

# Afghanistan Return and Circular Migration

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Annex to  
Afghanistan Migration Profile



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International Organization for Migration (IOM)



# **AFGHANISTAN RETURN AND CIRCULAR MIGRATION**

## **ANNEX TO AFGHANISTAN MIGRATION PROFILE**

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International Organization for Migration (IOM)



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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Since 2002, return migration to Afghanistan has been significant with over 6 million people returning to the country, the majority of which are repatriating refugees from Pakistan and the Islamic Republic of Iran. Over the past 10 years, however, these flows have changed from repatriating refugees to current forms of return and circular migration for labour purposes. This report provides data and information on this shift in return and circular migration and suggests policy options for managing the changing return migration flows to Afghanistan.

This report aims to provide an overview of return and circular migration flows currently occurring in Afghanistan. The objectives of this report are to:

- Clarify the current types of return migration flows to Afghanistan.
- Provide information on these flows inclusive of:
  - the number of individuals,
  - the demographics of the flows,
  - the reasons for the initial migration,
  - the reasons for return and
  - the impact of these flows on Afghanistan.
- Understand the levels of reintegration in Afghanistan for the various types of return migrants.
- Understand the current policy dynamics regulating the different forms of return migration to Afghanistan.
- Provide policy recommendations on the different forms of return migration to Afghanistan.

The report is based on a thorough compilation of all existing data on return and circular migration in Afghanistan. In addition, new survey data collected in 2011 by the IS Academy project has provided further insights into the current situation of return and circular migration.

This report is divided into six key sections. Following the introduction and the description of the methodology, the third section provides an overview of the different forms of return and circular migration:

- Return of temporary, cross-border and circular migration
- Repatriating refugees
- Repatriating asylum-seekers
- Forced returns
- Return migrants
- Temporary return programmes/ reverse circular migration

The current data available on the above forms of return migration are analyzed. The fourth section of the report discusses the impact of return migration, the fifth section explores return migration governance in Afghanistan and the final section provides a conclusion and recommendations.

## SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS

- **A lack of data regarding returnees in Afghanistan.**

The most comprehensive source of data on return of migrants to Afghanistan is the IS Academy: Migration and Development project which includes a sample of 1,100 returnees. This, however, is not nationally representative and was only collected in five provinces. There is a need for more rigorous data in Afghanistan that assesses the situations and needs of returnees.

- **Lack of data on highly skilled return.**

Highly skilled return is essential to increase capacity and rebuild a country after conflict and a large brain gain. There is very little data as to the prevalence of highly skilled return and the effectiveness of highly skilled returnees in Afghanistan.

- **Number of total return migrants.**

The majority of data in Afghanistan estimates the number of returnees. Early evidence in the mid 2000s illustrated that the initial estimates of refugee returns were grossly underestimated. Gathering accurate understandings of the number of returnees is essential for effective planning and service provision.

- **More recent returnees are not refugee returns but labour returns.**

The data utilized in this report provides evidence that there is a change in the type of return migration to Afghanistan. Repatriating refugees are no longer the primary flow of returnees and labour migration returnees are increasing. These returnees primarily return from the Islamic Republic of Iran and Pakistan. The return households are also economically worse off than repatriating refugee households, suggesting that their low economic status is a driver for the recent migration and returns.

- **Although there is no official circular migration programmes there is evidence of circularity in migration and return flows.**

Analysis of the labour migration movements between Afghanistan and Pakistan and the Islamic Republic of Iran illustrate circularity in movement that is irregular and undocumented.

- **Repatriating refugees are slightly better off economically as compared to other forms of returnees.**

The data in this report illustrates that repatriating refugee households are not the most vulnerable return migrant households.

## POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- **Improvements in data collection.**

Data collection on return migration to Afghanistan needs to be improved. This is a challenging task, but accurate numbers of return migration and the form of return migration need to be collected to provide for appropriate planning.

- **Vulnerable populations.**

Returnees comprise nearly one third of the population in Afghanistan, which is too large of a population to target as vulnerable. Furthermore, it is evident that repatriating refugees are not the most vulnerable population in Afghanistan, thus policies should not be focused on repatriating refugees, but vulnerable households in Afghanistan. Targeting vulnerable households may also assist to prevent future migration as people seek livelihoods abroad.

- **A growing urban challenge.**

In the past 10 years, refugee return and internal displacement have caused rapid urbanization rates in Afghanistan. Kabul experienced a threefold increase of its population and has been termed one of the fastest growing cities in the region. About 70 per cent of Kabul is composed of informal settlements. With an urban growth rate of 5.4 per cent annually and a doubling of the population over the next seven years (Turkstra and Popal, personal communication, 2010), it is becoming increasingly difficult to track, estimate and assess the presence and profiles of returnees settling in urban areas directly or as a result of a secondary displacement (Majidi, 2011).

- **Prioritizing evidence-based policy decisions.**

The Governments of Afghanistan, the Islamic Republic of Iran and Pakistan, with the support of UNHCR, have presented the *Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees* to address the reintegration needs of refugee returnees in Afghanistan through a community-based approach. However, as the present study has shown, returned refugees do not fare worse than the rest of the population. Field data and evidence collected shows that the targets should be categorized to encompass the ‘poor’ and the ‘neediest’, whether returnees or non-returnees. The common denominator should be based on needs, not on migration experience, to avoid running the risk of increasing social tensions.

- **Improving context analysis.**

The specific context of transition will be the basis upon which to inform return migration and other policy decisions. It is key to examine the appropriateness of returnee and reintegration support measures in a context of ongoing insecurity and renewed displacement, limited institutional capacity and historically low refugee return compared to increasing internal displacement trends.

- **Regulating the unregulated.**

Afghanistan is currently working to establish circular migration partnerships in the Middle East (such as with Qatar), however, the greatest need is for legal circular migration programmes with the Islamic Republic of Iran.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Define vulnerability.**

Afghanistan should define vulnerability within the country context and provide assistance to those fitting that definition regardless of their return migration status.

- **Focus humanitarian actors on their mandate.**

Given decreasing donor funds, actors should focus on what they know best: for humanitarian actors this should be to provide for the first phase of return (up to three years in the case of refugees) and for the needs of IDPs, landless and shelterless populations.

- **Support development actors.**

Given the large numbers and flows of returnees as well as the poverty profiles and vulnerabilities of Afghan rural and urban populations, priority should be given to development actors to address structural poverty and development challenges in Afghanistan. Targeting responses to specific sub-groups will only add to existing social and economic tensions.

- **Mainstream reintegration through NPPs.**

There are 22 National Priority Programmes (NPP) which represent a new commitment to empower Afghan institutions for a more sustainable development of economic, legal, social and governance structures. Mainstreaming migration and displacement priorities through these NPPs, advocating for a greater inclusion and reintegration of returnees, will ensure a more comprehensive, sustainable and nationally led response.

- **Develop an urban approach.**

Policymakers, humanitarian and development actors should agree on the need to develop an urban approach. Although the NPPs are strong on the development of rural areas, urban areas have so far been left aside without a proper strategy. The lack of infrastructure, land and housing in the main urban areas is a source of increasing tensions. Any national strategy needs to include an urban component to address the needs of populations at large and of returnees who predominantly choose to reside in urban centres.

- **Circular migration programmes.**

There is a strong need for legal and regularized migration programmes with the Islamic Republic of Iran. Afghanistan should work to create legal circular migration programmes with the Islamic Republic of Iran that ensure Afghans can legally work there.

- **Include IDPs in the policy narrative.**

Although numbers now point to a greater importance of internal displacement trends, rather than refugee or migration trends, internally displaced persons (IDPs) are left out of major policy decisions on return and reintegration. With a national IDP policy currently being drafted, further support should be provided to raise the profile and needs of IDPs, especially conflict-induced IDPs (the current numbers reaching around 400,000 IDPs).



# I. INTRODUCTION

The multiple conflicts that have engulfed Afghanistan since 1979 led to one of the greatest refugee populations in history. Over 6 million people fled the country, with the majority seeking refuge in Pakistan and the Islamic Republic of Iran, and those whom were able taking refuge further afield in Europe, North America or Australia. The United States-led intervention in 2001 marked the beginning of the official post-conflict period in Afghanistan. In 2002, official refugee repatriations to Afghanistan began, with a focus on repatriating refugees from the Islamic Republic of Iran and Pakistan.<sup>1</sup> European countries also began to change their policies and promoted Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration programmes and/or engaged in forcible removals of failed asylum applicants as Afghanistan became viewed as a safe country for return. Since 2002, however, migration flows within, to and from Afghanistan have not stopped.

Internal displacement in Afghanistan is on the rise, due mostly to increasing numbers of conflict-induced displacement. Internally displaced persons (IDPs) migrate to safer living conditions, whether in terms of physical or human security, and often find themselves included in mixed migration flows with rural-urban migrants, other displaced populations and return migrants. One of the durable solutions to internal displacement is return to the area of origin; however, many studies in Afghanistan have shown the often permanent nature of displacement (World Bank and UNHCR, 2011) and the multiplicity of displacement patterns, with secondary and tertiary displacement also on the rise. This report acknowledges the importance of analysing return and reintegration of IDPs but will focus on the link between migration and return to Afghanistan, not displacement and return.

On the migration front, *outward* migration, migration from Afghanistan, continues as people seek opportunities abroad and will continue to do so as the security situation and economic transition pave the way to an increasingly uncertain and volatile future. Important evolutions in Afghanistan in the past 10 years have underlined the need to understand population movements out of Afghanistan through the prism of migration (whether mixed, voluntary or forced migration) rather than a conflict and refugee-focused lens. This paper will discuss these changes in the profiles and types of movements recorded. Some are historical cross-border movements, while others are temporary, seasonal and circular movements influenced by transnational social and labour market networks.

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<sup>1</sup> Return migration flows to Afghanistan and Pakistan had, however, been occurring throughout the conflict, with mass returns occurring in 1992.

Migration *inward*, the return back to Afghanistan, whether by choice or force, takes on many different shapes and forms. Since 2002, over 6 million refugees have returned to Afghanistan and many engage in regular patterns of circularity in migration (regular movements back and forth) between Afghanistan and the country of migration (generally the Islamic Republic of Iran and Pakistan). This leads to further forms of return migration, such as economic short-term and long-term return migrants, educational return migration, social and culturally motivated returns and forced returns. In many of these cases, return is not the final stop in a migration cycle. It is often a hiatus period, a period of rest, recuperation and reflection, or the precursor to a new departure.

All of these numerous types of flows, as well as the large volume of these flows, further complicate the context of return in Afghanistan. It is difficult to speak generally regarding 'return' to Afghanistan as there is such a diversity of return migration flows and migration experiences in the country. These return flows must be differentiated from one another with an understanding of the distinct effects of each.

The objectives of this report are to:

- Clarify the current types of return migration flows to Afghanistan.
- Provide information on these flows inclusive of:
  - the number of individuals,
  - the demographics of the flows,
  - the reasons for the initial migration,
  - the reasons for return and
  - the impact of these flows on Afghanistan.
- Understand the different return migrants' levels of reintegration in Afghanistan.
- Understand the current policy dynamics regulating the different forms of return migration to Afghanistan.
- Provide policy recommendations on the different forms of return migration to Afghanistan.

These objectives will be achieved through a detailed profiling of the different forms of return migration. The second section of this report will discuss the methodology for the report. The third section will detail the different forms of return migration to Afghanistan. The fourth section will explore the impact of return migration in Afghanistan. The fifth section will examine the governance system of return migration in Afghanistan and the final section will provide an overview with key findings and recommendations from the report.



## 2. METHODOLOGY

This report is based on a mixed methods approach including an intensive document review, quantitative and qualitative research. A key basis of this report is a document review put together with the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, the International Organization for Migration (IOM), United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the Migration Profile Temporary Working Group to collect all available reports and sources of data on return migration to Afghanistan. This was supported by an academic and grey literature review.

The primary quantitative data for this research includes surveys conducted with 1,100 return migrants in Afghanistan as part of the IS Academy: Migration and Development Project (hereafter referred to as the IS Academy Survey) conducted by Maastricht University and co-funded by the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the International Organization for Migration in Afghanistan. The study was conducted in partnership with the Afghanistan Central Statistics Organization and implemented by Samuel Hall Consulting.

This study included the surveying of 2,000 households in five provinces of Afghanistan: Kabul, Balkh, Herat, Kandahar and Nangarhar. These provinces were selected to reflect the socio-demographic diversity in Afghanistan and the impact of structural factors on migration. In each province surveys were collected at three sites: one urban district (provincial capital), one peri-urban district (one common border with the capital) and one rural district (no common border with the capital). Further, primary sampling units (PSUs) were obtained from the Central Statistics Organization and PSUs in each designated site were chosen at random for enumeration. In each PSU a household list was established with a local community leader and each household was designated a migrant, non-migrant or return migrant household. From this list, households were selected for enumeration. The focus of this report is on the 1,100 return migrant households.

**Table 1: Provincial distribution of return migrant households, IS Academy**

Province	Frequency	Percentage
Nangarhar	283	25.73
Kabul	240	21.82
Heart	217	19.73
Kandahar	190	17.27
Balkh	169	15.36
Missing	1	0.09
Total	1,100	100.00

Source: IS Academy Survey, 2011.

The secondary quantitative data utilized in this report is the National Risk and Vulnerability Assessment (NRVA) 2007/08 data from the Afghanistan Central Statistics Organization. The NRVA sample includes 22,576 households with a male and female questionnaire and is the closest data set to census information currently available in Afghanistan. The survey was conducted using random sampling methods and includes information on seasonal migration.<sup>2</sup> Other quantitative data utilized in this report includes data collected by UNHCR on return statistics and cross-border monitoring as well as assisted voluntary return statistics collected by IOM.

The qualitative data collected for this report includes both focus groups with return migrants and key informant interviews with individuals working in the field of return migration in Afghanistan. In each region where quantitative fieldwork was carried out, a focus group with four to six participants was conducted with return migrants, resulting in five focus groups, with approximately 30 participants overall. A total of three field visits were conducted within a period of seven months wherein key stakeholders working on return migration were consulted.

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<sup>2</sup> For more information see: Icon-Institute, 2009.

### 3. FORMS OF RETURN MIGRATION

Return migration can take very different forms depending on the reason for the initial migration, the duration of time abroad, the experiences in the country of migration, the reason for return (including voluntary or forced return) and the conditions upon return. In order to understand return migration, one must first examine the different forms of return. Table 2 provides an overview of definitions utilized by the International Organization for Migration (IOM) representing different forms of circular, cross-border and return migration. It is important to note that these definitions are quite specific and more general definitions are often also used in migration studies.

**Table 2: Definitions of forms of circular, cross-border and return migration flows**

Term	Definition	Source
Repatriating refugees	Citizens returning after having enjoyed asylum abroad. Both refugees returning under internationally assisted repatriation programmes and those returning spontaneously are included in this category.	UN DESA, 1998
Repatriating asylum-seekers	Citizens returning after having attempted to seek asylum abroad. In principle, this category includes persons who return after their asylum cases have been decided negatively as well as persons who may not have been able to apply for asylum but who stayed abroad under temporary protection for some time.	UN DESA, 1998
Returning migrants	Persons returning to their country of citizenship after having been international migrants in another country and who are intending to stay in their own country for at least one year.	UN DESA, 1998
Circular migration	The fluid movement of people between countries, including temporary or long-term movement, which may be beneficial to all involved, if occurring voluntarily and linked to the labour needs of countries of origin and destination.	IOM, 2011
Migrant workers	Persons admitted by a country other than their own for the explicit purpose of exercising an economic activity remunerated from within the receiving country.	UN DESA, 1998
Seasonal migrant workers	Persons employed by a country other than their own for only part of the year because the work they perform depends on seasonal conditions.	UN DESA, 1998
Border workers	Persons commuting between their country of usual residence (which is usually their country of citizenship as well) and their place of employment abroad.	UN DESA, 1998

Source: IOM, 2011; UN DESA, 1998.

Table 2 underlines the importance of circularity in Afghanistan’s migration profile: although forced migration, refugee movements and internal displacement are key areas of concern for policymakers and humanitarian actors, migration - whether voluntary or forced - is an important trend in Afghanistan, with growing

numbers of circular migrants, migrant workers as well as seasonal and border migration in and out of Afghanistan. Recognizing that the migration landscape is complex, that it is composed of forced, voluntary and mixed migration flows, of refugees, IDPs and more broadly of migrants, will provide for a more exact understanding of these issues. Given the large category of ‘migrants’ to be taken into consideration, this report will specifically focus on profiles of return migrants.

Second, the information presented in Table 2 does not address the issue of legality or irregularity of migration flows. Some of the terms for migrant workers and circular migrants involve migrants participating in legal migration programmes organized between two states. Irregular migrants, on the other hand, may engage in short-term work in another country and then return (suggesting circularity in movement), however, they may not have the legal right to enter the country of migration. As Afghanistan does not currently have any implemented circular migration programmes<sup>3</sup>, this report will use the term ‘temporary migrants’ to describe individuals who migrate for a short-term (less than one year) to another country, regardless of the legal status of this migration.

This section will examine the return of several categories of migrants, including: cross-border, circular and temporary migrants, repatriating refugees, repatriating asylum-seekers, forced returnees and, finally, return migrants. Return migrants thus include those people who did not migrate as refugees and have returned after living a minimum of one year in another country. Finally, this section will provide a brief overview of temporary return. Temporary return occurs when a member of the diaspora returns to Afghanistan for a short period to contribute to the country. This form of return has also been called reverse circular migration, brain gain and diaspora return.

