongoing instability from the conflict has resulted in limited access to education and this is a serious issue for children and youth in the country. These children and their families do not see prospects of a secure future in Afghanistan with reasonable education and employment opportunities.

¹There are three broad categories of unaccompanied "children on the move": (a) children who migrate in search of opportunities but without prior authorization to enter the destination country; (b) children who are exploited in the context of migration, particularly through trafficking; and (c) children who flee dangerous situation and seek asylum. Children on the Move Draft Framework for Advocacy Considerations for UNICEF's Advocacy in Industrialised Countries in Favour of Unaccompanied Child Asylum-Seekers, Migrants and Victims of Trafficking, DRAFT 18-07-2008 p 1.

“If you have no problem stay in Afghanistan, if you really have problems then plan your journey very well. My message is - if you think it will be fun; it is not a good idea. They should know difficulty of the journey, there are many problems. There should be information about the dangers on radio and in the newspaper. I have some friends who go on the internet and they chat and hear music. They should tell Afghan boys in Afghanistan, Iran and Pakistan who want to make the journey... that there are many dangers and you could die.”

²Child Protection Action Networks (CPAN) is a national child protection mechanism operating in the provinces in Afghanistan to advocate for child rights and respond to child protection issues. It is led by the Department of Labour, Social Affairs, Martyrs and Disabled (DoLSAMD). <http://www.reliefweb.int/rw/rwb.nsf/db9005ID/LSGZ-7UUD9H?OpenDocument>

³Youth Information Contact Centres (YICC) operate in the provinces and work to empower young people to make informed decisions and actively participate in the decision-making process of their community. *ibid*

Key Recommendations

This study points to the following key recommendations:

Further research

There is a lot of anecdotal information about children on the move: who they are, how and why they move. A clearer picture is required to better understand, from a child rights perspective, the triggers that lead to the movement of these children, their circumstances in transit and destination countries and their future prospects. There is a dearth of factual information about children deported back to Afghanistan, their treatment when apprehended in host countries and circumstances in Afghanistan. This report should be used to identify questions for future research.

Governments and UN agencies need to generate additional knowledge to inform interventions to protect the children on the move.

There is a need for additional research into the following aspects of the children on the move phenomena:

- *Children in Afghanistan who are planning to be children on the move. Further analysis of these children's circumstances before migration and identification of the triggers that lead to the child's migration is required;*
- *Children on the move who are in transit countries. More analysis and critique needs to be done of governments who violate the rights of migrant children in transit, the impact on these children and how to prevent;*
- *Children on the move who are not registered with relevant authorities and have not sought asylum in western countries. These children have been identified as a particular group about which there is little knowledge and have significant protection needs. How are they being exploited and how should this be addressed;*
- *Children on the move who are deported. Further information and analysis of these children's circumstances before migration, protection risks during the journey and when they are deported back to Afghanistan is needed. Are there ways of supporting them in Afghanistan so that they do not return to the same circumstances of being children on the move.*

Interventions

This report identifies an urgent need for practical interventions in Afghanistan and along the migratory routes where these children congregate. Children and their families should be aware of the protection concerns that the child may face prior to making the journey. The journey is hazardous and children on the move are faced with life threatening situations. Any response to the growing number of children on the move must be realistic and guided by the principle of the best interests of the child. These interventions must be informed by additional research and revised as further information and understanding of children on the move is available. Despite the limitations of this study and the need for further research there is an immediate need to address these protection issues.

Before journey

- *In Afghanistan, there is a need for accurate and unbiased information to enable families and children who are contemplating the journey to make an informed decision. This information needs to alert them about the dangers of becoming a child on the move. Involvement of children and their families in the decision making process is a necessary precondition for effective interventions. The Child Protection Action Network (CPAN)² and Youth Information Contact Centres (YICCs)³ provide a local vehicle through which young people and their families could access information if it was available.*
- *The focus needs to be on the provinces that generate significant outflows of children on the move and the population centres located near major border crossings.*

“Families should know about the dangers before they send their boy on the journey - but who will tell them?”

During journey

- *During the journey an outreach program should be established in transport hubs where children on the move congregate along the major migratory routes, such as bus, train and truck stations.*
- *Indicators for protection of children on the move need to be identified and several strategies used to connect with these children.*
- *Messages to pass on to the children would include maintaining contact with family, how to deal with debt, avoid being exploited or trafficked, and options for return if they do not want to continue the journey.*
- *Outreach and information hubs should be used to provide impartial and practical information in a confidential setting, without promoting a particular course of action.*
- *Any response to the growing number of children on the move must be realistic and guided by child rights principles. Involvement of children and their families in the decision making process is a necessary precondition for effective interventions.*
- *Information provided to children and their families must be impartial and not promote a particular course of action. Strategies must ensure information and support is provided in a way that youth understand, to build a bridge between where the child is now and the choices they are faced with making when they become children on the move. The national actions undertaken in various European countries as part of the Council of Europe’s “Life Projects” initiative is a practice model that should be adopted in this regard. This approach should be taken at both the policy and practice levels.*
- *Several cross-cutting strategies must be considered to ensure greater understanding, information and action to support and protect children on the move. There must be co-operation between organizations at different ends of the children on the move chain.*

Emerging Profile of Children on the Move

The children interviewed for this study do not come from the poorest families. They are predominantly male, are being assessed by immigration authorities in destination countries to be older than their stated age, have experienced considerable hardship on the journey and have a strong desire for a better future. The children see their future life in a western country and are prepared to risk their health and safety to reach the destination country.

²The Council of Europe’s concept of life projects is set out in the Committee of Ministers Recommendation CM/Rec(2007)9 to member states on life projects for unaccompanied migrant minors. Life projects aim to develop the capacities of minors allowing them to acquire and strengthen the skills necessary to become independent, responsible and active in society. They are individual tools, based on a joint undertaking between the unaccompanied migrant minor and the competent authorities for a limited duration, and seek to promote the social integration of the child and his or her personal and cultural development, as well as to open access to housing, health, studies, vocational training and employment. Recommendation Rec(2007)9 adopted by the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe on 12 July 2007 and explanatory memorandum. Council of Europe, 2008.

Children interviewed in destination countries (UK and Norway) gave similar and in several cases identical accounts of their reasons for leaving Afghanistan - their father had been associated with the Taliban, was in jail, deceased or whereabouts unknown. The child was at risk of forcible recruitment by the Taliban or serious harm from government agents. Arrangements for their departure in several cases were made by their maternal uncle. The maternal uncle contacted an agent or smuggler, made the agreement and raised the funds. The child lived with his mother and siblings in the maternal uncle's house. The claim that the maternal uncle supported the family and arranged the child's journey contrasts with the customary practice, especially in Pashtun culture where typically it would be the paternal uncle taking over family responsibility in the absence of the father.

Before leaving Afghanistan the children said they had had little or no education. Their stated age of 14 to 17 years was subject to an age assessment test in the destination country. The age assessment test is based on a social work assessment in the UK and dental and medical examination in Norway. Age assessment measures can only assess an age range. An assessment that combines social and medical aspects may provide a more accurate result and should be in line with the Separated Children in Europe Program (SCEP) Statement of Good Practice.⁵

Children had contact with family or a link person during the journey to arrange payment to a smuggler. Since their arrival in the destination country most of the children had not been in contact with family. Three children were orphans. Several of the Hazara children had lived for varying periods of time in Iran before starting their journey to the west.

It was not clear from the interviews how long the journey had taken, some children referred to weeks, others to months and others more than a year. It is possible that these children have lived for extended periods in Iran, Pakistan, Greece and other countries en route to the destination country.

Children and families interviewed in Afghanistan presented a different picture. Children were living with their parents at time of departure, apart from one boy who had been working in a neighbouring country. The reason for their departure was to seek a better future, the general insecurity and lack of opportunity in Afghanistan.

The sample of children who had been deported was limited to four families involving seven children. It included a boy whose brother had died on the journey. In this case the mother made the arrangements and did not involve the father. In two cases the father had made the decision that the child would move to a western country, he made the necessary arrangements and raised the money. The children had agreed with the decision that they should go. In the other case, two children had made the decision and convinced their parents to agree. Three of these children were making plans to start the journey again, and the other three had decided to remain in Afghanistan.

An amount of between US\$7,000 and US\$20,000 was reportedly paid for the journey; it was not clear how the money was raised or when it is paid and it is likely that the actual amount was considerably less. Apart from selling some family land and the child earning some of the money to pay for the journey, most children did not know how the money was raised. The children were committed to repaying the debt incurred and financially supporting their family in Afghanistan. The most common routes were through Pakistan, Iran, Turkey, Greece, Italy, France to UK or Norway and from northern Afghanistan to Uzbekistan and Russia to Scandinavian countries.

Destination Country

The destination country was not always decided at time of departure. In half the cases the agreed destination before departure was a specific country: UK, Norway and Italy and in others it was identified as 'a western country' or 'Europe' or 'another country'. Some children sought advice during the journey from other children on the move about options for final destination. Several children referred to making contact with a smuggler at various destination points to arrange the journey, for example, from Greece to Italy and France to destination country and a family member would then arrange payment for that leg of the journey. Other children said that they arrived in Greece on a boat from Turkey and were met by a smuggler at the docks; the smuggler checked their name off a list and made arrangements for their forward journey. The smuggler was actively involved in making the decision about which destination country for many of these children.

Decision to Move

The decision to move was made by children and family members. In one third of the cases it was the child who initiated the decision to move. This corresponds with comments made members of the Child Protection Action Networks (CPAN) in the provinces - nowadays children talk amongst themselves and decide that they will go to the west. With the exception of one case, children participated and agreed with the decision that they would make the journey. In all cases the children had little or no information about the journey, where they would travel or how they would be cared for. Their own desire for a more secure future was an important motivation behind the decision to make the journey. Children said that unless that they were personally motivated to make this journey themselves, it would not be possible to do so.

Families and in particular, adolescent boys aged 16 to 17 years see moving to a western country as a means to a secure future. They do not see a future for themselves in Afghanistan or neighbouring countries. Children said that the lack of security and existing education and employment opportunities open to them in Afghanistan were limited or non-existent. Until these needs are met young people and their families will make the decision to have a child on the move to a western country.

Hardships Endured on the Journey

Most of the children openly discussed the journey while others did not want to recall the hardships. They experienced difficult and dangerous journeys to arrive in the destination country. They described their journey as hazardous and, in many cases, life-threatening. Most boys had experienced significant physical and emotional hardships - smugglers and some law enforcement agents were cruel and inhumane. Many children were detained without charge in countries such as Turkey and Greece. Some were subsequently deported to Afghanistan after their parents paid the flight cost. Alternatively, others were released and simply continued their journey. Iran routinely deports children back to Afghanistan over the border at Zaranj and Islam Qala. Children said that they did not disclose the fear and dangers they experienced to family and friends in Afghanistan. Children who have arrived in the western country are seen as successful through having made the journey. They would like to warn boys contemplating the journey to be aware of these dangers. However, they believe it is unlikely that children contemplating the journey would heed such warnings.

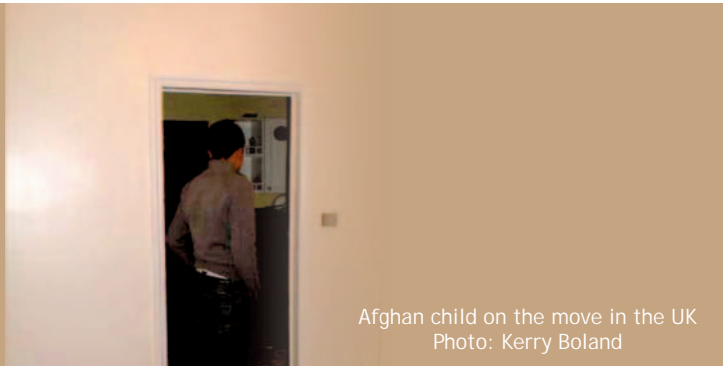
"It is all dangerous. Because we would not be allowed sleep during the night time we were very tired and kept falling over. I was always scared and frightened. The whole trip was dangerous, there was nothing in particular. [One of his companions] they just left him in the forest. Most probably he died; he was not able to keep pace with the others. We were supposed to run."

Adjusting to the New Environment

One of the consequences of their experience is that children on the move may not have trusted anyone, especially adults, while on the journey. This is an important consideration when workers in agencies are trying to establish rapport with these children.

Children expressed a strong desire to live in an environment where they feel secure and can plan their future. They want to learn and obtain employment. All the children interviewed were actively engaged in learning the language of the destination country and pursuing their education. They had adopted western dress and appeared to be enjoying the relative freedom of living in semi or independent accommodation. The uncertainty attached to their future - whether the host government will accept their stated age, extend their Temporary Leave application, and grant them asylum status - weighs heavily.

"You have no visa and live in a constant state of insecurity - this surrounds your status in this country".



Afghan child on the move in the UK
Photo: Kerry Boland

Part I: Introduction

The aim of this study is to assist the UNICEF Afghanistan Country Office in mapping an initial picture of children on the move from Afghanistan to western countries. There are two recognised groups of children on the move from Afghanistan: one group moves to neighbouring countries, such as Iran and Pakistan; the second group moves to western countries. This study focuses on the latter group - the movement of children to western countries from various regions of Afghanistan. Children may move or travel independently for reasons which may overlap or because their circumstances change.

This report provides a profile of the children on the move based on a small sample and identifies some of the protection issues. The report is divided into three sections, including this Introduction (Part I). Part I also contains an overview of the country situation in Afghanistan to set the broad context for understanding the environment that leads to children on the move, and categories of unaccompanied children on the move. Part II contains a map of administrative divisions and neighbouring countries through which children transit to other countries. Provinces where children on the move originate are identified. The routes travelled to destination countries are traced. The various triggers which led to the migration of these children are identified through case studies and information provided by agencies working with children and families in sending and in destination countries. Case studies of children on the move in destination countries provide another source of information on the triggers that lead them to leave their homes, their experiences during the journey and their circumstances upon arrival in the UK and Norway. Finally, Part III summarises key findings, offers a profile of the children and identifies some options for addressing the emerging protection issues.

“I would say to boys who are thinking of making the journey - I would tell them if you would really do not have to move, if your life is not in danger - don't do it - it is not worth it. Because if it would be up to me - I would say there is not so much big difference between where you live and these countries - people here also have problems. It's not because they only hear good things about the country, but they see that people here have money and can buy things.”



Afghan child deported from Iran at Zaranj border.
Photo: Kerry Boland

Part I Design and Methodology

Families who have a child on the move and deported children were interviewed in the country of origin - Afghanistan. Interviews with case study participants in Afghanistan were conducted during October 2009. The case study interviews were conducted in Kabul, Jalalabad and Mazar-i-Sharif - locations that had been identified as areas that generate children on the move. Security restrictions prevented access to several provinces including Ghazni, Wardak and Kunduz. Events surrounding the election, including the attack on the UN guesthouse in Kabul on 28 October 2009, resulted in no further access to field locations during the study period. Accordingly, interviews were not conducted in Herat and Islam Qala.

Interviews with case study participants in destination countries were conducted during November 2009 in the UK and Norway. The study was initially designed to include case studies from three western countries: the UK, Norway and Australia. The Federal Department of Immigration and Citizenship in Australia was responsive and supportive of this study. However, the State Department of Human Services in Victoria has delegated guardianship of the children identified as case study participants. This department indicated that the study would need prior approval from the Victorian Research Ethics Committee and this was not possible within the time limits.

To maintain confidentiality, the photographs used in this report were taken in the field, but do not include images that identify the children interviewed. Pseudonyms are used in place of children's names in the case studies. Efforts were made in each location to interview children from different gender, age and ethnic backgrounds. Interviews were only conducted with children who consented to be interviewed. Interviews were terminated if children became distressed or wanted to end the interview.

Caveats

The following 'Caveats' need to be appreciated when considering this study's findings and recommendations.

- Study was conceived on basis of doing an initial profile of some case studies of children on the move. This may lead to a more comprehensive study and inform the work of others such as UNHCR;
- Number of children interviewed in destination countries was based on time available and not representative of the large group of children on the move thus leaving out all those who are not registered and have not sought asylum;
- UK and Norway were chosen as destination countries to conduct the case studies on the basis that both countries had a large number of children on the move and were able to facilitate access to the children within the study period;
- Data collected in Afghanistan was limited to areas accessible to the author during the course of work on field assignments for UNICEF;
- Increased insecurity resulted in restrictions to field locations during the study period. This resulted in a reduced number of interviews with children who had been deported and families in Afghanistan who had a child on the move in a western country;
- The sample of group interviewed in the UK was chosen on the basis that East Croydon had the largest number of unaccompanied children of Afghan origin and staff was able to organise the interviews within the time period. This filter resulted in only children who were registered with the authorities and had applied for asylum being interviewed. Only children of Pashtun ethnicity were interviewed;
- The sample of group interviewed in Norway was chosen on the basis that Torshov Reception Centre housed only Afghan unaccompanied children. This filter resulted in both Hazara and Pashtun children being interviewed and respondents having only been in the destination country less than three weeks. Accordingly, their identification of protection issues in the receiving country was limited and reflections on the journey may have been limited;
- No female children on the move were located for purpose of the study;
- The selection of children in each location was based on availability of children and their interest in being interviewed. Neither government or agency staff made the interview choices;
- Only children who gave consent were interviewed.

"Their situation was bad on the journey but it only lasted for some months. In Afghanistan it lasts forever."

The range of interview questions included:

Sending country (Afghanistan) -

Families who have a child on the move

- Prompts related to the child's life before migration and the circumstances leading to his/her departure (on what information the child and his/her family based decision to become a child on the move);
- Questions related to child and family member involvement in decision for the child to migrate (to more fully understand who makes the decision and involvement of the child);
- Prompts related to circumstances that could have prevented the child becoming a child on the move;
- Prompts related to expectations and information available about the journey (what were the arrangements, how was the child cared for during the journey, did the child encounter protection risks?);
- Questions about destination and future (where is child living, what is his/her status, have child protection concerns been identified, is child in contact with family, and what are child's future plans?).

“When you take the boat from Turkey to Greece it's only a 50/50 chance that you will survive When you arrive in the destination country - you do not disclose to each other your experiences - you just tell a version - you must be strong. You only send back news about the new country and its riches - not the journey.”

Deported Children -

Children on the move who were deported

- Prompts related to the child's life before migration and the circumstances that led to his/her departure from the country of origin (to identify the triggers that precipitated the child's departure);
- Questions about acceptable conditions in country of origin (to identify if there are any conditions that would have prevented child from leaving country of origin);
- Prompts related to journey from sending country to the country where child was apprehended (to identify migratory route, and if child encountered any protection risks during journey /when apprehended);
- Prompts related to the child's experience if placed in immigration detention and what were the arrangements for returning child to country of origin (in order to more fully understand how procedures are implemented and their effect on the child. Were there protection risks?);
- Questions about child's current circumstances following deportation (to obtain information about how children are accepted back by family, if child has encountered any protection risks since return and how these have been resolved);
- Questions about child's future plans, if any. (What are the child's future plans, what circumstances would cause him/her to remain in country of origin or become a child on the move again?).

