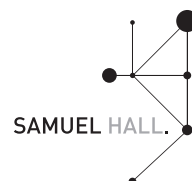


COMING BACK TO AFGHANISTAN

Study on Deported Minors' Return and Reintegration Needs in the Western region.



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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This research was led by Dr. Nassim Majidi and Camille Kasavan, with the support of Jawid Hassanzai, Abdul Basir Mohmand, Ibrahim Ramazani, Saida Azimi, Naqibullah Ahmadi and Melad Kakar.

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ABBREVIATIONS

ADSP	Asia Displacement Solutions Platform
AIHRC	Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission
CPAN	Child Protection Action Network
DEVCO	Directorate-General for International Cooperation and Development
DoE	Directorate of Economy
DoLSAMD	Directorate of Labour and Social Affairs, Martyrs, and the Disabled
DoRR	Directorate of Refugees and Repatriation
DRC	Danish Refugee Council
EU	European Union
ECHO	European Commission Humanitarian Aid
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
HLP	Housing, Land, and Property
IASC	Inter-Agency Standing Committee
ICLA	Information, Counselling, Legal Assistance
ICT	Information, Communications and Technology
IOM	International Organization for Migration
IRC	International Rescue Committee
KII	Key Informant Interview
MDI	Multi-Dimensional Integration Index
MEL	Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning
MoLSAMD	Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, Martyrs, and the Disabled
MoRR	Ministry of Refugees and Repatriation
MFA	Ministry of Foreign Affairs
NRC	Norwegian Refugee Council
SSI	Semi-Structured Interview
TVET	Technical and Vocational Education and Training
UAMSC	Unaccompanied Minors and Separated Children
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
WCUK	War Child UK

Child: Persons who are below the legal age of majority and are therefore not legally independent. This term includes adolescents. Under the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), a “child” is a person who is below the age of eighteen, unless the applicable law sets a lower age. The CRC equates “child” with “minor”.

Deportation: The act of a State in the exercise of its sovereignty in removing a non-national from its territory to his or her country of origin or third state after refusal of admission or termination of permission to remain.

Family Reunification: The process of bringing together families, particularly children and elderly dependents with previous care-providers for the purpose of establishing or re-establishing long-term care. Separation of families occurs most often during armed conflicts or massive displacements of people.

Guardian: One who has the legal authority and duty to care for another’s person or property, usually because of the other’s incapacity, disability, or status as a minor. A guardian may either be appointed for all purposes or for a specific purpose.

Minor: Persons who are below the legal age of majority and are therefore not legally independent. This term includes adolescents. Under the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), a “child” is a person who is below the age of eighteen, unless the applicable law sets a lower age. The CRC equates “child” with “minor”.

Separated Children: children under 18 years of age who are outside their country of origin and separated from either parents, or their previous legal/customary primary caregiver.

Sustainable Reintegration: “Reintegration can be considered sustainable when returnees have reached levels of economic self-sufficiency, social stability within their communities, and psychosocial well-being that allow them to cope with (re)migration drivers. Having achieved sustainable reintegration, returnees are able to make further migration decisions a matter of choice, rather than necessity” (IOM 2017).

Unaccompanied Children: Persons under the age of majority in a country other than that of their nationality who are not accompanied by a parent, guardian, or other adult who by law or custom is responsible for them. Unaccompanied children present special challenges for border control officials, because detention and other practices applied to undocumented adult non-nationals may not be appropriate for children.

In Afghanistan, returns from Europe, from Gulf countries, and from Pakistan and Iran have increased since 2015, with mass returns from Pakistan shadowing returns from Iran. Yet, the constant stream of forced returns from Iran – annually at around 400,000 between 2007-2017 – urges cautious and attention. In 2018 nearly 800,000 undocumented Afghans returned or were deported from Iran¹. Among these large return numbers, research has highlighted the presence of children, with a rise in the number of unaccompanied children since 2015, as well as children returned with their families².

This study contributes to charting a path forward to for **a post-deportation protection framework adapted to the protection profiles and needs of unaccompanied minors, their families and communities of return**. This population provides a concrete example of the humanitarian-development nexus that can be bridged to ensure that children do not leave unaccompanied out of necessity. To establish a protection system in areas of return requires a stronger understanding of the attitudes and practices around unaccompanied minors' migration, screening their vulnerabilities, and exploring the possible models for community-based responses. This study does this and:

- Provides actionable learning to inform more effective and relevant design, implementation, and adjustment of future interventions targeting minor deportees and their families.
- Elevates the voices of deported children and their families, presenting direct input from respondents on the complexities, challenges, and nuances of lived experiences
- Presents an evidence base for advocacy efforts to target structural obstacles and opportunities to support minor deportees, their families and their communities.

Through conversations with 518 minor deportees, their families and key stakeholders supporting them, this study focuses on four communities of return in Herat and in Badghis, to draw lessons learned and operational recommendations for child-sensitive reintegration programming. The key recommendations are summarised below (table 0) and offer both a model for monitoring, evaluation and learning that can benefit all actors working on reintegration; and offers a model for a joint humanitarian-development nexus programming through a pilot study on minor deportees' reintegration. The rationale behind these recommendations is discussed in the full report which reviews knowledge attitudes and practices (part 1), minor deportees' reintegration needs (part 2) and a sustainable reintegration and post-return protection framework (part 3), before concluding on the way forward.

¹ IOM (2019). Returns to Afghanistan: Joint IOM/UNHCR Summary Report 2018

² Ibid.

Table 1. Recommendations

<p>Target the multiple dimensions of reintegration</p>	<p>HLP, food and water, livelihoods, education, health, safety and legal all present different entry points for programming</p>
<p>Establish a two-way communication between deportees and agencies</p>	<p>Increase opportunities for ICT and ICLA; adapt and scale a strategy for social workers with access to communities of return</p>
<p>Build community-based approaches to reintegration support, improving monitoring and learning</p>	<p>Community-level monitoring, the use of the Multi-dimensional integration index (MDI) and the integration of a learning partner</p>
<p>Improve coordination through a joint humanitarian-development programme</p>	<p>A pilot initiative in Herat and/or Badghis can be used as a basis to develop an exit strategy and a government and national plan</p>
<p>Develop a strategy for minor deportees at the governmental level</p>	<p>With flexible programming, referrals and mapping of organisations, and the development of youth councils, as an example.</p>

1. Introduction

1.1 RATIONALE FOR THIS STUDY

Sustained, widespread violence, insecurity, lack of economic opportunities and displacement in Afghanistan have led to an influx of Afghan migrants to neighbouring countries, or further abroad to Europe in the hope for stability and a better future for themselves and their families. The main response to this migration – which happens largely irregularly, due to a lack of legal pathways – has been for states to rely on forced returns. In Afghanistan, returns from Europe, from Gulf countries, and from Pakistan and Iran have increased since 2015, with mass returns from Pakistan shadowing returns from Iran. Yet, the constant stream of forced returns from Iran – annually at around 400,000 between 2007-2017 – urges cautious and attention. In 2018 nearly 800,000 undocumented Afghans returned or were deported from Iran³. Among these large return numbers, research has highlighted the presence of children, with a rise in the number of unaccompanied children since 2015, as well as children returned with their families⁴.

In a global context where migration is exceedingly politicised, and where more than half of displaced people are children⁵, the situation of unaccompanied minors in particular has drawn increased attention. The Global Compact for Migration includes provisions for child sensitive approaches⁶ and outlines a framework for establishing dignified returns, it does not provide a foundation for framing deportation. This gap, as well as the unwillingness of many countries to sign or implement the compact at a national level⁷ leaves child protection especially vulnerable to in disorganised and chaotic return contexts, including those of deportation.

The demographic shift in the profile of returnees and deportees calls for a similar shift in the way programming and policies are being designed. While research conducted between 2008 and 2016 has focused on the needs of deportees at the border, this research addresses gaps in knowledge on the long term reintegration needs within communities of return, and specifically children's reintegration needs, and possibilities for supporting them. In spite of increased returns and deportations, there are a diminishing number of actors and programmes providing support beyond the border and the immediate return moment.

Few comprehensive follow-up activities exist for these children beyond family reunification – and currently no programme responds or measures effectively and sustainably whether children have their rights respected after return, whether they are able to access documentation and services such as education or health in the long term. Where and when assistance is provided, it does not always match expectations held by children and their families. Past research has shown the need to better take into account the autonomy and aspirations of children and the needs of their families in order to plan solutions with them⁸.

³ IOM (2019). Returns to Afghanistan: Joint IOM/UNHCR Summary Report 2018

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Save the Children / Samuel Hall (2018) Achieving Durable Solutions for Returnee Children: What do we know?

⁶ See Global Compact for Safe, Orderly, and Regular Migration, Article 15 (h).

⁷ "Global Compact for Migration: what it is and why are countries opposing it?" In The Conversation, December 7th, 2018.

⁸ Majidi, N. (2017) Deportees lost at "home": post-deportation outcomes in Afghanistan, in Khosravi, S. edited volume.

Table 2: Information Gaps on Unaccompanied Minors Deported at the Western border and their Reintegration

- Protection needs at the border, disaggregated by age and gender, is limited
- Data is short term, most commonly limited to three months post family reunification
- Monitoring and Evaluation on the effectiveness of return/reunification programming is unavailable
- Lack of multi-dimensional data on reintegration needs limits programmatic responses

1.2 WHAT THIS STUDY CONTRIBUTES

War Child UK, in partnership with UNICEF, is one of the few actors working directly with deported minors on the Western border. The two organisations partner to deliver a programme of work to improve the protection of unaccompanied minors and separated children deported from Iran through the Islam Qala Border. In Afghanistan, War Child UK has a history of implementing a wide range of child protection and education programmes. In recent years this has included support to unaccompanied minors, specifically children in conflict with the law and children on the move.

This study contributes to improving the understanding of the factors influencing unsafe migration of unaccompanied children across Afghanistan's borders, and open up opportunities to advocate for greater stakeholder engagement – across Government, UN, I/NGOs, and civil society – to allow these children, and their families, to fulfill their own aspirations of a better life.