### 3.1. RETURN OF TEMPORARY, CROSS-BORDER AND CIRCULAR MIGRANTS

The migration landscape in Afghanistan today is composed of Afghans who are regularly moving across the borders between Afghanistan and the Islamic Republic of Iran and Afghanistan and Pakistan. The borders on either side have a long history of human, commercial and cultural exchanges, with the Afghanistan-Pakistan border, or the Durand line, being especially porous.

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<sup>3</sup> Afghanistan has signed a circular labour migration agreement with Qatar, however, the agreement has yet to be implemented.

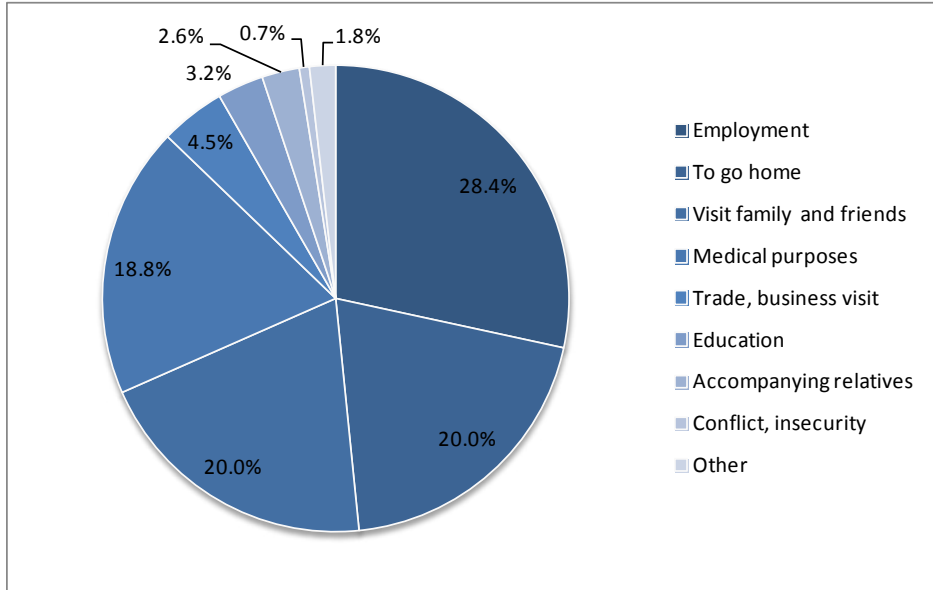
Due to the historical porosity of this border from Pakistan's side, increasing Iranian entry restrictions and the the informal and irregular nature of these migration patterns, data remain weak. However, studies have been conducted to understand and explain the purpose and duration of these movements. This section will examine both cross-border migration and temporary migration.

In 2008, UNHCR commissioned a study on cross-border movements between Pakistan and Afghanistan (Majidi, 2009a). The main finding of the research showed that the majority of Afghans travelling to and from Pakistan in 2009 were temporary migrants, far exceeding refugee movements in either direction. This highlights the need to develop a migration-focused discourse and policy framework to address cross-border movements, instead of a refugee or forced migration focus. The study added to the literature on cross-border movements by showing that the conflict-refugee view is no longer appropriate for understanding the causes and patterns of movement. The findings of the study on population movements between Afghanistan and Pakistan highlight that the temporary and circular nature of migration is influenced by conflict and insecurity, as well as longstanding social, cultural and economic factors.

The study was based on interviews with 1,007 migrants crossing to Pakistan, 1,016 migrants crossing to Afghanistan and counting exercises of people crossing the border. The counting exercises revealed that in an average week during one morning or afternoon, 11,297 people entered and 16,257 people exited Afghanistan. On a given day official numbers would show 138 exits, while the counting would show 23,934 exits, illustrating that official records substantially underrepresent cross-border flows (Majidi, 2009a).

The survey portion of the study provided a clear picture of the types of migrants and their reasons for cross-border migration. The vast majority of the migrants were males travelling alone (75.3%). The results indicate that 81.3 per cent of interviewees travelled back and forth on a regular basis, 85.9 per cent have lived in Pakistan for over a year, 89.5 per cent were planning to spend less than one year in Pakistan and 19.7 per cent had permanent residence in Pakistan. Figure 1 shows the primary reason cited for their travel to or from Pakistan. The majority of migrants (64.7 per cent) were planning to work in low-skilled professions (construction and retail) in Pakistan. A lack of employment opportunities in Afghanistan was driving them to find temporary work in Pakistan that would allow them to meet their basic needs and that of their families.

Figure 1: Reason cited for travel to or from Pakistan, 2008



Source: Majidi, 2009a.

UNHCR in cooperation with the Department of Refugees and Repatriation (DoRR) has collected border crossing statistics since 2007 at Torkham on the Afghanistan-Pakistan border. Table 3 shows the number of cross-border movements based on headcount exercises. The number of people crossing the border decreased in 2010 and 2011 compared to 2008 but remains at the relatively high level and equal to the level recorded in 2009. The partial decrease has been attributed to the decreasing security situation and contentions between Afghanistan and Pakistan (UNHCR, 2012). Nonetheless, the figures below show that inward and outward migration through the Pakistani border remains 'business as usual', with these numbers only recording the crossings through the main eastern crossing point. The entire 2,250 km long border also includes other official and unofficial crossing points, the latter which number in the hundreds.

**Table 3: Cross-border movements between Afghanistan and Pakistan at Torkham Border Point based on monthly head-counting exercises, 2007-2011**

Month	2007		2008		2009	
	<i>Outgoing</i>	<i>Incoming</i>	<i>Outgoing</i>	<i>Incoming</i>	<i>Outgoing</i>	<i>Incoming</i>
January	-	-	24,919	18,048	27,493	19,850
February	22,605	16,319	27,138	21,634	37,536	29,901
March	26,662	33,551	30,510	29,279	26,970	22,823
April	28,235	30,191	43,129	36,354	24,476	25,781
May	-	-	38,265	20,974	23,578	30,769
June	30,320	24,326	34,172	30,613	18,503	18,871
July	19,244	15,839	37,747	37,559	26,772	27,252
August	-	-	37,734	47,474	16,189	15,170
September	24,707	9,323	31,911	26,886	24,819	22,359
October	-	-	31,886	31,540	20,987	21,405
November	30,867	16,266	27,003	36,438	22,793	21,007
December	16,125	22,026	37,041	27,934	12,984	19,199
<b>Total</b>	<b>198,765</b>	<b>167,841</b>	<b>401,455</b>	<b>364,733</b>	<b>283,100</b>	<b>274,387</b>
Month	2010		2011			
	<i>Outgoing</i>	<i>Incoming</i>	<i>Outgoing</i>	<i>Incoming</i>		
January	18,081	16,106	26,535	25,267		
February	24,932	18,671	27,856	22,166		
March	29,978	18,189	23,622	23,174		
April	25,494	34,559	22,692	22,567		
May	32,134	26,545	20,660	22,293		
June	27,385	37,663	22,481	27,921		
July	26,127	29,180	24,612	25,694		
August	21,969	27,307	20,139	18,533		
September	43,247	34,292	20,735	21,226		
October	33,848	29,838	15,794	18,123		
November	28,820	26,808	22,338	23,876		
December	25,437	23,431	18,275	19,503		
<b>Total</b>	<b>337,452</b>	<b>322,589</b>	<b>265,739</b>	<b>270,343</b>		

Source: UNHCR, 2012.

The most ample source of data on temporary migrants, at a national scale, is from the NRVA 2007/08 survey. This data referred to individuals over the age of 15 who had been outside of the community for more than 1 of the past 12 months as seasonal migrants. Table 4 provides an overview of the seasonal migrants in the NRVA sample.

**Table 4: Seasonal migrants: Overview, NRVA 2007/08**

	Frequency	Percentage
Average number of months lived abroad during the past 5 years		17.50
Household member spent one month or more abroad during the past 12 months	787	1.15
Male	773	98.22
Literate	266	33.80
Average age		27.05
<b><i>Relationship to the household head</i></b>		
Son/ daughter	407	51.72
Household head	272	34.56
Brother/ sister	82	10.42
Other family	23	2.92
Husband/ wife	3	0.38
<b><i>Marital status</i></b>		
Married	420	53.37
Single	234	29.73
Engaged	120	15.25
Widow	13	1.35
In that past 5 years lived away from community for at least 3 months	515	65.44
<b><i>Place lived</i></b>		
Islamic Republic of Iran	406	78.83
Pakistan	91	17.67
Arabian Peninsula	9	1.75
Other	9	1.75
<b><i>Reason lived abroad</i></b>		
To find work/ better work	497	96.50
Accompany family members	7	1.36
To get a better education	4	0.78
Lack of security/ protection problems	4	0.78
Other	3	0.58

Source: NRVA, 2007/08.

The NRVA found that 1.2 per cent of households surveyed had an international seasonal migrant. The majority of migrants were sons of the household head, although 34.6 per cent were the household head themselves. The average age of the temporary migrants was 27 years. 33.8 per cent of the temporary migrants were literate, as compared to the adult male (over 15 years



old) literacy rate of 39 per cent in Afghanistan (Icon-Institute, 2009). The majority of temporary migrants were married (53.4%), although a large percentage were single (29.7%). Of those who migrated, 65.4 per cent had been away from the household for more than 3 months. The majority of these migrants were in the Islamic Republic of Iran (78.8%).

Nearly all of the temporary migrants migrated to find work (96.5%) and on average the migrants had been abroad for 1.5 years. Table 5 provides an overview of the temporary migrant's current employment positions in the country of migration. The majority were employed in the construction sector (55.4%), followed by the agricultural industry (23.9%). The majority were day labourer's (62.2%), followed by individuals who were self-employed (24.9%). The average profit for temporary workers in the past 30 days from the time of surveying was AFN 3,940 (USD 80). The average daily wage for the temporary workers was AFN 332 (USD 6.75).

**Table 5: Seasonal migrants: Current employment position, NRVA 2007/08**

	Frequency	Percentage
<b>Sector of employment</b>		
Construction (including road construction)	355	55.38
Agriculture/ livestock	153	23.87
Other	70	10.92
Retail trade	48	7.49
Manufacturing	7	1.09
Education	6	0.94
Mining and quarrying	3	0.47
<b>Type of job the migrant had in the past 30 days</b>		
Day labourer	399	62.15
Self-employed	160	24.92
Unpaid family worker	42	6.54
Salaried worker private sector	32	4.98
Salaried worker public sector	5	0.78
Employer	4	0.62
Average profit of the migrant worker in the past 30 days (in AFN)		3,940
Average daily wage for the migrant worker for the past month (in AFN)		333

<b>Place where migrant worker did most of the work</b>		
Construction site	273	42.59
Plantation/ farm/ garden	131	20.44
Employer's house	106	16.54
Other	32	4.99
Shop/ market/ kiosk/ restaurant	29	4.52
Shop/ market/ kiosk/ restaurant	29	4.52
On the street (no fixed location)	22	3.43
On the street (fixed location)	10	1.56
Formal office	5	0.78
Quarrying site	4	0.62
Factory	3	0.47
Average number of days migrant worker was at main job in the past 30 days		21.10
Average number of months away for seasonal work		5.35

Source: NRVA, 2007/08.

The data from both the border crossing study and the NRVA show regular temporary migration movements between Afghanistan and Pakistan and Afghanistan and the Islamic Republic of Iran. The NRVA data also highlights that the majority of temporary migration for labour purposes is to the Islamic Republic of Iran. Temporary migration to the neighbouring country has been documented as a key source of income for household's livelihoods in Afghanistan. A study commissioned by UNHCR highlighted that the vast majority of current migration from Afghanistan to the Islamic Republic of Iran is composed of single adult males who migrate with the goal of earning higher salaries and sending remittances back to their families in Afghanistan. These remittances often constitute the sole source of income for these families, while the information available on undocumented refugees in the Islamic Republic of Iran shows an opposite trend, with a marginal level of remittances and savings. In effect, due to transnational networks, an informal labour market and a demand for the skills and wage differentials of Afghan workers, the potential for single adult males to succeed financially is significantly higher in the Islamic Republic of Iran than in Afghanistan with four times higher monthly wages. The informal labour market in the Islamic Republic of Iran feeds an irregular labour migration flow. Even if Afghans return voluntarily, seasonally or forcefully through strict deportation measures, they often return back to the Islamic Republic of Iran, in patterns of circular and cyclical migration. The data collected through a survey of over 700 men showed that, in 2008 and 2009, 59.7 per cent of the sample had entered the Islamic Republic of Iran more than once and 23 per cent had been deported

more than once. The goal is therefore not to settle down but to spend, as this sample suggested, on average 3.5 years to provide support and revenue for families in Afghanistan. This migration is predominantly motivated by economic and labour considerations and is unlikely to end as it constitutes a key livelihoods strategy for populations in Afghanistan (Majidi, 2008).

## 3.2. REPATRIATING REFUGEES

Against this backdrop of circular, temporary and cross-border migration, it is key to remember that refugee flows have constituted a major source of both in- and out-migration in Afghanistan. Afghanistan has experienced the largest repatriation effort in the history of UNHCR. Since 2002, approximately 6 million people have returned to Afghanistan from the Islamic Republic of Iran and Pakistan.<sup>4</sup> Table 6 shows estimated return flows from 2001 until 2012. UNHCR divides repatriating refugees into two groups: assisted voluntary returns, meaning that the refugees are assisted by UNHCR, and spontaneous returns, meaning the refugees are not assisted. This section will include information on both assisted and unassisted repatriating refugees.

**Table 6: Estimated refugee returns to Afghanistan, 2002-2012**

Year	Pakistan			Islamic Republic of Iran		
	<i>Assisted</i>	<i>Spontaneous</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>Assisted</i>	<i>Spontaneous</i>	<i>Total</i>
2002	1,565,066	194,127	1,759,193	259,792	117,364	377,156
2003	332,183	45,125	377,308	142,280	124,615	266,895
2004	383,321	41,103	424,424	377,151	74,976	452,127
2005	449,391	11,597	460,988	63,559	225,815	289,374
2006	133,338	9,681	143,019	5,264	238,384	243,648
2007	357,635	7,541	365,176	7,054	155,721	162,775
2008	274,200	7,897	282,097	3,656	74,773	78,429
2009	48,320	-	48,320	6,028	-	6,028
2010	104,331	-	104,331	8,487	-	8,487
2011	48,998	-	48,998	18,851	-	18,851
2012	79,435	-	79,435	15,035	-	15,035
Total	3,776,218	317,071	4,093,289	907,157	1,011,648	1,918,805

<sup>4</sup> Statistics regarding return flows vary by source. In particular, flows that are unassisted by UNHCR are difficult to accurately measure.

Year	Other countries			Total		
	Assisted	Spontaneous	Total	Assisted	Spontaneous	Total
2002	9,679	-	9,679	1,834,537	311,491	2,146,028
2003	1,176	-	1,176	475,639	169,740	645,379
2004	650	-	650	761,122	116,079	877,201
2005	1,140	-	1,140	514,090	237,412	751,502
2006	1,202	-	1,202	139,804	248,065	387,869
2007	721	-	721	365,410	163,262	528,672
2008	628	-	628	278,484	82,670	361,154
2009	204	-	204	54,552	-	54,552
2010	150	-	150	112,968	-	112,968
2011	113	-	113	67,962	-	67,962
2012	86	-	86	94,556	-	94,556
Total	15,749	-	15,749	4,699,124	1,328,719	6,027,843

Source: UNHCR, 2011, 2012, 2013c.

Note: "-" indicates that data is not available for the type of refugee return from the respective country for the given year.

From March 2002 to June 2011, UNHCR estimates that 379,790 individuals spontaneously returned from Pakistan and 1,656,848 individuals spontaneously returned from the Islamic Republic of Iran, however figures are not currently available for the number of spontaneous returns from 2008 until 2011 per year, therefore the total figures in Table 6 are underestimates. These numbers are based on data provided by border monitors and thus must be taken as estimates. From March 2002 to June 2011, a total of 4,604,568 individuals have been assisted by UNHCR in their return (UNHCR, 2011). This brings the total estimated number of voluntarily repatriating refugee returns between March 2002 and June 2011 from Pakistan and the Islamic Republic of Iran to 6,606,714 individuals. Again, this number is slightly different than the total shown in Table 6. It is, however, important to keep in mind that all of these numbers are estimates, which helps to account for such discrepancies.

It is important to note that determining the number of returnees is a difficult process when dealing with such large flows. In the initial returns from Pakistan there was an issue of 'recyclers'. A recycler is a refugee that registers with the Voluntary Repatriation Centre in Pakistan, crosses the border to Afghanistan to receive their cash grant, food and other items, then returns via an alternative route to Pakistan and engages in the process again. In the Islamic Republic of Iran, recyclers were not as prevalent, as the effort it takes to return to the country is much greater, the cash grant and return package were far less substantial and in the Islamic Republic of Iran it took on average one month to

get a Voluntary Repatriation form, whereas in Pakistan the form was issued the same day (Turton and Marsden, 2002). The issue was virtually resolved by the fall of 2002, as UNHCR received iris-scanning technology that made recyclers identifiable (Kronenfeld, 2008).

The five provinces that have received the highest number of refugee return are Kabul, Nangarhar, Kunduz, Baghlan and Kandahar, with Kabul receiving the highest number of returns. This is a reflection of the increasingly urban destinations chosen by return migrants. A research study commissioned by NRC on the coping strategies of returned refugees in urban settings of Afghanistan showed that urbanization is a return strategy for many refugee households (Majidi, 2010b). In the sample surveyed for this study, 91.6 per cent of households were spread out across 11 provinces prior to their exile. Upon return, they concentrated in four urban areas, which were and still are the most populated urban areas of Afghanistan, namely Kabul, Nangarhar, Herat and Mazar-i-Sharif.