Destination Country

Children on the move in destination country

- Prompts related to the child's life before migration and the circumstances that led to his/her departure from country of origin (to identify the triggers that precipitated the child's departure);
- Questions about acceptable conditions in place of origin (are there any conditions that would have prevented the child from leaving his/her country and becoming a child on the move?);
- Prompts related to journey from sending to receiving country (what were the arrangements, how was the child cared for during the journey and did the child encounter protection risks?);
- Prompts related to the child's experience if placed in immigration detention in destination country (to understand more about how procedures are implemented, their effect on the child and protection risks);
- Questions about child's current circumstances (to obtain information about how and by whom children are cared for, has the child encountered protection risks in destination country and how have they been resolved?);
- Questions related to the child's own desires and sense of future (if able to remain in destination country, what are their plans for the future; if not able to remain, how do you feel about returning to country of origin?).

Part I: Country Situation in Afghanistan

The situation in Afghanistan is marked by political uncertainty, increased military activity and general insecurity which has heightened children's vulnerability to conflict related violence including in areas previously considered as relatively safe. The UNHCR Eligibility Guidelines for Assessing the International Protection Needs of Asylum-Seekers from Afghanistan released July 2009 describe the situation in Afghanistan as one of an intensifying armed conflict accompanied by serious and widespread targeted human rights violations.⁶ The following is an extract from that report:

The Government and its international allies, the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) and Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF -- US led forces serving under the banner "Operation Enduring Freedom"), are pitted against groups of insurgents including the Taliban, the Hezb-e Eslami and Al-Qaeda. A complex array of legal and illegal armed groups and organised criminal groups also play an important role in the conflict.

With 18,500 asylum applications submitted by Afghans in 2008, in industrialised countries, the number is at its highest since 2002 (29,400 claims) and is almost double the figure of the year before (10,000 claims). This made Afghanistan the fourth most significant source country of asylum-seekers in the industrialised world. The deteriorating security situation in Afghanistan is a significant factor in many cases. The top 15 destination countries of Afghan asylum-seekers in 2008 recorded an increase in numbers compared to 2007, with the highest numbers reported for the United Kingdom (3,700 claims), Turkey (2,600), Greece (2,300), and Italy (2,000). In South and South-East Asia, 1,617 Afghan asylum-seekers arrived in 2008 compared to 900 in 2007. They arrived almost exclusively in India, Malaysia, Indonesia and now Australia. Additionally, in Tajikistan, 2008 arrivals almost doubled over 2007, totalling 1,360 individuals.

In addition to those seeking international protection, there are large numbers of Afghans leaving the country due to socio-economic concerns. Such movements to and through Pakistan and Iran are decades long, and include seasonal migration and in some cases multiple trips in either direction. Currently, an average of 40,000 persons transit daily official crossing points with Pakistan in either direction with minimal if any formal processing. They include Afghans registered as refugees in Pakistan and persons seeking employment, medical care or engaging in family visits, as well as those in need of protection. In addition, it is thought that over 4,000 Afghans, without entry visas, cross each day into Iran, often with the assistance of smugglers.

"My message is that they (other Afghan boys) should come here, it is far better here; they cannot go to school there. In Afghanistan there are a lot of bombs and it is very dangerous. There are a few problems on the way, so I would suggest they take a better route. They will need to tolerate starvation on the journey."

Children are reportedly being killed, exploited and ill-treated in ever-increasing numbers in Afghanistan as the violence across the country worsens. Allegations of recruitment of children by armed groups, including those associated with the Taliban, have been received from all regions, particularly from the south, south-east and east. Recruitment is also reported to be prevalent in areas with high concentrations of returnees or IDPs, particularly in the south and south-eastern provinces. Recently, allegations were received that children living in the southern border areas were being approached and offered money to carry out activities on behalf of armed groups. A study conducted by the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) also documented cases of children being used by the Taliban to carry out suicide attacks. There are also concerns that due to inadequate age-verification procedures in its recruitment processes, children have been found in the ranks of the Afghan National Police.

Children have been captured, arrested and detained by Afghan law enforcement agencies and international military forces because of their alleged association with armed groups. There is evidence of children being ill-treated, detained for long periods of time by the National Directorate of Security and prevented access to legal assistance, in contravention of the provisions of the Afghan Juvenile Code and international standards on juvenile justice.

Unaccompanied and separated children represent one of the most vulnerable groups in Afghanistan, in terms of the potential risks, and the weakness of social and legal protection networks. Addressing issues such as trafficking has not improved, with UNHCR aware of cases of severe mistreatment and even torture of children

“Life in Afghanistan is not good. There is a two-fold danger if you get to leave. The first danger is on the way, the second is when you are here.

You have no visa and live in constant sense of insecurity this surrounds your status in this country.

They tell us to look forward. If you take my case, I have adapted myself to their culture, there are a lot of facilities, I could not dress this way and hair could not be like this. Either way they would kill us for being western or force us to a suicide bomber.”

“The time we got a rocket attack on our house I not only lost parents but I got head and hand injuries. I have no relatives in Afghanistan.”

⁷UNHCR Eligibility Guidelines for Assessing the International Protection Needs of SYLUM-Seekers from Afghanistan Ibid.

⁸AFGHANISTAN: 2009 Annual Report on the Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict in Afghanistan, United Nations Assistance Mission (UNAMA) [19 January 2010]

⁹Humanitarian Action Plan (HAP) 2010, Humanitarian Action Plan, United Nations p 6.

¹⁰Ibid p12.

¹¹Ibid p34.

Whatever progress has been achieved towards enforcement of children's rights is threatened by the worsening humanitarian situation, the intensifying armed conflict, and the reduction in access to humanitarian assistance. Vulnerable children include, but are not limited to, those at risk of forced recruitment (including use as suicide bombers), sexual violence, child labour in exploitative conditions, and trafficking. Such children are at risk of persecution as a particular social group. Forcible recruitment of children for the purposes of sexual exploitation is a form of gender-related violence, which may constitute persecution. Trafficked children can be particularly susceptible to serious reprisals by traffickers after their escape and/or upon return, as well as to a real possibility of being re-trafficked or of being subjected to severe family or community ostracism and/or severe discrimination. In the case of child soldiers, issues such as age, mental and emotional maturity, voluntariness of service, and treatment by other military personnel, all factor heavily in determining whether exclusion from refugee protection is appropriate.⁷

The 2009 annual report on the Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict in Afghanistan notes that women and children are victims of air strikes, house-raids, suicide and improvised explosive devices (IED) attacks. As well as being victims of air strikes, suicide attacks and roadside bombings, Afghan children have also been recruited and illegally detained by armed groups. In some situations children are being used as human shields, foot soldiers or even trained by the Taliban as suicide bombers. The detention and ill-treatment of minors allegedly associated with armed groups by pro-government military forces also remains a concern, according to the UNAMA Protection of Civilians Report.⁸

The Humanitarian Action Plan (HAP) 2010, reports a similar picture and notes that in addition to the alarming death toll and injuries, as well as the continued violations of international law, the armed conflict is taking an increasingly heavy toll on civilians by the destruction of infrastructure, loss of livelihood opportunities, and deterioration of access to basic services, often disproportionately affecting vulnerable individuals, such as women, children and internally displaced.⁹ Insurgents have also increasingly targeted persons perceived to be supportive of the government or associated with the international forces or community. Teachers, students, doctors, health workers, tribal elders, civilian government employees, and labourers involved in public-interest construction work have all been the target of intimidation.¹⁰

The ongoing instability from conflict suffered by Afghanistan over the past 30 years has severely restricted access to education for children and youth in the country. This has been more recently compounded by insecurity because of threats and attacks on schools, students and teachers causing a decrease in school attendance. According to UNDP, 65 percent of the population are under 25 years of age and life expectancy at birth is 43 years.¹¹

“If not really necessary don't do it - but if you have to leave - the trip is very dangerous, you will be starving and there is a chance you will die.”

Part I: Categories of Unaccompanied Children on the Move

The Children on the Move 'Draft Framework for Advocacy' identified three broad categories of unaccompanied children on the move: (a) children who migrate in search of opportunities but without prior authorisation to enter the destination country; (b) children who are exploited in the context of migration, particularly through trafficking; and (c) children who flee dangerous situations and seek asylum. However, these groupings are neither mutually exclusive, watertight categories (children may move or travel independently for reasons which overlap) nor definitive (children may move from one to another at different phases, e.g. a refused asylum-seeker who becomes an irregular migrant).¹²

The Separated Children in Europe Programme - Statement of Good Practice (SCEP) notes that although there is a broad range of categories of separated children most will fall under one of three main headings: those seeking asylum because of fear of persecution or the lack of protection due to human rights violations, armed conflict or disturbances in their own country; those who have been trafficked; and those who are migrants seeking relief from situations of poverty and deprivation and seeking economic and/or educational opportunities. The latter group includes those seeking family reunification.¹³

The children on the move phenomenon is complex:

- the commonalities among the three main groups of children on the move, as described above, being that they are unaccompanied, outside their country of origin, and beneficiaries of all Convention on the Rights of the Child rights in the destination country and entitled to all rights in the CRC; for example on the lines of the EU Council Resolution of 26 June 1997: “Unaccompanied minors are in a vulnerable situation requiring special safeguards and care” (Preamble) and “Irrespective of their legal status, unaccompanied minors should be entitled to the protection and basic care in accordance with the provisions of national law” (Art. 3.2), or
- the specificities of each group, as reflected in a large number of focused international and regional texts and referring inter alia to the children's legal or “irregular” status, existing specific rights for asylum-seekers and victims of trafficking, special and separate procedures already foreseen for these two groups, etc.¹⁵

In the first case, care must be taken to use correct terminology for children on the move as a whole. Referring to “refugees” or “migrants” to describe all, for example, is not only confusing but also reduces credibility and can obscure the rights that are to be applied correctly. Certain rights as well as protection needs specific to each group will often need to be acknowledged.

In the second case, it will be necessary to recognise that the boundaries between groups are not always well-defined and, in particular, that an individual child may move from one group to another at different moments or be in two groups simultaneously. These groups cannot be seen as mutually exclusive and there cannot be, and is, considerable overlap and movement within these categories. There is need to reference to “core rights” applicable to every child while he or she is in the country of destination/ outside his or her country of origin. Such “core rights” would include all the rights outlined in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.¹⁶

¹²Children on the Move Draft Framework for Advocacy. p 1 *ibid*

¹³Separated Children in Europe Programme - Statement of Good Practice, 4th edition 2009 Introduction, A2 Definition p 2.

¹⁵Children on the Move Draft Framework for Advocacy. p 2 *ibid*

¹⁶The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) brings together the children's human rights articulated in other international instruments. This Convention

Part I: The Emerging Picture

Information from government and non-government sources

Embassies, government ministries, domestic and international development organisations in Kabul and the provincial cities are in one way or the other concerned with the issue of children on the move from Afghanistan to western countries. Discussions with staff of these organisations and information on agency websites provided the following information.¹⁷

International Organisation for Migration (IOM) assists the reintegration of Afghans returning from Iran and Pakistan. With over four million Afghan refugees and irregular migrants living in Iran and Pakistan and the host governments expressing their intention for the return of Afghan nationals in the coming years, IOM works to strengthen the absorptive capacity of receiving communities and create viable livelihood options for their sustainable reintegration. The programme targets Afghans who have returned from Iran or Pakistan, as well as members of communities of Herat, Farah, Nimroz, Kunduz, Bamyán, Kabul and Nangarhar. IOM is working with the government to improve border control in the southern Nimroz province, which borders both Pakistan and Iran, and serves as a main gateway for illicit activities such as irregular migration and drug trafficking.¹⁸

“Agents don’t tell you that there are dangers on the way, once you start your journey you cannot go back. I have been here for the last 20 months I don’t have any visa and my age has not been accepted. My future is uncertain.”



AIHRC staff at Zaranj border.
Photo: Kerry Boland

Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC) was established in 2002 with a mandate to protect, promote, and monitor human rights of Afghan citizens in the country. The Commission receives and investigates reports of human rights violations and imparts human rights awareness to all segments of Afghan society, ranging from government officials to the general population and school children.¹⁹ It receives complaints especially at border crossings on the Iranian border from individuals and families about human rights abuses in relation to the dealings of smugglers or traffickers who arrange the movement of children to overseas countries. These complaints relate to false promises, exorbitant fees charged and inhumane conditions children are kept in during the journey.

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) 2010 Country Operations Profile reports that the management of migration has already superseded refugees and IDPs as the pre-eminent population movement challenge in Afghanistan, although the government has yet to adapt its policies accordingly. Achieving sustainable return and reintegration is becoming more challenging in the current context.²⁰

British Embassy staff in Kabul report an increasing number of “children on the move” of Afghan origin entering the UK. (See appendix 1 for UK Border Authority figures on unaccompanied asylum seeking children (UASC).

Norwegian Embassy staff in Kabul report an escalating number of “children on the move” from Afghanistan entering Norway. There has been a rapid increase and the number of new arrivals continues to rise. (See appendix 2 for Directorate of Immigration figures of unaccompanied asylum seeking children and ethnic breakdown of caseload in Norway.)

¹⁷Based on discussions with staff from these organizations in Kabul and provinces during period September to November 2009.

¹⁸IOM Afghanistan, Activities, Emergency and Post-Conflict Migration Management Website accessed 10 December 2009.

¹⁹UNHCR/Refworld/Afghanistan, Annual Report 2008 Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission.

²⁰UNHCR - Afghanistan 2010 UNHCR Country Operations Profile - Afghanistan Working environment, The context. www.unhcr.org

Information from provincial networks and programmes

Background

Field missions to UNICEF's Zonal Offices and interactions with implementing partners and members of the Child Protection Action Networks (CPAN) in the provinces provided opportunities to gather local information about children on the move. The field missions took place during September and October 2009.

Child Protection Action Networks have been established in 28 provinces where government authorities and organisations active in child rights meet to discuss prevention and response strategies to child protection concerns and case manage individual cases. A structured reporting format is used to record incidences of different types of child protection cases. In the reporting period of January to December 2009, 22 cases of child trafficking were reported. The reporting forms currently used by CPANs do not include a separate category that would identify children on the move from either sending country or deported children returned to Afghanistan. CPAN members and UNICEF national staff provided the following insights.

CPAN Kabul report that children on the move to western countries do not seek assistance from DOLSA.²¹ Information about these children is anecdotal.

"In Kabul only families who have a lot of money can send their children to a western country. It takes 10 to 15 years to save the money to send a child to a European country. It is usually an older son; a girl could not go unless she is escorted by an immediate family member. The smugglers charge a lot of money, from US\$7,000 to US\$15,000. Many of them have brokers based in Kabul. The broker or the smuggler arranges all the necessary papers. It is mainly Hazara and Pashtun families from Kabul and Logar, Ghazni, Kunduz, and Nangahar provinces that send a child to a western country"

National staff in UNICEF country and zonal offices said that the family and child make the decision. It would be rare for a child to be forced to go. It would only be in a very rare case that an orphan or someone whose father has died would go abroad. People who send a child to a western country know someone in those countries and there is either immediate or extended family. They report that there are different reasons for going but most commonly it is for education and employment. If a family can afford to pay US\$10,000 for movement to a western country they are not sending their child abroad for work. Children going to Gulf countries, Iran and Pakistan are going for employment. In Paktia, Ghazni and Ghor, some communities identify a male child with good employment prospects and collectively meet the cost of sending the child to Iran for work. Part of the smuggler's fee is to arrange for the child to send money back to the village.

From 2006 to 2009 one staff person said he was working with the World Food Program (WFP) doing food distribution in drought stricken areas. In the rural areas where he was working, WFP was not able to find labourers, as the boys were going to Iran from age fourteen. These boys work in Iran to send money back to their families. Some of these boys decide after living in a neighbouring country to move to the west. These boys travel together and are mostly encouraged by someone already living in the west.

"They say, let's leave this country...this man can take you to a western country. There are many routes, you can go to Iran, Pakistan and India and then to a western country, it costs lots of dollars"

²¹Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs, Martyrs and Disabled (MoLSAMD) is the focal Ministry of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan mandated to work on labour affairs; social protection and welfare and providing services for people with disability and families of Martyrs.

Families sending children to western countries are mainly from urban and more prosperous rural areas. Families in Paktia send their children to western countries and Hazaras who are based in Kabul send their children to western countries. There are different arrangements for sending the children abroad. The brokers give the options and cost to the family. Some families send the child to a western country and these children eventually return because the family does not want the child to become totally western. Other families intend for their child to permanently remain in the receiving country. If younger children are sent, then arrangements are made for someone to look after them on arrival. It would be rare for families to send a female child and she would need to be accompanied by an adult male family member. Hazaras are an organised community and do things on a well thought out plan. It is usually based on education: they believe that their level of education will progress them to eventually run businesses, and succeed in music and sport. The third reason for sending children to a western country is the belief that, whatever their circumstances in the receiving country, they will be better off.

Very few children (at the age of travelling) will have a birth certificate; it was not usual in the past. Most Afghans have Tazkera²² (ID) since Tazkera is mandatory for all Afghan nationals. Without it they will not be enrolled at school and will not be admitted to attend University. Those living in remote areas do not attend school and will not bother to get Tazkera unless they need it. The Tazkera indicates the year of birth, but it does not state day or month.

CPAN Jalalabad said there are many ways of going to the west; it depends on the agreement with the smuggler and how much you can pay and includes the following options:

- *Fly from Kabul to destination in Europe with a genuine/false passport escorted by a smuggler for entire journey;*
- *Fly part way and sea/road transport and smuggler escort for all or part of journey;*
- *Travel by bus/lorry/boat and foot with assistance of smuggler from country of origin to first destination point. Children from Jalalabad usually start the journey with a smuggler in Peshawar and Quetta. Thereafter children link with each other, decide next stage of journey and engage smuggler to take them to next destination.*

*“In this month of Ramadan we were expecting things in Afghanistan to get better.
But when you are crossing the path, alongside you there might be someone with a bomb.
There is no bright future here.
There are many rumours because everybody is trying to send one of their sons abroad.
Everywhere you go, if you go into the bazaar you see a deal being made.
The father will find a way, only the father, he will never ask the mother.
When someone reaches the destination country they will email and say,
‘Take this number but do not say you were introduced by me.’”*

The broker engages a smuggler on behalf of the family. Families do not trust the smugglers. The agreement is made with the broker, and is not put in writing. The agreement is usually for three attempts. If the child reaches the destination, is interrogated and then deported, the family still pay. If the child is deported during the journey to the final destination, the family do not pay for first two failed attempts. There were no brokers or travel agents operating during the Taliban period, so brokers established their businesses in Pakistan or other neighbouring countries. Nowadays you do not have to go to Kabul to engage a broker; they are in every city in Afghanistan.

²²Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, Afghanistan: Issuance of taskera (tazkira) inside or outside of Afghanistan; information contained in the document during the Taliban and post-Taliban period. AFG102680.E, available at: <http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/47d6543dc.html> Taskera (tazkira) is an identity document issued for Afghan nationals. It states year of birth, it does not indicate month or day of birth.

“There will be a flow on effect from the suicide attack in Kabul (28 October 2009). In the past we were able to identify who was on which side. Now the factional fighters are not clear.”