This UNICEF - War Child - Samuel Hall research study begins by exploring the knowledge, attitudes and practices towards the migration of unaccompanied minors and to generate actionable learning to inform the future of War Child's Afghanistan programme. The research was designed to:

- Build a deep understanding of knowledge, attitudes and practices among parents, children and community people in the targeted communities (including identifying gaps in knowledge and existing practices that lead to negative impacts on child protection issues)
- Provide recommendations for potential and new interventions, building a model on the basis of findings of KAP study to respond to.
- Understand how to support the safe and sustainable reunification and re-integration of deported children who return to Afghanistan.

Over the last decade, the number of organisations present at the Western border has decreased.

United Nations agencies, NGOs and other implementing partners are less present and/or traveling to the border. One of the core constraints to programming is the lack of knowledge of needs. This study aims to fill in knowledge gaps and provide a stronger evidence base for current and future programming and funding towards unaccompanied minors and their families, beyond the border, into their reintegration phase. Research questions foundational to this study are outlined in Table 3.

1. Introduction

Table 3: Research Questions and Sub-Questions for Report

Theme and main question	Research Sub-Questions
<p>What are the Knowledge, Attitudes and Practices towards child migration?</p>	<p>Why do families send their children to migrate to Iran? What are the root causes of child migration to Iran? What is the level of families' awareness with regards to child protection and rights? Are families aware of the risks associated with unsafe migration for children? What risks do they associate with their children not migrating? What does child migration tell us about the link between internal displacement and cross border migration?</p>
<p>What are children's reintegration needs?</p>	<p>What are the protection profiles and (re)integration needs of Afghan deportee minors? What return and reintegration processes are already in place to support children to (re)integrate sustainably in their communities of origin or return? Are these mindful of the aspirations of children and their families?</p>
<p>What can a sustainable programmatic framework look like?</p>	<p>Which community members and organisations can support the protection and (re)integration of UASC in Afghanistan? How can these systems be improved programmatically, linking several programmes and organisations (UN, (I)NGO, (N)NGO and governmental)? Building further on the NRC/SH 2016 study, what can a child-sensitive post-deportation protection framework look like? What is the government capacity and ownership? How are coordination systems functioning to access this group?</p>
<p>How can M&E (and learning) be improved?</p>	<p>What types of indicators can be recommended to improve the capacity of UNICEF and War Child to trace trends, profiles and protection needs of UASC?</p>

2. Research Methodology

2.1 RESEARCH APPROACH

In-person qualitative data collection was supported by a quantitative phone survey with War Child beneficiaries to evaluate reintegration needs and provide a baseline for future monitoring. Qualitative data allowed for deeper and richer information in order to discuss the nuances of household and community dynamics. The research framework was built on two previous rounds of research conducted in 2008 and 2016 with deportees in Western Afghanistan – tools were designed to expand on this research and fill identified key knowledge gaps.

In total 403 phone surveys were conducted with deportee children, and over 80 deported children/young people or their parents/guardians were part of the qualitative research (Table 3). Visual tools and drawings were used to provide children with a medium of expression adapted to them. Parents were invited to reflect on their children's visual representations of their experiences, to provide room for dialogue and exchange between them.

Interviews with 29 key informants were also conducted with government representatives at national and sub-national levels, CPAN, UN and NGO representatives throughout the course of the research.

Table 4: Information Gaps on Unaccompanied Minors Deported at the Western border and their Reintegration

QUALITATIVE	FGD participants	SSI	Case Study	TOTAL
<i>Children/Youth</i>	23	12	3	38
<i>Parents/Guardians</i>	35	10	3	48
<i>Key informant interviews (KIs)</i>				29
QUANTITATIVE				403
TOTAL	58	22	6	518

The design of the research tools was based on the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) protection framework, which hones in on protection through the prism of material, physical, and legal needs. A particular focus was placed on children's mental and physical health needs, as well as on the wider needs of families affected by the return of a deported child. A child protection and safeguarding protocol was followed and supplemented by War Child's own child safeguarding protocols. This protocol and do-no-harm principles guided all stages of the research.

2. Research Methodology



A Note on Conducting Research with Children

As part of this research, children were interviewed in order to gather information on their knowledge, expectations, and experience with return and reintegration. Samuel Hall followed the ethical principles highlighted by UNICEF in its working paper *What We Know about Ethical Research Involving Children in Humanitarian Settings: An overview of principles, the literature and case studies* (June 2016) in particular the seven categories identified as requiring reflection in the specific setting to the research, namely:

- Institutional capacity to involve children in research; understanding power relations; harms and benefits;
- Informed consent and capacities of participants; Privacy and confidentiality (including ICT); payment, compensation, ancillary services and reciprocity; and Communication of results.*

* UNICEF (2016), *What we know about ethical research involving children in humanitarian settings; an overview of principles, the literature and case studies*, Innocenti Working Paper 2016-18, p. 17

2.2 RESEARCH FRAMEWORK AND TOOLS

Data Collection Tools

The study included a desk review of key documents and literature essential to understanding the context of post-deportation protection for child deportees. Existing and relevant laws and regulations on migration were consulted. International and national annual reports and research studies relevant to migration and risks of unsafe migration to Afghanistan were reviewed. Together, they led to the development of the following research tools to conduct the primary data collection:

- **Semi-Structured Interviews (SSI):** Individual SSIs were conducted with 12 child deportees and 10 of their parents or guardians. SSI questions centred on themes of migration history and experience, experience and needs upon return, community and family perceptions, knowledge of services available, and aspirations.
- **Focus Group Discussions (FGD):** In-depth FGDs were conducted with deported children and their parents in Herat and Badghis. In total 10 FGDs were conducted: 6 in Herat and 4 in Badghis, with between 5-7 participants. These discussions lasted 1.5 to 2 hours, and served as a setting for participants to voice their thoughts on child migration, community perceptions of this migration, the impact on families on return and challenges and opportunities for effective reintegration support. Participants were also asked to share their views on what defines a 'good life' and how this can relate to migration and return.

2. Research Methodology

- **Case Studies:** 3 SSI respondent families (parent/child pairings) were invited to participate in further in-depth, open-ended, one-on-one conversations with selected individual child deportees and their parents/guardians. These included participatory and visual activities such as drawing the migration and return journey as well as drawing community maps and colour coding services available and services lacking.
- **Key Informant Interviews (KII):** A first set of KIIs were conducted during the inception phase, targeting IOM, War Child, DoRR, DoLSAMD, AIHRC and other stakeholders providing services to child deportees after deportation. KIIs were conducted on a rolling basis throughout the project with actors with particular knowledge or expertise on child and youth migration, return, and reintegration programming, including donors such as ECHO. Interviews were conducted in Herat, Badghis, and Kabul with international, national and local stakeholders.
- **Scouting mission to Herat and the inclusion of a Quantitative Survey (403):** As part of this mission, the Samuel Hall researcher conducted interviews with War Child monitoring and evaluation teams as well as the social workers in Camp Ansar transit centre, the screeners in Islam Qala. Key informant interviews were also conducted with DoLSAMD and DoRR staff, both in Herat city and in IQ for the latter. During the KIIs at DoRR and DoLSAMD, the research project was described in details and full endorsement was received from both the stakeholders.

It was initially presumed that the War Child social workers accompanied child deportees all the way to their homes during the reunification process. However, interviews revealed that the reunification was at times done through CPAN and at other times parents/guardians of child deportees were asked to come to a central location at the provincial and/or district level and pick up their children.

Security was the main reason behind social workers being unable to accompany child deportees to their homes, particularly in Badghis – one of the provinces for this study. This presented a challenge for the research teams in tracing child deportees and their families in both the provinces but more in Badghis given that the social workers were not able to provide any support in this regard. Community level interaction and connection was also found to be rather weak and at times non-existent between the social workers and the communities of return leaving the research teams unable to use community level stakeholders to trace child deportees and their families.

In order to overcome the challenge in tracing child deportees and their families, the research team added **a phone-based quantitative interviews using War Child's database of assisted child deportees in Herat and Badghis**. This was done through Samuel Hall's call centre in Kabul and based on a training in child-sensitive research practices. Questions revolved around deported children's current work and educational situation, their top needs, as well as their hopes and plans. Interviews were conducted in a call centre set up by the research team, via mobile data collection using the Open Data Collection (ODK) Toolkit.

2. Research Methodology

The quantitative phone survey sampled numbers randomly from the beneficiary database; call attempts were made a maximum of four times on numbers that did not answer on the first attempt. In order to meet the target sample, 2,287 phone numbers were called from the database; missed attempts and refusals were tracked, and in total the survey achieved an 18% response rate, or 403 respondents.

Sampling

The qualitative research was conducted in **two communities of return in Herat and two communities of return in Badghis**. The War Child UK beneficiary database served as the base for sampling both qualitative and quantitative respondents. For child deportee respondents, they had to have been under the age of 18 when they were deported from Iran, although youth respondents who had turned 18 since their deportation were also considered; parents and guardians interviewed had to be the custodian of a child or youth answering to this same criteria.

For qualitative data collection, participants were contacted from Herat and Badghis numbers in the database to assess their eligibility and provide information on the study, and were then invited to participate in person. In Badghis, a higher rate of beneficiaries were found to have already re-migrated, and identifying beneficiaries was a larger challenge. In order to address this, the research team conducted a smaller number of FGDs and a higher number of SSIs with children. A pilot of qualitative tools as well as additional KIIs were conducted in Kabul. Given the reality that nearly all deportees are male, and the fact that WCUK only supports male deportees, gender quotas were not set – all respondents in both qualitative and quantitative data collection were male. Efforts to ensure a range of ages and socio-economic profiles in qualitative fieldwork were however made at the pre-call stage. Given low sample sizes however, the team interviewed all children or youth who fit into the main research criteria. All qualitative research was conducted face to face.

The quantitative phone survey sampled numbers randomly from the beneficiary database; call attempts were made a maximum of 4 times on numbers that did not answer on the first attempt. In order to meet the target number, 2287 phone numbers were called from the database; missed attempts and refusals were tracked, and in total the survey achieved an 18% response rate, or 403 respondents. Phone survey participants ranged in age from 10 to 23 years old, with the majority falling in the 15-17 years age bracket (see Figure 1). 100% of participants were male.