Many returnee families have not returned to the rural areas from which they fled, but directly to urban centres instead for improved access to employment and basic social services. They were often used to better living conditions during exile (the case for the urbanized Afghan refugees of the Islamic Republic of Iran) or found themselves unwilling to live in returnee camps or precarious conditions upon return. As a result, the high concentration of returnee flows to specific urban areas has contributed to the increasing pressures on local absorption capacities in terms of access to services, goods and infrastructure, as well as stretching capacities and rendering the quality of life in urban areas lower than what was initially expected by returnees. As a result, common challenges after an average of 15 years of exile were recorded to be: access to land, housing, employment, food, water, health and other services. These were mentioned by respondents, during the fieldwork led for the NRC survey in 2009, as greater challenges than security, corruption, rule of law or lack of documentation (Majidi, 2010b).

Urbanization is a key development and policy factor to consider when discussing return migration in Afghanistan. Since 2002, estimates - given the lack of both a census and proper delimitation of the urban areas - indicate that Kabul has grown between seven- and tenfold. The annual growth rate in 2002 was as high as 15 per cent, of which 12 per cent was reported to be due to migration (World Bank, 2005). Due to the steady streams of return and the lack of infrastructure, many urban returnees are now living in illegal and/or informal settlements on land that they do not own. Overall, the absorption capacity of many communities, even in main urban areas, has reached a limit, presenting

a massive challenge for the governments and international community if returnees' expectations of the conditions of their return are to be fulfilled.

Different studies have shown changing profiles of repatriating refugees over the years. The earlier 'waves' of return, up to 2006, seem to indicate the return of a population better equipped to reintegrate successfully on the Afghan labour market. More recent waves of return have coincided with less voluntary forms of return, caused by camp closures, police harassments or an overall deteriorating environment in countries of exile, and met with a similarly less welcoming and more insecure environment upon return. In general, the more protracted the exile, the more changes can be seen in the profiles, needs and vulnerabilities of repatriating refugees. The numbers have hit an almost all-time low as presented in Table 6, hence showing that the refugee return lens is currently no longer a priority, especially if compared to internal displacement and migration figures.

In 2011, the IS Academy Survey in Afghanistan surveyed a total of 1,100 return migrant households. The majority of these households can be considered repatriated refugees (808). A repatriated refugee is identified in the IS Academy Survey as a returnee who identified their reason for migration to be security or political reasons. This definition would include both assisted and unassisted UNHCR repatriating refugees. Within the 808 households, the survey collected data on 6,230 individual repatriating refugees. This shows an important distribution of return migration profiles. While 73 per cent of the return profiles are refugee returns, the remaining 27 per cent of the return population is composed of other non-refugee returnees.

Table 7 provides an overview of the summary characteristics of the repatriated refugees. Slightly more of the repatriating refugees were men (53.4%) than women (46.6%). The repatriating refugees were fairly young at an average age of 22 years old. The majority were single (62.3%), followed by married (35.4%). The majority had no education (50.6%) and 41.4 per cent were literate. Upon return to Afghanistan, current primary activities of repatriating refugees varied, with a total of 30.8 per cent of repatriating refugees being employed. Overall, their primary activities included: doing housework (39.9%), self-employed in business (14.6%), paid work (11.7%) and education (8.7%). The primary ethnicity of the repatriating refugees was Pashtun (57.3%), followed by Tajik (32.8%). It should be noted that, without a national census, exact figures about the size and composition of the various ethnic groups of Afghanistan are not available. However, an approximate distribution of the ethnic groups, by the Library of Congress Country Studies and the CIA World Factbook rank Pashtuns at

42 per cent, Tajiks at 27 per cent, Hazaras 9 per cent, Uzbeks 9 per cent, Aimaks 4 per cent, Turkmen 3 per cent, Baloch 2 per cent and others (for example Pashai, Arabs) at 4 per cent of the overall population (CIA, 2013; Library of Congress Studies, 2008). The Asia Foundation provides the following estimates based on its survey of the Afghan people of 2010 with a sample of 6,226 Afghans: 42 per cent were Pashtun, 31 per cent Tajik, 10 per cent Hazara, 9 per cent Uzbek, 2 per cent Aimak, 2 per cent Turkmen, 1 per cent Baloch and 3 per cent other (The Asia Foundation, 2010).

**Table 7: Repatriating refugees: Summary characteristics, IS Academy**

	Frequency	Percentage
Male	3,319	53.40
Female	2,896	46.60
Average age		22.00
<b>Marital status</b>		
Single	3,868	62.32
Married	2,197	35.40
Widowed	138	2.22
Divorced	4	0.06
No education	2,637	50.61
Literate	2,158	41.43
<b>Primary daily activity of repatriating refugees 18 years and older</b>		
Doing housework	1,273	39.86
Self-employed (business)	466	14.59
In paid work	347	11.71
In education	279	8.74
Other	239	7.48
Unemployed	149	4.67
Self-employed (agriculture or herding)	143	4.48
Disabled	132	4.13
Family worker	117	3.66
In education and paid work	17	0.53
<b>Ethnicity</b>		
Pashtun	3,564	57.25
Tajik	2,043	32.82
Hazara	338	5.43
Turkmen	154	2.47
Other	82	1.31
Uzbek	44	0.71

Source: IS Academy Survey, 2011.

Table 8 provides an overview of the migration history of the repatriated refugees. The majority of repatriated refugees migrated to Pakistan (70.9%), followed by the Islamic Republic of Iran (29.3%). The largest flow was in the 1980s (39.3%), followed by the 1990s (36.7%). For the vast majority of return migrants, their migration episode was not intended to be permanent (96.0%) and their average duration abroad was 11.5 years. The most frequent reason for return was the establishment of peace and security in Afghanistan (54.2%), followed by the change in the political situation in Afghanistan (22.0%).

**Table 8: Repatriating refugees: Migration history for all migration episodes, IS Academy**

	Frequency	Percentage
<b>Country of migration</b>		
Pakistan	576	70.90
Islamic Republic of Iran	239	29.25
Other	2	0.24
<b>Year of emigration</b>		
Prior to 1970	3	0.37
1970-1979	130	15.97
1980-1989	320	39.31
1990-1999	299	36.73
2000-2011	62	7.62
Migration was intended to be permanent	33	4.05
Average duration abroad (in years)		11.50
<b>Reason for return</b>		
There is now peace and safety	441	54.18
The political situation changed	179	21.99
I missed my country and wanted to return	70	8.60
I wanted to be in my cultural environment	63	7.74
I wanted to be closer to my family and friends	25	3.07
I was repatriated/ deported	10	1.23
Employment opportunities	8	0.98
I was unable to reach my intended destination	6	0.74
Other	5	0.61
My work contract ended	3	0.37
I did not like the country of migration	2	0.25
My documents expired	1	0.12
My asylum application failed	1	0.12

Source: IS Academy Survey, 2011.



Migration was most frequently financed through savings (45.1%), followed by the selling of assets (27.1%) and informal loans (22.9%). The majority of refugees migrated to Pakistan because it was easy to gain entry there (72.1%). While this was also the most common reason for refugees who migrated to the Islamic Republic of Iran (58.4%), they were more likely to cite that they migrated there because of the better employment opportunities (19.3% versus 6.7% for Pakistan) or the better living conditions in the Islamic Republic of Iran (16.7% versus 15.3% for Pakistan). The vast majority migrated without any documents (96.0%) and the majority did not have information on the country of migration prior to their departure (83.2%).

**Table 9: Repatriating refugees: Migration experience for most significant migration episode, IS Academy**

	Frequency		Percentage	
<b>Financing of migration</b>				
Savings	364		45.05	
Sold assets	219		27.10	
Informal loans (family/ friends)	185		22.90	
Gift from family/ friends	14		1.73	
Employer paid	10		1.24	
Came with family as a dependent	7		0.87	
Formal loans (bank)	5		0.62	
Other	4		0.49	
Migrated without documents	776		96.04	
Had information on country of migration prior to departure	136		16.83	
<b>Primary information source</b>				
Friend/ family member in Afghanistan	66		48.53	
Friend/ family member in country of migration	63		46.32	
Friend/ family member in country of origin	6		4.41	
	<b>Pakistan</b>		<b>Iran</b>	
<b>Reason migrated to a specific country</b>	<b>#</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>#</b>	<b>%</b>
Easier to access/ gain entry	411	72.11	136	58.37
Better employment/ work conditions	38	6.67	45	19.31
Better living conditions	87	15.25	39	16.74
Family/ friends already there	29	5.09	8	3.43
Other	3	0.53	5	2.15

Source: IS Academy Survey, 2011.

Table 10 provides an overview of the experiences of the returned refugees while living in the country of migration. It is noteworthy that the most frequent place that refugees lived in the country of migration was in a rented room or shared apartment (42.1%). Due to the prolonged duration of exile, many refugees were able to find employment (65.0%) and were often able to move out of the refugee camps. This number also provides evidence as to how the numbers of Afghan refugees and expected returns were underestimated as primarily only camp populations were expected to return. However, large numbers of refugees were settled in Pakistan and the Islamic Republic of Iran outside of camps.

Very few migrants were able to make an investment in land (5.9%), a home (13.4%) or a business (0.7%) in Afghanistan while in the country of migration. Overall, the majority who did invest still owns this investment. Few migrants were also able to send remittances while in the country of migration (4.5%). The average amount that people were able to send per year was AFN 24,204 (USD 488). The majority of returnees did not bring money back to Afghanistan (60.4%). Those who were able to bring money with them brought an average amount of AFN 54,796 (USD 1,105). This money was primarily for daily needs (70.7%), while some were able to use the money for an investment or a business (20.5%).

**Table 10: Repatriating refugees: Migration experiences for most significant migration episode, continued, IS Academy**

	Frequency	Percentage
<b><i>Type of housing in the country of migration</i></b>		
Rented room/ shared apartment	340	42.13
Refugee camp	276	34.20
With family	87	10.78
Work site	45	5.58
Asylum centre	28	3.47
Own house	17	2.11
Other	6	0.74
Motel/ hotel/ hostel	5	0.62
Charitable centre/ shelter	3	0.37
Employed in the country of migration at any time	525	64.98
Received general education degree in the country of migration	42	5.29
<b><i>While abroad made an investment in:</i></b>		
Land in Afghanistan	48	5.94
Still own the land	40	83.33

House in Afghanistan	108	13.37
Still own the house	96	88.89
Business in Afghanistan	6	0.74
Still own the business	6	100.00
<b>Remittances</b>		
Sent remittances to the household while abroad	36	4.46
Average amount sent per year (in AFN)	24,205	
Money sent for daily needs	13	1.61
Sent remittances to non-household while abroad	4	0.50
Brought money upon return	239	29.58
Average amount (in AFN)	54,797	
<b>Primary use of this money</b>		
Daily needs	169	70.71
Housing/ land	49	20.50
Other	11	4.60
Investment/ business	5	2.09
Debt payment	3	1.26
Education	2	0.84
No contact with family/ friends in Afghanistan	613	75.87
Temporarily returned to Afghanistan	61	7.55
<b>Duration of stay in Afghanistan on the last return trip</b>		
Less than a week	14	22.95
1-2 weeks	30	49.18
3-4 weeks	3	4.92
1-2 months	4	6.56
More than 2 months	10	16.39
<b>Primary reason for temporary return</b>		
Visit family/ friends/ vacation	31	50.82
Significant event (funeral/ wedding)	12	19.67
Preparing for permanent return	12	19.67
Business purposes	3	4.92
Other	2	3.28
Cultural event	1	1.64

Source: IS Academy Survey, 2011.

The majority of refugees were isolated from family and friends in Afghanistan while in the country of migration (75.9%). A small group was able to engage in temporary return trips to Afghanistan (7.6%). The purpose of

these trips was primarily for visiting family and friends or to attend a significant event, such as a wedding or funeral (70.5%). One fifth of returnees engaged in temporary return to prepare for their permanent return.

Table 11 shows the experiences of repatriating refugees in their return to Afghanistan. As per the UNHCR data, the majority of repatriating refugees returned post-2000 (60.4%). It is surprising that 34.9 per cent returned in the 1990s, prior to the fall of the Taliban. However, during the 1990s the conditions in the Islamic Republic of Iran and Pakistan were becoming increasingly hostile towards Afghan refugees. Half of the repatriating refugees stated that they did not receive assistance from anyone (50.7%). 19.8 per cent cited receiving support from the UNHCR in their return.

It is interesting to note that a total of 366 repatriating refugees in the sample returned during the period 2002-2011. Of these repatriating refugees only 93 (30.0%) reported receiving assistance from UNHCR. When examining the overall number of returns from Pakistan and the Islamic Republic of Iran, according to UNHCR figures, 50 per cent were assisted by UNHCR.<sup>5</sup> This data poses interesting questions, such as, are the total number of returns to Afghanistan from Pakistan and the Islamic Republic of Iran underestimated? Were people underreporting assistance received from UNHCR in the IS Academy sample? Was the IS Academy Survey conducted in areas of lower UNHCR assistance?

Probable explanations to these answers can be given but cannot be certain. Indeed, one of the explanations is that the total number of refugee returns from abroad has been underestimated, with a greater population returning without official assistance from UNHCR. However, this seems unlikely, knowing the vast reliance of Afghan households on external assistance. In this case, the explanation is one of underreporting of the assistance received in the sample, with populations ‘hiding’ their benefits in order to maximize chances for future assistance.

**Table 11: Repatriating refugees: Overview of return to Afghanistan, IS Academy**

	Frequency	Percentage
<i>Year of final return to Afghanistan</i>		
Prior to 1980	2	0.25
1980-1989	36	4.47
1990-1999	281	34.86

<sup>5</sup> This figure includes UNCHR assisted returnees, unassisted spontaneous returnees, and forced removals from the Islamic Republic of Iran and Pakistan to total 8,520,294 returns, of which 4,570,076 individuals have been assisted by UNHCR (UNHCR, 2011).

2000-2011	487	60.42
<b>Returnee received assistance from</b>		
No one other than myself	410	50.74
UNHCR	160	19.80
Partner/ spouse	78	9.65
Father/ mother	62	7.67
IOM	59	7.30
Friends	27	3.34
Other	26	3.22
Brother/ sister	13	1.61
Employer in the country of migration	8	0.99
UNDP	6	0.74
Government of the country of migration	4	0.50
Government of the country of origin	3	0.37
Community members	1	0.12
In paid employment since return	196	24.26
Average number of months to find a new job		13.17
Own a business	98	12.13
Maintain contact with family/ friends in country of migration	209	25.87

Source: IS Academy Survey, 2011.

Since returning to Afghanistan, only 24.3 per cent of the repatriating refugees had been in paid employment. For those in paid employment, it took them on average over a year to find a position (13.2 months). A few of the repatriating refugees owned their own business at the time of survey (12.1%). Finally, one quarter of the repatriating refugees maintained contact with family or friends in the country of migration.

### 3.3. REPATRIATING ASYLUM-SEEKERS

Failed or unsuccessful asylum-seekers generally return to Afghanistan through assisted voluntary return and reintegration (AVRR) programmes. It is important to note that although AVRR is officially considered a voluntary process it is one that occurs with limited other options for the individual. Table 12 shows the number of AVRRs by country of return from 2003 until 2011. The highest number of AVRR participants returned from the UK (38.8%), followed by The Netherlands (11.7%), Germany (11.6%), Indonesia (10.7%) and Greece (6.2%).

**Table 12: Number of AVRRs by country of return, 2003-2011**

	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	Total
Australia	70	9	5	-	-	-	1	1	4	90
Austria	53	46	41	23	4	6	25	24	40	262
Azerbaijan	-	-	-	1	-	-	7	-	-	8
Belarus	-	-	-	-	5	-	2	10	44	61
Belgium	9	10	14	6	7	16	5	14	25	106
Brazil	13	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	13
Bulgaria	7	-	-	-	-	-	4	-	-	11
Cambodia	2	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	2
Canada	4	-	15	3	-	-	-	-	-	22
Damascus	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	4	4
Denmark	75	34	52	8	1	1	-	1	30	202
Egypt	3	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	3
Finland	9	13	4	2	7	-	2	18	14	69
France	19	8	11	6	-	-	18	33	-	95
Germany	142	182	291	173	57	33	18	36	66	998
Greece	1	5	14	67	37	54	-	130	222	530
Hungary	8	1	1	1	3	-	-	3	1	18
Indonesia	45	12	5	5	13	26	352	359	100	917
Iran	6	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	7
Iraq	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	1
Ireland	1	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	2	4
Italy	1	5	2	-	2	2	4	-	4	20
Kazakhstan	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	8	-	8
Lebanon	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1
Lithuania	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	2	2
Luxembourg	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	1
Malaysia	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	1
Mexico	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1
Nauru	137	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	137
Netherlands	89	252	286	164	32	14	34	63	72	1,006
Norway	2	26	41	45	32	12	34	45	94	331
Papua New Guinea	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	1
Poland	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	1	-	2
Portugal	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1
Russia	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	2	2
Slovakia	2	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	2

Slovenia	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	1
Sri Lanka	3	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	3
Sweden	2	5	8	1	9	18	19	39	33	134
Switzerland	5	15	7	5	8	4	6	1	12	63
Turkey	-	1	3	10	-	-	4	24	10	52
UAE	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	1
UK	114	264	437	536	383	350	466	493	305	3,348
USA	19	11	7	12	-	-	-	-	-	49
Vietnam	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	7	-	7
Zimbabwe	7	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	7
Total	851	900	1,245	1,069	601	536	1,004	1,310	1,088	8,604

Source: IOM, 2012.