Traditionally, if a child is being sent by parents, then parents decide which country. If someone knows someone who has sent a child to a particular country, they will make a recommendation. The parents then talk to the child. Families choose a boy who is mature and capable. The boy is sent as part of a larger group. Nowadays things are changing - boys talk amongst themselves and decide they will go the west. They put pressure on the family to finance the journey. Families sell their land and borrow large sums of money. Many boys who make the journey to a western country have the experience of living in Pakistan. Many boys live with relatives and find work in Peshawar or Quetta before they go to Europe.

There are dangers. In one instance 26 children were locked inside a container, with no passports or other identification. Some of these children perished inside the container.

CPAN Mazar The eldest boy has to remain -- it is the culture for him to care for the family -- and only the second eldest boy can go abroad.

The security situation deteriorated in the lead up to the election and this will encourage many more boys to leave Afghanistan and make the journey to the west.

People tell boys to get a scholarship in the western country and then find a job. Boys are looking for jobs so they can send money to their families. Those who have capacity to study, combine study and work. Most are happy to be there and work.

There are direct flights from Kabul to Moscow or you can go by road to Uzbekistan. It takes one hour by road from Mazar-i-Sharif to Tashkent. You need a transit visa and you will have 12 hours to make arrangements with a smuggler and leave. If you take the train to Moscow you need a visa and a return ticket. From Moscow you can get the smuggler to take your child anywhere, to Scandinavian countries, even to Australia.

Families do not send their children unless they are at least 14-17 years of age. During the Russian occupation, Afghan children as young as 12 years of age were sent to orphanages in Russia. They received education and food but when they returned many of them had psychological problems. Therefore, families do not send young boys abroad.

There is an agreement between the smuggler and the family; it costs between US\$10,000 and US\$20,000 and you get three goes. If you are not successful after the third attempt then you have to pay a second amount. The smuggler never takes just one child; he takes many children, maybe around ten at a time.

Terre des Hommes (tdh) Torkham border program on eastern border with Pakistan. There are many circumstances and ways for a child to move to a western country. Children ask to go and work in a neighbouring country to pay for the journey. Even if the child does not want to go, the parents will motivate the child. There are some children who have parents or relatives in Pakistan. They tell these children to work in Pakistan with their relatives. That is the first step, and then they ask them to move to a western country where they can earn more money. Parents have in mind that the child will work and remit money to the family. Some children run away from home, they link with a broker in the bazaar. These children promise to work in the western country to pay off their debt. There are 52 illegal routes between Afghanistan and Pakistan in the Torkham border area.



Torkham border crossing.
Photo: Kerry Boland

Part II: Afghanistan - Provinces and Neighboring Countries



Notes

Provinces that generate children on the move are Nangarhar, Kabul, Balkh, Ghazni, Herat and Wardak.

Part II: Routes travelled to UK

Routes travelled to UK based on information provided from interviews with children



Route 1

Afghanistan – Iran – Turkey – Greece – Italy – France - UK

Route 2

Afghanistan – Pakistan – Iran – Turkey – Greece – Italy – France - UK

Note

**Children often move between Afghanistan /Pakistan and Afghan/Iran before journey to the west*

**There are two main crossings on the Afghanistan and Iran border – Islam Qala and Zaranj.*

**The main border crossing on the Afghanistan/Pakistan border is Torkham. There are reported to be 52 routes used by smugglers in this area.*

Part II: Routes travelled to Norway

Routes travelled to Norway based on information provided from interviews with children



Route 1
Afghanistan - Iran - Turkey - Greece - Italy - France - Belgium - Denmark - Sweden - Norway

Route 2
Afghanistan - Iran - Turkey - Greece - Italy - France - Belgium - Germany - Netherlands - Norway

Route 3
Afghanistan - Uzbekistan - Russia - Sweden - Norway

Route 4
Afghanistan - Kazakhstan - Russia - Ukraine - Hungary - Austria - Germany - Denmark - Sweden - Norway

Note

*Children often move between Afghanistan /Pakistan and Afghan/Iran before journey to the west

*There are two main crossings on the Afghanistan and Iran border - Islam Qala and Zaranj.

*The main border crossing on the Afghanistan/Pakistan border is Torkham. There are reported to be 52 routes used by smugglers in this area.

Part II: Case Studies

The case studies are based on transcripts of interviews to enable the children to speak for themselves. The sample comprised 20 unaccompanied asylum seeking children (UASCs) of Afghan origin in the UK and Norway. In Afghanistan four families were interviewed involving six children who had been deported and a child who died on the journey. Three families in Afghanistan with children on the move in western countries were interviewed. The interviews in Afghanistan were conducted in Kabul, Jalalabad and Mazar-i-Sharif.

Messages from the children

“Their situation was bad on the journey but it only lasted for some months.
In Afghanistan it lasts forever.”

“When you take the boat from Turkey to Greece it's only a 50/50 chance that you will survive
When you arrive in the destination country -
you do not disclose to each other your experiences -
you just tell a version - you must be strong.
You only send back news about the new country and its riches -
not the journey.”

“It is all dangerous.
Because we would not be allowed to sleep during the night time we were very tired
and kept falling over. I was always scared and frightened.
The whole trip was dangerous, there was nothing in particular.
[One of his companions] they just left him in the forest.
Most probably he died; he was not able to keep pace with the others.
We were supposed to run.”

“Families should know about the dangers before they send their boy on the journey -
but who will tell them?”

“Agents don't tell you that there are dangers on the way,
once you start your journey you cannot go back.
I have been here for the last 20 months I don't have any visa and my age has not been accepted.
My future is uncertain.”

“I travelled in the space between wheels under a lorry.
I could have fallen onto road and died.
My message to boys in Afghanistan -
is never come unless you have proper documents.”

“My message is that they (other Afghan boys) should come here,
it is far better here; they cannot go to school there.
In Afghanistan there are a lot of bombs and it is very dangerous.
There are a few problems on the way, so I would suggest they take a better route.
They will need to tolerate starvation on the journey.”

“If not really necessary don't do it - but if you have to leave - the trip is very dangerous,
you will be starving and there is a chance you will die.”

“If you have no problem stay in Afghanistan,
if you really have problems then plan your journey very well.
My message is - if you think it will be fun; it is not a good idea.
They should know difficulty of the journey, there are many problems.
There should be information about the dangers on radio and in the newspaper.
I have some friends who go on the internet and they chat and hear music.
They should tell Afghan boys in Afghanistan, Iran and Pakistan who want to make
the journey...that there are many dangers and you could die.”

“I would say to boys who are thinking of making the journey -
I would tell them if you would really do not have to move, if your life is not in danger -
don't do it - it is not worth it. Because if it would be up to me -
I would say there is not so much big difference between where you live and these countries -
people here also have problems.
It's not because they only hear good things about the country,
but they see that people here have money and can buy things.”

Case studies in Afghanistan (with deported children)

Ali - Hazara, Kabul

Destination Italy and deported from Turkey. Father made decision because no education or job prospects in Afghanistan. Child on return lives with family and plans to go again.

Facts: 17 year old boy, Hazara ethnicity, eldest son of 11 children. Family resides in Dashti Barch district, Kabul. His father aged 48 years was a policeman until he lost his job two years ago during the reorganisation of the police force. His father started saving to send his son abroad more than ten years ago. The decision to go abroad to a western country was made by his father. He and his mother participated in the decision and he chose Italy as a destination. He wanted to go because there are no good education or job prospects in Afghanistan. His father paid a smuggler in Kabul US\$10,000 to take his son to Italy.

The journey: His plan was to go to Italy because he had heard that Italy is accepting Afghan children as refugees. He has no relatives or friends in Italy but he has seen nice pictures. It does not matter if you have no relatives or friends in the country; it is good to live in a multicultural community. He will be educated and get a good job. He travelled from Kabul to Iran with a smuggler. He crossed into Iran at the Nimroz border. When he arrived in Turkey the smuggler put him and 24 other children in a room. The conditions were very bad, it was hot, dirty and there was very little food. The smuggler visited them every day for one month and then one night they were taken by bus to a river. Four small motor boats had been placed in a river and six children were allocated to each boat. The plan was to make the two hour journey by boat to Greece. The Turkish police were waiting for them on the beach. Six children ran and hid in the bushes but he and the other children were caught and put in jail. The Turkish police telephoned his father and told him to transfer US\$1,000 through Western Union bank to pay for his air fare back to Kabul; otherwise he would remain in prison. His father paid the money and he was deported back to Kabul one week ago.

Outcome for the child: He is living with his family and working as a casual labourer until he gets enough money to try again. He will try and go to Australia next time. He has heard of Afghan children drowning in the river between Indonesia and Australia. The smugglers are getting high dollars and using old boats. He will go to Australia to study, get a good job, send money to his family and then he will come back to Afghanistan.

His father said he paid a further US\$10,000 to a smuggler to take his younger son to Europe. His younger son was deported from Iran and he will also attempt the journey a second time.

Jafar - Hazara, Kabul

Kabul. Destination Netherlands and deported from Iran. Family and child made decision because he wants education and job prospects. Child on return lives with family and plans to go again.

Facts: 17 year old boy, Hazara ethnicity, second eldest son of six children. He completed his schooling. His family resides in Dashti Barch district, Kabul. His father works in a government office as a clerk. His father asked him to go abroad to a western country and he agreed. His mother and other family members agreed that he should go.

The journey: He went with one other boy, his cousin. His final destination was the Netherlands. His family has heard about other boys going to the Netherlands. His father agreed to pay a smuggler US\$7,000. He departed from Kabul one month ago. The smuggler took him and his cousin to Zaranj in Nimroz province; he stayed in a hotel until another smuggler took him to Tehran. He paid the smuggler US\$1,000 to take him across the border to Iran. He rented a room in a hotel and worked each day in a tailoring shop while he was waiting to go to Turkey. One day he was apprehended by the police and put in Safed Sang jail in Taibat province, Iran. After seven days he was put on a bus and sent to Herat.

Outcome for the child: He is living with his parents and working in a tailor shop in Kabul. His plan is to go to the Netherlands after he earns some money. If he is accepted by the Dutch government he can study and get a good job.

Wahdat Samsor – Pashtun, Kabul

Kabul. Destination UK, 14 year old brother killed at Nimroz border and other brother deported from Iran. Mother made decision for education and financial prospects. Surviving child on return lives with family and no plan to make journey again.

“The mother said ‘You are young, you are strong, look [at] your father, he is sick and has no job, and we have no house. Look at other boys who are in Europe, they have jobs and send money to their families for a house and car. You will live with your sister and after two or three years you can invite us and we will all have a good life together”

Facts: Two brothers, 14 year old and 16 year year old, Pashtun ethnicity from Kabul. Elder married sister lives in London and two younger brothers reside with parents in Kabul. The family went to Pakistan during the Taliban period and decided to come back to Afghanistan a year ago because situation in Pakistan was deteriorating. When they got back there was no job for the parents and the schooling was bad. The father suffered from poor health. The mother decided that the two eldest boys would go to the UK. An elder married daughter was already living there and sending money to the family. The mother used this money to pay the smuggler. They did not want to go. The younger boy was very unhappy about going. The mother said 'You are young, you are strong, look [at] your father, he is sick and has no job, and we have no house. Look at other boys who are in Europe, they have jobs and send money to their families for a house and car. You will live with your sister and after two or three years you can invite us and we will all have a good life together.' An aunt in Pakistan had sent her three sons to the west and they were accepted by Belgium. The mother of these boys thought that her sons could achieve the same, she arranged for her sons to go; she did not consult her husband. The relationship between the parents had deteriorated because of finances - the father was an educated man, he had a good job with the last government but now he had no job. The mother took the two boys back to Peshawar on the pretext that they would study there. The father did not know about the plan until he heard that his younger son had been killed. The daughter in the UK did not know that her brothers were coming. The mother did not consult any family member because they might have told her not to send the children.

The journey: The travel arrangements were made through a broker in Peshawar. There are many layers of negotiation - you speak to someone who has sent their child abroad and they put you in contact with someone who knows someone who knows a broker who deals with smugglers. She paid an agreed amount of money to a broker to take the children from Peshawar to Iran by bus, when they reached Iran they were to be taken to the Turkish border near a place called Black River. The two boys travelled with a group of ten adults and other children. They had no travel documents.

The group was stopped while trying to cross the border at Zaranj by a group of Baluch village people. The governor of Nimroz had announced that day, 'if you catch drug smugglers trying to cross the border just kill them.' The Baluch people suspected that the group was carrying drugs. The younger brother was fatally shot along with others in the group. His body was put in the hospital morgue in Zaranj. The older brother was released and travelled to Iran. He telephoned his mother and told her that his younger brother had been killed. The Iranian police deported him from Iran by bus to Herat.

Outcome for the children: Younger brother died on journey. Surviving child is living with his parents and working in Kabul. His mother came to the border with a passport and Iranian visa. She was escorted by her brother-in-law. When she arrived in Zaranj she found her younger son's body in the hospital morgue. She had the documentation done in Iran to enable her to bring the body back to Afghanistan. The boy's body was buried in Kabul. The mother says, 'I am sorry; I am the one who sent my son; and now he is dead.'

Farid and Jamal - Tajik, Mazar-i-Sharif

Destination western country, deported to Iran from Turkey and voluntary return to Afghanistan. Children made decision for economic reasons. Children on return live with family and no plans to go again.

Facts: Two boys, 16 and 17 year old, Tajik ethnicity from Mazar-I-Sharif decided to make their future in a western country. During the Taliban time they could not go to school so they totally forget what they had studied. After the Taliban they could go to school but they would fail to pass the entrance exam for university (Kancor). They had forgotten everything and the teaching level was low. They decided to move to a western country so they could make a good living. They encouraged and finally convinced their parents about the good life in Greece and Italy.

The journey: They left Mazar-I-Sharif in mid October and crossed into Iran at Zaranj border. A cousin guided them from Mazar-I-Sharif to Zaranj and then into Iran. They stayed in Mashhad in Iran where they each paid a smuggler US\$300 to take them from Iran to Turkey. They stayed in Izmit and found a smuggler to take them by boat to Greece for an amount exceeding US\$1,200 per person. They got caught by Turkish police and were deported to Iran. The police asked where they had come from and they said Iran. They made their own way back to Mazar-i-Sharif.

Outcome for the children: They have heard about a special cabinet in the ships - there is a button and they can throw away this cabinet if the ship is intercepted by police. Lots of Afghanis die this way on the boat from Turkey to Greece.

One boy said, 'I got to Turkey and spent two months but I did not have a calm day, every day there were police, my wage was low.' They were renting a room from a cousin who had been in Turkey for 10 yrs and he was trying to get them to Greece. They left Mazar-I-Sharif last year during Ramadan and returned in January. "We do not plan to go again, this dust you see in Afghanistan; we accept this dusty weather and dirty streams.' In Turkey we did not polish our shoes; here we dust our shoes."

When they first went to Turkey, they thought it was very beautiful but then saw that was only for the rich, they were small boys they soon lost their courage. The boys sell burkas in the bazaar in Mazar-I-Sharif and do not want to make the journey again. The shop was financed by the boys' fathers and an aunt.



Boy working in burka shop, bazaar in Mazar-i-Sharif.

Photo: Lizette Potgieter

"The smugglers were not honest people. We were taken through a very big forest, in the middle of the way there were big wells, the smugglers said you go first, we said 'you know the way you go first - the smugglers said you must go first'".

Case studies in Afghanistan (Families who have a child on the move)

Ahmad - Hazara. Kabul

Kabul family has younger brother in Norway. Child made decision with father's agreement to go for economic prospects. Child is now adult citizen and lives in Norway.

Facts: Hazara family in Kabul has a brother who went to Norway three years ago when he was 16 years old. Older brother operates a small IT shop in Kabul. The family lives in a rented house that they share with another family.

The younger brother went to Pakistan during the Taliban time. He saw that people in Pakistan lived in a more civilised society. He decided to go to Iran and saw that life there was better than Pakistan. This was the first stimulus. He spent one year in Iran and then another year in Dubai. Dubai was better than Pakistan and Iran but he was in contact with other boys who told him about Norway. He decided that there was no secure future in Afghanistan, it was a backward country and decided to go further away and go to Norway. He asked his father's permission and his father considered the need for him to earn money for the family. He did not get any information about Norway.

The journey: He travelled back to Afghanistan because it is not easy to depart from Dubai without a passport. His route from Afghanistan was through Iran, Turkey, Greece, Italy and France

He and his family knew that he may lose his life on the journey. Once he started the journey he had to keep going. His family paid the smuggler a big amount of money, approximately US\$8,000. The risk was worth it. There were a few guards and police at some borders. In some places there was no smuggler to help him. He had to hide under trucks and buses. There were many risks; he was often hungry, not being able to speak the languages and the fear of being caught when he moved from one destination to another.

When he first arrived in Norway he was taken by the police to a camp where asylum seekers are kept. He was held there for six months, he was taught some Norwegian, released and allowed to work. There is nothing that would have stopped him from making the journey. Normally when these children are leaving home, they have already experienced separation by living in a neighbouring country, they have had experience and they have contact with people in the destination country. They ask these people which way is safer.

Outcome for the child: He has Norwegian residence. He was not literate and repaired cars until he learnt the Norwegian language. He now works as a taxi driver. Last year he was able to travel legally to Pakistan to be married. He lives in Norway with his Afghan wife.

Qurban and Jan Ali - Hazara, Kabul

One son living in UK and second son living in Sweden. Children made decision with permission of parents to move for economic prospects. Children plan to remain in destination countries.

Facts: 17 and 16 year old brothers, Hazara ethnicity, eldest of seven children. Family previously lived in Ghazni and now reside in Kabul. They fled to Iran during the Taliban time. The eldest son lives and works for a Pakistani family in UK. The family paid the smuggler to take him to the UK so that he could earn money to send home. He has not sent any money to the family yet. He is well looked after by the Pakistan family. He does not have legal status in the UK.

The second son is living in Sweden. He was granted refugee status and is going to school. There is no future for their sons in Afghanistan. They must stay in the west so they can earn money for the family. The family lived in Iran and Pakistan during the Taliban time and now they live in a part of a rented house in Kabul. They cannot trust any government in Afghanistan or the UN. When they came back to Afghanistan UNHCR promised them a house and a job. The government does not offer any future. Their sons had already lived in Iran before they decided to go to a western country. Their sons made the decision to go to a western country and informed their parents. The parents gave their consent.

Outcome for the children: Their sons will remain in the west. There are many young boys on the way to Australia or going soon. They are waiting in Pakistan. There is no direct person in Afghanistan to take them to the western country. They go to Pakistan, Iran or India to make contact with the smuggler. The main causes of children moving to a western country are poverty and there is no future in Afghanistan. The government in Afghanistan is not able to provide employment and they have to leave to get a job. Children are not moving to western countries to get an education - they are going to earn money so that the family can survive. They earn money and send it to their family. The father will always try and keep his sons together - but they have to go to another country to support the family.

Jamal - Tajik, Mazar-i-Sharif

Living in Sweden. Father made decision to go for employment and financial prospects. Granted asylum and plans to remain in destination country.

Facts: 17 year old boy, Tajik ethnicity, second eldest son of six children. His father knew two other families who had sent their sons to Sweden. The father asked his son if he wanted to go to a western country and his son agreed. He wanted to send his son to a western country because he had heard from other families that it is possible to get a good job and earn lots of money.