2. Research Methodology

Participants for the quantitative survey were sampled from 23 provinces throughout Afghanistan, with the majority of respondents coming from the provinces of Herat, Takhar, Faryab, Kabul, and Badakhshan.



Photo - Children working in Badghis

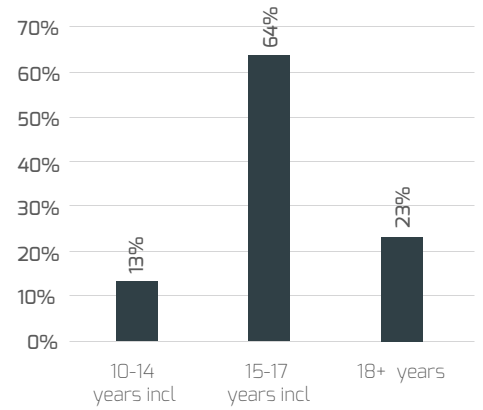


Figure 1: Age of Survey Participants

3. Knowledge, Attitudes, and Practices Around Child Migration and Return

3.1 DECISION MAKING

Who are the deciders?

The migration decision, in particular when it comes to sending children, is neither hierarchical nor linear. Instances of parents pushing children to move in spite of the child's desires were uncommon. More frequently, migration is a family decision, a decision which comes after many hesitations, back and forth discussions, and careful considerations. These **decisions are also transnational and multi-sited** with family networks in Iran weighing in and facilitating the decision making process by committing to providing support after the border crossing. Most strikingly, **children often become the 'decision maker' and initiate the migration conversation**, convincing the family to proceed with an unaccompanied migration to Iran.

Children bringing up the migration idea to their parents or family members occurred around half the time in discussions with research participants, highlighting the child's agency and ownership of the migration decision. In these cases, children often had to work for several weeks, sometimes months, to convince their families to allow them to leave, and were often inspired by existing friends, cousins, or other members of their social networks who had made or were planning to make the journey. One child FGD participant in Herat described his own insistence on migrating in the face of an initial family refusal: *"Lots of our relatives are there in Iran but my family did not want to let me go there. I contacted my cousin and he also did not want to let me migrate to Iran, he told me to continue my education. But when I insisted, he then agreed, because he is who I am closest to."*⁹ A parent in Badghis highlighted a similar dynamic: *"I did not want [my child] to migrate. I wanted him to study but he decided to go to Iran and after a few months I agreed to it because our economic situation was so bad."*¹⁰

⁹ FGD with Children in Herat. August 2019

¹⁰ FGD with Parents in Badghis. August 2019

3. Knowledge, Attitudes, and Practices Around Child Migration and Return



Box 1: Perceptions of Childhood

Prevailing narratives of childhood in Afghanistan present a picture of young adulthood that begins quite early. Past research had shown that children in Afghanistan are frequently in positions where they have to work, support families, and even act as spouses or parents before age 18.¹¹ “There is a general rule in Afghanistan: when a person is above 10, he is no longer a child,” confirmed a social worker interviewed for this study¹². As soon as a child hits puberty, according to this narrative, he or she may be considered an adult, with adult responsibilities.

Our research reveals, however, a more nuanced vision of this narrative. On the one hand, children take on significant responsibilities in their household – especially where the head of household is absent or unable to work, the burden of providing for the family most often falls on the child. In interviews youth and children themselves emphasised their role and the feelings of responsibility towards their families. “My father broke his hand twice in Iran [...] and I told [my mother] that I should migrate to Iran and help my father there, and my mother supported my decision,” shared one 14 year old¹³. “No one asked me to go and earn money but I felt responsible so that's why I went” echoed one of his peers.¹⁴

On the other hand, parents acknowledge their child's right to childhood, even in later stages of adolescence. One father emphasised this in interviews: “My child was young and I saw him as a child, but because of economic problems he went to Iran with my consultation; he was 15-16 years old when he migrated to Iran.”¹⁵ Several children interviewed mentioned that they “felt like a child” when they moved, and many highlighted moments along their journey or return when they felt scared or particularly at risk because of their age. Parents and guardians also remained keenly aware in interviews of the vulnerability their children face while moving due to their youth.

Migration itself was seen in some cases as a rite of passage, as the moment when the child becomes an adult. “When my son was going to Iran, I thought he was a grown up then,” highlighted one parent interviewed in Badghis. This is echoed by some children and youth themselves: “I migrated to Iran three times and I did not think I was a child...The first time, I did not know about the risks along the way but the second and third time I knew about it but I was not worried; I just wanted to go to Iran and work.”¹⁶

¹¹ UNICEF/Samuel Hall, 2018.

¹² KII WCUK Social Worker, Kabul. July 2019

¹³ SSI with Child, Herat. August 2019.

¹⁴ SSI with Child, Herat. August 2019.

¹⁵ FGD with Parents, Badghis. August 2019

¹⁶ FGD with Children and Youth, Badghis. August 2019.

3. Knowledge, Attitudes, and Practices Around Child Migration and Return

In a few cases, children had taken their decision and left home to migrate without telling their families or discussing it with them in advance. One child in Badghis shared his experience of leaving without telling his family:



It was three years ago when I went to Iran and I was about 13 years old. I decided myself to go to Iran, we were five friends and made a decision to go to Iran, we did not have specific plans, we did not tell anything to our parents and family members. We had a smuggler's phone number and we found him in Nimroz province. During the way we were scared of car wrecks, of theft, and of firing by the border police. I was interested in finding work for myself, we planned to go to Tehran because our relatives and friends were there. When we arrived in Herat province our families called us and asked about our situation and they did not prevent us from migration and they told us: 'Allah save you and go if you want.'¹⁷



Even in these cases where the child leaves on his own, the decision and journey remain collective, often with friends or neighbours, and the family is included at a later stage in the journey. In addition, the decision to move, and where to move, is influenced by social networks already present in Iran. The majority of families interviewed highlighted the fact that family networks in Iran were crucial in mitigating concerns related dangers for their children on route, as they know that they have someone to take care of their child and provide guidance into finding work and safe living in Iran.

All respondents interviewed highlighted that, whether they were moving with or without the initial knowledge of their families, they were reuniting with family, friends, or community members in Iran. **The ties that bind Afghan migrants to these social networks in Iran are strong, and these can play a mitigating role when potential young migrants and their families are assessing the risks of migration.**

Why do children move?

One clear idea emerged from qualitative interviews as a whole: in general, **most children and their families do not want to move, but feel that they have no other choice but to move.** They feel forced to, that the child is one of the only viable members of the family who can support their family, and that, in spite of the anxiety that a child's movement will cause for his parents and family, the decision is a necessary one.

¹⁷ SSI with Child in Badghis. August 2019

3. Knowledge, Attitudes, and Practices Around Child Migration and Return

Both parents and children noted the limited choices, and highlighted migration as one coping mechanism for dealing with impossible life circumstances, even with the awareness that it would not be an easy one. Focus group participants and individual interviewees expressed what they commonly viewed as a lack of choice, leading to an often agonising decision to let their child leave. In discussions participants often used the language of obligation, of being 'forced' to make a decision on migration because they see no other options. As one parent participant in Herat described: *"When I sent my child to Iran, I and his mother were crying for three days but I was forced to send him to Iran because our economic situation was too weak."*¹⁸

Poverty and economic anguish are a central element impacting the decision to migrate – this comes up time and again from all qualitative participants interviewed for this study. Poverty, lack of access to job opportunities and so to ways to improve a family's well-being were constantly cited by children and their parents as being a core reason for why they need to find work in Iran. One child's guardian describes the financial stress that led to two of his younger brothers looking for work in Iran: *"We are unable to afford our life, the problems are many. [...] My father is sick and we have attempted and spent a lot of money on his treatment. My mother also experiences seizures twice or three times a day. We are strengthening her by medicine. My father is in debt to relatives and his friends due to his illness. My brother [who is in Iran] cannot pay the debts by himself, but we can pay our father's debt cooperatively together."*¹⁹

Specific family shocks, such as parents or family members who were ill or disabled were common. Finding work abroad, if successful, can mean being able to support the provision of healthcare and medicine for sick or disabled family members (a common occurrence), ensure that younger siblings and other family members have enough to eat, and generally support one's family in avoiding or reducing the significant stress of economic precarity.

However, **poverty is linked to other concerns related to conflict and climate and cannot be decorrelated.** In Badghis, a region highly dependent on its agricultural production, severe droughts in the past few years have had a devastating effect on households. This has translated into both internal displacement and migration to Iran as coping mechanisms for dealing with climate disasters. *"Last year we experienced a very severe drought and famine, the agriculture farms did not harvest. As a result my son decided to migrate to Iran and we agreed as well,"* explained one parent in Badghis, echoing a common reaction in the region. War and security impact poverty and the ability to work, as well as explicitly informing the decision to migrate.

¹⁸ FGD with Parents in Herat. August 2019

¹⁹ SSI with Guardian, Herat. August 2019.

3. Knowledge, Attitudes, and Practices Around Child Migration and Return

Insecurity is often the impetus of an initial first, familial, internal displacement that precedes a child's migration to Iran. This internal displacement, while addressing concerns of safety, can have an impact on a family's financial situation and debt, as they have to find new means of livelihoods, new shelter, and restart their lives in areas where they are uprooted and which are often temporary, but have long lasting impacts even when they return to their province of origin. One parent of a child deportee in Badghis described this situation: *"We went to Herat for a year during the Taliban period. Our situation was relatively better when we moved to Herat. But currently we owe people money and are suffering a drought also. We have to live here but the creditors are making us flee and move to somewhere else."*²⁰ This internal displacement, due to drought or conflict, at least for a few months, was very common amongst research participants from Badghis.

The appeal and relative safety of urban areas compared to rural districts is also a factor in mobility. One child in Badghis explained this as follows: *"I would like to live here [in this district] for now, because our own district is at war. We live in the city right now which is good because there are jobs here, and children can go to school whereas in the rural areas children are only after shepherding."*²¹ The intersection between economics, security, work, and education is crucial to understand. People moving because of poverty may also be fleeing conflict or climate extremes; people fleeing because of insecurity may also make decisions on where to go based on economic rationales. These are not mutually exclusive factors, and understanding these intersections and the complexity of the migration decision making process, the choices faced by families of potential child migrants is an imperative first step if effective protection support is to be provided to deportees and their families.