Table 13 shows the return destination in Afghanistan of the AVRR participants. It is evident that the majority of returnees are male (91.7%) and return to Kabul (78.7%).

**Table 13: AVRR participants' final destination in Afghanistan by gender, 2003-2011**

	Male	Female	Total
Kabul	6,132	639	6,771
Nangarhar	227	10	237
Jaghori	203	3	206
Herat	184	21	205
Ghazni	159	1	160
Torkham	146	-	146
Balkh	94	21	115
Kandahar	86	12	98
Uruzgan	97	1	98
Spin Boldak	57	1	58
Baghlan	50	1	51
Laghman	49	-	49
Daykundi	46	-	46
Hilmand	34	2	36
Wardak	32	-	32
Khost	27	2	29
Islam Qala	28	-	28
Kunduz	28	-	28
Parwan	27	-	27
Kunar	26	-	26

Logar	26	-	26
Paktia	20	1	21
Banyan	18	-	18
Mazar	16	1	17
Farah	9	-	9
Ghor	9	-	9
Sari Pul	8	-	8
Faryab	7	-	7
Nimroz	6	-	6
Badakhshan	5	-	5
Kapisa	4	-	4
Zabul	4	-	4
Jalal Abad	3	-	3
Panjshir	3	-	3
Samangan	3	-	3
Tagab	3	-	3
Paghman	2	-	2
Pul e Khumri	2	-	2
Sarobi	2	-	2
Takhar	2	-	2
Badghis	1	-	1
Islamic Republic of Iran	1	-	1
Jawzjan	1	-	1
Not specified	1	-	1
Total	7,888	716	8,604

Source: IOM, 2012.

States have often offered different return and reintegration packages to AVRRs, however, in 2002, the EU member states collaborated to facilitate the Return, Reception and Reintegration of Afghan Nationals to Afghanistan (RANA) Programme. This programme was designed to complement states' existing programmes and offer "enhanced reception and reintegration assistance to Afghan nationals returning from one of the EU member states" (Hunzinger, 2007: 3). The RANA reintegration package included the following elements (Hunzinger, 2007):

- Training: Vocational or educational for three months.
- Employment: Either through an IOM established vacancy database or direct placement.



- On-the-job training: If possible with a contribution by IOM to participants salaries while they are training.
- Self-employment: Through the creation of a small business and the provision of a starting grant.

The RANA programme was operational until 2007. Over this time, a total of 4,800 returnees received assistance through the programme, of which 2,097 were voluntary returnees and 1,983 were involuntary returnees (forced returnees). The majority of returnees participated in the business establishment programme. During interviews conducted in 2008 in Kabul with 38 returnees for a study on return from the UK, 55.8 per cent of respondents who had started a business reported that the business was now closed. The majority of respondents (74.4%) indicated that the lack of success of the business was due to insufficient funds allocation for a proper business development strategy (Majidi, 2009b). These results are similar to those found by Strand et al. (2008) in research conducted with 28 returnees from Norway. Of the 28 returnees, 27 had started a business and at the time of interview (between October 2007 and February 2008), 14 were still operating their businesses. The participants also expressed that the start-up grant was too small. Those who were successful often had market access and connections to assist them in facilitating their businesses (Strand et al., 2008).

Michael Collyer's work on the *Management and Reintegration of Return Migrants: The Role of Return Programmes* presents the differences between voluntary return programmes that vary according to status of migrants targeted, amount of money offered and means of transfer of money. His research on Sri Lanka shows that findings are similar as above: "there is an extremely small uptake, with limited behavioural change and irrelevant development effects" (Collyer, 2009: 3). In the case of Sri Lanka and Michael Collyer's work, one of the key components of the voluntary return programme, business development, had a very low success rate. 80 per cent of IOM's VARRP-funded ventures failed or are failing, only 10 per cent are able to sustain themselves and for the remaining 10 per cent it was too early to judge at the time of the research.

These findings are similar to those found in the Afghan case study, corroborating the conclusion that reintegration assistance - albeit financially helpful - is not a decisive element in the return process. Of those men who have been deported and attempted to reintegrate into Afghanistan, the final outcome is grim. Based on the interviews conducted by Majidi (2009b), there is a high risk that the employment activities started upon return do not remain operational. On average, among the pool of deportees, 63 per cent of businesses started with

the reintegration package were operational at the time of interview in 2009, a few months after return. When these populations were interviewed again in 2011, the number of operational businesses had dropped down from 63 per cent to 3 per cent, with only one person who still had an operational business in Afghanistan. This illustrates the short-term impact of certain assistance packages (Majidi, 2009b, 2012).

Increasingly, European (and other) countries are looking into options to return unaccompanied minors, who also fall under the failed asylum-seeker category. The situation of unaccompanied and separated children from Afghanistan has received growing media and policy attention. Afghans remain today the largest group of unaccompanied minors applying for asylum in Europe. In this context, some countries are exploring the establishment of reception or care centres in Afghanistan, to which children – who are found not to be in need of international protection – could be returned in the absence of family members willing and/or able to receive and care for the children. This is the case of the European Union Return Platform for Unaccompanied Minors (ERPUM), a pilot project securing the return of unaccompanied minors who have received final rejections of their asylum applications. Sweden, the United Kingdom, the Netherlands and Norway are the core members of this project, with Denmark and Belgium as observer countries (Lemberg-Pedersen et al., 2013)

UNHCR has published necessary minimum safeguards to the return of unaccompanied and separated children, while IOM provides assistance once they have arrived in Afghanistan. A number of organizations have raised concerns over the compatibility of ERPUM with the best interests of the child (European Council on Refugees and Exiles, 2013).

To date, the return of unaccompanied minors (UAMs) from the Islamic Republic of Iran can illustrate the shortcomings in this return system to Afghanistan. In principle, UAMs returned from the Islamic Republic of Iran are met at the border by the local staff from the Ministry of Refugees and Repatriation (MoRR) through their border teams and advised to go to the transit centre supported by IOM and MoRR in the province of Herat. According to a comparative study of the return of minors, which included fieldwork in Afghanistan, children stay in centres for a short period until their family's location is identified, at which stage IOM gives them funding for their transportation to return home. Only in a minority of cases of more vulnerable children (young children or girls), some efforts are made to ensure that they will be escorted home by a relative, but no formal system is in place to ensure the children's security during their trip home. There is also no assessment of the family during this process, no formal

system of handover of care once children are returned and no monitoring after return. For children whose parents cannot be found, they are transferred to an orphanage. The Ministry of Labor, Social Affairs, Martyrs and Disabled has drafted care standards but these do not mention reception centres for returning children and there is no system in place for organized family tracing mechanisms (European Council on Refugees and Exiles, 2011).

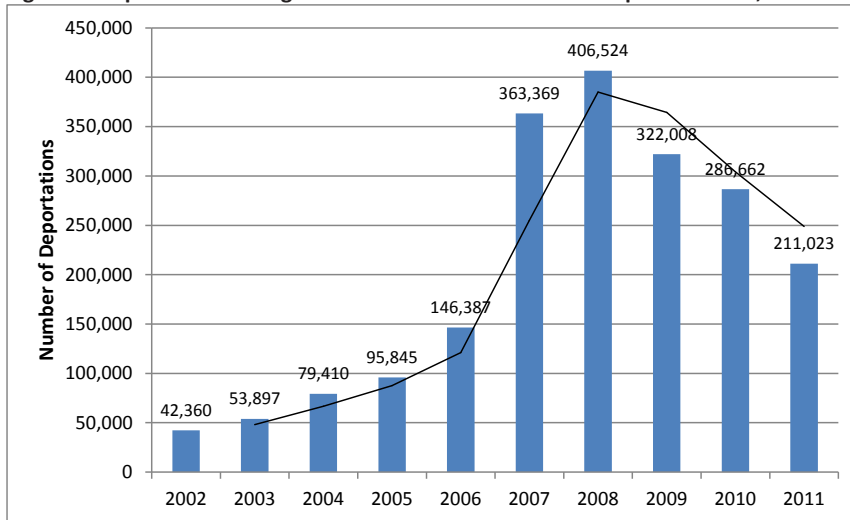
### 3.4. FORCED RETURNEES

Forced returnees are individuals that do not want nor agree to return and are deported from the country of asylum through forced removals. Forced removals have occurred from Pakistan and the Islamic Republic of Iran as well as from European countries. According to UNHCR, the Islamic Republic of Iran has engaged in the largest forced removals of 1,898,524 individuals between March 2002 and June 2011 (UNHCR, 2011). Figure 2 shows the number of forced removals from the Islamic Republic of Iran per year from 2002 until 2011. In 2012, a total of 258,146 Afghans were deported and in the first three months of 2013 there were 49,708 registered deportations (UNHCR, 2013c). The removals peaked in 2008 at 406,524 people. According to a study conducted by Majidi (2008), 69.2 per cent of deportees in a sample from the Islamic Republic of Iran had a difficult deportation experience, with 75.9 per cent receiving bad or very bad treatment from the Iranian authorities. Pakistan has had considerably less forced removals at 15,156 individuals between March 2002 and June 2011 (UNHCR, 2011). In the first four months of 2013, 1,079 Afghans were deported from Pakistan, significantly more than in the same period in 2012 (496) (UNHCR, 2013c).

Forced removals from the region - both the Islamic Republic of Iran and Pakistan - have increased significantly since 2007 (UNHCR, 2012), in sign of deteriorating conditions for Afghans living in host countries and emblematic of increasing policy restrictions. In the case of Pakistan, extensive refugee camp closures since 2007 led to a push for refugees to return to Afghanistan. Given no other choice than eviction from their place of residence, flows of returnee families returned to Afghanistan against their will, many now living in spontaneous settlements in bordering Nangarhar province. A similar trend occurred in the Islamic Republic of Iran in 2007, when the Iranian government adopted a by-law on the "Determination of Areas restricted for the Movement and Stay of Foreign Nationals in Border Areas of the Country", marking the legal

implementation of its 'No-Go Area Policy'.<sup>6</sup> Districts bordering Afghanistan and Pakistan were classified as restricted zones for all foreign residents. UNHCR estimated the potentially affected number of refugees to be 120,000; many of these families were forced to return to Afghanistan as a result of their eviction from these areas. Although not physically taken back at the border, changes in the legal framework, threats and pressures from the police resulted in the return of legal refugees who had lived in the Islamic Republic of Iran for over 20 years (Majidi, 2008).

**Figure 2: Deportations of Afghan nationals from the Islamic Republic of Iran, 2002-2011**



Source: UNHCR, 2012.

Statistics from Norway reveal that by the end of 2007 there was significantly more forced removals to Afghanistan at 206 individuals than AVRR returns at 67 individuals. The gap is partially due to people requesting AVRR but being declined by the Norwegian police or because they were expected to cause difficulties during the journey (Strand et al., 2008).

Table 14 presents figures for 2010 from European Union Member States that have engaged in forced removals to Afghanistan (EMN, 2011). Italy has a much higher number of forced removals than any of the other states. Data, however, were not available for all European states. According to UNHCR in June 2011 there had been a total of 2,551 forced removals from the UK, 224 from Germany and 85 from the Netherlands (UNHCR, 2011).

<sup>6</sup> More information on this policy is provided in Box 1 in section 5 of this report.

**Table 14: Number of forced Afghan removals from European countries, 2010**

State	Number of Removals
Italy	680
Slovak Republic	61
Norway	57
Sweden	26
Netherlands	15
Estonia	2
Latvia	2
Belgium	1

Source: EMN, 2011.

Note: \*The information provided in this table is based on figures that these states voluntarily provided to the European Migration Network. Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Portugal and Slovenia indicated that they did not carry out forced removals of Afghans. Other European countries did not permit the provided information to be made publicly available.

Individuals who are forcibly returned from European states were still eligible for participation in the RANA programme, as discussed above. Of the 1,983 deportees that participated in the RANA programme, the majority were from the United Kingdom (88.0%), Germany (11.0%), the Netherlands (3.6%), Denmark (2.2%), or France (2.0%), with a few remaining cases coming from Belgium, Portugal and Sweden (Hunzinger, 2007).

After 2007, European governments adopted different deportation assistance measures. In the case of the UK, the Returns and Reintegration Fund was launched in April 2008 in line with the British government's strategy to manage migration to the UK. The fund's stated goals were to increase the number of foreign national prisoners and failed asylum-seekers who return to Afghanistan, and to ensure that those who return are effectively reintegrated. Afghan deportees were assisted through AGEF, a German NGO established in 1992, which has since left Afghanistan. An evaluation of the organization for DFID and the UK government in 2009 showed that the programme design failed to contribute to returnees' reintegration: only 30.2 per cent of deportees participated in the programme as the NGO did not offer a service of job placement or vocational training that benefited returnees (Majidi, 2009b). The NGO did not provide any reporting, monitoring or evaluation of activities. In 2010, AGEF was charged with corruption allegations, after it closed its offices in Afghanistan without paying its employees or rendering the required services to returnees, albeit receiving a GBP 3.2 million budget from the UK government alone (Crawford, 2011).

Data collected in 2012 (Majidi, forthcoming), on the same population of deportees interviewed in 2009, shows that a mere two years after their return,

50 per cent of the assisted deportees had left again to the Islamic Republic of Iran, Pakistan or to Europe. Of the remaining 50 per cent, only 20 per cent mentioned having had a positive return process, while 70 per cent stated their family's disappointment about their return and 88 per cent voiced their inability to find a sustainable source of economic livelihood.

This is symptomatic of the limited impact of return and reintegration policies that do not take into account returnee profiles, the return context or individuals' expectations and needs upon return. It is also illustrative of the way return migration - and more precisely deportations - have become a business for many governments and NGOs in the field.

### 3.5. RETURN MIGRANTS

Data available on the situation of return migrants come from the IS Academy Survey. For the purposes of this report a return migrant is defined as someone who lived outside of Afghanistan for a minimum of one year<sup>7</sup> and based on the survey identified their reason for migration as one of the following: economic opportunities, family reunification, family formation, moving with family, education, health or other. In total, 231 return migrant households fit into this category in the sample, which includes a total of 1,572 individual return migrants.

Table 15 presents an overview of the characteristics of the return migrants. There were slightly more male (52.8%) than female (47.2%) return migrants. The average age of the return migrants was 21 years. The majority was single (62.0%). The current activities of the return migrants varied including: education (23.6%), housework (25.2%) and self-employment in business (7.3%). The majority of return migrants were from the Tajik ethnic group (60.6%).

**Table 15: Return migrants: Summary characteristics, IS Academy**

	Frequency	Percentage
Male	759	52.78
Female	679	47.22
Average age		20.93
<b>Marital status</b>		
Single	893	62.01

<sup>7</sup> The timeline of one year is chosen following the definitions utilized by IOM in Table 2 for a return migrant. For the IS Academy project, a return migrant was defined as someone who had lived abroad for a minimum of three months.

Married	504	35.00
Widowed	43	2.99
No education	607	52.51
Literate	435	37.63
<b>Primary daily activity of individuals 18 years and older</b>		
Other	426	29.50
Doing housework	364	25.21
In education	341	23.61
Self-employed (business)	106	7.34
In paid work	75	5.19
Unemployed	38	2.63
Disabled	32	2.22
Self-employed (agriculture or herding)	32	2.22
Family worker	24	1.66
In education and paid work	6	0.42
<b>Ethnicity</b>		
Tajik	878	60.64
Pashtun	398	27.49
Hazara	102	7.04
Turkmen	36	2.49
Other	23	1.59
Uzbek	11	0.76

Source: IS Academy Survey, 2011.

Table 16 shows the migration history of all the migration episodes of the return migrants. The majority of return migrants migrated to the Islamic Republic of Iran (65.4%), followed by Pakistan (33.6%). The majority migrated recently, post 1990, with nearly half of the return migrants migrating post 2000 (46.6%). A large portion of the return migrants returned for personal reasons (40.5%) including a desire to be in their home country, to be closer to family and friends and wanting to be in their cultural environment. This was followed by a large percentage returning due to the change in political and safety situation in Afghanistan (27.9%).

**Table 16: Return migrants: Migration history for all migration episodes, IS Academy**

	Frequency	Percentage
<b>Country of migration</b>		
Islamic Republic of Iran	146	65.47
Pakistan	75	33.63
Other	2	0.90
<b>Year of emigration</b>		
Prior to 1970	1	0.45
1970-1979	11	4.93
1980-1989	31	13.90
1990-1999	76	34.08
2000-2011	104	46.64
Migration was intended to be permanent	10	4.48
Average duration abroad (in months)		68.68
<b>Reason for return</b>		
I wanted to be closer to my family and friends	55	24.77
There is now peace and safety	46	13.96
The political situation changed	31	13.96
I missed my country and wanted to return	23	10.36
Employment opportunities	20	9.01
I was repatriated/ deported	13	5.86
I wanted to be in my cultural environment	12	5.41
Other	11	4.95
I was unable to reach my intended destination	6	2.70
My work contract ended	2	0.81
My documents expired	2	0.90
My asylum application failed	2	0.90
I did not like the country of migration	1	0.45

Source: IS Academy Survey, 2011.