The journey: The father engaged an agent who was recommended by a relative. He agreed to pay US\$12,000 for his son to travel to Sweden. The agreement provided that his son would be given three attempts to reach his destination. His son travelled from Mazar-i-sharif to Termez in Uzbekistan and stayed in a house with other boys until arrangements were to travel to Moscow. He travelled to Moscow by train. He stayed in Moscow for five months; the family does not know where he stayed or who looked after him. A smuggler arranged for him to travel to Denmark by bus and lorry. They do not know which countries he travelled through.

Outcome for the child: He reached Sweden in the middle of last year. He said that he was granted asylum. He sends money back to the family. A child has a very good future if he goes to a country in Europe. The family knows of many families who are planning to send one of their sons abroad.

Children in destination country - UK

Interviews in the UK and focus group discussion were conducted in the children's flats in the outer London suburb of East Croydon. The respondents were all unaccompanied asylum seeking children in the care of Croydon Local Authority. The sample comprised ten children of Pashtun ethnicity

Nesar - Pashtun, Nangarhar

Planned destination was "another country". Departed Afghanistan because government believes he is working for Taliban. Maternal uncle made decision.

Facts: 16 year old boy, Pashtun, eldest of three brothers. He left his village in Nangarhar almost a year ago. His village is about one hour by car from Jalalabad. His family was in the village when he left. His father was previously a farmer; he joined the Hezb-e-Islami and then the Taliban. He is not sure of father's whereabouts, when Americans took over Afghanistan, his father disappeared.

He started his journey direct from Afghanistan. His mother and maternal uncle took the decision to send him abroad because his life was in danger. The current government believed he was working for the Taliban. He did not want to leave; he wanted to stay with his family.

His mother and his uncle arranged with an agent for him to leave. He is not sure how they arranged the finances, his mother told him, 'You are going to another country and you must speak to the government - go to the home office.' He did not know which country he was going to, his mother did not tell him.

They were no preparations on his part. One day when he was visiting his sick brother in the hospital in Jalalabad, his uncle came to the hospital and took him to his house. His uncle told him that people from the government had destroyed his family house, his mother and younger brothers were forced to leave. People from the government administration had been looking for him. He does not know the reason.

The journey: He was given no information about the journey; his uncle said, 'This person is going to take you to another country.' He met the agent in Jalalabad city. He was just wearing his usual clothes, he had no warm clothes, no food, and there were other boys with him, three or four other boys. He did know them before hand, they couldn't talk. It was very dark. It was a very tough time. The agent didn't tell him anything, he was just put in a container. He was scared and it was dark. It took approximately five months.

"We would walk in forest during the night time. We had to follow the agent, we could not talk, we would not see the day light, and during the day we would be in the container, for the toilet we just had a dish. We were given some food once in four or five days. We had a bottle and if we found water during the night we would fill the bottle."

It was starvation; he still has problems with his stomach as a result of this time. "The agent would not speak to us. If we tried to speak to him he would beat us. We were put in different containers and the boys would change at each destination." Only the young people would be in the container, the agent did not travel with them.

The journey was all dangerous.

"Because we would not be allowed to sleep during the night time we were very tired and kept falling over. I was always scared and frightened. The whole trip was dangerous, there was nothing in particular. [One of his companions] they just left him in the forest. Most probably he died; he was not able to keep pace with the others. We were supposed to run."

He does not know which countries he travelled through. His whole journey was in containers or walking at night. He is not sure if he stayed in Calais before he arrived in the UK. The agent left him there and he went to police; the police fingerprinted him and told him he was in London, which was the first time he knew he was in London. He arrived in the cold weather. He had never been outside Nangarhar province before.

After police fingerprinted him they took him to the Home Office. A lawyer was arranged, he was taken to social services and then he was handed to a foster family. His foster parents were black English people, he spent just two months there. He was nervous, they could not communicate with him, the food was different, and they would try to speak to him. There were no other children, they had sofas and chairs.

During the day he would go the Refugee Council in Brixton for English lessons. He has a key worker who gives him a weekly allowance. He gets GB£50 a week for food and other things. You are put in school, if you arrive in the middle of term you cannot join a course until the next term. He spent two months in the foster home. The key worker visits him to arrange his appointments and see how he is living. The social worker at the council arranges his solicitor appointments. He lives in a two bedroom flat, he does the cooking for himself, he cannot get Afghan bread.

Future plan: His plan is to continue to go to school five days a week to learn English. He will get educated and then he would like do something for this country. He cannot go back to Afghanistan, if he can do something it will be for this country. This country is taking care of him.

He goes to the mosque. He has no contact with his mother or brothers. He doesn't know how to contact them. He would like to contact them, he told the social worker and she has spoken to the Red Cross, but since then he hasn't heard from them. No-one in his village has a phone. He has no contact in the UK with other people from Afghanistan. He just knows the other Afghan boys in East Croydon. The boy he shares a flat with is another Pahstun from Jalalabad.

At the weekend he sees his friends and goes to the bazaar to do shopping.

There is nothing that would make him go back to Afghanistan. He is not sure if any changes in the future are going to affect his decision. He would like to visit his family. "I am not sure if my mother knows I am here." He would like to become an engineer or a doctor and work in some business.

He has not been given proper status; he has discretionary leave to remain. He has applied for asylum, "They said I was lying and they refused me. They do not believe my age, they say I am older." He cannot remember how old they said he was. He wants to be permanent, he wants citizenship here and to be provided with documents which give him refugee status.

He will not go back to Afghanistan. If he went back dressed in western clothing, his family is going to beat him. They would not accept the picture on his black T-shirt, the chain around his neck or his haircut.

Atal - Pashtun, Kabul

Departed Afghanistan because police and 'family friends' wanted to harm him. Maternal uncle made decision and child agreed.

Facts: 17 year old boy, Pashtun ethnicity, eldest of three children. He was born in the Panjshir and went to live in Kabul when he was 10 years old. His father was a supporter of General Massoud during the Taliban time. The father could not get a job with this government. One of his father's friends killed an Afghan soldier. Police came to search his house and arrested him because he had contact with this man. His father was put in jail when he was in school. His maternal uncle said the police were looking for him. He told him not to go home. The boy lived in secret in another house and never went back to his house. The police wanted to question him but he does not know why. The police made a problem for his family, it was political. He had threats from his father's friends -- he does not know why. His father worked in a shop selling gold then he got a small car like a taxi. They lived in a rented house. He spoke with his mother and she said, 'You must leave.' His maternal uncle and his mother made the decision that he would leave Afghanistan. He was happy to leave because he had problems.

The journey: He left his country two years ago and went via Greece. His maternal uncle arranged an agent for him, and paid US\$2,000 to him. It was supposed to pay for the journey from Kabul to Iran. He went alone with the agent. There were no other boys. He went by bus to Herat and from Herat to Tehran by lorry. He spent two months in Tehran, and another agent took him to Turkey. US\$3,000 was paid to this agent. They walked through forest for two days and spent four days waiting in the forest. He travelled in a lorry to Istanbul. During this journey there were 10 other boys. He had no information about how he would travel or the conditions before he started the journey. The route from Iran to Turkey was very dangerous. He travelled from Turkey to Greece in a small ship.

***"There were 20 boys; if the motor had stopped we would have all drowned.
He had a very tough time in Greece, he spent one month in a park.
All the agents are connected. You say take me there, and you arrange
for the smuggler to get money from your house in Kabul."***

He does not know how his family got the money to pay for his journey. He spent three months in Greece. He was not accepted by Greece as a refugee, and was issued with a letter telling him to leave. The smuggler arranged for him to travel to Italy in a container. He spent up to 10 days in Italy but he does not remember where he travelled there. He travelled by bus to Paris, where he met a few Afghans who were legal but had no jobs or accommodation. Until that point he did not know he could go to the UK. It was his family's decision that he should go from Greece to Italy. He had contact with his mother at that time, but it was his decision to go to the UK. He travelled from Milan to Paris without a ticket. He spent four or five months in Paris, and made many friends while living in square Villemin in the 10th arrondissement. He met an old man who spoke Farsi. This man gave him information in a pamphlet about the UK. What they give you in the UK is very good. He thinks this man was from the French government. He said it is up to you but here is information about every country - Norway, Sweden, Italy, UK and France.

He did not apply for asylum status in France. When he read the rules for the UK he decided to go to that country. He got a train in Paris and travelled to Calais via Lille. He travelled without a ticket to Calais. He travelled inside the lorry that went on a ship to Dover. He boarded the lorry in a petrol station. He travelled in the space between the wheels under the lorry. He could have fallen onto the road and died. "My message to potential asylum seekers is, never come unless you have proper documents." He was scared the whole journey. When he got to Dover, he spoke with a taxi man and asked where London was. The taxi man said, "You have to pay first." He was with four guys, one other from Afghan, two from Pakistan. His journey to the UK took him 11 months.

Outcome for the child: Since his arrival in the UK, he has worked hard on his studies. He wants to improve his English and next year he will be in the business class. He has Temporary Leave to remain for three months and then he has to apply for an extension. His age is not accepted by the UK social workers: "They are wrong."

He doesn't have contact with his family. He does not have the phone number of his mother. He cannot remember the number he used when he was in Greece. He does not like mobiles; therefore he does not try to contact his family.

Everyone likes his own country but in this country he can make his future. Every day he sees on the news there is bombing, and there are many soldiers in Afghanistan. He would like to be a security officer in the UK.

Hewad - Pashtun, Kabul

Maternal uncle made decision because the Taliban wanted him to join. Destination country Europe.

Facts: 14 year old boy, Pashtun ethnicity. He comes from a village one hour's drive from Kabul. His father died six years ago and his older brother died two or three years ago. His father worked with the Taliban and took his older brother to join them. His father used to send money to his family. He is not sure what type of work his father or brother did for the Taliban. He doesn't know how his father earned an income before he joined the Taliban. His family went to live with his maternal uncle when his father died. After the death of his brother, his mother's uncle arranged for an agent to take him to a country in Europe because the Taliban wanted him to join. His uncle handed him over to the agent. He was not given any information, and he was just told the agent was going to take him.

The journey: They started the journey in a car, it took three hours and then he boarded a lorry. He travelled for one or two days in a lorry with other boys. He was told to stay in a room; there were six or eight other boys. They were asked to get in a lorry and travel again. When they arrived in the UK they were told to hand themselves over to the police. He is not sure about the countries he travelled through. There were red people and in some places they were very tall. He does not know how much money his uncle paid to the smuggler. He didn't travel that much by foot, most was inside containers on lorries.

"There is starvation - I have forgotten what it was like."

Outcome for the child: He has been in the UK almost 7 months. The British government has assessed that he is aged 16 years. He is not sure if things are going to change in Afghanistan. He has not been in contact with his family in Afghanistan. He does not have a contact number for his family. He does not send any money to Afghanistan. "They just give me £50 a week and I cannot save anything from that."

The guy he lives with has a lot of visitors and they cook in the kitchen and do not clean up.

"My message is that they (other Afghan boys) should come here, it is far better here; they cannot go to school there. In Afghanistan there are a lot of bombs and it is very dangerous. There are a few problems on the way, so I would suggest they take a better route. They will need to tolerate starvation on the journey."

Maiwand - Pashtun, Baghram

Organised by maternal uncle because he had problems with the Taliban and the government. Destination country "another country"

The facts: 14 year old boy Pashtun ethnicity, second son of three children. His mother and one elder brother and one younger sister remain in Afghanistan. His father died about five or six years ago. His father was working for the Taliban. He went to a madrassa for one year, it was in Baghram. He left Afghanistan eight months ago because he had problems with the Taliban and the government. He had a problem with the Taliban because they wanted him to carry a bomb and kill people. The government might have put him in prison because he went to the madrassa. His maternal uncle and mother decided that he should leave Afghanistan. His maternal uncle spoke to the agents. His uncle said, 'You must go to another country.'

The journey: He went from Kabul in a big lorry to Iran. It was very dark inside and there were other boys. He does not know how many were inside the truck. He doesn't know which places they travelled to in Iran. From Iran he travelled to Turkey, sometimes in a lorry and walking. He was scared. In the night they were walking very close together, maybe 50 or 60 boys. He does not know what happened on the way. 'My agent said, you are going to the UK, I cannot remember when he told me.' He crossed into the UK from Calais. There were two different agents. One arranged the plan with his uncle and the other did the transfer. He cannot recall anything else about the journey

Outcome for the child: He has discretionary leave to remain (TLR) in the UK. His age has been disputed by the UK authorities. He will not return to Afghanistan.

“I have no plan to go back to Afghanistan. If the war ended and things are okay then I don’t mind going there.”

“Agents don’t tell you that there are dangers on the way. Once you start your journey you cannot go back. I have been here for the last 20 months. I don’t have any visa and my age has not been accepted. My future is uncertain.”

Khaibar - Pashtun, Jalalabad

Organised by maternal uncle. Made decision because the Taliban wanted to recruit him. Destination country UK.

Facts: 17year old boy, Pashtun ethnicity, second eldest of four children. Family lives with his maternal uncle. His father was taken by the Americans shortly before he left Afghanistan. He left Afghanistan 20 months ago. He had to leave because there was a threat to his life. His father used to work for the Taliban; he used to a deliver things from one place to another for the Taliban. The Taliban came looking for him so his uncle sent him here. He participated in the decision, his mother agreed with his maternal uncle. The female is supposed to make decisions if there is no male. His uncle sold his father's land which was his land to pay the smuggler. He is not sure how much they paid; it was a lot of money. His family were farmers before his father worked for the Taliban. His uncle has a shop selling gas.

The journey: He went with an agent and started his travel from Jalalabad in a taxi. He crossed the border into Iran at Nimroz. He does not remember how many boys were with him in different cars. They did not know each other. From Iran he went by lorry. He is not sure where they took him.

He was provided with food and water most of the time. His uncle and mother told him, 'You are going to the UK because it is a secure place.' The agent recommended it. He did not know anyone in the UK. None of the boys on the journey had serious problems. He does not know which countries he travelled through. He did not travel with the same boys. In different countries he was separated and went with different groups.

From Jalalabad to Calais the journey took a total of nine months. During that time they stayed in rooms and sometimes spent months in a room -- it was just like a prison.

Outcome for the child: He has had no contact with family. He will send money to his family. "He is happy so he has no need to contact them." He is thinking of doing it sometime. He will get educated. He plays football with friends in a park they call Afghan Park; it is in Thornton Heath. "I have no plan to go back to Afghanistan. If the war ended and things are okay then I don't mind going there."

"Agents don't tell you that there are dangers on the way. Once you start your journey you cannot go back. I have been here for the last 20 months. I don't have any visa and my age has not been accepted. My future is uncertain."

Babur-shah - Pashtun

Maternal uncle made decision because Taliban wanted to kill him because his father worked for the government. Destination country UK.

Facts: 16 year old boy, Pashtun ethnicity, second eldest of six children. He left Afghanistan one year ago because there were many problems; he was in danger and the circumstances were not good. The Taliban killed his father. His father was a soldier with the government. The Taliban wanted to kill him because his father worked for the government. After his father died his family went to live with his maternal uncle. His maternal uncle and mother made the decision for him to go to a western country but he was also interested. His elder brother also left for a European country -- he is not sure where. His brother once mentioned the UK, so he wanted to go to the UK. He does not know the whereabouts of his elder brother.

The journey: He travelled from Kabul to the Nimroz border and into Iran. He spent four months in Iran. He was kept in a room with many other boys. Sometimes they did not receive any food. It was like a prison. He travelled by lorry to Turkey. It was very hot and two boys died because nobody would provide them with water. They travelled for 20 hours inside the container. They were put in a house in Istanbul, and for two months they did nothing. It was like a prison; the agent just bought food and water and left them.

"We were locked in the house, we were all sick; we had headaches and pains in the legs from the long walks"

They travelled to Greece by boat. There were 36 boys in a small boat. Six fell down and drowned in the river. The boat did not stop and try to rescue them. He spent two months in Greece; he was locked in a room with 10 other boys. The food was okay and the boys did not fight. It was like a prison, they were locked in the room. The agent just said, 'It will happen today or tomorrow' and 'did not let us out of the room'. Then one night they were put inside a truck and crossed the border into Italy. They travelled on the truck for three nights; there were eight boys inside the truck. It was very dark and they did not know where they were going. They spent three nights in Paris and travelled to Calais by train. There are camps made of shopping bags. A Christian lady gave us food; she was the caretaker of a church.

Outcome for child: He has not had any contact with his family or anyone in Afghanistan since he arrived in the UK. He does not have their phone number.

He is not going back. "I will go to college and look after myself." He is not yet sure what he will do. He has applied for asylum - he was told that 99.9% fail. His age has not been accepted by the authorities. He has a suggestion for UNICEF - teach English to boys in Afghanistan.

Nader - Pashtun, Nangarhar

Maternal uncle made decision because Taliban wanted to kill him because his father worked for the government. Child decided final destination when he arrived in Greece.

Facts: 16 year old boy, Pashtun ethnicity, second of three children. The Taliban wanted him to join so his maternal uncle arranged for him to go to another country. He wanted to go and his mother agreed with the decision. He does not know how much money his uncle paid to the agent. He made the decision to go to the UK when he was in Greece. He has been in the UK for eight months. A lot of Afghan boys are living with foster parents but these boys are seen as less than 16 years by the authorities. He is living in a flat with another boy. The Home Office thinks he is more than 16 years old but that is not true. He is suffering a lot because his future is uncertain. He does not know if he will get a visa to stay in the UK. He cannot go back to Afghanistan. He plays cricket, he is a batsman. He left Afghanistan because his life was in danger. He does not know the whereabouts of his father; he thinks he is working with the Taliban. He has two sisters. He does not know where they are living.

The journey: He does not want to talk about the journey to the UK. It was very bad.

Outcome for child: He has had no contact with his family since he left Afghanistan. He does not have a phone number for his family, since the agent told him not to carry any information. He has a key worker to help him. His key worker is going to take him to the supermarket and show him what food to buy. He said that I should buy more wholesome and cheaper food. He will have a cooking lesson next week. He did not know that he has to pay for his mobile phone. He does not have enough money. He has a lot of worry.

Khoshal Khan - Pashtun, Loghar

His paternal uncles made decision for him to leave because of a family feud. One brother died on the journey. Surviving child decided final destination when he arrived in Greece.

Facts: 17 year old boy, Pashtun ethnicity, eldest son of eleven children. His parents are deceased. His father used to work with Taliban and one day he did not come back. The boy was nine or ten at the time. The death of his father was in the papers. He has two uncles and they support his family. They are farmers and they grow wheat and these things. He had to leave Afghanistan because his grandfather and mother's uncle were killed in the feud. "A third party killed the killers and they said we did it, but actually we did not do it. It is a long story. So those people were after my family."

He is the eldest boy and so his uncles sent him and his younger brother away. His younger brother was 16 years old. They wanted to leave. The agent said that the UK was a good place.

The journey: He lost his brother on the journey.

"It was a forest and the agents are very bad people. They divided us into two groups, they separated my brother and me. I insisted that they allow my brother and me to be in the same group me but they did not and I have not seen him since."