3.2 WHAT ARE THE RISKS, AND KNOWLEDGE OF THESE RISKS?

Families are aware of the risks they or their children may face on the migration journey. Parents or guardians interviewed listed specifically the dangers surrounding vehicle accidents, hunger and thirst, robbery, kidnapping, sexual violence, physical assault, torture by police, shootings and death. One deportee interviewed recalled being 17 years old and seeing dead bodies strewn along the road during his migration journey. Previous research highlights similar risks, including increased risks of violence or detention along the return journey.²²

Risks are known through information stemming from social networks, including other family members who have migrated or returned, friends, or community members. In some cases participants highlighted that elders in their community had counselled youth against migrating; this counselling however has little impact according to one deported child interviewed, who explained that *"people do not listen to elders about the risks. I knew about the risks and the thirst and hunger along the way but I went anyways. My advice to children under 18 is not to go to Iran, but those who have to will not listen to anyone."*²³

²⁰ FGD with Parents, Badghis. August 2019.

²¹ FGD with Children, Badghis. August 2019.

²² Save the Children/ Samuel Hall. 2018

²³ FGD with Children, Badghis. August 2019

3. Knowledge, Attitudes, and Practices Around Child Migration and Return

Knowledge of risks is not a deterrent to movement; if families feel that migration is the only option for hope that they have, they will take that hope along with the risks. They will also, however, attempt to take measures to mitigate these risks as much as is possible. The most frequent, but often too costly, mitigation measure cited by families for reducing harm to children on the move was for children to travel accompanied, ideally in the company of an older relative or trusted adult. In many cases however, even as families recognise this, resources for sending more than one family member are often limited: there is either no available adult or the cost of sending two people is too high.

3.3 IMPACT ON FAMILIES

Upon their return, children discuss the risks and hardships they have encountered, both along their journeys and within Iran. While families accept the risks and dangers of the journey, the specifics of what a child faced in Iran are a source of concern for families: this was especially true when it came to the negative financial and emotional impact that children faced both in Iran and after being deported, including being exploited and not being paid by employers, as well as the police abuse and the impact this had on children. One parent in Herat described the abuse experienced by his son and the effect this had on him: *“When my son returned, he was stammering and telling stories of Iranian Police. They were harshly tortured, their clothes were taken off, tied to the wall and beating them up. He had no physical illness but mentally he didn’t seem in good condition. He was shy due to his return.”*²⁴

Other parents and children interviewed for this study corroborated allegations of abuse, describing physical assault, electroshock, being deprived of food, border shootings. Some reported humiliating practices such as being forced to stand naked in snow for significant periods of time. Parents of children who experienced these violations reported noticeable changes in their child’s behaviour upon their return, including being withdrawn, expressing humiliation and shame, aggressive behaviour, and physical pain as a result of assault injuries lasting at least a week.

Some families expressed regret regarding the migration decision upon the return of their child. This regret most often came about as a result of their concern for their child, as well as hearing first-hand from their child about their experience, especially for families who were not able to benefit economically from this migration. One father recounted the anxiety he experienced when he lost touch with his son, and how this impacted his thoughts on the migration decision:

²⁴ FGD with Parents, Herat. August 2019

3. Knowledge, Attitudes, and Practices Around Child Migration and Return

“

For ten days, I had no news of my son. After ten days the UN called me and said that my son was with them, under their care. When I learned about this – I was very happy. I was so happy to know he was safe and alive. The entire family was happy to know he was alive. Those ten days, at night, we would not sleep thinking of where he could be and what could have happened to him. Could he be dead, or lost? These are the thoughts that went through our minds. I regret this decision because for 10 nights I had no news from my son – I did not know if he was dead or alive.²⁵

”

This initial happiness at the return of their child is a tempered reaction: both parents and children interviewed frequently highlight the happiness families feel when their child returns to them alive and healthy, but also the anger and stress that surfaces after this initial reunification, especially given the financial stress that ensues upon a child's return. This financial stress is exacerbated by the fact that debt to smugglers, as well as for basic costs of living, is a common concern. Families borrow money to send their children to Iran; when a child is deported before he has been able to work off this debt or return the dividends to his families the debt remains to be repaid.²⁶ One parent explained the debt spiral that emerged after his son's deportation:

“

The people in the community were not happy because he went and came back still owing. It had a negative impact on our family; I borrowed 10 sheep and sold them cheaper to pay the smuggler. I bought the sheep for AFN 10,000 each and sold them for AFN 4,000 each so that I could pay the smuggler on time. I still owe the money for the sheep.²⁷

”

²⁵ SSI with Parent, Herat. August 2019.

²⁶ Majidi, 2016.

²⁷ FGD with Parents, Badghis. August 2019

4. Reintegration Needs of Child Deportees

4.1 COMMUNITY DIMENSIONS OF RETURN AND REINTEGRATION

The community dimension of migration is a core element of the migration and reintegration ecosystem. Families make the decision to send their children to migrate based on social networks abroad and at home; children take these networks into account when making the decision to move.

Upon return, the community can play an integral part in ensuring a supportive reintegration context; however, this community involvement has not until now been formulated programmatically, even as deported children and their families report ad hoc community support and involvement.

Some children explained how migration had made drawn them closer to family and friends, highlighting the sympathy they received from community members well aware of the challenges and pains encountered along the journey. One child described a common aspiration to be further involved in the community, through the local council and his desire to see a youth committee established. The closeness he felt to the community during his weekly Friday prayers at the mosque made him want to be more engaged at the community level. Another participant noted his participation in local decision making processes, through a youth council: *"I participate [in the youth council] we are holding sessions and making road asphalt, , digging canal and community activities - for instance, we go from the down-village mosque to the upper-village mosque and discuss there with the youth in this regard. I am satisfied that I am in the council and I think my participation in this council indicates my improvement [since I have returned]."*

Quantitative data seems to support this: a majority (83%) of phone survey participants responded that they strongly agree or agree with the statement "I feel that I belong to the community I live in," indicating **a strong sense of inclusion and social cohesion on the part of deported children** (see Figure 2).



Photo - Street scene in Badghis

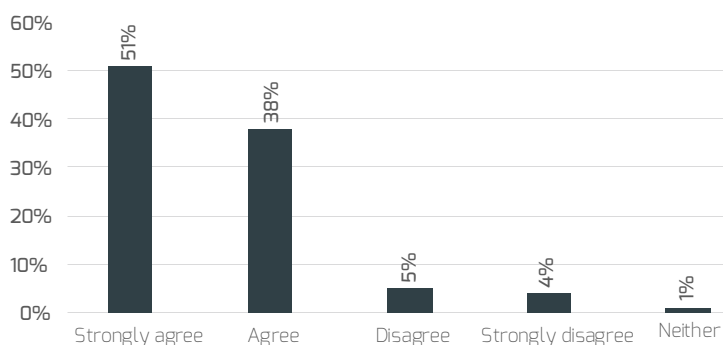


Figure 2: "I feel that I belong to the community I live in"

4. Reintegration Needs of Child Deportees

Deportees and their families express a strong desire to stay in Afghanistan if they can, although some parents acknowledge that, although they might not want to send a child, they might have to in spite of hardships faced.

One parent articulated this dilemma: *“if I get forced, I will probably send him again. He suffered a lot of problems during his previous trip, but I still want to send him again because our economic situation is worse. When there is no food, no work, no money, then we are forced to send him again.”*²⁸

Children interviewed and their families define a ‘good life’ as being in Afghanistan with their family members around them. Quantitative data supports this, as the majority of respondents surveyed answered ‘No’ to the question ‘Do you plan to re-migrate?’ (see Figure 3). These results should be treated with caution however, as sampling is biased towards those who have stayed in Afghanistan – low survey response rates suggest that more deportees have chosen to re-migrate, either internally or internationally, than what our sample indicates, although further research on this is needed in order to better understand these trends.

Needs shift slightly depending on how much time has gone by since the respondent was deported: for those who are very recently arrived, food and water and non-food household items take precedence; however, once a longer time has passed education takes slight precedence, and food and shelter needs become equivalent (see Figure 4). Clothing, support for transportation home, and health support – precisely the type of immediate support

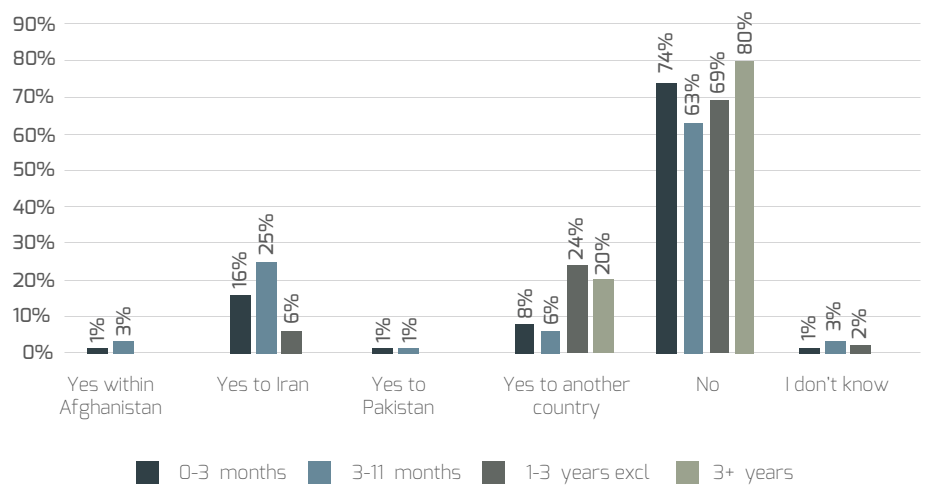


Figure 3: “Do you plan to Remigrate” By Time Since Deportation

most often provided by War Child and other organisations at the border – are among the lowest ranked needs by all respondents surveyed. This is likely due to the fact that, while material and transportation support provided at the border is crucial for immediate return needs and mitigating vulnerability, it does not play a strong role in long term reintegration needs.