Table 17 shows the pre-migration experience overview of the return migrants. It is interesting to note that the most frequent method of financing the migration was through formal loans (37.1%), followed by savings (29.6%). For migrations to both Pakistan and the Islamic Republic of Iran the most common reason for choosing that country was that it was easier to gain entry there than in other countries. However, more return migrants stated that they migrated to the Islamic Republic of Iran because of the better employment/working conditions (44.0%) than to Pakistan (30.0%). The vast majority of return migrants migrated without documents (92.5%) and did not have any information on the country of



migration prior to their migration (70.0%). The majority was also not in contact with any family or friends abroad prior to their departure (79.4%).

**Table 17: Return migrants: Migration experiences for most significant migration episode, IS Academy**

	Frequency		Percentage	
<b>Financing of migration (primary source)</b>				
Formal loans (bank)	79		37.09	
Savings	63		29.58	
Came with family as a dependent	29		13.62	
Employer paid	15		7.04	
Informal loans (family/ friends)	15		7.04	
Gift from family/ friends	7		3.29	
Sold assets	3		1.41	
Other	2		0.94	
Migrated without documents	197		92.49	
Had information on country of migration prior to departure	64		30.05	
<b>Primary information source</b>				
Friend/ Family member in Afghanistan	35		54.69	
Friend/ Family member in country of migration	23		35.94	
Friend/ Family member in country of origin	5		7.81	
In contact with family/ friends living abroad prior to departure	46		21.60	
	<b>Pakistan</b>		<b>Iran</b>	
<b>Reason migrated to specific country</b>	<b>#</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>#</b>	<b>%</b>
Easier to access/ gain entry	38	54.29	67	47.52
Better employment/ work condition	21	30.00	62	43.97
Living conditions were better	8	11.43	6	4.26
Family/ friends already there	1	1.43	5	3.55
Other	2	2.86	1	0.71

Source: IS Academy Survey, 2011.

Table 18 illustrates the return migrants' migration experiences for their most significant migration episode. The majority of the return migrants lived at the work site or in a rented room or apartment while in the country of migration (77.0%). It is noteworthy that although the return migrants expressed that they did not migrate as refugees, 8.5 per cent stated that they stayed in a refugee camp in the country of migration. One possible reason for this is that their families were refugees and they could benefit from their status of being a

refugee, including that the camps and legal status granted to refugees are safer than the situation for undocumented migrants.

The majority of the return migrants were employed in the country of migration during their stay (76.2%), however, few were able to make investments in Afghanistan while abroad (10.8% invested in a house). Over one third of return migrants sent remittances to their households while in the country of migration (37.1%). The average amount of remittances sent per year was AFN 12,049 (USD 242). The vast majority of these remittances were sent for daily needs (71.3%).

**Table 18: Return migrants: Migration experiences for most significant migration episode, continued, IS Academy**

	Frequency	Percentage
<b><i>Type of housing in the country of migration</i></b>		
Rented room/ shared apartment	94	44.13
Worksite	70	32.86
Refugee camp	18	8.45
With family	18	8.45
Asylum centre	5	2.35
Own house	4	1.88
Motel/ hotel/ hostel	2	0.94
Charitable centre/ shelter	1	0.47
Other	1	0.47
Employed in the country of migration at any time	176	76.19
Received general education degree in the country of migration	5	2.17
<b><i>While abroad made an investment in:</i></b>		
Land in Afghanistan	4	1.88
Still own the land	3	75.00
House in Afghanistan	23	10.80
Still own the house	21	91.30
Business in Afghanistan	1	0.47
Still own the business	1	100.00
Sent remittances to household while abroad	79	37.09
Average amount sent per year (in AFN)		12,049
Money sent for daily needs	34	80.95*
Sent Remittances to non-household while abroad	4	1.88
Brought money upon return	115	53.99
Average amount (in AFN)		42,768

<b>Primary use of this money</b>		
Daily needs	82	71.30
Other	15	13.04
Housing/ land	11	9.57
Debt payment	5	4.35
Education	1	0.87
Investment/ business	1	0.87
No contact with family/ friends in Afghanistan	98	46.01
Temporarily returned to Afghanistan	11	9.57
<b>Primary reason for temporary return</b>		
Visit family/ friends/ vacation	8	72.73
Significant event (funeral/ wedding)	3	27.27

Source: IS Academy Survey, 2011.

Note: \*Based on the number of individuals who sent money for a specific reason.

Over half of the return migrants were able to bring money with them upon their return (54.0%) and the average amount brought was AFN 42,768 (USD 860). It is interesting to note that this is less than repatriating refugees brought on average on their return. The majority of this money was also spent on daily needs (71.3%). While living in the country of migration, just over half of the return migrants were able to maintain contact with their family or friends in Afghanistan (54.0%), however, very few engaged in a temporary visit to Afghanistan (9.6%).

Table 19 provides an overview of the return migrant's final return to Afghanistan. The majority have returned post 2000 (77.7%) and stated that they received assistance from no one other than themselves (62.0%). A smaller percentage of the return migrants cited receiving assistance from UNHCR (9.9%).

**Table 19: Return migrants: Overview of return to Afghanistan, IS Academy**

	Frequency	Percentage
<b>Year of final return to Afghanistan</b>		
Prior to 1979	3	1.42
1980-1989	3	1.42
1990-1999	41	19.43
2000-2005	72	34.12
2006-2011	92	43.60
<b>Returnee received assistance from</b>		
No one other than myself	132	61.97
UNHCR	21	9.86

Partner/ spouse	17	7.98
IOM	16	7.51
Friends	10	4.69
Father/ mother	9	4.23
Brothers/ sisters	4	1.88
Other	4	1.88
In paid employment since return	51	23.94
Average number of months to find a new job		12.12
Own a business	11	5.16
Maintain contact with family/ friends in country of migration	74	34.74

Source: IS Academy Survey, 2011.

Since their return, 23.9 per cent have been in a position of paid employment and the average duration for return migrants to find a position was one year. Very few return migrants own their own business (5.2%). One third do maintain contact with family and friends in the country of migration (34.7%).

### 3.6. TEMPORARY RETURN PROGRAMMES/ REVERSE CIRCULAR MIGRATION

Temporary return programmes (also termed reverse circular migration and brain gain) were initiated in 2002 in Afghanistan to contribute to building skills and capacity as the country rebuilt after the wars. Temporary return programmes are intended to contribute to capacity development. Low levels of highly skilled return to Afghanistan raised concerns regarding capacity within the country. International organizations began to fund programmes to encourage the Afghan diaspora to return temporarily and contribute to rebuilding the country.

Temporary return programmes were implemented by different organizations and in different forms. The majority of temporary return programmes were offered by the IOM. Table 20 provides an overview of temporary return programmes run by IOM. The table highlights that temporary return programmes were not only offered to the wider diaspora, but also to those in the neighbouring country of the Islamic Republic of Iran. Table 20 also shows that the purpose and duration of the programmes varied with the shortest programmes being the Temporary Return of Qualified Nationals Programme from the Netherlands at three months duration and the longest programmes being twelve months in duration.

**Table 20: Summary of IOM temporary return to Afghanistan programmes**

Programme name	Countries	Period	Priority sectors	Objective	Number of participants (Total)	Number of Applications	Duration of Assignment (Planned)
Reconstruction, Capacity Building and Development of Afghanistan Through the Transfer of Qualified and Highly Qualified Afghan Nationals from European Union Member States (RQA- EU/ Global)	UK, Sweden, Netherlands, Germany, France, Finland, Denmark, Austria, Belgium	2002 - 2005	Health, Education, Public Administration, Public, Infrastructure	To contribute to the recovery, rehabilitation and reconstruction efforts in Afghanistan.	150	715	6-12 Months
Reform Implementation Management Unit – Technical Assistance Project (RIMU-TAP)	Northern America, Europe, Australia, Africa, Pakistan, India, Nepal, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Islamic Republic of Iran, Afghanistan	2007 - 2009	Ministry of Education, Culture and Science Reform Information Management Unit	To provide assistance to develop the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science into an effective, accountable, fully funded and functioning public institution that facilitates education for all.	5	-	12 Months
Return of Qualified Afghans from Neighbouring Countries (RQN-NC)	Afghanistan, Pakistan, Islamic Republic of Iran, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Europe, North America, Australia	Nov 2005 - Oct 2008	Education and health, construction and transport, rural development and agriculture, and commercial development	To contribute to the reconstruction of Afghanistan through capacity-building in the country's administration, restoration and development of essential social services, such as education and health, construction and transport, rural development and commercial agriculture and commercial development.	210 (and 750 family members)	-	12 Months

Placement of Afghan Expatriate Professionals from EU Countries into the Public Administration of Afghanistan (PAEP-EU)	EU	Mar 2005 - Sep 2008	Public Administration	To enhance the contribution of Afghan expatriate professionals residing in Member States of the European Union (EU) in the re- construction efforts of Afghanistan by enhancing policy and institutional capacities within the public administration.	14	156	12 Months
Temporary Return Of Qualified Nationals Project 1 (TRQN 1)	Netherlands	Apr 2006 - Jun 2008	Education, health, infrastructure		37	309	6 months
Temporary Return Of Qualified Nationals Project 2 (TRQN 2)	Netherlands	Jul 2008 - Jun 2011	Education, Health, Infrastructure		68 to date		3 months
Return and Reintegration of Qualified and Skilled Afghans from the Islamic Republic of Iran	Islamic Republic of Iran	Mar 2010 - Dec 2010	Industrial skills, mechanical qualifications, construction and renovation skills	To contribute to the reconstruction of Afghanistan through capacity-building.	300 (target)		7 months

Source: Kuschminder, 2011.

In addition to the IOM, the World Bank and the United Nations have both implemented temporary return programmes to Afghanistan. The World Bank funded the Afghanistan Expatriate Services Programme (AEP), which began in 2004. The purpose of the AEP was to bring highly qualified Afghans to work in government positions for a period of six months to one year. By the end of 2006, 76 people had participated in the AEP across 20 different ministries. The United Nations Volunteers (UNV) launched the Transfer of Knowledge through Expatriate Nationals (TOKTEN) to Afghanistan programme in 2002. Its objective was to support the Afghan Interim Government and the succeeding government administrations. By March 2006, 29 volunteers had participated in the programme (Kuschminder, 2011).

Although, small in number, research conducted by Kuschminder (2011) on the Netherlands Temporary Return of Qualified Nationals Programme indicated that the temporary returnees were successful in being able to transfer knowledge and develop capacity in Afghanistan. This is not to say that all temporary return programmes are successful, however, further research is required to understand the effects of temporary return on development in Afghanistan.





## 4. IMPACT OF RETURN MIGRATION

This section will explore the impact of return migration on households' economic and social wellbeing as well as the impact in terms of current employment in Afghanistan. First, however, the section will examine reintegration of return migrants.

### 4.1. REINTEGRATION OF RETURN MIGRANTS

UNHCR defines reintegration as the “ability of returning refugees to secure the political, economic, [legal] and social conditions needed to maintain life, livelihood and dignity” (UNCHR, 2004: 4). To assess the potential for reintegration, one would have to proceed with an assessment of returnees situation in relative terms and in comparison with local populations. It would also require an assessment of the range of return experiences within the returnee population by looking at the nuances of reintegration. Lastly, it would require an assessment of returnees' own perception of return, focusing on the level of information about and the expectations held before and after return.

As such, reintegration can be explored through both the measurement of returnees economic and social wellbeing, but also in terms of their subjective or self-perceptions of their situation and reintegration. This section will refer to returnee's self-perceptions of reintegration. Table 21 shows how returnees feel regarding being a part of a community in Afghanistan now, after their return. The table illustrates that the vast majority of returnees feel that they are a part of a community in Afghanistan (89.7%).

**Table 21: Feelings of being a part of a community now in Afghanistan, IS Academy**

	Repatriating refugees		Return migrants		Other returnees		All returnees	
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
Not a part of the community	12	1.49	1	0.45	0	0.00	13	1.19
Somewhat a part of the community	68	8.47	25	11.21	4	6.15	100	9.12
Very much a part of the community	723	90.04	197	88.34	61	93.85	983	89.69

Source: IS Academy Survey, 2011.

Furthermore, returnees participating in the focus group discussions expressed that they were happy to return to Afghanistan:

I am happy at the moment. If there are no good economic job opportunities here at least I am close to my family and feel some serenity thanks to that.

On the other hand, reintegration can also be a difficult process for some returnees. One individual that initially migrated to the Islamic Republic of Iran in 1999 described his experiences of return and initial challenges of reintegration:

Like many other families, we returned to Afghanistan in 2003 because we were told that it would be better for us. We were assisted by the United Nations. But I was not happy with my life in Afghanistan so I decided to go back to Iran a second time, but this time on my own. I was deported after two years in 2009...That second time I had wanted to go back to Iran because I could not get used to the social and cultural life in Afghanistan, but mainly because Iran offers more jobs, better wages and more possibilities to have a better life than Afghanistan. Once I went there I realized that those promises of a better life were not really what I expected. In reality, it has become much more difficult to even travel to Iran, let alone to have a good life.

Reintegration is a highly subjective process for individuals based on their individual experiences. Overall, the data suggest that the majority of returnees feel well integrated into Afghanistan and are happy to return to their cultural environment. Furthermore, 90.0 per cent of the returnee households interviewed feel strongly a part of their community, with the heads of households feeling that their own position in their household has been reinforced since their return (59.2%) and 52.7 per cent saying that their situation has improved compared to their situation before their exile.

Economic indicators also show that returnee and non-migrant households are at par and overall in a weak position given their lack of stable employment, lack of savings and lack of land tenure security. At times, returnee populations even fare better: either because their exile has taught them new and more marketable skills or because they have a greater awareness of credit systems. All in all, returnee and non-migrant households report similar levels of vulnerability to external shocks, whether job loss, illness and death or increases in input and food prices. This points to the fact that structural challenges of development and poverty affect all households interviewed – but no specific sub-group (returnee or non-migrant).

The collected data sheds light on recent policy efforts to develop national strategies in Afghanistan to address the reintegration of returnees. Many of the issues confronting returnee households are the same issues that confront non-returnee and non-migrant households: these are structural issues of a country where development has not reached the mass of urban and rural poor. It also

highlights the importance of evidence-based policies: without a rigorous study of the situations of returnee and non-returnee households, it is challenging to speak of reintegration levels and to develop national strategies for sustainable reintegration.

## 4.2. RETURN MIGRATION AND ECONOMIC WELLBEING

This section will provide a comparative of different forms of return migrants' economic wellbeing and is based on the IS Academy Survey. The categories of returnees included are the repatriating refugees (808), return migrants (213, who migrated for non-refugee reasons and were outside of the country for a minimum of 12 months) and a third category of other returnees (68).<sup>8</sup> The other returnees include those who migrated for less than 12 month for non-refugee reasons and those that cited environmental conditions as the reason of their migration. The reason for migration of environmental conditions has been placed in the other category as it could be that the migrants are environmental refugees, however, environmental refugees are not yet recognized under the 1951 *United Nations Convention relating to the Status of Refugees* and may have differing experiences than convention refugees.

Table 22 provides a comparison of the assets of the different groups of return migrants. Repatriating refugee households are more likely to own land than other return households (24.1%), and simultaneously are likely to own considerably more land than other return households at 4.7 jeribs (0.9 hectare or 9400m<sup>2</sup>) compared to 2.7 jerib (0.5 hectare or 5400m<sup>2</sup>) of return migrants and 2.5 jerib (0.5 hectare or 5000m<sup>2</sup>) for other returnees. In terms of home ownership, repatriating refugees are also more likely to own their homes (72.4%), however, their homes are not significantly larger than other returning migrants. In regards to livestock, there was not significant variation in the average number of each type of livestock owned by the different return households.

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<sup>8</sup> The total sample of refugee returnees is 1,100, however the three categories of repatriating refugees, return migrants and other returnees only add up to 1,089 cases. The reason for this is that 11 survey cases were missing from the reason for migration question, which was utilized to create the returnee group classifications.

**Table 22: Assets of returnee households, IS Academy**

	Repatriating refugees		Return migrants		Other returnees		All returnees	
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
<b>Land</b>								
Household owns land	195	24.13	34	14.72	6	8.82	235	21.36
Average amount of land owned (in jeribs)	4.69		2.74		2.50		4.33	
<b>Food consumption provided by own land</b>								
Nothing	43	22.05	8	25.00	0	0.00	52	22.13
Some	123	63.08	18	56.25	5	83.33	147	62.55
Quite a lot	22	11.28	5	15.63	1	16.67	28	11.91
Almost all	7	3.59	1	3.13	0	0.00	8	3.40
<b>Housing</b>								
Average number of rooms (without bathroom and kitchen)	2.98		2.57		2.84		2.86	
Home ownership	585	72.41	136	63.85	45	66.18	773	70.28
<b>Average number of livestock owned by household</b>								
Sheep	6.85		7.75		3.67		6.68	
Poultry	5.44		4.16		7.44		5.37	
Goats	3.79		5.80		4.33		4.23	
Cows	1.39		1.28		1.58		1.38	
Oxen	1.21		1.20		2.00		1.27	

Source: IS Academy Survey, 2011.

Table 23 provides an overview of the different forms of returnee's household incomes. For all returning households, unskilled day labour is the most important source of household income and on average all households receive income from this source for 12 months per year. Repatriating refugees had the highest average household income of the three groups at AFN 191,856 (USD 3,833), whereas other return migrants had the lowest average household income at AFN 119,482 (USD 2,386).

**Table 23: Income of returnee households, IS Academy**

	Repatriating refugees	Return migrants	Other returnees	All returnees
Most important source of income: Unskilled day labour	250	84	28	366
%	30.94	39.44	41.18	33.30

Average number of months household received most important income source	11.71	11.93	11.86	11.78
Total average household income per year (in AFN)	191,856	135,831	119,482	176,300

Source: IS Academy Survey, 2011.