He started his journey from Pul-i-Alam in a car with his brother, four other boys and an agent. They crossed into Iran, he is not sure of the name of the place but it was a big city. They travelled in buses and trucks and walked in the forest during the night. In Turkey they were kept in a room for 10 days. He got sick there, they were not allowed to go out. There were 10 to 15 boys locked in the room. They did not fight. **"The agent would bring us food and water, and told us not to speak. There was a toilet and somewhere to wash."** It was in a big city, he does not know the name. He is not familiar with that country. He was put in a container with the same 10 to 15 boys. They travelled a long way. It was like a day and a night inside the container. Then they walked in a forest and there was a river. They were divided into two groups and put in small boat to cross the river. An agent was waiting for them at the other side; it was a four hour journey. Nobody died in the water. **"It was very scary, there were very big waves."**

In Greece they were put into a container and they kept on travelling for many days and nights. They arrived at a place he thinks was Calais. One day they managed to cross to the UK inside a container on a lorry.

Outcome for the child: He has had no contact with family. He does not know the phone number; there are no phones in his village. He does not know if his family knows about his brother because he has had no contact.

He does not want to return to Afghanistan because he wants to stay here and complete his education. He wants to become a doctor, social worker or a key worker.

He has warnings for others who may make the journey. **"It is full of dangers and threats to life. You will be kept in containers, you will have to travel a lot of your feet, and there is no proper food. There will be 30 to 35 boys in the sea in one boat."**

His Discretionary Leave to Remain has expired and his asylum case has been refused. He applied for an extension; he is not sure what is going to happen to that application.

Mirwais - Pashtun, Kabul
Maternal uncle made decision because family feared for his safety after his older brother disappeared. Destination UK.

“Life in Afghanistan is not good. There is a two-fold danger if you get to leave. The first danger is on the way, the second is when you are here. You have no visa and live in a constant sense of insecurity - this surrounds your status in this country.

They tell us to look forward. If you take my case, I have adapted myself to their culture, there are a lot of facilities, I could not dress this way and my hair could not be like this. Either way they would kill us - for being western or force us to be a suicide bomber.”

Continued...

Facts: 15 year old boy, Pashtun ethnicity, second eldest son of five children. His father is dead and his older brother has disappeared. His mother and younger brother are living in Kabul with his maternal uncle. He has two older married sisters and one younger brother. One sister lives in Kabul and one lives in Jalalabad. His father died during the Taliban time. He was quite young and cannot remember much about his father. His brother went missing and his uncle feared for his safety. His uncle searched for his brother. The time passed but he did not turn up. His uncle decided that he should leave Afghanistan and go to UK. It was his uncle's decision. His uncle told him, "We don't know who is our enemy and I cannot protect you all the time." So then my mother and uncle told me that we must leave Afghanistan. It was his uncle's decision that he should go and his mother agreed.

The journey: The agent said he will be with me all the time. He does not know why the UK was selected, his uncle said he should go to the UK, and they sold their land and paid 900,000Afs (US\$18,000) to the agent. The agreement with the agent was that he would get good food like chicken and the agent would always travel with him. The agent said to his mother and uncle that the journey would take a maximum of 10 days and it would be proper and nice. It was altogether a different story.

He started his journey from Kabul on a bus and he travelled to Kandahar. So this meant that what the agent said was true - he would go on a bus. But in Kandahar the problems started. They were put in a van with more than 20 boys. Some boys were smoking hashish, and it was hot and very crowded. It was a very bad journey. They arrived in Spin Baldok after three hours. 50 boys were made to stay in a room. They had to sit with their legs crossed - if they stretched their legs they would hit another boy. They were only given boiled pulses and bad bread to eat. There were Hazaras in the room, the Hazaras wanted to go to Iran and the Pashtuns wanted to go to UK. They were asked to sit in a car with six boys in the back seat, three in the front and three in the boot. From Spin Baldak they travelled to Quetta and stayed at the Afghani Hotel. From Quetta they travelled on a big bus and arrived in Taftan on the Iran border at 3am. When they were getting off the bus this man would ask who was sent by Majid. Majid disappeared in Kandahar. In Kandahar he said, "I am just going to get some food." Then we called him from Spin Boldak and his phone was turned off. The first agent who did the agreement with the family was dressed like a respectable mullah. His family trusted this person. When he saw this agent for the first time he brought a box of grapes to the car so he thought this agent was very good. The agent changed at every destination.

None of the agents are good people. **"In Iran we were in a car, I needed to go to the toilet, he hit me and broke some of my teeth and I became unconscious."** More than 15 boys were put into a small jeep. They could not fit, but the agents made them all stand up. It was very suffocating and some boys fainted. They were taken to a deserted building and put in a room. There were spiders and scorpions. They killed a few but there were many. If he recollects those memories then he thinks he was crazy to have made the journey. They wanted to go the market to buy some food. They had money but as they got off the jeep there were 23 men with Kalashnikovs and they locked us in a room. When they asked for food they said there is no food in this place.

"I was lucky, I got into a container and went to the UK on my first try, and some take four or six months."

"At 3am we were forced to leave the bus station. We were caught by the police. They asked if we had passports. We said no, we are from Afghanistan, please help us - the police drove away."

Then we meet a very nice person who came into room, we asked him for food, he said he cannot bring food because there is none but he said he can boil potatoes. He gave three potatoes for equivalent of GB£100. He was not sure if this man was with the agents but he could not get into room without getting past the men guarding us with Kalashnikovs. The next morning the agent came and said they would be leaving that evening. The boys asked for food, he said there is none and became aggressive. One of the older boys became angry and said we will leave if you do not supply us with food. The agent said he had a pistol and if you create any problem I am going to kill you. The boy said it is better to die. The agent came back with three more men with Kalashnikovs. That boy was beaten in front of them to make an example. He lost consciousness and both his legs and arms were broken. The boy said, **"I don't mind what you charge me but send me back to Afghanistan."** A nice agent charged him a price and arranged for him to return to Afghanistan. He had some money with him and the agreement was that he would pay half the agreed price in advance and second inside the Afghan border.

They started the journey again and arrived at the Turkish border. There was a very big wall on the border. There was a hole in the wall and they were asked to go through the hole. There were police on both sides of the wall but they did not stop them. He does not know the name of the place.

On some boats there were drivers. There was a Muslim driver on his boat. On the other side of the sea there was a forest and we handed ourselves to the Greek police. The police provided us with very good food; they kept us in a camp for 12 days. The children were kept in a separate section, we were given toiletries. After 12 days we were given a ticket for Athens. We went on a ship like the Titanic and an agent came down to the port and asked for our name. If your name was on his list then he took you. I was taken by an agent with six other boys and stayed in his house for one week. We were put inside big boxes that were on a lorry, and the lorry boarded a ship. The agent was not with them in the boxes. The ship stopped in Italy and they were met by another agent, he gave them a train ticket to travel to Paris. They were caught by the police and sent back to the Italian border. He boarded a bus and hid in the toilet until the bus crossed into France. When they arrived in Paris it was night and they had no idea where to go. "At 3am we were forced to leave the bus station. We were caught by the police. They asked if we had passports. We said no, we are from Afghanistan, please help us - the police drove away." They stayed in Paris for three weeks. They made their way to Calais by train from Paris. It was dangerous trying to cross to the UK. "I was lucky, I got into a container and went to the UK on my first try, and some take four or six months."

Outcome for the child: He asked the British police for asylum. He was given Temporary Leave, now he has applied for an extension. Three months have passed. He is not sure of the outcome.

"Life in Afghanistan is not good. There is a two-fold danger if you get to leave. The first danger is on the way, the second is when you are here. You have no visa and live in a constant sense of insecurity - this surrounds your status in this country. They tell us to look forward. If you take my case, I have adapted myself to their culture, there are a lot of facilities, I could not dress this way and my hair could not be like this. Either way they would kill us - for being western or force us to be a suicide bomber."

Focus Group Discussion - UK

The following are comments made by a group of Afghan children of Pashtun ethnicity during a discussion about their reasons for departure and journey to the UK. The group comprised eight children and included three children who had participated in the individual case study interviews.

It was not possible to stay in Afghanistan because:

- *It is not safe and there is no future;*
- *You cannot get a good education or a good job;*
- *The Taliban force you to join them;*
- *It is a difficult situation in Afghanistan and it not possible to live there anymore;*
- *It is a difficult situation in Pakistan and it not possible to live there anymore;*
- *There are family feuds.*

There are dangers on the journey and many boys do not survive:

- *Tell the parents once you leave - say good bye forever;*
- *Your life is in danger when you put yourself in the hands of the smuggler;*
- *If you get sick on the journey they will leave you in the forest or kill you;*
- *If you can walk - join us or stay behind and die;*
- *Sometimes a husband, wife and children take the journey. The husband and wife are forced to leave a child in the forest;*
- *If you go on a boat, you may drown, from Turkey to Iran 36 boys were put into a small boat, six died when they fell into the water - the smuggler refused to stop and rescue them;*
- *The police can blow up the boat and you will drown;*
- *One boy paid a smuggler 70 Euro for some food and he was given one tomato and a cucumber. He was beaten with sticks when he protested.*



Afghan children looking at photos from Afghanistan, Torshov Reception Centre, Oslo.
Photo: Kerry Boland

Children in Destination country - Norway

Interviews in Norway were conducted in the Torshov Transittmottak Reception Centre, Oslo where newly arrived unaccompanied and separated children of Afghan origin are housed. The Centre is under the management of the Norwegian Directorate of Immigration. The sample comprised seven children of Hazara ethnicity and three children of Pashtun ethnicity

Yaqoub - Hazara, Ghazni
Living in Iran 10 years, forced back to Afghanistan and robbed. Mother (widow) made decision. Destination Norway.

“The smuggler knows how to get the money - they establish connections, they make you pre-arrange for some person they know will come up with the money. Then you or the smuggler just makes a phone call to the contact person and the smuggler will get the money”

Continued...

Facts: 15 year old boy, Hazara ethnicity, eldest son of four children. His family comes from Ghazni, Qarabagh district. He was living in Iran for 10 years and in 2007 his family was forced to return to Afghanistan. His mother, one younger brother and two sisters live in Iran. He has not seen his father since he moved from Afghanistan 10 years ago. When they returned to Afghanistan the Taliban said his family were not Afghani and robbed them and took all their money. They didn't want to move back to Afghanistan but the Iranian government forced them to return. He does not know if his father is still alive. He thinks the Taliban killed him. For the first two years they sent him money and clothes from Iran, and after two years the connection disappeared. The plan was that the smuggler would take his mother and children to Iran and his father would follow but that never happened. His family is now living back in Iran because when returned to Afghanistan they were treated as foreigners and robbed by Taliban. A man came to their house and asked for money. He hit the man on the head and that night escaped back to Iran. His family followed him back to Iran.

His mother decided that he should go to a country in Europe. He agreed with the decision and started the journey from Iran six months ago. He wanted to go to Australia because he heard that it is easy to find jobs and so on. His family decided he should go to Norway; he could get a get good job and maybe get money to buy some land in Afghanistan. They paid an agent US\$5,000. They sold their land in Afghanistan and his mother had some jewellery to pay for his journey. His family in Iran relies on his mother working as a servant in other people's homes.

The journey: He started his journey in Jada Sora where his family live in Iran. He got the phone number of an agent from a neighbour. He made the connection and was told to come to a place where he was picked up in a car and driven close to the Turkish border. When they got close to the border, the driver told him to cross on foot and he was picked up the other side in Turkey. Two people were shot by border guards while he was crossing. They were wounded; he doesn't know what happened to them. He was put into a bus. There were 40 persons in the bus, it tipped over and 30 passengers died. He is one of only 10 survivors. The bus was full of people from Afghanistan and included adults. It was dark and he is not sure what happened, maybe the driver fell asleep. It was total chaos - he and few other boys walked to a nearby town. When they reached the town they phoned the smugglers and told them what happened. The day after, they were picked up by the smugglers.

The smugglers had false Iranian passports for each boy. They drove for a while, and after two to three hours they were told to leave the vehicle. They had to walk for 24 hours, and then they were picked up by another vehicle and transported in a van for almost one week. There were five boys; they did not know each other beforehand. He was very afraid and he was thinking that the police would come and send them back to Iran.

The smugglers gave them food. They were not allowed to go out of the van. After travelling for one week they arrived in a city in Turkey. He does not know the name of the place. The smugglers were not good with them at all. They always promised good conditions, they would say just walk for a few minutes but they walked for long hours. The boys were promised good living conditions but never got them.

The smugglers bought bus tickets for themselves and the boys. They drove for 24 hours and got off the bus in Istanbul. From the train station in Istanbul they took a bus to another town. When they got to this town the boys were put in a basement for two weeks and then were picked up and taken to Greece. There were 21 boys in the basement and there was one light. They used something as a toilet but it wasn't a toilet. There were no blankets and they slept on the floor. The smugglers bought them some food. They were frightened but did not show their fear because they were in the hands of the smugglers. All the boys were Hazara. When they started travelling from Greece they were given Spanish ID cards, and told, if the police stop you say that you are hitch hiking. The smugglers said we will take less money if you do it this way. He paid US\$1,000 in the beginning when he was smuggled to Turkey. People chose different destinations - he paid US\$4,000 when he got to Greece. The smuggler said, depending on how much you pay, will depend how we take you. "The smuggler knows how to get the money - they establish connections, they make you pre-arrange for some person they know will come up with the money. Then you or the smuggler just makes a phone call to the contact person and the smuggler will get the money." He called the agent that he met in the beginning and his mother arranged for the money to go to the smugglers.

During his journey he did not always know which country he was in because he was always on a bus or walking and was just told to show the Spanish ID card. Each time he was stopped by police he was allowed to continue. He was driven to Norway in a car with three older Iranians. He does not know their status, you cannot ask. The last drive lasted for 12 hours and he remembers that shortly after they reached Norway, he was told to get out of the car and walk.

Outcome for the child: He has been in Norway for 13 days. He travelled with boys and families from different countries. Since he has been in Norway he has experienced some difficulties. His age has been tested and he attends courses where they try and teach Norwegian and English. They are just standing there trying to teach without him understanding any of it. He is very confused about whether he will be allowed to stay. He has heard about this Dublin thing²³ and if they find your fingerprints they can send you to another country.

It has been one month since he has had contact with his mother. He does not have a phone and his mother does not have a phone in her house. He hasn't got results yet, he had a test on his teeth and hand bones and he is a little afraid of this. In Afghanistan they don't write down your age. He is afraid that there might be a difference between what he has told them and the test results. He just told them what age his mother had given him.

He would say to boys who are thinking of making the journey:

"I would tell them if you really don't have to move, if your life is not in danger - don't do it - it is not worth it. Because if it would be up to me - I would say there is not so much big difference between where you live and these countries - people here also have problems. It's not because they only hear good things about the country, but they see that people here have money and can buy things."

His future plan is to study and get a job to earn money for his family.

²³The Dublin II Regulation sets out the rules for deciding which EU country should decide an asylum application and is based on the principle that the first European Union country which the asylum seeker entered into should decide their asylum claim. Some non-EU countries are also deemed to be safe in the sense that it is assumed they will decide asylum claims in the same way that the UK would. Lists of safe third world countries are made under the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999 s 12 and delegated legislation, e.g. the Asylum (Designated Safe Third Countries) Order 2000 SI 2000/2245.

Hussain - Hazara, Ghazni
Fled to Iran because he
feared the Taliban. Child
made decision. Destination
Europe.

*“It was a scary situation
because we did not know
when we would get
stopped by police.
Food was scarce, just
enough to keep us going.
We had heard that the
Turkish police will beat
you really bad.”*

*“If not really necessary,
don't do it. But if you have
to leave, the trip is very
dangerous, you will be
starving and there is a
chance you will die.”*

Facts: 17 year old boy, Hazara ethnicity, from Ghazni, Muqur district. He left Afghanistan about one year ago because he feared the Taliban. His brother was working for a commander. The Taliban took his brother prisoner and beat him up very badly. They hit him with a Kalashnikov. After the Taliban beat him up they said go and tell your brother to come to us. Of course he would not go to the Taliban and give himself up so he decided that he would escape to Iran. He does not know why the Taliban wanted him.

The whole family advised him to leave. His mother is dead. He was 11 months in Iran; he was working for a gardener in Rabat, Tehran province. He did not stay in Iran because one day he told his story to the gardener who said, 'Don't worry, I will help you.' He told the man his whole life story - he was a kind man who decided to help him. He decided to leave Iran because the situation in Iran is not good. This man wished for him a better future and that was why he advised him to go to another country. "He said, 'You will still owe me money. When you arrive you will get a good job and you can pay me back later.'" He is not sure how much the gardener paid to the smuggler but he thinks it was US\$11,000. About US\$3,000 was his wages. He had contact with the smugglers and they smuggled him to Turkey. He did not choose Norway when he started the journey - the smugglers did not tell him which country they would take him to. They only told him that they would take him to Europe. He did not know anything about Norway.

The journey: The smuggler picked him up in a car. He stayed in the smuggler's house in Tabriz and was taken from there to Turkey. He does not know where in Turkey. There were 23 persons in the group - three families with children and the rest were boys like him. All were Afghan Hazaras who had been living in Iran. They travelled in a big van. When you are first in the hands of smugglers it is dangerous. "It was a scary situation because we did not know when we would get stopped by police. Food was scarce, just enough to keep us going. We had heard that the Turkish police will beat you really bad." During his trip one person died. It was when they arrived in Turkey. Crossing a river, there was a hole in the bottom of the boat and it took in water. "There were only five safety tyres and there were six persons - so the one who did not get a tyre died."

They were arrested by the Turkish police. The police put them in jail; four of them were released because they were less than 18 years. One person was kept in the jail because he was over 18 years. When he was released he went to Istanbul - there he met some other boys and that's how he got connected with the smugglers again.

After one day he found a smuggler. He was taken to a house and kept there for one month. He tried to cross the sea again and had to return back to Turkey. He had to stay in Istanbul for another month there because smugglers could not arrange transport in another country. The smugglers took watches from kids so they did not even know the time. The smugglers did not treat them well. They were not able to wash their clothes or bodies for one month. When he recommenced his journey from Turkey to Norway he was taken another way. He does not know which countries or route they took. It was fast because the gardener had paid the high price. He did not know he was going to be taken to Norway; he was outside some bus station and given a ticket. He said what is this and he was told, 'This is for your final destination to Oslo.' He has not had any difficulties since arrival and is looking forward to his life here. He has not made contact with the gardener as yet. He will repay the debt.

Outcome for the child: He arrived in Norway two weeks ago. If he gets a Norwegian passport he will never return. He has never been to school and has been working since he was nine or 10 years old. He learnt to speak English in Iran. He is going to have his age tested; he looks like a man because he has travelled on a long journey. He would say to others, "If not really necessary, don't do it. But if you have to leave, the trip is very dangerous, you will be starving and there is a chance you will die."

Murtaza - Hazara, Ghazni

Fled Afghanistan because Taliban were told that he worked for the British. Child made decision. Destination Europe and in Turkey decided Norway.