²⁸ FGD with Parents, Herat. August 2019

4. Reintegration Needs of Child Deportees

Existing reintegration support processes for deportee children, youth, and their families remain limited.

While immediate support is given to deported children who identify themselves at the border, this support is short lived and does not aim to address the long term needs of the majority of deportees. This chapter provides an overview of what these longer term reintegration needs are in order to build the basis for the design of a reintegration programme suited to the profiles of minor deportees and their families, looking at needs through three protection lenses: material, physical, and legal.

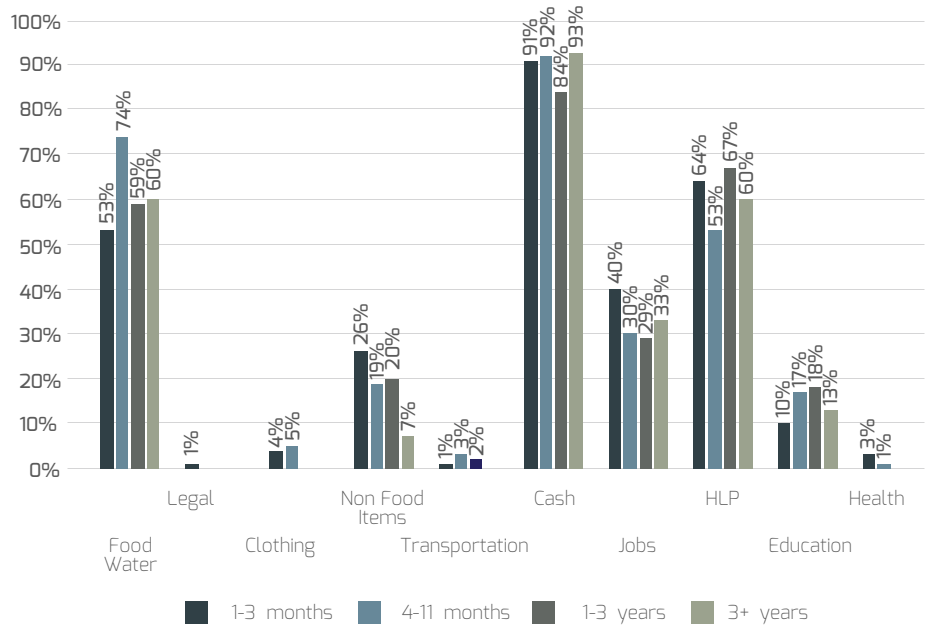


Figure 4: Most Important Needs by Time Since Return

4.2 MATERIAL NEEDS

Material needs categories include HLP, food and water, livelihoods, health, and education. These are outlined in more detail below.

Housing, land, property (HLP) needs

HLP and shelter are a top priority for respondents. While the majority live in their own family homes, a significant minority (44%) rent accommodation (see Figure 5). Rentals put families into a state of precarity, putting financial pressure on the family to meet payments each month, even as money for food or health remains tight. Multiple participants interviewed described owning their own home as a central tenant to stability and dignified family life.

Qualitative interviews reveal that renting is a source of economic stress for families, eating into a significant portion of family budgets. Rentals are also negatively perceived as not constituting a 'true' family home and, for poor families, a sign of tenure insecurity: when asked to define what a 'good life' would entail, several respondents highlighted owning a home where they could raise a family as being a key component of this.

4. Reintegration Needs of Child Deportees

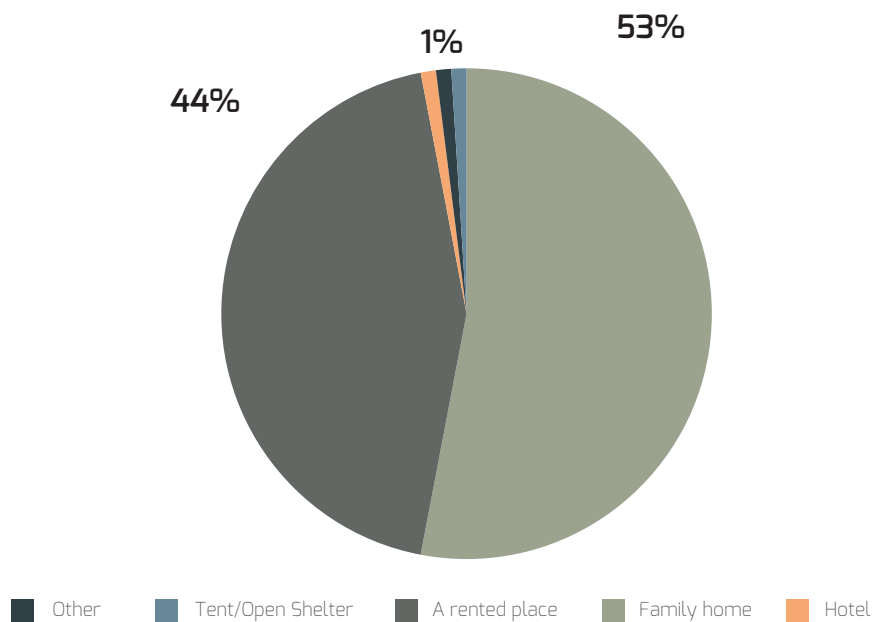


Figure 5: **Current Accommodation Type**

A majority of families surveyed own their homes. However, qualitative data reveals that even for those who own their housing, instances of disaster or conflict have affected the quality of their shelter. A participant interviewed in Badghis described the damage caused to his home by flooding, and his incapacity to fix his home. **Disasters and loss of property have led to internal displacement, creating increased pressures on HLP needs and access in displacement.** While the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) reports that some deportees are covered by its shelter programme in Herat²⁹, none of the children or families interviewed in our study described receiving any support on shelter or HLP from any entities.

Food and water

Food and water compete with HLP as the top need category after cash. Parents and children interviewed note how much of a difference food support makes, allowing heads of households to feed their families while diverting spending to other needs, include paying back debts to smugglers incurred during migration. Without this support, families would have to spend money normally earmarked for food on debt reimbursement. When migration fails, if there is no support, debt can have a direct impact on a family's food security.

²⁹ KII NRC, Herat. August 2019.

4. Reintegration Needs of Child Deportees

One father in Herat describes the lasting impact that food support for deportee families can have: "After three months, we received a phone call and were asked to come to Camp Ansar, where we were given food items: flour, 25 kg rice, 10 kg rice, 5L oil, 5 kg lentils, 5 kg nokhod, 5 kg beans, 5 kg sugar, ½ kg salt. We received these only once – they were very useful because my son had spent 4,000 Afs on his migration, and we didn't have any more money to pay for our expenditures. This is the support we still live on to this day."³⁰

This support is a source of contention however when it is distributed unevenly. When some families receive this assistance and some do not, disillusionment and confusion sets in. One child describes the frustration he feels watching other families receive help when he has not yet: "I wanted that my family should be provided with foodstuff and fuel but we haven't received any support yet. The best parts of this support have been that we were provided with (immediate support) when we needed it. The worst parts have been that the families of our friends were provided with foodstuffs (i.e. flour, rice and etc.) and we were promised that they will provide us with foodstuffs and cash assistance as well, but nothing have been provided to us yet."³¹

Jobs and Livelihoods

Many children work upon return. 62% of minor deportees surveyed were employed in some capacity; when compared to national child labour rate estimates of 40%³², **child labour seems to be more prevalent and a higher risk for deportees than for non-deportees**, increasing deportee vulnerability.

When disaggregated by length of time since deportation, there is an upwards trend: 80% of respondents who were deported over three years ago are employed, versus only 53% of those deported in the three months prior (see Figure 6), indicating that **they often find work back home over time, primarily in the agriculture or construction sectors**. These jobs require no formal levels of education, can be obtained through daily labour arrangements, providing no income security and often being hazardous or difficult jobs for minors and youth.

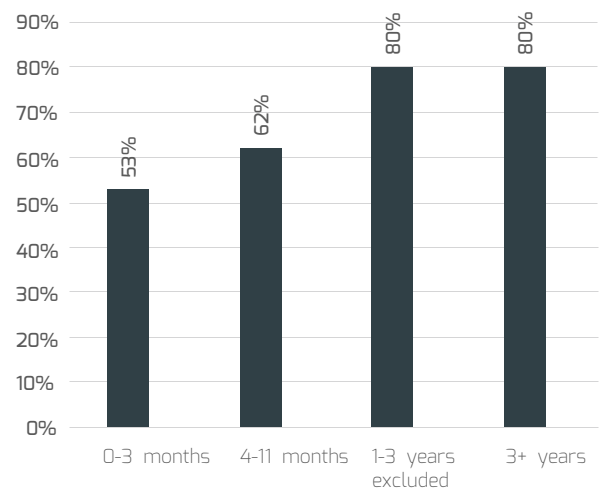


Figure 6: Currently Working by Time Since Deportation

³⁰ SSI with Parent, Herat. August 2019.

³¹ SSI with Child, Herat. August 2019.

³² APPRO, 2018.