The average frequency of shocks experienced by households is represented in Table 24. All return households reported that the most significant shock experienced in the last five years was job loss. This was most prominent for the other returnees (67.7%), followed by the return migrants (58.0%) and the repatriating refugees (42.2%). The return migrants and other returnees experienced job loss on average 15 to 16 times during the past five years, whereas repatriating refugees experienced job loss on average 11 times in the same time period. The serious illness of a household member also represented a significant shock to households, with other returnees reporting the serious illness of both an adult male and female occurring an average of four times in the past five years, whereas for repatriating refugees and return migrants the average serious illness of an adult male was two times in the past five years and once in the past five years for an adult female. Repatriating refugees reported the highest average occurrence of drought affecting the household in the past five years at 1.4 times on average, whereas other returnees reported an average of 0.8 times. The final shock that significantly affected all return migrant households was an increase in food prices. Return migrants reported the highest average of increases in food prices at 14.0, compared to 12.8 for repatriating refugees and 7.4 times in the past five years for other returnees.

**Table 24: Average frequency of returnee household shock in the past five years, IS Academy**

	Repatriating refugees	Return migrants	Other returnees	All returnees
Increase in food prices	12.82	13.96	7.44	12.65
Job loss	11.17	15.74	15.40	12.31
Serious illness of adult woman	1.77	1.76	3.96	1.93
Serious illness of adult man	1.68	1.81	4.37	1.88
Drought	1.42	0.92	0.84	1.28
Serious illness of child	1.11	0.87	1.82	1.11
Wedding/ funeral	0.15	0.51	0.22	0.48

Source: IS Academy Survey, 2011.

Table 25 shows the borrowing and saving experiences of return migrant households. Repatriating refugee households are slightly more likely to have a bank account (6.8%) and are slightly more likely to save (14.9%) compared

to return migrant households (10.8%) and other return households (10.3%). In addition, the average amount saved of repatriating refugee households (AFN 185,622, roughly USD 3,750) is three times the amount of the average amount saved of return migrant households (AFN 56,556, roughly USD 1,142). Across all return categories, the majority of households generated money through loans from family or friends in Afghanistan. Finally, for all three return groups, the majority stated that if they needed to generate USD 100 within one week they would be able to do so. This was slightly more likely for the repatriating refugees (66.2%) and return migrants (62.4%), whereas only 50.0 per cent of other returnees would be able to generate the USD 100.

**Table 25: Borrowing and saving of returnee households, IS Academy**

	Repatriating refugees		Return migrants		Other returnees		All returnees	
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
Household member(s) has/ have bank account	55	6.81	12	5.63	3	4.41	71	6.45
Household saves	120	14.85	23	10.80	7	10.29	151	13.73
Total amount saved in the past 12 months (in AFN)	185,622		56,556		148,000		161,098	
<b>Household money generating activity if needed</b>								
Loan from family/ friends in Afghanistan	616	76.43	164	77.00	57	83.82	846	77.05
Own cash/ savings	74	9.18	16	7.51	3	4.41	94	8.56
Sale of household assets	39	4.84	20	9.39	3	4.41	63	5.74
Sale of animals	18	2.23	5	2.35	3	4.41	26	2.37
Sale of other farm/ business assets	20	2.48	2	0.94	0	0.00	22	2.00
Loan from family/ friends abroad	15	1.86	0	0.00	1	1.47	16	1.46
Other	10	1.24	3	1.41	1	1.47	14	1.28
Gift from family/ friends abroad	7	0.87	2	0.94	0	0.00	9	0.82
Gift from family/ friends in Afghanistan	4	0.50	1	0.47	0	0.00	5	0.46
Sale of crops	2	0.25	0	0.00	0	0.00	2	0.18
Savings association	1	0.12	0	0.00	0	0.00	1	0.09
If USD 100 are needed for emergency, household could obtain it within a week	535	66.21	133	62.44	34	50.00	709	64.45

Source: IS Academy Survey, 2011.

In addition to assets and income, the usage of and access to facilities that a household has provides an important indication of their economic situation. Table 26 provides an overview of the usage of and access to facilities for each of the return migrant groups. For approximately one third of households across all three categories access to drinking water was through a private well in both the rainy and dry season. The majority of households across all three groups had a private pit or latrine for a toilet. 10.8 per cent of repatriating refugees had their own flush toilet. Gas was the most frequent cooking method for repatriating refugees (40.2%) and return migrants (40.9%) households, whereas wood was the most common cooking method for the other returnees (50.0%). The majority of returnees had access to electricity from either a public or private source. Other return migrants were most likely to have lighting provided by gas, kerosene or candles (42.7%). Finally, the majority of returnees in all three groups had access to a health centre, hospital and public transportation. The majority did not have access to a post office, Internet connection, a bank, a money transfer operator or a microfinance institution.

**Table 26: Usage of and access to facilities of returnee households, IS Academy**

	Repatriating refugees		Return migrants		Other returnees		All returnees	
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
<b><i>Primary source of drinking water for the household in the rainy season</i></b>								
Private well	260	32.22	70	32.86	25	36.76	359	32.67
Private tap in house	167	20.69	50	23.47	13	19.12	231	21.02
Shared well	144	17.84	27	12.68	13	19.12	187	17.02
Shared tap	110	13.63	35	16.43	3	4.41	148	13.47
River, lake, pond or stream	60	7.43	29	13.62	14	20.59	105	9.55
Other	65	8.05	2	0.94	0	0.00	68	6.19
Bottled water	1	0.12	0	0.00	0	0.00	1	0.09
<b><i>Primary source of drinking water for the household in the dry season</i></b>								
Private well	242	30.02	61	28.64	9	13.24	316	28.78
Shared well	182	22.58	36	16.91	42	61.76	264	24.04
Shared tap	120	14.89	43	20.19	3	4.41	167	15.21
Private tap	113	14.02	38	17.84	1	1.47	152	13.84
River, lake, pond or stream	81	10.05	32	15.02	13	19.12	127	11.57
Other	64	7.94	3	1.41	0	0.00	68	6.19
Bottled water	4	0.50	0	0.00	0	0.00	4	0.36
<b><i>Type of toilet mainly used by the household</i></b>								
Private pit/ latrine	649	80.32	184	86.38	63	92.65	905	82.27
Private flush toilet	87	10.77	15	7.04	4	5.88	107	9.73

Shared pit/ latrine	60	7.43	11	5.16	1	1.47	73	6.64
No toilet	8	0.99	0	0.00	0	0.00	8	0.73
Shared flush toilet	4	0.50	3	1.41	0	0.00	7	0.64
<b>Type of fuel mainly used for cooking by the household</b>								
Gas	325	40.22	87	40.85	24	35.29	443	40.27
Wood	306	37.87	67	31.46	34	50.00	409	37.18
Straw/ shrubs/ grass	86	10.64	22	10.33	5	7.35	114	10.36
Animal dung	49	6.06	18	8.45	3	4.41	70	6.36
Charcoal	28	3.47	10	4.69	1	1.47	40	3.64
Kerosene	8	0.99	6	2.82	0	0.00	14	1.27
Electricity	6	0.74	3	1.41	1	1.47	10	0.91
<b>Type of lighting mainly used by the household</b>								
Electricity (public source)	403	49.88	122	57.55	32	47.06	562	51.14
Kerosene, gas, candles	267	33.04	64	30.19	29	42.65	364	33.12
Electricity (private source)	94	11.63	16	7.55	6	8.82	117	10.65
Other	39	4.83	4	1.89	0	0.00	44	4.00
Electricity (combination of public and private)	5	0.62	6	2.83	1	1.47	12	1.09
<b>Facilities used by household member(s)</b>								
Public transportation	759	93.94	204	95.77	67	98.53	1 041	94.64
Hospital	665	82.30	153	71.83	60	88.24	889	80.82
Health centre/ clinic	637	78.84	159	74.65	63	92.65	869	79.00
Bank	67	8.29	19	8.92	1	1.47	88	8.00
Internet café/ connection	31	3.84	6	2.82	0	0.00	38	3.45
Money transfer operator	19	2.35	4	1.88	0	0.00	24	2.18
Microfinance institution	21	2.60	1	0.47	0	0.00	22	2.00
Post office	9	1.11	2	0.94	0	0.00	12	1.09

Source: IS Academy Survey, 2011.

Households offered their own perspectives on their economic situation, which is presented in Table 27 on subjective wealth. Other returnees were most likely to state they are currently finding it difficult or very difficult to cope (33.8%). The majority of repatriating refugee (59.5%) and return migrants (55.9%) households reported that they currently view their household's economic situation neutrally, as coping. When comparing their current situation to the living conditions of the household five years ago, the majority of other returnees report that the situation had stayed the same (54.4%). Most frequently, repatriating refugees (41.0%) and return migrants households (42.3%) report that their household situation has improved or very much improved compared to five years ago. Compared to other households in their community, the majority



of other return migrant households saw themselves as about average (51.5%). Repatriating refugees were the mostly likely among the three categories to see themselves as above average, although this was overall low at 9.8 per cent. When comparing to the wealth of households in the community five years ago, slightly more repatriating refugee households saw themselves as above average at 12.0 per cent. Finally, other returnees were the most likely to report having difficulties with meeting food needs at 72.1 per cent, as opposed to repatriating refugees (52.7%) and return migrant households (56.3%).

**Table 27: Subjective wealth of returnee households, IS Academy**

	Repatriating refugees		Return migrants		Other returnees		All returnees	
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
<b><i>Current economic situation of the household</i></b>								
Finding it very difficult	29	3.59	8	3.76	2	2.94	39	3.55
Finding it difficult	153	18.94	46	21.60	21	30.88	221	20.09
Coping (neutral)	481	59.53	119	55.87	33	48.53	641	58.27
Living comfortably	132	16.34	38	17.84	12	17.65	184	16.73
Living very comfortably	13	1.61	2	0.94	0	0.00	15	1.36
<b><i>Living conditions of the household compared to five years ago</i></b>								
Become much worse	23	2.85	5	2.35	1	1.47	29	2.64
Become worse	174	21.53	54	25.35	10	14.71	239	21.73
Stayed the same	280	34.65	64	30.05	37	54.41	388	35.27
Improved	318	39.36	85	39.91	20	29.41	426	38.72
Very much improved	13	1.61	5	2.35	0	0.00	18	1.64
<b><i>Current household wealth compared to other households in the community</i></b>								
Amongst the poorest in the community	73	9.03	18	8.45	5	7.35	96	8.73
Below average	256	31.68	71	33.33	25	36.76	354	32.18
About average	394	48.76	105	49.30	35	51.47	542	49.27
Above average	79	9.78	18	8.45	3	4.41	101	9.18
Among the richest in the community	6	0.74	1	0.47	0	0.00	7	0.64
<b><i>Household wealth compared to other households in the community five years ago</i></b>								
Amongst the poorest in the community	78	9.65	23	10.80	3	4.41	104	9.45
Below average	256	31.68	77	36.15	26	38.24	362	32.91
About average	373	46.16	95	44.60	36	52.94	509	46.27
Above average	97	12.00	18	8.45	3	4.41	121	11.00

Among the richest in the community	4	0.50	0	0.00	0	0.00	4	0.36
<b><i>Frequency of the household having difficulties in meeting food needs</i></b>								
Daily	10	1.24	4	1.88	1	1.47	15	1.36
Weekly	50	6.19	12	5.63	4	5.88	66	6.00
Monthly	165	20.42	42	19.72	14	20.59	222	20.18
Once every few months	201	24.88	62	29.11	30	44.12	295	26.82
Never	382	47.28	93	43.66	19	27.94	502	45.64

Source: IS Academy Survey, 2011.

This section has explored the differences in economic wealth between repatriating refugees, return migrants and other migrants' households. Overall, the results suggest that as a whole the repatriating refugees have a slightly higher economic wellbeing as compared to the other two groups. This might be further evidenced by the fact that both return migrants and other migrants are more likely to be engaged in current migration and return patterns that are largely driven by the lower economic status of their households.

### 4.3. RETURN MIGRATION AND SOCIAL WELLBEING

Following the same methodology as in the economic wellbeing section, this section will examine return migrants social wellbeing. Social wellbeing will be assessed in terms of return migrants perceptions and child outcomes.

Table 28 shows return migrants perceptions regarding how migration affected their ability to contribute to their communities and to their mental health. The majority of return migrants across all categories agreed or strongly agreed that their migration increased their ability to contribute to their communities. This was most prevalent amongst return migrants (67.0%), followed by other returnees (63.1%) and repatriating refugees (61.9%). The majority of return migrants also agreed or strongly agreed that their migration had improved their mental health. This was most prevalent amongst return migrants (73.2%), followed by repatriating refugees (67.4%) and other return migrants (60.0%).

**Table 28: Returnees perceptions of migration, IS Academy**

	Repatriating refugees		Return migrants		Other returnees		All returnees	
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
<b><i>Overall I feel that migration has increased my ability to contribute to my community.</i></b>								
Strongly disagree	17	2.11	1	0.48	0	0.00	18	1.65
Disagree	168	20.90	47	22.49	8	12.31	224	20.57
Neutral	121	15.05	21	10.05	16	24.62	161	14.78
Agree	379	47.14	99	47.37	33	50.77	517	47.47
Strongly agree	119	14.80	41	19.62	8	12.31	169	15.52
<b><i>Overall I feel that migration has improved my mental health.</i></b>								
Strongly disagree	20	2.49	4	1.91	0	0.00	24	2.21
Disagree	99	12.33	29	13.88	5	7.69	133	12.22
Neutral	137	17.06	23	11.00	21	32.31	186	17.10
Agree	445	55.42	119	56.94	34	52.31	604	55.51
Strongly agree	102	12.00	34	16.27	5	7.69	141	12.96

Source: IS Academy Survey, 2011.

The impact of return migration on social wellbeing can also be explored in terms of the outcomes of children, as presented in Table 29. Children of other returnees were the most likely to have attended school in the past week (50.0%), while children of return migrants were the least likely (41.3%). Children of other returnees were also the most likely to have above average grades (38.9%) and children of return migrants were the most likely to have below average grades (16.3%). Children of repatriating refugees were the most likely to have average grades (60.5%). The vast majority of children did not show any signs of anti-social behaviour across all three groups. Children of return migrants were the most likely to show signs of anti-social behaviour, although the percentage was very low at 4.4 per cent. The majority of children were also not involved in labour activities. The children of repatriating refugees were the most likely to be involved in labour activities, but the percentage was low at 9.0 per cent.

**Table 29: Child outcomes of returnee households, IS Academy**

	Repatriating refugees		Return migrants		Other returnees		All returnees	
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
Child attended school in the last week	1,313	44.00	299	41.30	110	50.69	1,733	43.80
<b>Child grades</b>								
Below average (0-65%)	179	13.53	48	16.33	9	8.26	239	13.77
Average (66-79%)	801	60.54	169	57.48	58	53.21	1,032	59.45
Above average (80-100%)	317	23.93	76	25.85	38	34.86	434	25.00
Child shows any anti-social behaviour	57	2.96	19	4.44	1	0.63	76	3.00
Child labour in the last week	175	8.97	32	7.42	13	8.13	221	8.62

Source: IS Academy Survey, 2011.

Overall there is not a large difference in the social wellbeing of the different types of return migrants; however, the survey utilized for this analysis did not comprehensively address issues of social wellbeing. Further research would be required to fully understand the social wellbeing of different forms of return migrants in Afghanistan.

## 5. RETURN MIGRATION GOVERNANCE

The vast number and forms of return migration creates many challenges for effectively governing these flows. This section will outline the policy frameworks of the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, the laws regulating return migration, international frameworks and international cooperation.

### 5.1. POLICY FRAMEWORK

At this time Afghanistan does not have a comprehensive national return and reintegration strategy. However, efforts are currently under way on several fronts, including a proposal to develop a National Reintegration Strategy and a separate process seeking to address the need for a National IDP Policy under government leadership.

This section will discuss both of these ongoing processes, examine the key bodies involved in return to Afghanistan and the incorporation of return into Afghanistan's overall development plans.

#### **5.1.1.A work in progress: National Internally Displaced Persons Policy and Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees**

A national IDP Task Force meeting on 14 March 2012, marked the launch of a Working Group to plan for a National IDP Policy for Afghanistan. The Ministry of Refugees and Repatriation (MoRR) has been tasked to initiate the process, expressly stated at a minuted Cabinet meeting, and UNHCR advocated for a strategy to enable clarity and harmonization of roles and responsibilities of the various stakeholders. Endorsement of the need for a National IDP Policy for Afghanistan was provided by all present – United Nations agencies, NGOs and donors alike. A Working Group (WG) to support MoRR has been formed to further develop the alternative and approaches to a National IDP Policy in the Afghanistan context. Its members include MoRR, UNHCR, NRC, IOM and OCHA.

A separate process, under the name of the Regional Reintegration Strategy, initiated by UNHCR and co-led with MoRR and UNDP, aims at garnering support and funds to address challenges of returnee reintegration. This strategy builds on a partnership between the government, humanitarian and development actors, to provide area-specific interventions at the community level. It aims both at preserving space for Afghan refugees in neighbouring countries over

the coming three years and beyond and at supporting sustainable reintegration for those Afghans who return home. The strategy was endorsed at the Geneva Conference on Afghanistan, which took place 2-3 May 2012. The commitment to the Strategy was reaffirmed by the international community at the Tokyo Conference on 8 July 2012.