Facts: 17 year old boy, Hazara ethnicity, second eldest of six children. He was living in Ghazni, Jaghuri district for six months before he departed for Europe. He went to Iran in 2004. He doesn't have a father; he does not know what happened to him. His mother and his five brothers and sisters lived with his maternal uncle. His uncle did not allow him to go to school. He did not like his uncle and he wanted to go to school. He learnt to speak English in Iran. He studied in Iran, some boys from his village said, stay here if [you] want to work, but if [you] want to study go to Qom. He worked and went to school in Qom. He was sent back to Afghanistan because he had no documents. The police took him and asked for ID and deported him through Islam Qala. He had some money that he had left with a mullah in Iran. The mullah gave him his money and clothes. He went back to Jaghuri to live with his mother and uncle. He started fighting again with his uncle. His uncle asked him what he had been doing and where was his money. His uncle knew that he had learnt English in Iran so he told the Taliban that he had worked for the English. His friends advised him to go to Europe to save his life.

The journey: He travelled back to Iran and contacted a smuggler. The smuggler told him, "If you want to go by this way, it will cost you this much and if you want to go to Greece in a plastic boat it will cost you less." He arranged to sell farm land that was owned by his father. He had to pay the smuggler more than US\$10,000 to go to Norway. He made the decision to go to Europe after he arrived in Turkey. In Turkey he talked to other boys and got information about the options. He asked about the best place to study and a safe place. He was told that Greece is a bad place to go.

*"If you want to go by this way,
it will cost you this much and if you
want to go to Greece in a plastic boat
it will cost you less."*

He saw many people crossing the border from Iran into Turkey. One woman could not walk and she died; a smuggler took her body back to the village. He spent three months in a prison, where there were smaller and older children, men and women - it was dangerous and dirty. The police asked him where he was from; he told them he had no father. An Iranian who was a powerful guy decided to escape, so he went with him.

Through some of the boys in Turkey he found a gold smuggler named Jabar, who said he would lend him the money for his journey. The smuggler cost a lot of money but he was good. He put him in a truck and hid him inside some stuff. He had food. There were six persons inside the truck. They were Hazaras from Afghanistan. The trip took nine or 10 days. It was dark and he did not know if it was day or night or what countries he travelled through. The smuggler gave him a bottle for a toilet.

Outcome for the child: He has been in Norway for one week. He has already learnt some Norwegian. The Norwegian officer asked him if he had ID. He had a copy of his tazkera and they said would you please show us the original. He told them that he did not bring the original. He will ask his friend to send the original. They want to test his age - he says go ahead. His face looks old because he has tolerated a lot of hardships.

All the smugglers are dangerous and they are not kind especially to the Kurdish people.

He will never go back to Afghanistan. He has a big problem; his uncle has told the Taliban that he is a translator for the English in Iran.

Ewaz - Hazara, Ghazni

Iranian government forcing Afghans to return. Paternal uncle and child made decision, destination Norway.

Facts: 16 year old boy, Hazara ethnicity born in Ghazni province. He lost his family in Kabul when he was six or seven years old. A rocket hit their house and killed his parents. He was born in Ghazni, Jaghuri district and when he was one year old the family came to Kabul. After his parents were killed he was cared for by his paternal uncle who took him to live in Iran. He lived in Iran with his uncle until he came to Norway. The last time he was in Afghanistan was 10 years ago. He can talk about Iran but not his life in Afghanistan.

There are lots of Afghan children living in bad conditions in Iran. He was living with his uncle in Khasran; later on he got a job and worked in a factory making clothes. Other boys around him who did not have friends or relatives are deported by Iranian police back to Afghanistan. Sometimes the police would torture them.

"The time we got a rocket attack on our house I not only lost parents but I got head and hand injuries. I have no relatives in Afghanistan."

He decided to come to Norway because the Iranian government was looking to collect all his countrymen and send them back to Afghanistan. He has been away from his country for a long time, but he hears that the situation is very bad in Afghanistan. His uncle decided to send him to a western country. He saved some of the money from working and the rest of the money came from his uncle. He does not know how much money his uncle paid. He participated in the decision. A friend of his uncle also wanted to send his son to the west, so they decided to send them together. They did not decide initially on a specific country, just a safe country in Europe. Then a friend of his uncle heard that Norway is good - he had heard about some boys who were there and the conditions were good.

The journey: When he left Iran he walked a lot, and he suffered a lot of hunger and thirst.

From Turkey we had to take a boat to Greece, it took five to six hours. The smuggler drove the boat, it was an inflatable boat, and there were 60 boys.

"There were three small boats tied together. Only the middle boat had a motor. It was a very dangerous."

He heard that another boat was punctured and sank and all the boys drowned. When they came to Greece they travelled by trailer inside the container - it was hot and difficult - "we saw on our eyes that we were close to dying." He wanted to get out of the container but the smuggler came and beat him to keep him quiet. There was no air, they could not breathe, and he thought he was going to die. The smuggler forced him to sit and be quiet. The other boys were screaming and crying. There was no oxygen and his hands and legs wrinkled and he could not breathe. He was in the container for 48 hours. There were no safety visits by the smuggler.

When they came to Greece they were captured by the police and put in jail. They could not see the sun, one time there was a hunger strike of four days. The prison was just for children going to a western country. Most of the children in the jail were from Afghanistan and some were from Somalia. Ten boys tried to escape and two of them were shot and killed by the guards. After the four day hunger strike they were released. One of the boys had an epileptic fit, he did not receive medication, and he fell down.

Continued...

When he was released he was given a ticket and he travelled to Athens. He can't remember the rest -- it was very hard. After Greece we talked to the smuggler, it was not interesting for us to know which country we travelled through. Our only interest was to reach Norway. After Greece he came to Norway in a container, there were 18 boys; there was no light, no toilet. For 48 hours he did not eat anything. We were not allowed to take any luggage. Those who had a mobile, the smuggler took it from them because if someone called they could be discovered. They travelled in western clothes; they had to wear these clothes for the journey. He wore western clothes in Iran. When he left Iran he had money and a small bag. When he came to Greece the situation was different. He could only carry some money but no bags. When he ran out of money, he got money through a transaction with people not a bank. He was put in a container that was lifted onto a boat, he travelled almost 36 hours. He was taken out of the container, handed over to another smuggler and continued the journey. After they were taken out of the container, the smugglers were waiting for them, they arranged a small car and they travelled to Sweden. From Sweden they travelled to Norway. It was a kind of mini bus, and there were 13 boys. It took two or three days, with two drivers. The boys were all Afghans, the drivers were Kurds.

Outcome for the child: He has been in Norway two or three weeks. They are going to test his age. He does not know his uncle's phone number so he cannot contact his family. Another boy contacted his uncle on the journey, that boy is now in Sweden. He did not stay in Sweden because his uncle told him to go to Norway.

His plan is to get a good education, and then he will work here. He has no plan to return to Afghanistan, he has no relatives there. He cannot return.

Mohammad Ali - Hazara, Wardak

Child is an orphan and must care for younger siblings. Child decided Europe and Norway as final destination when he got to Greece.

Facts: 16 year old boy, Hazara ethnicity, eldest of four children. He has 2 younger brothers and one sister. He lost both his parents, his mother died during delivery of a baby. His father died during a conflict between Taliban and people in his village. The Taliban wanted to take their land. That was eight years ago. His mother died 10 years ago. When he was in Afghanistan his family had some farm land. His family also had conflict with some people about their land but they kept some and farmed it. Four years ago they went to Pakistan and then moved back to Kabul two and a half years ago. The conditions in Kabul were very bad; he worked for a man in Kabul fixing trucks. The situation in Wardak was not good. It was ruled by Taliban so he decided to go somewhere else to secure their future. He talked to his brothers and sister and told them that he would have to go somewhere else to get a future for them. He used the money he got from selling his father's land; it was almost US\$4,000. He had inherited the farm land from his father. His brothers and sister stayed with his auntie, she is a widow and lives with his uncle. His two younger brothers can weave the carpets and they can work as carpet makers. He and his brother learned how to weave carpets in Wardak so when he went to Pakistan he got work making carpet.

He did not have any opportunity to go to school. His brothers are interested in going to school but do not have the opportunity. They have a plan to go to school in the future; the situation at present does not allow them to go to school. They have to work so they have enough money to buy food and to live.

In Kabul they had no place to live. In Wardak, the Taliban rule. He talked to his siblings and aunt and told them that he would have to go to another country to make their future. He talked to other people; his uncle's friends helped to put him in contact with a smuggler and lent him some money. He went to Iran, then to Turkey.

The journey: On the way they walked and travelled under great difficulty. He took a boat to Greece; it took seven or eight hours. After he came to Greece he was caught by police. His health was not good, and the police sent him to the hospital. He escaped from the hospital. They caught him and he was put in the prison. He was released after one month.

Continued...

He went to Athens, then to Patra. The smuggler told him and 15 other boys to get inside a container, which was put on a boat and he was taken to Italy. After the boat arrived he had to escape from the container. He does not know where in Italy. They tried to find a train station to continue their journey -- they did not have a smuggler with them. There were those who had money and they got help from a smuggler. He did not have money.

"It is life and death to get into the container." He had to suffer these problems but it was even worse in Afghanistan. Their situation was bad on the journey but it only lasted for some months. In Afghanistan it lasts forever. The journey from Afghanistan to Norway took five to six months.

He took a train from Rome to Paris, he travelled with other boys. Until France they did not have any documents, they had to hide under the seats. Then they got a train from Paris to Denmark without paying. They did not have tickets; there are seats at the end of the train that you can hide under. Some of the boys were caught by police. In France there are lots of boys waiting to get on trains to other countries in Europe. At the station there is no problem getting on and off trains. The problem is getting caught while you are on the train. We had to ask other Afghan boys to help us with information - how to get to the train station, how to read the signs. Some of the boys can speak English, he can read the Latin letters a little bit.

He made his plan to travel to Norway when he got to Greece. When he arrived in Greece he saw that it was not a good country to live. There are lots of problems, there is no place to live, it is hard to seek asylum, and the food is very bad. He saw boys from his country surviving in very bad conditions; they did not receive help from the government. They lived on the streets. When he arrived in Italy he met some Afghan boys. They had received some ID from the government but they sleep on the park and had food from the church. He does not know which countries he travelled through to reach Denmark. He was taken inside a lorry. From Denmark to Sweden he travelled by train. The guards on the train asked for documents. "We tried to communicate, they were a little kind and they let us come to Malmo, Sweden." When they arrived in Malmo, they talked around: some said Sweden is better, some said Norway, some said Norway is taking a lot of boys and families, so that is why he decided to come to Norway.

Outcome for the child: He has no plan to return to Afghanistan. He does not have a place to live. **"It is not safe, the war is all over. There is no good economy so if I go back it will be even worse than before."**

His plan is to go to school and later on he has to help his family economically. **"The important thing is that I live safely, with no danger of war and then I can help my family."** If he can, he will bring his brothers and sister to live with him in Norway.

He has not had contact with family; he has been here two weeks. He wishes to make contact with them, at least they should know he has reached his destination.

"Since I was born I have not had any safe place or good moments so I hope this government will accept me."

"Lots of water came into the boat, all the boys started screaming. We tried to bail the water out with our hands; we saw death in our eyes."

"If you had money it was okay. If you had no money they kept you there until you get money. In Istanbul there are lots of smugglers. When you take the boat from Turkey to Greece it's only a 50 to 50 chance that you will survive. There were lots of Afghan boys around and they told us."

Baqer - Hazara, Ghazni

A personal problem and an economic problem. Worked in Iran, raised funds. Child made decision. Destination Norway.

Facts: 16 year old boy, Hazara ethnicity, oldest son of four children. He is from Malistan district, Ghazni. His parents, three sisters and two brothers remain in Afghanistan. He has one older sister and the rest are younger. He and his father worked as daily labourers. When he was ten years old his family moved from Ghazni in Herat. He has two main problems: one with his own family and one was an economic problem. He does not want to disclose the family problem. The economic problem was that his family did not have enough money to survive. "If you don't have money it is difficult to survive." He went to Iran and worked for four or five months. The boys he worked with in Iran decided to go to a western country. He decided to make the journey with these boys. Some boys talked about Sweden and some boys talked about Norway. He decided to go to Norway. When he started travelling, lots of boys talked about Norway and that is what made him decide. They said it is easy to get asylum and to find a job and the standard of life is good.

The journey: There were some smugglers and these boys found their phone numbers and contacted them. The smugglers were engaged to help them go to Turkey. They paid about 700 euro for the smuggler to take them from Tehran to Istanbul. When they got near the border they had to walk for eight hours and then they came inside the Turkish border.

Before they got into the boat the smuggler said there would be 15 people. When the boat started the journey there were 30 people. They heard a story about a boat carrying 27 persons and they all drowned. There were families and kids on the boat, all from Iran. They had travelled for 40 minutes, and then the motor stopped. **"Lots of water came into the boat, all the boys started screaming. We tried to bail the water out with our hands; we saw death in our eyes."**

When they arrived in Greece the smugglers demanded money, and they were kept like prisoners until each boy arranged for the money to be paid. Those who did not pay had their feet tied together and were beaten with a stick. Each boy had to pay the smugglers US\$2,100. They stayed in Greece for one week. If you have money you can cross into Italy easily, if not there are lots of problems. **"If you do not have much money they put you in the container. One time they heard that one of these truck containers was transporting meat, the boys were told they there would be ventilation to get fresh weather. There was no ventilation, 10 boys lost their lives."**

"In Athens they will put you inside a container on a boat and take you to Italy." They did not go by boat because some people on the boats had been stopped; they travelled by road to Austria inside a container. From Austria they travelled to Venice. They did not eat for 44 hours. "When you go from the container you are unconscious, then you get better and then you can walk."

They found the train station two or three hours after they arrived. They took the train from Venice to Rome. They saw that the boys living in Rome had to sleep in the park and get their food from the church. After one week they found a smuggler to send them to France. They arrived in Paris on the train; they hid in the toilets when the guards checked for tickets. They lived in square Villemin, Paris during the day and slept under a bridge at night. From Paris a smuggler sent him to Sweden and after Sweden another smuggler gave him a ticket for Norway.

Each boy had a contract with a smuggler. If you arrive at the destination the smuggler gets 7,000 euro in total. He borrowed US\$3,500 from his uncle and he had saved some money when he worked in Iran. Of course he has to pay the money back. He has an agreement to pay his uncle back within one year. He does not know how he will pay money back.

He did not have information before he left Afghanistan or when he engaged the smugglers in each country.

“If you do not have much money they put you in the container. One time they heard that one of these truck containers was transporting meat, the boys were told they there would be ventilation to get fresh weather. There was no ventilation, 10 boys lost their lives.”

The smugglers do not tell you anything in the beginning - they say it is a two hour walk then it is eight hours. Everything is different when you start travelling. The smugglers don't want to tell you about the dangers before you leave. There are different smugglers in each country but they are the same. Boys who could not walk were left in the forest.

When they arrive in the destination country the boys do not discuss the dangers they experienced at all. When you arrive you think about the new country - not what happened on the journey. He thinks that 70 to 80 percent do not know what to expect when they make the decision to start the journey. They just send back news about the new country

Outcome for the child: He has been in Norway for three or four days. He might be given an age test - if they doubt his age they will have to do it. He has not had contact with his family yet. He called them 12 days ago when he was in Italy. He has no plan about his future. He will first have to work for 20 years to pay back the debt. He will have to fix his internal family problem.

Ali Reza- Hazara, Herat

Mujahedeen wanted him to join and fight against the government. Child decided to go to another country and decided Norway as final destination when he got to Germany.

When they arrived in Greece the police took their finger prints and put them in prison. One boy died from the beatings by police.

"They asked to see our documents; they just talked to each other and let us go."

Facts: 17 year old boy, Hazara ethnicity, he has two brothers and two sisters. He is from Shidand province, Herat. He lived with his uncle's family. Both his parents are deceased. His father worked for the Taliban and he was killed by the Americans. His mother died in child birth. During the Taliban regime the Americans came and he lost his father. The mujahedeen wanted him to join and fight against the government. He did not, so he moved to Iran almost 8 months ago. He worked there for two months, and then the owner of that place said no Afghans can work here, so he had to go to another place. He talked to boys who were going to another country. They were Hazara boys from Pakistan.

The journey: He took his money from the place where he worked and he started to travel with them. There was an agreement that when they arrived in Turkey they must pay the smuggler. Some boys could not pay and the smugglers cut their hands off. "We saw it happen to some boys so we escaped before we had to pay them." They came to Istanbul and then he travelled on a boat to Greece. They failed on their first try but they got onto a boat on their second try.

He and another boy managed to hide between the wheels of a truck that was loaded onto a boat. The boat took them to Italy. The truck was driven off the boat and when it started to drive down the road the other boy could not hold on and he fell onto the street. He was able to hold on and then escaped when the truck stopped. When he arrived in Paris the other boy's cousin told him that when he fell down he died, and his body was sent back to Afghanistan for burial.

He lived in the park in Paris for one month, and slept under a bridge. The police used to come and catch the boys. He arranged with a smuggler to get some money from his uncle and he took a train to Belgium, Germany and Holland. He was lucky; he was not stopped and fingerprinted by the police.

In Hamburg lots of boys gave him advice about how to travel to Norway. He travelled from Holland to Sweden by bus and train and then by bus to Norway. He was stopped on the border of Sweden and Norway by the border police.

Outcome for the child: He has a conflict with the people who wanted to send him to fight against the government. **"They said wherever we find you we will kill you; even in Iran it was not safe for me."** He has very sad dreams, when he sleeps **"there is someone behind me with a gun and they will kill me."** He went to the doctor because he is having breathing problems. The doctor said he is having this problem because of what he has seen in Afghanistan. He has been here three weeks; he does not have a plan for his future. He has never been to school.

Zalmai - Pashtun, Jalabad

Unknown person wanted to kill him. Maternal uncle made decision. Destination Norway.

Facts: 16 year old boy, Pashtun ethnicity. He is from Shinwari district Nangahar province. His father and brother were killed in 2008 during the conflict. His mother is living in Jalalabad with his maternal uncle. He lived for many years in Kazakhstan when he was a child and returned in 2006 aged 13 years. His father would travel from Kazakhstan to visit other places. His father had a grocery shop in Almaty, Kazakhstan. He would come back and tell them that no country is safe. His father decided that because Karzai was in power the family would go back to Afghanistan. His father was headmaster of a school when the family returned. He was not a teacher.

His father was killed at the end of 2008 and his mother said that he had to move to Jalalabad city to live with his maternal uncle. He left Afghanistan two months ago. He wanted to stay in Jalalabad but some people wanted to kill him, and his uncle told him that he must go to some place that is safer. His uncle has a shop in Jalalabad and these people came and told him that they wanted to kill him to get revenge. They wanted to kill him because of a dispute between two families. His uncle said it is better that you leave this country. He did not return to Kazakhstan -- no one was connecting with Russia any more. His uncles decided that he would go to Norway. He had no idea about Norway, his uncle decided. He agreed with the decision to make the journey.

His uncle has a shop in Jalalabad and these people came and told him that they wanted to kill him to get revenge. They wanted to kill him because of a dispute between two families. His uncle said it is better that you leave this country.