4. Reintegration Needs of Child Deportees

Those who do manage to find work in Afghanistan average only around 200 Afs per day, with significant minorities earning between 50-100 Afs or 100-200 Afs (see Figure 7). In contrast, 90% of respondents who worked in Iran earned daily wages equivalent to more than 300 Afs. **When minors in Iran were able to find work, the salaries earned were substantially better, making the wage differentials a sufficient draw for poor households to send their children to work.**

Those who are employed in Afghanistan earn less than they would if employed in Iran; they also work long hours. Under Afghanistan's labour law, 18 is the minimum age of employment; children over 15 may do 'light types of work' and 14 is the minimum age for vocational training.³³ In addition the labour law prohibits youth from engaging in work that is physically arduous or harmful to health. 46% of child deportees who work are between the ages of 10 and 14 years old; 61% are 15-17 years old (see Figure 8). The majority of these workers work more than 41 hours a week, with significant groups of these working more than 51 hours a week (see Figure 9). **This is in violation of the terms of Afghanistan's own labour laws, but the capacity of the government to enforce these laws is lacking.**

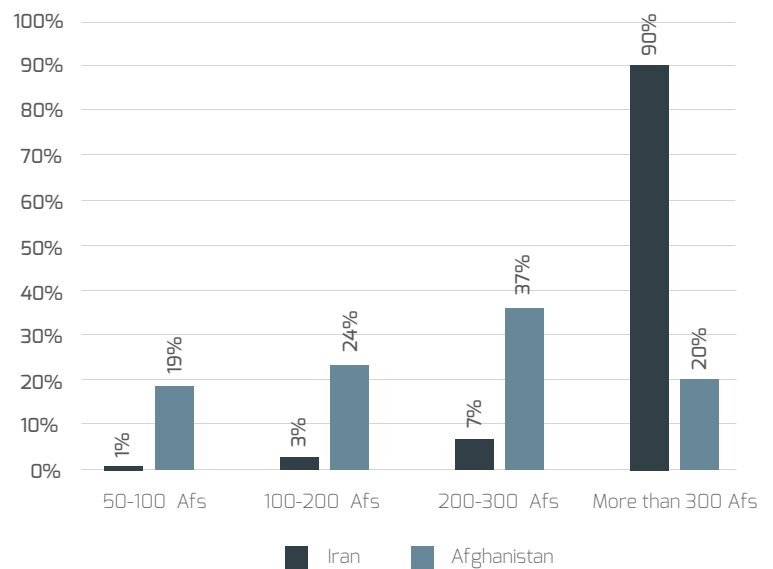


Figure 7: Daily Earning in Iran vs. Afghanistan (in Afs)



Photo - Market in Badghis

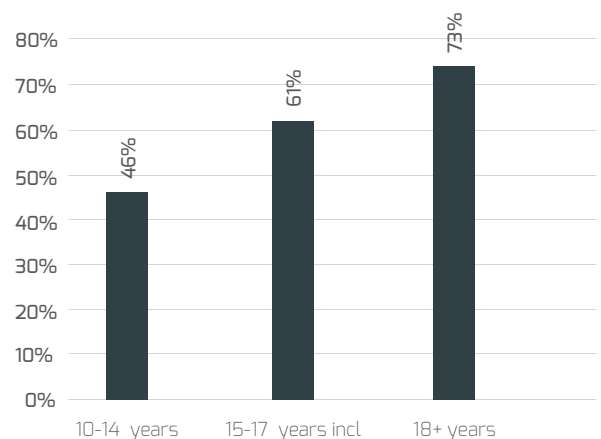


Figure 8: Currently Working After Deportation By Age

³³ "Labor Law of Afghanistan," No. 790, November 11, 1999, https://www.ilo.org/dyn/natlex/natlex4.detail?p_lang=&p_isn=78309&p_country=AFG&p_count=75 arts. 13 and 120

4. Reintegration Needs of Child Deportees

Education

Families interviewed unanimously want their children to study. *“The best thing for our children is studying. If someone makes their child to drop off school, they are in fact the enemy of that child.”*³⁴ However education remains difficult to access and for some unaffordable, due to the opportunity cost of having to choose between school or work. Attendance rates post deportation are low, and data suggests that these decrease steadily as the child gets older (see Figure 10).

Reasons for these low attendance rates are varied. In areas that are Taliban held, as is the case for many families in Badghis, government schools are inaccessible and limited forms of religious education are the only education available. *“In my family,”* noted one child, *“no one goes to school because the area is under the control of the Taliban. There are two school buildings in our area but the Taliban does not let children go to school.”*³⁵

Access to education is a problem for families where the child is the sole family provider, where he is the de facto head of household due to either death or disability of the father. In these cases, families express a wish that there was an option for the child to go to school while still being able to provide for the family. Otherwise a child must often drop out of school in order to support his family. School expenses can also prohibit attendance.

Migration often marks the end of a child’s educational trajectory – this is a break in their childhood, a turning point that is often difficult to come back from. The education system is not built to re-accommodate or re-integrate those who have dropped out of school and decide to return, sometimes months or years later. As one child explained: *“When I left school, they insisted that I should continue my studies, but now they tell me to not go to school because it has been a long time since I left school.”*³⁶

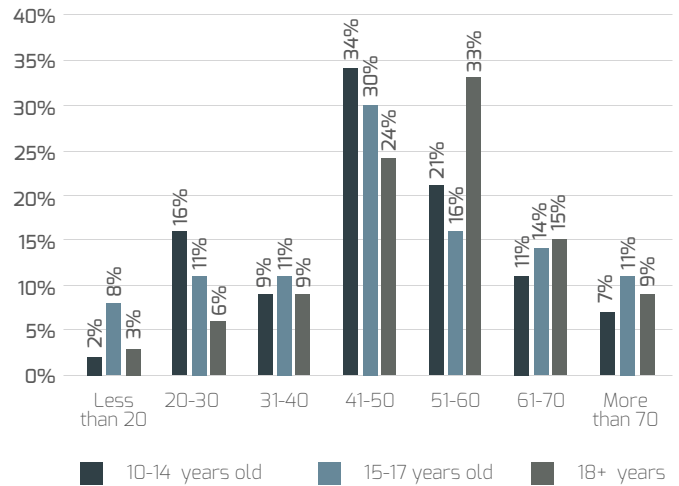


Figure 9: Weekly Hours Working by Age

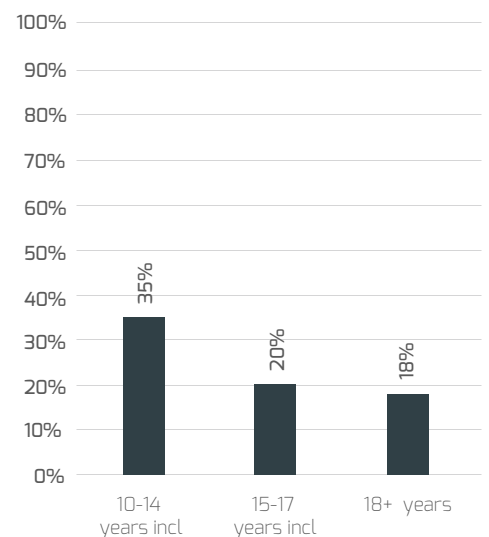


Figure 10: School Attendance by Age

³⁴ FGD with Parent, Badghis. August 2019.

³⁵ SSI with Child, Badghis. August 2019

³⁶ SSI with Child, Herat. August 2019

4. Reintegration Needs of Child Deportees

Families and children express sadness about this lack of education, and this can affect the family relationship at home as well, as another child described: *“My relationship with my family has changed a little bit because I returned empty handed from Iran. And they are sad with me because I have left school and haven’t joined it again since I have returned home.”*³⁷

Health

While health is not identified as a priority by survey respondents relative to other needs, when asked directly “do you or anyone in your family need medical assistance?” 58% of survey participants answered ‘yes’. Of these, a little over a quarter reported needing heavier physical or psychological trauma support (see Figure 11).

Mental health is a key need and criteria for evaluating minors’ reintegration needs.³⁸

Minors and their families need support, implicitly or explicitly. Parental descriptions of their children being “frightened” since their return, “too tired” to attend school or work,

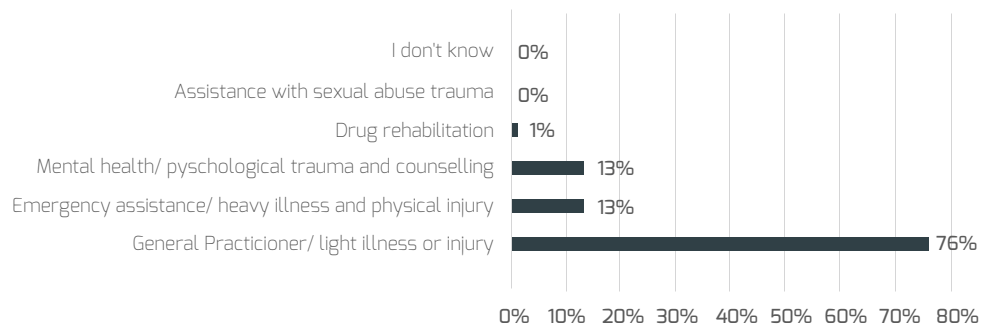


Figure 11: What Type of Medical Assistance Does Your Family Need

feeling shame or sadness, and being either more withdrawn or more aggressive than before they migrated are not uncommon.

In some cases, these behaviour changes result in **exacerbated tensions at home**, with siblings or other family members. One parent in Herat describes how their child turned violent towards his brothers and sisters after his return: *“since my child has returned, his behaviour has changed, he has become more aggressive, impatient and he is always fighting with his sisters and brother and beats them up. I think he has mental issues.”*³⁹

Many parents and children reiterated however that, although they had been shaken during their journey and had experienced stress or fear upon first arrival, they were now ‘normal’ and did not have any specific mental health needs. There was sometimes confusion about what constituted normalcy or mental health stress, as when one father both described the changes in his son upon returning while also emphasizing the fact that his son was now ‘normal’: *“When my child returned, he was frightened and his condition was really bad because they pulled gun over him but they didn’t beat him. He was mentally normal but was frightened. He was apparently changed but his personality was not changed and was normal.”*⁴⁰

³⁷ SSI with Child, Herat, August 2019

³⁸ Save the Children/ Samuel Hall, 2018.

³⁹ SSI with Parent, Herat, August 2019.

⁴⁰ SSI with Parent, Herat, August 2019.

4. Reintegration Needs of Child Deportees

In cases where parents or children identified that they or their child struggled with mental health and were desiring psychological support, access to this support was non-existent, largely due to the prohibitive cost of accessing this support, where it was existent. One child described this need as follows: *“Yes, I want to receive psychosocial counselling because the difficulty of the journey really disturbs me, if it’s free because I don’t have any money to pay for it, and I have more to share with them and they might help me.”*⁴¹ Other families similarly highlighted their inability to pay for medical or psychological help as a key barrier to accessing support.

However, while social workers at the border officially provide a level of immediate psychosocial support, the effectiveness and quality of this support in both the short and long term remains unclear. More focused research on mental health is needed in order to identify psychological needs and the best ways to address these at both community and medical levels.