### **5.1.2. Key coordinating bodies, documents and announced priorities on return migration**

Migration governance and return migration are policy issues in Afghanistan that are mainstreamed through the National Priority Programmes (NPPs). However, migration governance does not constitute a programme on its own. The Ministry of Refugees and Repatriation (MoRR), although one of the ministries of the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, is not a sectoral ministry: it does not have any implementing power or a separate budget. There are, however, no specific mechanisms dealing with migration issues other than MoRR, whose role it is to act as a coordinating body: “The Ministry for Refugees and [Repatriation] will coordinate the provision of support programs for refugees and returnees implemented through other ministries” (Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, 2008: 15). Its responsibility is to ensure that its population of concern is included in national programmes, through coordination, advocacy and policy making on behalf of refugees, returnees, internally displaced persons (IDPs) and other migrants at times as well. Furthermore, the ministry is a temporarily mandated ministry, to be dissolved when the problem of refugees and IDPs is solved.

The Refugees, Returnees and IDPs (RRI) Sector Strategy falls under Pillar 7 (Social Protection) of the 2008-2013 Afghanistan National Development Strategy (ANDS), which is Afghanistan’s Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper. The ANDS strategic objective with regard to refugees, returnees and IDPs is to “efficiently manage the voluntary return of refugees and IDPs and their reintegration into productive participation in society” (Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, 2008: 13), emphasizing the key principle of voluntariness and planned assistance. In accordance with the required procedures of the ANDS, a mid-term review has been required to strengthen the policy framework on return migration. This review is ongoing at MoRR in the hope of building a national strategic response to complex migratory patterns. The first step has been, in partnership with UNHCR in 2011/2012, to focus on the return and reintegration of returned refugees in high return areas.

However, returnees and IDPs remain a focus, as vulnerable groups, in the overall development efforts in Afghanistan. The Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development (MRRD), through the National Solidarity Programme (NSP), promotes the rights of returnee's access to services by including returnees in its target list of beneficiaries. It does not make its assistance conditional on any migration experience, but states instead that, due to the large membership of returnees in Afghan society, their needs are invariably covered through a comprehensive, community-based approach, in line with the social fabric of Afghan society: organic rather than taking as a base hypothesis a returnee versus non-returnee dichotomy in the assistance provided. Similarly, the Ministry of Labor, Social Affairs, Martyrs and Disabled's (MoLSAMD) National Skills Development Programme (NSDP) has been designed with the needs of returning refugees in mind and NSDP is actively working with IOM and other stakeholders to develop returnee-specific skill development activities. These still remain at a local level, with no such plans under way at the national level.

### **5.1.3. Mainstreaming return migration into development plans**

At a time of record lows in repatriation figures<sup>9</sup> and as detailed in the ANDS Pillar 7 RRI strategy, a target priority since 2008 has been to improve absorption capacities, security and peace in areas of refugee origin and of high refugee return. In this context, both National Priority Programmes (NPPs) and Provincial Development Programmes (PDPs) were developed through national and subnational consultations, formulating policy based on inputs which, among others, included setting as a priority the inclusion of vulnerable social groups such as refugees, returnees and IDPs.

MoRR's development budget activities is centred on managing the Land Allocation Schemes (LAS) through which land is sold at discounted rates to qualifying returned refugees in their province of origin. However, it still remains unclear for MoRR, at the central level, what external partners are doing to address return migration more broadly – by encompassing other types of return. In principle, MoRR is involved in all return programmes as per the NGO law and the semi-annual reports to the Ministry of Economy (MoEc) that have to be approved by the DoRRs locally before they are forward to the central MoEc. The latter has all the information on hand but is unable to extract information as it does not have an electronic data management system. As per the NGO

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<sup>9</sup> Numbers released by UNHCR in February 2012 show a decreasing trend: from 112,958 returnees in 2010, the following year saw a decrease of 40% down to 67,962 individuals. This was the second lowest repatriation number, preceded only by the year 2009 with 54,552 refugees having returned to Afghanistan (UNHCR, 2011c).

law, NGOs have to share a copy of their MoEc activity reports with relevant line ministries; but if this happens, it mostly takes place at the provincial level, leaving MoRR, at the central level, unable to set up a system to retrieve reports for its own planning and analysis of return migration. Data and information on return migration, for policy purposes, are lacking: even the Ministry of Finance (MoF) Donor Database, where optimally all donor assistance should be registered, does not take into account the entire budget of United Nations agencies present in Afghanistan – it only considers the contributions that have been donated locally by donors in Afghanistan.

Over the years since 2002, return migration has taken other degrees of policy importance. In 2007, the Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran began a wave of forced returns, or deportations, of Afghan irregular migrants, through its main crossing points into Herat and Nimroz. At the same time, growing interest among European governments began privileging the return of failed asylum-seekers and irregular migrants through both voluntary and forced return programmes. The latter were done in partnership with, and with the approval of, the Afghan government who authorized the returns from Europe to Afghanistan. However, upon return, the failure to mainstream these populations into development plans often led to their remigration either internally, regionally or internationally, hence increasing rather than decreasing their vulnerabilities and dependence on migration as a coping strategy.

The following sub-sections will highlight the various forms of return migration – from repatriation of refugees, to voluntary return, forced return, permanent and temporary return schemes – to provide an overview of the laws, regulations, institutional framework and international cooperation on return migration.

## 5.2. LAWS AND REGULATIONS

### 5.2.1. Presidential Decrees 297 and 104 : Land Allocation Schemes

On 3 June 2001, Hamid Karzai, then the President of the Afghan Interim Administration, signed Decree 297 on the Dignified Return of Refugees. This decree stipulates that Afghan nationals and refugees living abroad could return freely and without harm to their homeland, without being subject to any harassment, intimidation or persecution for reasons of race, religion national



and membership of a particular social group, hence ensuring protection from the state (Article 2<sup>10</sup>).

To solve the problem of housing and landlessness, identified as key obstacles to reintegration, a Land Allocation Scheme (LAS) initiative was endorsed by the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan in 2005 under the Presidential Decree 104 that legalizes distribution of uncultivated government land to landless returnees (with proper UNHCR Voluntary Repatriation Forms (VRFs)) and IDPs in their province of origin. A landless returnee who does not own land or a house under his or her name, the name of a spouse or minor child in Afghanistan, is eligible to apply for land under the LAS. Selection is done by inter-ministerial commissions, which also set the price of the land.

This scheme has, however, been weakened by land claims by private landowners, lack of coordination among government ministries and a weak selection process resulting in speculation and favouritism. As a result, many of the LAS sites are today at about 20 per cent capacity – this is the case of Aliceghan and Barikab in Kabul province, or Dashte Shor Jalaluddin Balkhi in Balkh province.

There has, to date, not been any thorough and comprehensive evaluation of the Land Allocation Scheme despite its importance in both numbers and funds spent. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) has released its own appraisal of one specific Land Allocation Scheme, namely that of Aliceghan in Kabul province, for which it had overall development management responsibility. Aliceghan commenced in September 2006 with the aim of assisting with the reintegration of returning Afghan families, whether refugees or IDPs. The project sought to develop a new settlement, providing housing, services, infrastructure and livelihood opportunities for 1,400 families. A range of key challenges prevented the development of this plan; today, about 200 families live at this location. Among the challenges were the lack of sustainable water, land ownership disputes with adjacent communities, lack of employment opportunities, lack of transportation to the city, lack of school and teaching staff, and lack of a clinic. Overall, the Land Allocation Scheme was seen as a low impact and cost ineffective initiative.

Among the lessons learned are the need to strengthen:

- Project inception: Encouraging reintegration of beneficiaries at the location of origin instead of creating new settlements. In part, the

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<sup>10</sup> Decree of the President of the Afghan Interim Administration, Ref No. 297, 13/03/1980 (03 June 2001).

argument proposed was that consolidating groups of returnees in single settlements compromised the very principle of reintegration UNDP also encouraged for activities at LAS settlements to be incorporated within Provincial Development Plans to enhance integration within existing districts.

- Site selection: Undertaking independent feasibility studies prior to confirming the suitability of a given site; ensuring agreement with adjacent communities over land ownership and access to water; ensuring proximity to urban areas or vacant agricultural land to maximise livelihood opportunities.
- Beneficiary selection: Recognizing multiple problems of fraud and forgery with repatriation forms, lease agreements and personal information as well as the limited capacity of provincial departments to manage data.

Faced with the overarching weaknesses of the LAS initiative, many donors are now asking whether the LAS can be salvaged or whether they should be ruled out. A proper assessment of all LAS sites should be undertaken in order to provide answers to such questions; however, information to date shows the disparity between sites and the unavailability of any homogeneous response.

### **5.2.2. Voluntary return**

The “Volrep”, the voluntary refugee repatriation programme, is governed by Tripartite Agreements, which enable the parties – Governments of Afghanistan, Pakistan or the Islamic Republic of Iran and UNHCR – to ensure the integrity and voluntariness of the repatriation process. First introduced in 2002, the Governments of Pakistan and Afghanistan, along with UNHCR, formally agreed to extend the agreement governing the voluntary repatriation of registered Afghans in Pakistan at the end of June 2013 (UNHCR, 2013b). Similarly, on 15-16 January 2013, UNHCR and the Governments of the Islamic Republic of Iran and Afghanistan held Tripartite Consultations on the voluntary repatriation of Afghans in safety and dignity (UNHCR,2013a).

In 2002, the decade of repatriation began in Afghanistan with the return of refugees, mainly from the neighbouring Islamic Republic of Iran and Pakistan. Other, less sizeable, but important regulations favouring voluntary return of refugees and asylum-seekers were introduced and formed the basis of migration policy making by European states keen on addressing rising immigration. A variety

of bilateral and tripartite agreements have been signed to facilitate the return of failed asylum-seekers, those awaiting a decision and those with time-limited leave to enter or remain, who wish to return to their country of origin. Among these are the bilateral and tripartite agreements with the following countries:

- UK
- Norway
- Denmark
- Sweden
- Netherlands
- France
- Australia

In 2012, MoRR, UNHCR and UNDP revealed their intention to launch a Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees and a “Voluntary Return and Reintegration Programme” to improve standard of living and livelihoods in 48 sites for returnees and their communities, ensuring sustainable socioeconomic reintegration, peaceful coexistence and development. This plan received verbal endorsement at an “International Conference on the Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees to Support Voluntary Repatriation, Sustainable Reintegration and Assistance to Host Countries” in May 2012 in Geneva, at UNHCR headquarters, however it remains to be seen whether donors will provide the required funding for the actual implementation of the plan – which would cost a total of USD 1.9 billion for 3 years (2012-2014) for 3 countries. At the time this report is being written, financial pledges had not been made and hence put in question the sustainability of the project. In 2012/2013, UNHCR and ILO collaborated to identify the needs in high return areas through a baseline data survey to identify and compare status of returnees, community members and communities in 22 high return areas; while ILO undertook a livelihoods assessment of 22 high return areas to inform future programming opportunities.

### **5.2.3. Forced return**

Almost all of the bilateral agreements signed with the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan treat return broadly, encompassing both voluntary return as well as alternatives to voluntary return, in accordance with international law and applying to all cases of failed asylum that should result in a return to the country of origin. Some of these agreements were built on principles of return while others contain more specific and precise requirements for return and reintegration in Afghanistan. The Afghan government, through its Ministry of Refugees and Repatriation, has contested certain deportation

measures, as illustrated in 2001 with the disputes over the agreement signed with the Government of Australia over the return of migrants and failed asylum-seekers. However, routine forced return schemes, such as the UK's bi-monthly charter flights continue to bring back failed asylum-seekers.

In reality, forced returns or deportations are ongoing in Afghanistan, whether from the Islamic Republic of Iran, Europe or Australia. The UK and members of the European Union are now envisaging extending these forced return activities to include unaccompanied minors. The UK is not the only country that wants to send children back: Norway, Sweden and the Netherlands are all involved in the European Return Platform for Unaccompanied Minors (ERPUM) addressing the issue of the return of unaccompanied minors who received a final rejection to their asylum application. In this framework, a proposal has been submitted to start deporting unaccompanied Afghans with a commitment to tracing and reunification upon return – tasks that will become increasingly complex, if not impossible, in a country facing conflict and instability. This has never been attempted in Afghanistan before and the project has been paused for a couple of years, with disagreements over its content with the Afghan government (Lemberg-Pedersen et al., 2013).

The largest numbers of forced returns are recorded from the Islamic Republic of Iran to Afghanistan. In 2012, a total of 258,146 deportations were recorded, showing an average of 705 deportations a day. At the end of March 2013, the total number of deportations had reached 49,708 deportations, representing a decrease of 25 per cent compared to the same period the previous year (UNHCR, 2013c). Although these numbers have been even higher in the past, with over 363,000 forcible returns in 2007, an all-time high, the current numbers are still considerable. In addition, some of the forced return figures include unregistered or registered refugee families in the Islamic Republic of Iran who, under the threat of the Iranian 'No Go Area Policy' as described in Box 1, are at times intimidated into returning to Afghanistan, out of fear of eviction and deportation.

### **Box 1: Iran's hardening policy towards Afghan refugees and migrants**

The Government of Iran (Gol) has, since 2002, taken policy decisions to 'encourage' refugee return. Afghans who are benefiting from a refugee status have encountered increasing difficulties with regard to access to education, health care and food rations, as the Gol has implemented measures to cut subsidies, forcing Afghans to pay for these resources. For example, in February 2004, it was announced that Afghan refugees living in Iran would lose their exemption for school fee payment and that their health care premiums would be increased to levels higher than those paid by Iranians. Similarly, in September 2007, the Gol adopted a by-law on the "Determination of Areas restricted for the Move and Stay of Foreign Nationals in Border Areas of the Country", marking the legal implementation of a "No-Go Area Policy". This creates areas where no foreign nationals are allowed to reside. This policy was understood by observers and specialists to be designed to target Afghan refugees. The by-law was amended in 2002, 2004 and 2007 to include the locations bordering Afghanistan, as well as Gulestan, East Azerbaijan and Sistan-Baluchistan which alone put at risk as many as 80,000 legal Afghan refugees who have been residing in these areas for over 20 years. Any foreign national refusing to relocate from these areas faces deportation. This led in effect to the internal displacement and, in extreme cases, the deportation of Afghan refugee families.

Confronted with low levels of voluntary return, and with the realization that Afghans preferred to stay in Iran for economic and practical reasons, the Gol announced a set of measures intended to push for a more substantial level of repatriation in 2004. A series of 11 articles were adopted under Article 138 of the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran and referred to as "Regulations on accelerating repatriation of Afghan nationals". These articles take measures to: (i) prevent the unauthorized employment of Afghan nationals by taking legal action against Iranian employers, (ii) promote the return of Afghan nationals to Afghanistan through the main broadcasting organization and (iii) prohibit Afghans of irregular status in Iran from renting accommodation, accessing administrative services, participating in social, political or cultural groups, opening bank accounts or accessing insurance services. Overall, by raising the cost of living for Afghans, introducing fees for the extension of ID cards and enrolment in schools, increasing the cost of health insurance and the rate of nominal taxation, a campaign was launched to induce the departure of Afghans and justify the deportations of those residing and working in Iran without authorization.

Following the Persian New Year in 2007, the Gol started a deportation campaign of single adult males and a small number of family groups living without proper legal status in Iran. The numbers exceeded 360,000 deportations in 2007 and 406,524 in 2008. The trend decreased in 2009, albeit remaining high (322,008 deportees), raising protection issues notably with regard to the rising number of unaccompanied minors (UAMs). Since 2002, the figures of UAMs forcibly returned from Iran to Afghanistan have almost doubled with 595 deportations in 2002 and 1,043 deportations in 2009.

Iran released a new policy in the summer of 2011 calling for special Exit Visas to be given to undocumented Afghans living in Iran, giving them the opportunity to request an exit slip that would allow them to return to Afghanistan, where they would then request a passport and be given a visa to legally re-enter Iran. This initiative caused concerns among the humanitarian and policy community, as it was seen as a technique to return large numbers of Afghans without taking them back, hence raising concerns that such returns would contribute to new insecurity, especially in urban areas. Initial estimates of returns under this scheme ended up being much larger than the actual flows. The scheme ended at the end of the Persian Year 1390, on March 31, 2012.

In 2012, the Government of Iran endorsed the *Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees* and intends to view returns from Iran through this framework.

*Source:* Majidi, 2010a, 2013; UNHCR, 2009.

## Box 2: Pakistan's stricter policy towards Afghan refugees

Although Pakistan has pledged its commitment to the hosting and gradual return of Afghan refugees, the atmosphere is one of wariness of the Afghan presence. Similar to the situation in Iran, Afghan refugees are increasingly being seen as a source of economic insecurity (unemployment, lower wages, competition for job opportunities, chronic poverty and so forth) and political instability along the border regions (for example rising criminality, smuggling of goods, drugs and arms.).

The military government of General Musharraf administered the closing of a number of refugee camps and demolished informal settlements arguing that they were protecting against insurgencies, forcing Afghan refugees to repatriate to other camps or to return home. In 2004 and 2005, the Pakistani government closed all camps in FATA with the "option" for Afghans to relocate within Pakistan. According to UNHCR, over 80 camps have been closed. Such policy has caused internal displacement and involuntary return flows. In June 2008, the closure of Jalozi camp in the North-West Frontier Province (NWFP) resulted in the forced return of 53,000 Afghans. Of the population of Afghans remaining in Pakistan, qualitative evidence shows that they are intimidated by pressure from authorities and police harassment which, coupled with increased insecurity, has made their stay less certain.