The journey: His uncle paid the smuggler US\$10,000 to send him from Jalalabad to Kabul and from Kabul to Herat. He stayed in Herat for 10 days and then he travelled across the border to Iran. He stayed in Iran for 15 days and travelled to the border of Russia and to Kazakhstan. From Kazakhstan he travelled to Moscow and Hungary. When he arrived in Hungary he found a phone number to contact the smuggler in Budapest. When he arrived in Budapest no bank would change his money so he decided to go to the police and ask for asylum. He then decided to wait and find a money changer. Then he got some food.

The smuggler gave him a train ticket to Germany and from there he got a train direct to Sweden. He was told that from Germany you should pass through Denmark to get to Sweden. In Sweden he got a bus ticket for a bus to Norway. His ticket was checked during the journey but he was never asked for his ID or passport at any stage of the journey. His father organised his taskera before he died.

He travelled with some other boys. There were many dangers. When they had to walk across the border of Kazakhstan and Russia it was difficult to walk up and down the mountains. They were afraid of guards on the border because they beat people. He had no problem with weather: he had warm clothes and a bag of food. When they travelled through the Ukraine they had to pass through water and in some places there was snow. They were driven in a car and crossed the border by foot. When he was in the car there was the smuggler and some other people. These people did not know about his journey. He was afraid of animals and people could be dangerous. When the smuggler put him in a room for long time he was frightened.

Outcome for the child: He did not apply for asylum in the countries that he travelled through because his uncle had an agreement with smugglers that he should go to Norway. He has been in Norway 19 days. He has not had contact with family because he does not have the number. His plan is to get asylum and then he will get an education and work to help his family. Of course, he must repay his uncle the money for the journey.

Zowak - Pashtun, Kunduz

Taliban wanted him to join. Maternal uncle and mother made decision. Destination a safe place.

Facts: 16 year old boy, Pashtun ethnicity, eldest of three children. He is from Kunduz, Chardarq district. His mother and one younger brother and sister remain in Afghanistan. His father was killed by Taliban four months ago because his father was a member of the Afghan army. The Taliban tried to force him to finish with army and join them. They sent many letters to force him, and then one day someone said something has happened and he saw that his father was killed. His maternal uncle is looking after his mother. He attended school before he started his journey to the west. He has never worked because his family had enough money because his father was working. One day the Taliban came to his house and said he must join them. He refused and told Taliban that he had to study. He went with them for three days and then they forced him to fight. He came back and told his mother the stories and she said you must leave. Two reasons why he left: Taliban killed his father and forced him to join. "It is true they forced me I did not have any power."

The decision to leave Afghanistan was made by his uncle and mother but he said to them, send me to a place that is safe. He did not know before he came here how much it cost - then he called his uncle after he arrived and he told him that it costs 1.1 million Afghs (approximately US\$20,000). His uncle told him that the Taliban are still looking for him. He had lots of trouble on the way but it was worth it.

The journey: He started his journey in Kunduz, and travelled to Kabul, and Kandahar. He crossed the border into Iran at Zaranj. He met a smuggler in Tehran who took him to the Turkish border. He travelled from Turkey by boat to a small island. He does not know the name of the island. The police caught us. They took our finger print, they left us. The smuggler put him in a container that was loaded onto a boat. The boat stopped in many unnamed places, but of course he did not get off. He is not sure how long he stayed in the container; it could have been 10, 15 or 20 days. He did not have a watch. He had a small place to sleep and some water and food. He did not need to go to the toilet. There were two occasions when he could leave the container and go to the toilet. It was dark; he could not see the sun and he was given bad food. When he got out he had pain in his body. There were different smugglers at each stage of the journey. He was with other boys until he came to an island in Greece. The smugglers treated him very badly, and if he complained they beat him. **"We walked a lot, in places where we walked, they beat us."**

Outcome for the child: He is going to be tested for age; he thinks it's a good idea because he should also know his real age. He handed a copy of his taskera to the Norwegian police. Of course he will pay his uncle back; there is no set time for this.

His plan is to be safe, continue his education, and go to school. In future he wants to help human beings. If he goes back to Afghanistan the Taliban will force him to join and he will lose his life.

He has a message for boys planning to make the journey

"If you have no problem stay in Afghanistan, if you really have problems then plan your journey very well. My message: if you think it will be fun; it is not a good idea. They should know difficulty of the journey, there are many problems. There should be information about the dangers on radio and in the newspaper. He has some friends who go on the internet and they chat and hear music. They should tell Afghan boys in Afghanistan, Iran and Pakistan who want to make the journey ... that there are many dangers and you could die."

Wahdat - Pashtun, Jalabad

Taliban wanted to him to join. Maternal uncle and mother made decision. Destination 'somewhere safe' and Norway as final destination when he got to Paris.

Facts: 16 year old boy, Pashtun ethnicity, second eldest of four children. He has two brothers and one married sister. His father was arrested by Americans three months ago. They accused his father of working for the Taliban. His mother lives with his maternal uncle's family. His father's real job was working with the mujahedeen and recently there was shooting between Taliban and Americans, and his father was accused of being involved. Before he joined the mujahedeen his father was a shepherd and looked after sheep. The Taliban wanted him to join them. His uncle is also a shepherd and he helped his uncle. They lived in the same house and worked together. He went to school for one year when he was six years old. He left school because of economic problems.

He left Afghanistan because his cousin told him that it was not safe for him to stay. "Your situation is not good here because you have problems with Taliban and the government so have no chance to have a good life here." It was his maternal uncle and his mother who actually asked his cousin to send him somewhere. He agreed because it was not safe for him to stay in Afghanistan. He does not know how much money his cousin paid the smuggler.

The journey: He started his journey in Jalalabad and crossed the border in Nimroz. He stayed in Zaranj for two nights and the smuggler bought him to Iran. He is not sure where he stayed in Iran. He crossed the border into Turkey with 150 boys inside a container; it was so tight they could not breathe. They had no water or food; it took two days and had to use a bucket for a toilet. "It was so terrible, it was completely dark. All the boys were scared and screaming that they did not want to die." They were beaten, they were told that they must keep quiet or the police will catch them.

Two boys died on the first day and their bodies were with them one more day. These boys were aged between 15 and 18 years. They told the smuggler, "We are Pashtun and the bodies must be sent back to Afghanistan for burial." The smugglers said they would not send the bodies back because they would encounter a problem with the police.

In Turkey they had to wait eight days for weather conditions to improve before they took a boat to Greece. In the middle of the trip the boat ran out of fuel. They moved from side to side, they called the smuggler and he sent some fuel out to the boat. There were 37 families and the boys were Afghans from Iran and Afghanistan - they were crying and screaming. The smugglers had agreed they should put them safely on a boat to Italy. Instead they had to hang on tyres to get onto the boat. They had to hide under the trucks on the deck of the boat. They hid under the trailer between the wheels. When the truck drove off the boat they could not get down. The truck started driving on the road, he injured his hand and other boy broke his leg. They had a plan that when the driver started the car they would scream and driver would stop the car. After two hours driving, the driver stopped to look at the tyres, and then saw them. The boys screamed. The driver was so scared that he just left them on the road. There were three boys and they helped the boy with the broken leg. They got to an olive grove where they met a gardener. He helped them to get to the train station. They wrapped their clothes around the boy's leg to stop the bleeding. They took a train to Rome without tickets.

*"It was so terrible,
it was completely dark.
All the boys were scared and
screaming that they
did not want to die."*

The boy with the broken leg had a friend in Italy. This friend came to get this boy. He and another boy went to France. They met another smuggler in Paris and he arranged for them to travel to Norway. From France they went by car through Belgium. They had to take a train through some countries and there was another smuggler to help them. He bought a ticket and he said the last stop you arrive at will be Norway. They were stopped in many places by the police. The smuggler told them not to say they were going to Norway. We were told to just say the name of the next crossing. He cannot remember the names of those places. The smuggler said if they ask you to show your passport, just say that Afghans do not need a passport.

Outcome for the child: He has been in Norway for the past two weeks. His family does not have a phone, but he has telephoned a neighbour to say that he has arrived safely.
"They told me, we will send you to check your age." He is waiting on the results.

"Even if I told my family about the bad situations on the journey - if I arrive safely then the family thinks everything is okay. Before he started the journey, he heard these things but he did not believe. Until they see it they will not believe"

If a family has a problem, they prefer to send one of their sons to a safe place. But of course the journey is terrible. He does not think families know the dangers on the way. Even if I told my family about the bad situations on the journey - if I arrive safely then the family thinks everything is okay. Before he started the journey, he heard these things but he did not believe. Until they see it they will not believe.

He has to repay the money for the journey; he has an arrangement with his family. They want it back. They say, when you are settled you can send us the money. He plans to go to school, and then go to work.

Part III: Summary of Case Studies

Profile of children on the move

The following trends emerged from case studies. *Note they are not listed in order:

- *Male and majority aged 16 to 17 years;*
- *Children on the move to western countries do not come from the poorest families. Families must raise between US\$7,000 and US\$20,000 to send their child to a western country;*
- *They have already experienced separation by living away from the family and have often worked in a neighbouring country before making their journey;*
- *Some children fund their own journeys;*
- *Children have a large debt to repay after arrival in the destination country. Child will repay debt to family over time;*
- *Children usually travel in groups with other boys;*
- *Some children come from border areas adjacent to countries where journey commences – Ghazni, Wardak, Balkh, Herat and Nangahar. Kabul is another location that generates children on the move;*
- *Hazara children come from Ghazni or Kabul;*
- *Hazara children have previously lived in Iran with family or relatives;*
- *Pashtun have previously lived in Pakistan with family or relatives;*
- *Child may not have relatives in Afghanistan;*
- *Some children are orphans;*
- *Father deceased or missing;*
- *Mother and siblings live with maternal uncle;*
- *Children have had little or no education in Afghanistan;*
- *Child leaves with consent of family. In absence of father, uncle makes decision that child will go to a western country. In many cases it is the maternal uncle;*
- *In most cases, child participates in decision and is in agreement;*
- *Broker engaged in provincial cities in Afghanistan, smuggler engaged in neighbouring countries Pakistan and Iran;*
- *Desire for adventure and a better life;*
- *Child not aware or accepting of dangers prior to journey;*
- *Smugglers do not have regard to safety or protection of children. Sole aim of smuggler is for child to reach agreed destination and receive payment;*
- *Final destination not always decided by family before child starts journey; destination country is based on advice of other families;*
- *Final destination in some cases decided along the way, smuggler agrees to take child to the west, child talks to other children in transport hubs in countries along the route to decide final destination;*
- *Age of unaccompanied asylum seeking children is in doubt or disputed by authorities in destination country.*

Journey of children on the move

- Journey is taken in stages;
- Time taken to make journey ranges from months to a year and may take longer;
- Children exchange advice along the way;
- On the journey there are hubs along transport routes at train, truck and shipping locations where children on the move congregate;
- Journey is hazardous. Children are exploited by smugglers. Children die during journey.

Triggers that lead to migration of these children

Child's motives for leaving

- Prospect of secure future and prosperity - no prospect of secure future or financial success in Afghanistan;
- Desire for safety;
- Education leading to a good job - no prospect of a good education and job prospects in Afghanistan
- Father's political activity with Taliban;
- Forced recruitment or kidnapping of mainly Pashtuns by Taliban or militia group;
- Success of others who made the journey;
- Fear of government agents;
- Diminishing rights and employment prospects for Hazara in Iran;
- Forcible return of Hazaras from Iran to Afghanistan;
- Sense of adventure.

Motives of family for child on the move

- Protection and security for the child;
- The prospect that the child will generate wealth for family;
- The prospect of a good education and employment;
- To act as anchor for other family members;
- No prospects for child in neighbouring countries.

Part III: Findings

The following findings and recommendations are based on the case study interviews and focus group discussion.

Decision to become a 'Child on the Move' and child's future plan

[Children deported to Afghanistan](#) - Three respondents said that their father had made the decision, the mother and child participated and agreed with the decision. Despite spending time in jail in Turkey and Iran, two of the children intend to make the journey again. The parents raised the money for the journey and the children will repay when they eventually make it to Europe. Two children said that they made the decision and sought approval from their parents. They are now running a shop selling burkas in the local bazaar; they do not plan to make the journey again. In the other case where one brother was deported and the other brother was killed crossing the border at Nimroz, the mother had made the decision without involving the children's father. These two children did not want to make the journey. The surviving child is now living with his parents and working in Kabul and has no plan to make the journey again.

[Children in destination country](#) - In 11 cases the child's father was not present and another adult member of the family, usually the maternal uncle with the consent of the child's mother, made the decision for the child to move to a western country. The child agreed with the decision and wanted to make the journey. In six cases the child made the decision. 19 of the 20 respondents said their father had either died, was missing presumed dead, or in jail. Three respondents said they were orphans.

The future plan of each child was expressed as a firm intention to remain in destination country. They plan to study and obtain a good job and they had been presented with opportunities to do so. They expressed a strong desire to maximise their newly found opportunities. The destination country was caring for them - they had committed to living there. Each boy had an agreement to repay the debt incurred from cost of the journey. Repayment of the debt was not raised as a concern but rather an obligation that each child would meet. Several children referred to their intention to send money to support the family, rather than a specific intention to repay the debt.

[Families with a child on the move](#) - One respondent said his younger brother initially worked in Pakistan, Iran and Dubai and then sought permission from his father to move to Norway. One respondent said that his two sons made the decision to go to Europe and he gave parental consent. Another respondent said that he asked his son if he wanted to go and he agreed. Each family is receiving or expecting their son to remit money back to Afghanistan to help support the family. The children from these families have legal status in the destination country apart from one child who is living with a Pakistani family in the UK.

It was evident in all interviews -- with the exception of the one case where the mother coerced her children to make the journey -- that children participate in the decision and want to reach a western journey. CPAN members and UNICEF national staff made a similar observation.

*"It would be very rare for a child to be forced to go
Nowadays things are changing –
boys talk amongst themselves and decide
they will go to the west."*



Afghan child outside house where Afghan children were living in East Croydon, London.
Photo: Kerry Boland

Triggers that lead to decision to become a child on the move

Families interviewed in Afghanistan who have a child in the west said the decision was made because of the need to provide financial support for the family and the good economic prospects for their son in Europe. In one case the father knew of other families who had sent their sons to Sweden. In three cases the children decided on the destination country based on information provided by other children. Children who were deported back to Afghanistan said their parents had made the decision for education and employment reasons. Moreover, education and employment prospects would be the trigger for their next attempt. One family with a son in Sweden and another son living in the UK said that their children had moved to a western country because of the family's economic circumstances. They hear from other families that their sons have a secure future in a western country.

In contrast, all 20 children interviewed in destination countries UK and Norway, said the decision was made because their lives were in danger for a political or personal reason. Respondents of Pashtun ethnicity said their father had some link to the Taliban or another militia group. The Taliban wanted to forcibly recruit them or they were at risk of being arrested by the police on false grounds. 19 of the respondents said that an uncle acted as guardian. The children who participated in the focus group in the UK were all Pashtun and said it was not possible to stay in Afghanistan because there was no safety, proper education and job prospects, forcible recruitment by Taliban and family feuds. They all referred to the general difficulty of life in Afghanistan. Pakistan was no longer an alternative option. Hazara children who had been living in Iran prior to the journey said that the government had forced them and their families to leave Iran. Some had then gone back to Ghazni or Kabul and were robbed and/or put at risk by the Taliban or another militia group.

All children said that existing levels of security, education and employment prospects open to them in Afghanistan were limited or non-existent. Until these needs are met, children and their families will make the decision to have a child on the move to a western country.

Cost and arrangements for journey

Families paid between US\$7,000 and US\$20,000 to a broker or smuggler as payment for taking a child to a western country. It was not clear from the case studies how the money was raised. Almost all the children in destination countries said that an uncle had raised the money and they did not know how - apart from selling some farm land. Discussions with the Child Protection Action Networks (CPAN) in the provinces indicated that a child could have three attempts of getting to the destination country for the agreed price. If the child arrived in the destination country and was then deported, the family would have to pay the agreed price for the journey. If the family decided to send the child a second time, they would have to pay the price of the journey again. Some children said they did not know how much money was paid. It is difficult to verify how much families pay to send their child to a western country. Given the economic situation of the country and level of wages it is unrealistic that they could pay these amounts of money. It is likely the cost of the journey is not that high. Alternatively, the families are paying a small percentage of the fee in cash and the child takes on the debt. It was not clear how much money was paid 'up front'.

Reasons for departure suggest that children had to leave at relatively short notice for safety reasons and the money was readily available. Families said they made contact with a broker in the provincial city, agreed the price and destination. The boy travelled to neighbouring Pakistan or Iran where he connected with a smuggler and other boys. The agreed destination in some cases was 'a western country' or 'Europe' and in others it was a specific country. Most children referred to making contact with a smuggler at various destination points to arrange the journey, for example, from Greece to Italy and France.

Treatment by smugglers

Children described the journey as hazardous and experienced cruel and inhumane treatment by smugglers as well as by some law enforcement officials. Families were given false promises about the level of care and conditions that the children would experience during the journey. Several children said they witnessed other children being beaten when they protested and left to die when they could not keep up with the group. Some described being locked inside containers in cramped conditions without food or water and boys suffocating to death.

One boy was forcibly separated from his brother by a smuggler and has not seen his brother since. Another child described how six boys were washed into the sea after a wave hit their boat, the smuggler refused to stop and rescue them.

One boy was put on a bus that overturned and 30 people died. One boy described how his brother was fatally shot as a suspected drug smuggler by local villagers as they crossed the border at Zaranj.

Choice of destination country

None of the children interviewed in the UK or Norway said that they had a relative in the destination country. One child said he thought his elder brother had moved to the UK but he did not know his whereabouts. Most respondents said that the decision to go to a particular country was based on information from relatives or neighbours who already had a child there. In other cases the child said the initial decision was to go to Europe or a western country and during the journey - in countries such as Turkey, Greece, Italy or France -- they obtained information from other children on the move about preferred destinations. Several children referred to making contact with a smuggler at various points to arrange the journey, for example, from Greece to Italy and France to destination country and a family member would then arrange payment for that leg of the journey. Other children said that they arrived in Greece on a boat from Turkey and were met by a smuggler at the docks; the smuggler checked their name off a list and made arrangements for their forward journey. One respondent said that in Paris he was shown pamphlets for different country destinations by a man who he thought worked for the French government. On the basis of this information he decided to go to the UK. Other respondents said the destination country was decided during the journey and on the basis of what other children told them.

Length of journey

It was not clear from the interviews how long the journey had taken, some children referred to weeks, others to months and or to more than a year. It is also possible that these children have lived for extended periods in Iran, Pakistan, Greece and other countries en route to the destination country. Most of the Hazara children had lived for varying periods of time in Iran before commencing the journey. Some of the Pashtun children had previously lived or had relatives living in Pakistan.

Contact with family

Children had no or limited communication with family during the journey and after they reached the destination country. Most children said they had contact with a family member or a nominated person during the journey to arrange payment to a smuggler. Pashtun children interviewed in the UK and Norway said they had not contacted their families since arrival in the destination country. Reasons given were that they did not know the phone number; their family did not have a phone number they could be reached at, and the smuggler told them not to bring this type of information on the journey. They did not explain how they were able to contact family en route to arrange periodic payments without this information. In contrast, Hazara children interviewed said they had contacted their family or someone in the village to let them know they had arrived safely.