Physical health problems were highlighted by children and parents as being minor, except for a few cases where the deportee is tending to a more serious injury or pre-existing illness. In some cases serious injuries are directly related to the child’s migration experience, whether related to the long term effects of difficult physical labour in Iran or to physical abuse at the hands of police or along the journey. One father in Badghis described how his son working in construction in Iran had fallen off a building, and the needs this entailed: *“[My son] fell off a building there and is injured now but he is seeing a doctor. My friends in Iran took him to the doctors. He needs healthcare right now because he has fallen off an apartment building.”*⁴²

Some immediate health support is provided to just-arrived injured or ill child deportees in Herat with the joint support of IOM and War Child, who can refer deportees in need of immediate medical support to a hospital in Herat and who cover immediate costs. Mental health counselling is also available to deportees when they pass through the Ansar Camp transit centre. This support is however is more often related to emergency or immediate needs, and while useful and appreciated by participants who have had access to it, institutional health support for deportees and their families in the long term is limited.

Drug addiction is also one of the health risks highlighted often by children and parents interviewed for this study, as well as by UNICEF key informants – concerns that children and young people who migrate to Iran will become drug addicts are common. *“Drug addiction is a big problem for every individual,”* explained one child during an FGD in Badghis, as others in the group agreed.

⁴¹ SSI with Child, Herat. August 2019.

⁴² FGD with Parents, Badghis. August 2019

4. Reintegration Needs of Child Deportees

In practice however our research highlights that drug addiction is not common amongst deportees who are successfully reunited with their families. Less than 1% of survey participants reported that drug rehabilitation was a medical need for themselves or their family, and qualitative data echoes this. When asked during interviews and FGDs whether they (or their children, in interviews with parents) exhibited signs of drug addiction, the vast majority of participants said no, with parents highlighting frequently that they had not observed any signs of drug use or addiction. In only two cases did parents exhibit concern that their child was consuming drugs, mainly in the form of snuff.

International stakeholders caution that these numbers may be self-selecting and misleading. This study sampled participants who had been successfully reunited with family and who for the most part were living with family – one key informant interview with a UN official working on the issue noted that incidences of drug addiction are likely more common amongst the most isolated children, who will not have reunited from their families. As children reported having witnessed cases of drug addiction while in Iran, it is likely that numbers are higher than what our study suggests. In addition, stigma around drug use may further impede honest answers on drug use. More research is needed to evaluate the actual scope of the issue and its impact on children's reintegration prospects.

4.3 PHYSICAL SAFETY NEEDS

72% of phone survey participants interviewed for this study throughout Afghanistan report that they feel safe in their post return context (see Figure 12). Safety is a relative notion however, and physical safety is linked to region of residence.

Qualitative interviews in Herat and especially in Badghis highlight higher levels of uneasiness towards physical safety than the national level quantitative data suggests – while many participants interviewed do highlight feeling relatively safe with their families and within their communities, reports of insecurity and violence due to war or rising crime are common, in particular in rural areas.

In Badghis especially participants highlight that freedom of movement remains limited and that the security situation is highly tense. This is due in large part to the fact that most of the Badghis province outside of urban areas and district capitals remain Taliban held. One parent described the tension between the good relationships they have within their immediate community with the impact brought by war in their area as follows:

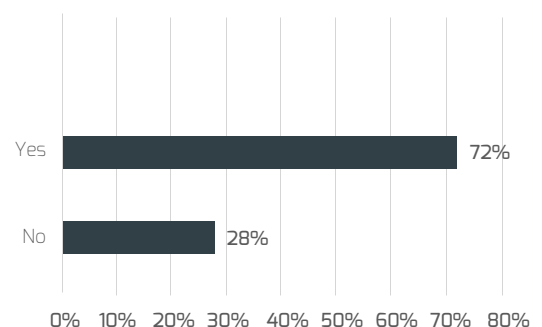


Figure 12: Do you feel physically safe post-return?

4. Reintegration Needs of Child Deportees

“

The security situation is not good. A few days ago, the aircraft came and brought the commandos then the fighting started and as a result some people were killed. Some people's wheat piles got burned and some people's houses got destroyed. We are able to move but during the war, we are not able to move freely. Our children are frightened a lot when the aircraft comes; they get scared and run to homes and hide. We have a good relationship with our neighbours, as we are of one ethnicity and we are relatives. But there is no security checkpoint in our area.⁴³

”

In addition to compromised physical safety due to political conflict, crime – especially theft and robbery – were described by interview participants in both Herat and Badghis as being a threat to this safety as well. One youth interviewed in Herat described being robbed three times by unknown individuals on motorbikes⁴⁴. Other children and youth interviewed also spoke of increases in theft in their community, of insecurity and limited ability to move, especially at night, and most complained of the inability of police to address these problems.

Safety in urban areas is considered better, and can be an impetus for internal migration. Participants who described having moved from rural to urban areas were happy with that decision. *“We feel safe in our community in general compared to the rural areas because the rural areas are chaotic,”* emphasised one father who had moved his family to Herat.

4.4. LEGAL SAFETY

Less than 1% of survey respondents highlight legal and documentation support as a top need. 80% of survey respondents report that they possess some form of documentation, most commonly a Tazkira ID. However, **deportees between the ages of 10 to 14 are more vulnerable to lack of documentation** – 33% of this age group report having no documentation at all (see Figure 13). While this gap is bridged as deportees increase in age, this lack of documentation for a segment of one of the youngest – and most vulnerable – group of child deportees can pose a challenge to their ability to access support services.

⁴³ SSI with Parent, Badghis. August 2019.

⁴⁴ SSI with Child, Herat. August 2019.

4. Reintegration Needs of Child Deportees

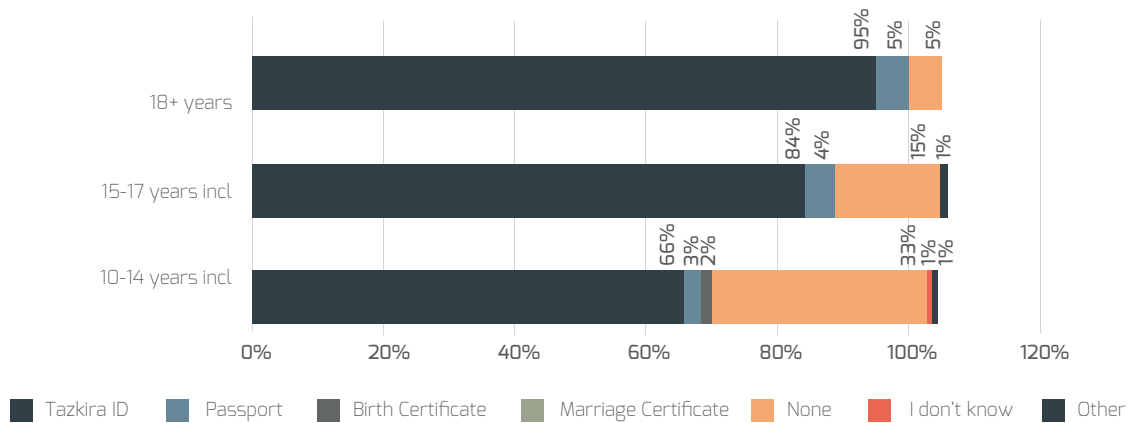


Figure 13: Documentation by Age

In addition, for deportees from Iran, obtaining a MoRR registration card and IOM beneficiary card at the border is crucial to obtaining support upon return. One UN official interviewed for this study recognized the challenges of verification, highlighting that support exists only on a status based level, but the most vulnerable children are likely those who have not been able to have recourse to this registration and subsequent status.

Recourse to justice is also a challenge for both deportees and host community members. Children and parents in Herat and Badghis frequently described low trust in police and authorities. The Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC) has an observer position when it comes to child deportees, monitoring and evaluation their treatment and reception upon return.

AIHRC also works to promote and educate families on children's rights, providing informative sessions on children's rights to both families and children themselves through various forms of mass media. This includes information on the risks of migration for children, as well as information on parental responsibilities, especially as they relate to a child's right to health, education, and nutrition. However parents and children interviewed for this study did not describe any experience with child rights programming, and the impact of this legal awareness raising remains unclear.

Interviews conducted for this study with AIHRC staff in Herat and Kabul highlighted that, while deported children and victims of sexual abuse, or their parents, have the ability to register a formal complaint by contacting their nearest AIHRC representative, the capacity to effectively respond to these complaints and offer justice in court is low, due in part to challenges inherent in identifying perpetrators. This is especially true when it comes to abuses committed on children in Iran.

4. Reintegration Needs of Child Deportees

4.5. ASPIRATIONS AND HOPES

Being able to return to school, to study and access education at the highest levels was one of the more common aspirations of deportee children. The ability to continue their education is seen as a way to improve their own life, but also that of their family, their community, and their country. As one 14 year old in Herat described: *"I am enthusiastic about my future. If I study, I am sure that I will be a useful person for the community. I want to continue to my education and become a successful doctor in the future in order to serve others. I love my future and know that I will have a bright future because I try my best and study my lessons to achieve to my dreams."*⁴⁵

When asked if they agreed with the statement "I feel hopeful about the future," a majority answered that they 'agreed' or 'strongly agreed' (see Figure 14). When asked to define what constituted a 'good life,' nearly all children and youth interviewed highlighted financial stability, owning a family home, being able to attend school, and getting married and starting a family as being key elements. Self-sufficiency and the ability to provide for family were also considered crucial to a satisfactory life – participants do not dream of extreme wealth or riches, but hope for just enough to be independent and to be able to help their family. One child described these goals in further detail:

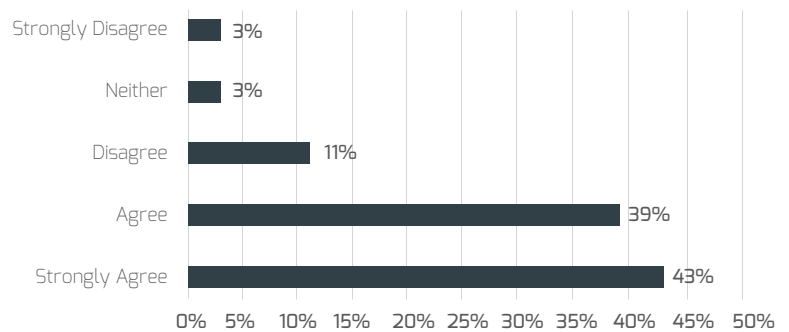


Figure 14: "I feel hopeful about the future"

“

My first ambition is to study and become self-sufficient, complete my education and become a doctor and serve my mom and country. I don't want too much money; I just want as much money as to help me become self-sufficient, help my father to return Afghanistan and besides, my father and mother don't work anymore. Further, to help my parents and buy them a house, and for me to get married and form a family. If anyone can help me achieve these goals until I become self-sufficient, I will seek help from them and then I will move forward by my own.⁴⁶

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⁴⁵ SSI with Child, Herat. August 2019.