In 2012-2013, decreasing humanitarian access to Afghan refugees has been a source of concern for non-governmental organizations working in the field of humanitarian assistance to vulnerable refugee populations. With restrictions (No Objection Certificates, relocation, etc.) set on foreign and national staff of international organizations, humanitarian access is decreasing in the KPK border area. In a context of greater insecurity and instability, the humanitarian priority remains to define solutions in order to access vulnerable populations, especially those who do not wish to return voluntarily. The role of national and local NGOs, as well as assistance modalities such as cash assistance and cash vouchers should be assessed for emergency and routine operations.

*Source: Majidi, 2010a, 2013; UNHCR, 2009.*

## 5.2.4. Skilled return

A final policy on return migration encompasses temporary or permanent skilled return schemes, such as the Return of Qualified Afghans programme. These programmes are tripartite programmes signed between the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, the host government and the International Organization for Migration (IOM).

As discussed in the third section of this report, temporary return programmes have been established in Afghanistan since 2002 to encourage the return and contribution of qualified and skilled Afghans within the Afghan government, the public as well as the private sector. IOM has been at the forefront of some of these programmes, including the TRQN (Temporary Return of Qualified Nationals Programme), as well as return programmes specifically from European countries and neighbouring countries as detailed in Table 20 in the section 3.6 of this report.

## 5.3. INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORKS

### 5.3.1. Functions of various ministries and governmental agencies

Return is mainstreamed through different sectoral ministries – whether MRRD and MAIL (Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation and Livestock) in rural areas or MoLSAMD on vocational training and employment service programmes in most of the country. These ministries are endowed with national programmes, for example the National Solidarity Programme (NSP) at MRRD or the National Skills Development Programme (NSDP) at MoLSAMD.

To take the example of NSDP, it serves returnees in two ways – first by building a system with a set of 85 occupational skill standards to be used as a resource and implemented by training providers; secondly, through the provision of quality training for the under- and unemployed. The current plan is to cover 150,000 individuals in 34 provinces up to 2013. The Ministry of Labor, Social Affairs, Martyrs and Disabled has partnered up with IOM to target 15,000 individuals in border provinces such as Herat, Nimroz, and Farah, Faryab, Badghis and Laghman. They were selected according to the following criteria: they had to be returnees, above 15 and unemployed. The first phase of this project ended in 2009; MoLSAMD is now working with IOM in Ghor with the objective of training 230 returnees with funds from the Government of Japan.



In this process, NSDP provides technical assistance and selects qualified NGOs to implement the training activities. MoLSAMD now emphasizes that NSDP can be improved to better achieve market linkages for returnees to be able to, with hard and soft skills, integrate in the local labour markets in their areas of return.

A second example is that of National Solidarity Programme (NSP). National reintegration activities in Afghanistan have been implemented, directly and indirectly, through the existing NSP, through Community Development Councils (CDCs) that can provide basic infrastructure and services, shelter upgrading and livelihoods support, for households throughout the country. Districts have been prioritized for participation by MRRD on the basis of vulnerability factors such as poverty levels, drought risk or security food supply, the number of returnees or internally displaced persons and security conditions. The NSP was created in 2003 by the Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development (MRRD) to develop the ability of Afghan communities to identify, plan, manage and monitor their own development projects. The development paradigm of NSP rests upon the assumption that local communities can make important decisions regarding their local priorities and contribute their own resources. NSP distributes block grants, up to a combined value of USD 200 per household and a maximum of USD 60,000 per community, for project implementation. Under this umbrella, reintegration assistance has been channelled to CDCs nationwide, for communities to solve their own problems, including those of reintegration.

The assumption behind the NSP approach to returnee reintegration is that you may not need to directly focus on returnees but you can still indirectly work towards achieving a reintegration objective. Instead of over-privileging a specific segment of the population, here returnees, reintegration is seen as a natural organic process that takes place through the development of whole communities that can provide equal opportunities to villages. This is a natural form of reintegration when opportunities are provided to all village members.

In order to plan for its village-level contributions, NSP has engaged in a rural area mapping process, whereby NSP field staff was assigned to collect data from 75 per cent of the country's rural areas, with data stocked at regional offices. The NSP plan for the next block grant is to collect data on the remaining 25 per cent of rural areas. The data collected is based on a village profile, where NSP staff members are assigned to count the population, returnees and non-returnees alike, assess the geography of the site and identify whether there are clusters of families to see how the village is naturally divided. As such, this preliminary information contains information on population figures and returnee figures, in order to determine the amount of block grants to be allocated, given that it is

calculated on the basis of the number of families per village, with a maximum of USD 60,000 per village.

### **5.3.2. Main international organizations assisting national migration management**

The main organizations partnering with the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan and foreign governments on return migration have already been named in this section: IOM and UNHCR. However, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) has supported return and reintegration initiatives and more local initiatives have been led by NGOs. The latter will not be a focus of this section, which will look into national programmes.

#### ***International Organization for Migration***

IOM has organized several return programs under the broad umbrella of its Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration (AVRR) programme, which is aimed at all Afghans seeking to return to Afghanistan, irrespective of their status, as described previously in this report. Two sub-programmes have been implemented by IOM in Afghanistan, with the acronyms of AVRIM (Assisted Voluntary Returns program for Irregular Migrants) and VARRP (Voluntary Assisted Return and Reintegration Programme).

AVRIM is different from VARRP as it falls outside of the asylum process and contains no reintegration element, except for vulnerable cases. It is IOM's lowest assistance package and started in Afghanistan in 2004, first as a six month pilot, then as a regular program and includes counselling, return arrangements, documentation, airport assistance upon arrival and in kind assistance up to GBP 1,000 in the case of returns from the UK (Majidi, 2009b).

In addition to the AVRR programmes, IOM has also run several temporary return programmes. These programmes are summarized in Table 20 of this report.

#### ***United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees***

UNHCR has assisted 4.6 million Afghan refugees in the neighbouring Islamic Republic of Iran and Pakistan to voluntarily return home since 2002. The return and reintegration of refugees has been facilitated through several key programmes of the agency, namely the Cash Grant Allocation, a cash-based assistance given to every refugee family that signed up to be assisted by the

organization to return home, and the shelter programme for vulnerable families that possess a plot of land in their province of origin.

UNHCR's shelter assistance programme has provided over 215,000 units of shelter to vulnerable returnees and internally displaced persons throughout Afghanistan since 2002. The programme has been reviewed from both technical and financial standpoints throughout the years, leading to revisions of its design and implementation procedures; however, its contribution to successful reintegration has not been proven, as there has not been, to date, any comprehensive evaluation of the programme. In 2012, UNHCR commissioned a study to evaluate its shelter programme to define whether the programme is cost effective and identify potential modifications to improve its current design.

In 2012, UNHCR launched a new *Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees* to bridge the gap between humanitarian and development efforts to address the reintegration challenge of returnees. In partnership with MoRR and UNDP, UNHCR is now seeking the financial commitment of foreign governments to fund a program aimed at focusing on 48 reintegration sites (identified as areas of high return) at a cost of USD 1.9 billion over 3 years (2012-2014) in 3 countries (Afghanistan, Islamic Republic of Iran and Pakistan – covering the main refugee hosting countries). At a time of transition, when donor funding is significantly decreasing, this initiative is seen by many as ambitious. It has been designed without any prior baseline study or feasibility assessment of the sites of return, except for one baseline study conducted by UNHCR in partnership with the United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS) in 22 high return areas after the start of the strategy. Efforts are being made to mainstream such activities through already existing national programmes such as the National Solidarity Programme (NSP) or the National Skills Development and Market Linkages Program (NSDP). However, a number of donors have expressed their concern and reservations on this strategy, which borrows a language and logic adapted to political and military strategies rather than to actual humanitarian strategies. Last but not least, the mandate of UNHCR, as a humanitarian agency, narrows its reach to the first three years of return, as detailed in the organization's own reintegration handbook (UNHCR, 2004), while this strategy extends UNHCR's activities to the development arena, with a request to establish a multi-donor trust fund (MDTF) to be overseen by UNHCR and its sister agency, UNDP.

### ***United Nations Development Programme***

UNDP offers short-term volunteer consultancies through the UNV and TOKTEN programmes. UNDP has also promoted the temporary return of diaspora

members worldwide since 1987 as a means of improving government services and building capacity in developing states. TOKTEN programmes have operated in over 30 countries, including Afghanistan. Evidence from case studies suggests that TOKTEN volunteers may attract less resentment than long-term returnees, because their return is temporary, their compensation is more modest and they are not directly competing for permanent positions (OECD, 2010).

## 5.4. INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION

It is both timely and relevant, in the light of the 2014 transition, to assess the outcomes of the international cooperation and programmes on return, briefly outlined previously. At a time of decreasing funds, limited access for humanitarian and development actors, strained relationships between foreign and national governments, all stakeholders implicated in broader return migration governance issues are forced to review and rethink their strategies, aiming for more cost-effective and efficient programmes.

The following excerpt from the OECD's 2010 report is enlightening as it holds significant implications for future migration governance and return migration initiatives:

Data from the Afghan diaspora indicates that many diaspora members are prepared to return to Afghanistan for short periods, but informal discussions with Afghan acquaintances - both those who had government positions in Afghanistan and those outside the country - indicate that there is a great deal of frustration about the slow pace of change in Afghanistan, and even more, about the precarious security situation. Dissatisfaction was generally the result of insecurity and work: insecurity was a major concern for all of the respondents; the slow pace of work, antiquated processes, and inability to foster changes in the working environment were the causes of dissatisfaction for three of our respondents. Two other factors - job prospects and women's roles - also contributed to dissatisfaction (OECD, 2010: 29).

These elements are indicators that return will decrease in the months and years ahead. This is further supported by the World Bank's predictions of the economic consequences of transition. In its preliminary presentations, the World Bank highlighted implications of the transition and troop withdrawals for economic growth, fiscal sustainability and service delivery.<sup>11</sup>

Looking ahead, at a time of transition, donors and stakeholders should focus on the most sustainable policy options with regards to return and reintegration.

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<sup>11</sup> The World Bank, Transition in Afghanistan: Looking beyond 2014, November 21, 2011.

Whether in the case of refugees, IDPs, migrants and failed asylum-seekers, the most practical, pragmatic, and already proven option is to build efforts through existing national programmes<sup>12</sup>. It is no longer the time to reinvent the wheel, initiate new strategies or seek institutional rebirths and new programmes through external actors or United Nations agencies. Instead, actors of this return migration should understand that return and reintegration are, first and foremost, a national responsibility. Hence, it is the responsibility and mandate of the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, and of its Ministries, to address the gap between return and reintegration. To first begin to address this gap, we need to return to the basics: assessments, baseline surveys and feasibility studies to see what has worked and what has not, to test hypotheses and use evidence-based research to build policies. If this is not followed, the risk is to build policies with no real grounding in the Afghan context, with limited capacity for change.

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<sup>12</sup> N. Majidi, Returnee Reintegration: What are the Standards? Presentation given at an MoRR Policy Review Workshop on Reintegration at the Serena Hotel in Kabul, 13 December 2011: <http://morr.gov.af/en/Documents>.



## 6. KEY FINDINGS, POLICY IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This report has sought to provide a profile of the various forms of return migration currently occurring to Afghanistan. Over the past 10 years 6 million people have returned to Afghanistan. Since 2005, the number of repatriating refugees has significantly decreased and other forms of return migration have increased, such as deportations from the Islamic Republic of Iran. Today, the primary return flows to Afghanistan are no longer repatriating refugees, but returning temporary migrants that cross the border for employment or social reasons. The needs of these groups are vastly different, as returning temporary migrants primarily return on their own and can rejoin their families in Afghanistan.

The impact of return migration on Afghanistan was assessed in terms of returnee's reintegration, economic and social wellbeing. A comparison was made between the different forms of returnees; however, it is essential to also compare returnees to the wider population, as was done in the main body of the Migration Profile. This report has therefore sought to further understand the impacts on different types of return migrants.

### 6.1. KEY FINDINGS

- **A lack of data regarding returnees in Afghanistan.**

The most comprehensive source of data on return migration to Afghanistan is the IS Academy: Migration and Development project which includes a sample of 1,100 returnees. This is not nationally representative, however, and was only collected in five provinces. There is a need for more rigorous data in Afghanistan that assesses the situations and needs of returnees.

- **Lack of data on highly skilled return.**

Highly skilled return is essential to increase capacity and rebuild a country after conflict and a large brain gain. There is very little data as to the prevalence of highly skilled return and the effectiveness of highly skilled returnees in Afghanistan.

- **Number of total return migrants.**

The majority of data in Afghanistan estimates the number of returnees. Early evidence in the mid 2000s illustrated that the initial estimates of refugee returns were grossly underestimated. Gathering accurate understandings of the number of returnees is essential for effective planning and service provision. The current work of the National Solidarity Programme of the Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development should contribute to having accurate return figures for the future.

- **More recent returnees are not refugee returns but labour returns.**

The data utilized in this report provides evidence that there is a change in the type of return migration to Afghanistan. Repatriating refugees are no longer the primary flow of returnees and labour migration returnees are increasing. These returnees primarily return from the Islamic Republic of Iran and Pakistan. The return households are also economically worse off than repatriating refugee households, suggesting that their low economic status is a driver for the recent migration and returns.

- **Although there is no official circular migration programmes there is evidence of circularity in migration and return flows.**

Analysis of the labour migration movements between Afghanistan and Pakistan and the Islamic Republic of Iran illustrate circularity in movement that is irregular and undocumented.

- **Repatriating refugees are slightly better off economically as compared to other forms of returnees.**

The data in this report illustrates that repatriating refugee households are not the most vulnerable return migrant households.

## 6.2. POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- **Improvements in data collection.**

Data collection on return migration to Afghanistan needs to be improved. This is a challenging task, but accurate numbers of return migration and the form of return migration need to be collected to provide for appropriate planning.



- **Vulnerable populations.**

Returnees comprise nearly one third of the population in Afghanistan, which is too large of a population to target as vulnerable. Furthermore, it is evident that repatriating refugees are not the most vulnerable population in Afghanistan, thus policies should not be focused on repatriating refugees, but vulnerable households in Afghanistan. Targeting vulnerable households may also assist to prevent future migration as people seek livelihoods abroad.

- **A growing urban challenge.**

In the past 10 years, refugee return and internal displacement have caused rapid urbanization rates in Afghanistan. Kabul experienced a threefold increase of its population and has been termed one of the fastest growing cities in the region. About 70 per cent of Kabul is composed of informal settlements. With an urban growth rate of 5.4 per cent annually and a doubling of the population over the next seven years (Turkstra and Popal, personal communication, 2010), it is becoming increasingly difficult to track, estimate and assess the presence and profiles of returnees settling in urban areas directly or as a result of a secondary displacement (Majidi, 2011).

- **Prioritizing evidence-based policy decisions.**

The Governments of Afghanistan, the Islamic Republic of Iran and Pakistan, with the support of UNHCR, have presented the *Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees* to address the reintegration needs of returnees in Afghanistan. However, as the present study has shown, returned refugees do not fare worse than the rest of the population. Field data and evidence collected shows that the targets should be categorized to encompass the 'poor' and the 'neediest', whether returnees or non-returnees. The common denominator should be based on needs, not on migration experience, to avoid running the risk of increasing social tensions.

- **Improving context analysis.**

The specific context of transition will be the basis upon which to inform return migration and other policy decisions. It is key to examine the appropriateness of returnee and reintegration support measures in a context of ongoing insecurity and renewed displacement, limited institutional capacity and historically low refugee return compared to increasing internal displacement trends.

- **Regulating the unregulated.**

Afghanistan is currently working to establish circular migration partnerships in the Middle East (such as with Qatar), however, the greatest need is for legal circular migration programmes with the Islamic Republic of Iran.

## 6.3. RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Define vulnerability.**

Afghanistan should define vulnerability within the country context and provide assistance to those fitting that definition regardless of their return migration status.

- **Focus humanitarian actors on their mandate.**

Given decreasing donor funds, actors should focus on what they know best: for humanitarian actors, this should be to provide for the first phase of return (up to three years in the case of refugees) and for the needs of IDPs, landless and shelterless populations.

- **Support development actors.**

Given the large numbers and flows of returnees as well as the poverty profiles and vulnerabilities of Afghan rural and urban populations, priority should be given to development actors to address structural poverty and development challenges in Afghanistan. Targeting response to specific sub-groups will only add to existing social and economic tensions.

- **Mainstream reintegration through NPPs.**

There are 22 National Priority Programmes (NPP) which represent a new commitment to empower Afghan institutions for a more sustainable development of economic, legal, social and governance structures. Mainstreaming migration and displacement priorities through these NPPs, advocating for a greater inclusion and reintegration of returnees will ensure a more comprehensive, sustainable and nationally led response.

- **Develop an urban approach.**

Policymakers, humanitarian and development actors should agree on the need to develop an urban approach. Although the NPPs are strong on the development of rural areas, urban areas have so far been left

aside without a proper strategy. The lack of infrastructure, land and housing in the main urban areas is a source of increasing tensions. Any national strategy needs to include an urban component to address the needs of populations at large and of returnees who predominantly choose to reside in urban centres.

- **Circular migration programmes.**

There is a strong need for legal and regularized migration programmes with the Islamic Republic of Iran. Afghanistan should work to create legal circular migration programmes with the Islamic Republic of Iran that ensure Afghans can legally work there.

- **Include IDPs in the policy narrative.**

Although numbers now point to a greater importance of internal displacement trends, rather than refugee or migration trends, internally displaced persons (IDPs) are left out of major policy decisions on return and reintegration. With a national IDP policy currently being drafted, further support should be provided to raise the profile and needs of IDPs, especially conflict-induced IDPs (the current numbers reaching around 400,00 IDPs).



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