Children who had not made contact with their family since arrival in the destination country said they had asked the Red Cross to trace their families. None of these children had established contact through the Red Cross at the time of the interviews. A range of options need to be explored to promote children maintaining contact with their families during the journey and once they have reached the destination country.

Limited Information about the journey before departure

Children had little or no information about any aspects of the journey before they departed. Many of them were told at short notice to be ready, that an agent would collect them and they would commence the journey. Families relied on information provided by friends and relatives about a reliable smuggler or on information provided by a child who had reached the final destination country. Children usually travelled in the company of children they did not know and the group changed throughout the journey, according to arrangements made by the smugglers.



East Croydon Local Authority, reception area where children attend to visit their social worker. Photo: Kerry Boland

Children expressed concern about false promises made to them and their families by agents especially regarding the level of protection that smugglers would provide on the journey. Children and their families should be warned about the dangers - though they may not heed such warnings.

"I haven't got results yet, I had a test on my teeth and hand bones and I am a little afraid of this. In Afghanistan they don't write down your age. I am afraid that there might be a difference between what I have told them and the test results. I just told them what age my mother had given me."



Bedroom in Torshov Reception Centre, Oslo, where Afghan children who arrive in Norway are housed for first three weeks.
Photo: Kerry Boland

Life in destination country

The study indicates that one of the consequences of the children's experience is that they have not trusted anyone, especially adults, while on the journey. This is an important consideration when workers in agencies are trying to establish rapport with these children.

Children expressed anxiety about their uncertain future. They were awaiting the outcome of age assessments, extensions to Temporary Leave and asylum applications. Child care staff in the UK and Norway said that children were often distressed and withdrawn following interviews for age assessment and asylum applications. In the meantime they were focusing their attention on language and education courses in the hope of good prospects in the destination country.

Children interviewed in the UK were living in independent accommodation and were at various stages of learning how to budget, cook and do household chores. At weekends they congregate at each other's house, play soccer and cricket in the park and go to the mall. They enjoyed wearing western clothes. School was good and they travel there by bus and train. They were learning how to budget so that they could pay for their food and clothing.

Children interviewed in Norway had been in the host country for no more than three weeks. They were living in supported accommodation in a reception centre and preoccupied with the various assessments they had to undergo and orientation to their new surroundings. They expressed a keen interest in language and educational opportunities that could lead to employment prospects. Despite their recent arrival they had adopted the dress style of local teenagers and enjoyed playing soccer.

Age of children

The largest number of age disputed asylum applications is children of Afghan origin in the UK and Norway. This corresponds to the high number of unaccompanied and separated children of Afghan origin lodging applications. This does not necessarily reflect the age of unaccompanied asylum seeking children or those children on the move in the UK, Norway or other western countries who are not registered with authorities.

The stated age of children interviewed in the UK and Norway was 14 to 17 years and subject to an age assessment in most cases. One child said he had a copy of his taskera.²⁴ All other children had arrived without documentation. An age assessment interview in the UK was observed. The age assessment is conducted by two social workers from the local government authority in the UK and two government appointed dentists and one doctor in Norway.

²⁴The taskera is an identity document issued for Afghan nationals. It states year of birth, it does not indicate month or day of birth. AFG102680.E ibid

²⁵Separated Children in Europe Programme - Statement of Good Practice, D5 Age Assessment p38, 4th edition 2009.

Part III: Recommendations

Further research

There is a lot of anecdotal information about children on the move: who they are, how and why they move. A clearer picture is required to better understand, from a child rights perspective, the triggers that lead to the movement of these children, their circumstances in transit and destination countries and their future prospects. There is a dearth of factual information about children deported back to Afghanistan, their treatment when apprehended in host countries and circumstances in Afghanistan. This report should be used to identify questions for future research.

Governments and UN agencies need to generate additional knowledge to inform interventions to protect the children on the move.

here is a need for additional research into the following aspects of the children on the move phenomena:

- **Children in Afghanistan who are planning to be children on the move.** Further analysis of these children's circumstances before migration and identification of the triggers that lead to the child's migration is required;
- **Children on the move who are in transit countries.** More analysis and critique needs to be done of governments who violate the rights of migrant children in transit, the impact on these children and how to prevent such violations;
- **Children on the move who are not registered with relevant authorities and sought asylum in western countries.** These children have been identified as a particular group about which there is little knowledge and have significant protection needs. How are they being exploited and how should this be addressed;
- **Children on the move who are deported.** Further information and analysis of these children's circumstances before migration, protection risks during the journey and when they are deported back to Afghanistan is needed. Are there ways of supporting them in Afghanistan so that they do not return to the same circumstances of being children on the move;

Support and interventions

This study points to the need for practical interventions in country of origin and along the migratory routes where these children congregate. The case studies show that many children were provided with misleading information before and during the journey. Once the journey was commenced there is little or no assistance given to children who want to seek assistance or return to their families. This could be addressed through the following strategies:

Before journey: Assist children and their families through dissemination of messages provided through Child Protection Action Networks (CPAN) Youth Information Contact Centres (YICCs) and use of radio and television (Tolo) to target provinces that generate children on the move. Provide information to children and their families about the treatment by smugglers, the difference between the agreement the agent makes with the family and the reality once the child starts the journey, the physical and psychological demands, length of journey and safety hazards. Although this information may have minimal impact, its availability to children and families contemplating the journey will assist them to make an informed decision. It is important this information is provided by Afghan-led agencies that have a commitment to ensuring the safety of local children. Key provinces include Nangahar, Ghazni, Herat, Kabul, Balkh and Wardak. The broad objective of this intervention would be to enable children and their families to make an informed decision before embarking on the journey.

During journey: Establish an outreach program in transport hubs where children on the move congregate along the major migratory routes. Locate where on the migratory route children congregate and move to reach their next destination such as bus, train and truck stations. Use an outreach program to make contact with groups of children in these locations, and talk to them about their plans, options and what information they have. Present information that is relevant and in their 'speak'. The service provider would need to be independent of governments and communicate in confidence with children. Indicators for protection of children on the move need to be identified and several strategies used to connect with these children. Messages could include maintaining contact with their family, how to deal with the debt issue and options for return if they do not want to continue the journey. Encourage

children to think about their possibilities and to have a plan B. That will eventually help them to return to their families. For children on the move it is currently a one track model - they are the chosen ones - one route - one destination - they must succeed. Many have a huge debt before they depart and then pick up further debt on the way. Many of them haven't been able to trust anyone, especially adults, on the journey. Outreach and information hubs could provide impartial and practical information in a confidential setting to these children.

The national actions undertaken in various European countries as part of the Council of Europe's "Life Projects" initiative is a practice model that should be adopted in this regard.²⁷ This approach should be taken at both the policy and practice levels.

The treatment of children on the move while they are in transit countries needs to be examined. A critique needs to be done of state actors who violate the rights of migrant children and the impact these violations (such as arbitrary detention) have on these children.

Any response to the growing number of children on the move must be realistic and guided by the principle of the best interests of the child. Involvement of children and their families in the decision making process is a necessary precondition for effective interventions. Information provided to children and their families must be impartial and not promote a particular course of action. Strategies must ensure that children participate in a language they understand about decisions they are faced with making when they become children on the move. This is necessary to build a bridge between where the child is now and the choices they are faced with making. Several cross cutting strategies must be considered to ensure greater understanding, information and action to support and protect children on the move. There must be co-operation between organisations at different ends of the child's journey.



Afghan children being deported from Iran at Zaranj border.
Photo: Kerry Boland

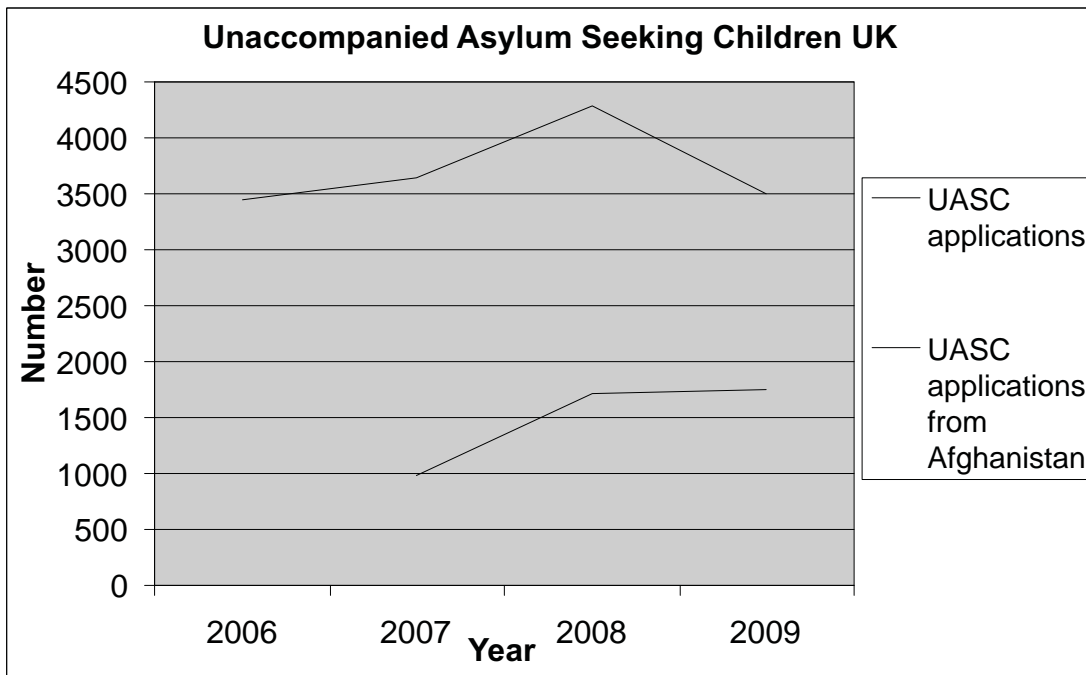
²⁷ ibid. Life projects for unaccompanied migrant minors: Recommendation Rec (2007)9 adopted by the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe on 12 July 2007 and explanatory memorandum. Council of Europe, 2008.



Drawing by Hazara boy in Torshov Reception Centre, Oslo. Photo: Kerry Boland

Appendix 1: Unaccompanied children statistics UK

Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC) applications UK

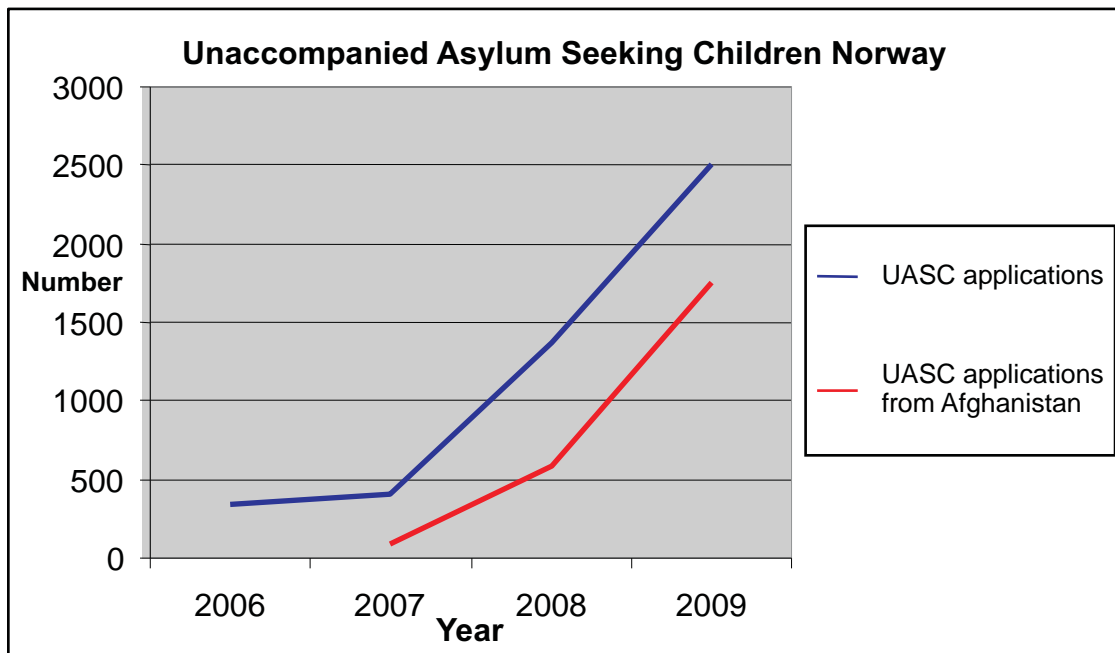


| Year | 2006 | 2007 | 2008 | 2009 |
|--|------|------|------|------|
| UASC applications | 3450 | 3645 | 4285 | 3500 |
| UASC applications from Afghanistan (%) | | 27 | 40 | 50 |
| UASC applications from Afghanistan | | 984 | 1714 | 1750 |

Note: Number of applications for 2009 is a projection based on data to end of Q2 (1700 applications). Ethnic breakdown not available for UK caseload. Anecdotal evidence indicates vast majority are of Pashtun ethnicity and some are of Tajik and ethnicity.

Appendix 2: Unaccompanied children statistics Norway

Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC) applications Norway

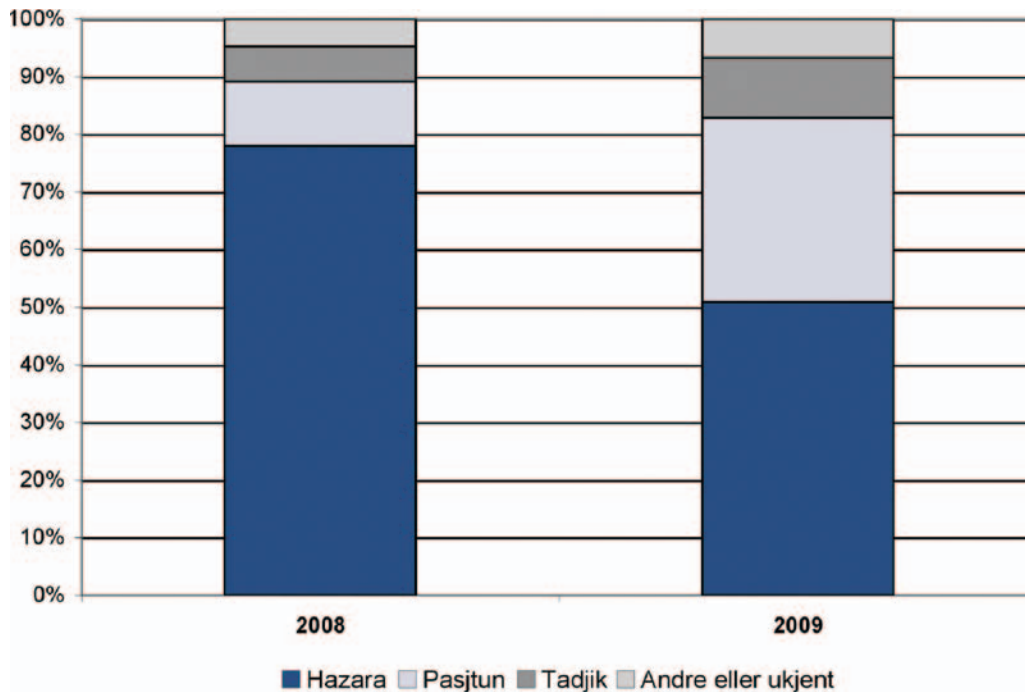
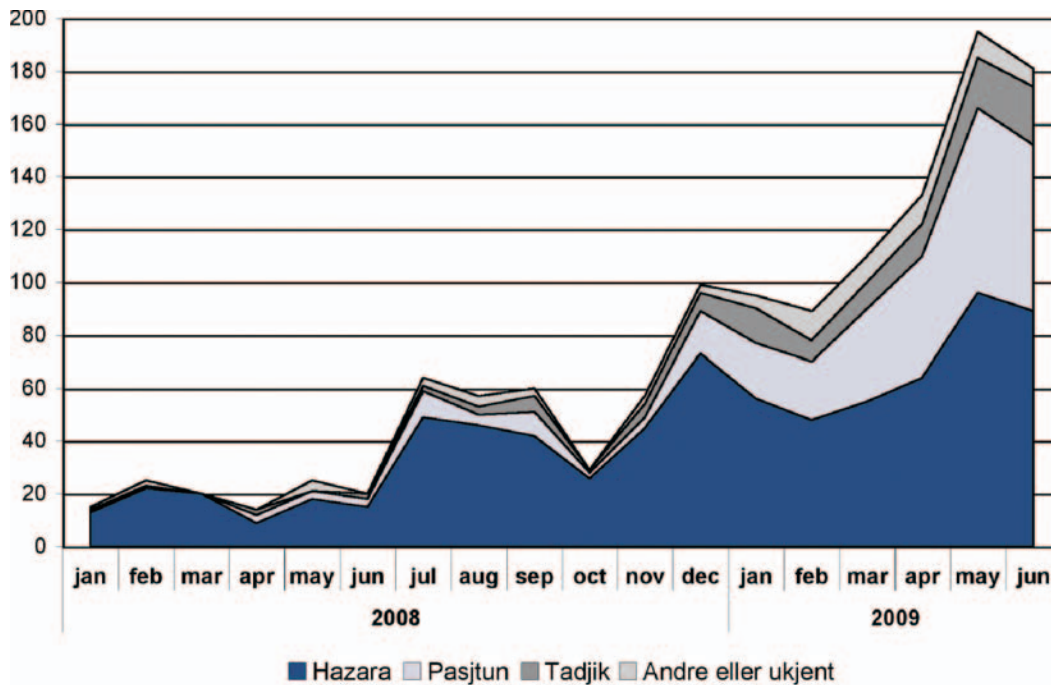


| Year | 2006 | 2007 | 2008 | 2009 |
|--|------|------|------|------|
| UASC applications | 349 | 403 | 1374 | 2500 |
| UASC applications from Afghanistan (%) | | 21 | 42 | 70 |
| UASC applications from Afghanistan | | 89 | 579 | 1750 |

Note: Number of UASC applications for 2009 is 2500.

Appendix 2: Unaccompanied children statistics Norway

Norway - ethnic breakdown of Norway UASC



Appendix 3: Interview with Child

Every child who is interviewed will be given a standard explanation of the purpose for asking them questions on this occasion. Likewise, every effort will be made to put them at ease by talking to the child in a place where others cannot overhear or interrupt. The text below will be read or adjusted to take into account the child's maturity.

Explanation

UNICEF, the UN agency with the mandate to care for children has asked a consultant to document the experience of children on the move from Afghanistan to western countries - to identify what causes children to move to a western country and if there are protection needs which could be addressed. I would like to ask you some questions to help find out what led you to leave Afghanistan, your experience during the journey and your circumstances since arrival in the destination country. If you were deported during the journey I would like to ask you some questions about your experience when you were deported.

The answers you give will be mentioned in a report prepared by the author, but it will not mention your name or contain any personal details about you or your experience which would identify you. The purpose of the report is to contribute to the understanding of why children move from Afghanistan to western countries and to identify emerging protection issues that could be addressed.

You do not have to answer these questions, or you can decide not to answer a particular question. Are you happy to listen to the questions and to try and answer them?