⁴⁶ SSI with Child, Herat. August 2019.

4. Reintegration Needs of Child Deportees

Many children interviewed highlight their desire to stay in Afghanistan and help their country and support their communities. *“As we say, East or West, home is the best,”* shared one FGD participant in Herat⁴⁷. Some children recognize that this community support requires sacrifices of their own, in order to ensure a good future for siblings or family members. As one child describes: *“I want to have a good life in the future, I want to open a shop in the future. I send my brothers to school to study and improve their future. I built our house that was collapsed by the flood. I try to do alone, if I cannot, I ask help from my uncles.”*⁴⁸ However, children and youth’s aspirations are often confronted with realities that make it difficult for them to conceive or plan for their desired future. Both children and parents express confusion and anxiety about their options and the situation in Afghanistan.

⁴⁷ FGD with Children, Herat. August 2019

⁴⁸ SSI Child Badghis. August 2019

5. Possibilities for Sustainable Programming Frameworks

5.1. GAPS BETWEEN EXPECTATIONS AND REALITIES OF EXISTING SUPPORT

When asked about assistance received, participants recount receiving clothes, food, transportation support. The majority do not know the name of the organisations that provide them with return, or post-return support: they describe 'an organisation' or in a few cases, 'the UN.'

Several children interviewed expressed dissatisfaction with the quality of clothing, shoes, and toiletry kits provided upon their arrival: some participants noted that toothpaste tubes were already empty, and that clothing that was given to them was flimsy, easily ripped, and the wrong size. However deported children were generally cognizant and grateful for the support they have received at the border, especially for transportation money, as figuring out how they could afford to travel home was a source of stress for many of them prior to their arrival at the border. In many cases, this assistance – any assistance – was an unexpected and pleasant surprise.

The majority of families – both parents and children – report receiving no support beyond initial kits. Children noted that promises of longer term support had been made to them at the Ansar transit centre which they were still waiting for. One child in Herat expressed the significant frustration he felt at this lack of follow through:

“

At the border, they gave us food and then they carried us to Ansar camp by car. I received one pair of shoes and clothes in Ansar camp. They didn't give us anything else and they took us to our homes. The assistance was not useful at all, I threw it away. They promised us a lot in Ansar camp - for example, that they will provide us with land and other support. To receive this they said they would call us, but we have not received any news so far. I don't have information about any organisation or services which help the migrants. My request is that they should actually provide support to the migrants and they should not deceive us by making promises and besides, the materials that they provide to returnees [at the border] should have better quality. ⁴⁹

”

Upon return to their families, children and the parents do not have information or knowledge of organisations that they could turn to for support and guidance. *“I do not know of any organisations that can help me”* and *“I have not received any assistance”* are two phrases commonly repeated by the majority of respondents. Basic assistance at the border, combined with this lack of knowledge on where to find support at home, creates a sense of confusion.

⁴⁹ SSI with Child, Herat. August 2019

5. Possibilities for Sustainable Programming Frameworks

As one father in Herat asked: *“The UN can provide any kind of assistance but I don’t why they don’t help us. The government can also provide support but I also don’t know why they don’t help us.”*⁵⁰

This is further exacerbated when children are provided with a reference for an organisation meant to help them, but they receive no response, pointing to weak referral systems. This was the case for one child interviewed in Badghis who explained that: *“when I was just deported, an organisation assisted us and gave us cards. They told us that if we referred to Qala e Naw’s DoRR, they would assist us but we have not received any assistance from them so far. I do not know about organisations that help people like me. I would refer to them if I knew about them. I know about organisations like the IRC, and the DoRR but they did not help us.”*⁵¹

In general, when asked who they hoped to receive support from, children and especially parents highlight that they expect support to come from the government first, which can bolster community capacity to take care of each other. *“The solution to every problem is that the government and the citizen should be united so that all the problems are solved. People in the community work together and help each other to overcome problems. The community members do everything that is good for all,”*⁵² wished one father. This common sentiment is however moderated by scepticism concerning the existing capacities of government – many interviewed participants highlighted government corruption as a reason why government actors were unable to provide this support.

While improvements since 2016 – including a stronger reception system at the border, the inclusion of social workers and a case management approach, as well as coordination between agencies – are positive signs of change, the follow through with referrals and long term support is lacking.

Recognising what is realistically possible is important – the below identifies both challenges to be addressed which can provide a way forward. Some of this can be addressed by War Child and other partners, whereas some is more structural and requires more robust advocacy and political pull in order to lay the groundwork for sustainable support.

⁵⁰ SSI with Parent, Herat. August 2019.

⁵¹ FGD with Children, Badghis. August 2019.

⁵² FGD with Parents, Badghis. August 2019.

5. Possibilities for Sustainable Programming Frameworks

5.2 KEY STAKEHOLDERS PRESENT

The number of actors working directly on the provision of reintegration support for child deportees is limited but experienced. These actors as well as their roles are outlined in the table below.

Table 5: Research Questions and Sub-Questions for Report

Theme and main question	Research Sub-Questions
UN	IOM Provides support to deportees at the border, in particular to vulnerable categories of deportees in need of assistance. IOM provides food, pays medical bills, and connects social worker networks. IOM also works on advocacy.
	UNICEF Funding partner for War Child and CPAN coordinator with MoLSAMD. Providing support to child deportees in 15 provinces.
	WFP Provides food security support.
Government	MoRR/DoRR Coordination role at the national and provincial level. DoRR provides deportees with registration status at the border. At the national level, MoRR supports family reunification of child deportees at the airport.
	MoLSAMD/ DoLSAMD Lead on awareness raising as well as supporting programming design. Manages transit centres and orphanages for deported children. Main coordinator for CPAN with UNICEF.
	MoE/DoE Attends case conferences, supports coordination and programming
	AIHRC Acts as a monitor and observer, with a focus on child rights. Participates in case conferences.
INGO	War Child UK Greets and interviews deportees at the border, provides initial psychological support. Accompanies hospital visits. WCUK social workers accompany the child along their reunification journey, from identification of family members to reunification and follow up calls.
	NRC Manages the screening hall

5. Possibilities for Sustainable Programming Frameworks

These stakeholders form a part of the Child Protection and Action Network (CPAN), an “inclusive network of governmental and non-governmental organisations with a mandate for field interventions in the area of child protection.”⁵³ Established in 2006, CPAN is meant to be community based, a network of over 50 organisations with CPAN focal points throughout 30 provinces and over 130 districts. Essentially a loose umbrella organisation, the CPAN network includes actors from overnment, NGOs (including War Child) and other national and international organisations. It is funded by UNICEF, and coordination is shared jointly between UNICEF and MoLSAMD. The network is evolving, and improvements have been made since 2017 to increase the staff's structure, introduce CPAN managers, and formalise the network's actions.

The network's main task with respect to the protection of child deportees is to support reunification with their families, especially in cases where identification of parents or guardians is a challenge, or where standard reunification mechanisms fail. CPAN network focal points have ties to community leaders and structures at the smallest district and village levels, and their ability to tap into these is their strength when it comes to supporting family tracing and reunification. This is most frequently done through case conferences, which are organised to bring together all actors working on child deportees in order to establish a solution.

MoLSAMD's CPAN focal point in Herat described the case conference process, and the different actors involved, as follows:

When a child's family is unknown and he is from a province, for instance from Faryab, WCUK organizes case conference. We attend this case conference, and once we know that the child is from Faryab, we at CPAN and the WCUK social workers contact with CPAN focal points in Faryab province. These provincial focal points share the issue at their CPAN district or province meetings if the monthly meeting is near, but if the monthly meeting is not near, for the sake of time the CPAN team in Faryab organises an emergency meeting. At this meeting they share the information about the child with other CPAN members in different districts of the province. CPAN members/ districts and villages departments share the information of this child with community leaders or head of shuras. In this way we find the family of the child.⁵⁴



There remains a lack of clarity and decisiveness when it comes to how these case conferences work in practice, and on how well versed they are in child protection. Several key stakeholders interviewed highlighted concerns CPAN staffs' technical competence to make best case determinations for children, to maintain professional levels of confidentiality, as well as expressing lack of clarity on what CPAN staff's job description is beyond contacting their networks. Past evaluations have also been critical of CPAN's ability to effectively provide protection to children under their umbrella.⁵⁵

⁵³ UNICEF (2017). "2017 Afghanistan: Evaluation of Child Protection Action Network"

⁵⁴ KII MoLSA/CPAN, Herat. August 2019

⁵⁵ UNICEF 2017

5. Possibilities for Sustainable Programming Frameworks

Key stakeholders interviewed at UNICEF however maintained confidence in CPAN's capacities, and noted that while coordination could be strengthened, the CPAN network was an asset that should be maintained.⁵⁶

5.2. COORDINATION

Coordination between actors and partners form a core element for the provision of effective support. Yet, only a handful of actors work directly on support for child deportees – while coordination agreements exist on paper and in the form of working groups, in practice coordination is loose, and perceptions of the effectiveness of this coordination are mixed. Coordination and partnership can be divided into three categories: implementing partners with each other; with the government; and between government entities.

Coordination between implementing partners. War Child UK's work is viewed positively – an NRC representative in Herat highlighted WCUK's work as being “very useful and successful”⁵⁷. In general however stakeholders work more in silo than in partnership, and perceptions of coordination vary from the central to the field level. One stakeholder in Kabul highlighted IOM's coordination with WCUK on hospital referrals – wherein WCUK accompanies the child to the hospital and IOM covers medical bills – as a positive example of effective interagency coordination.⁵⁸ In Herat however, WCUK social workers expressed frustration at this same referral system, noting that it was not working well and alleging that IOM was not taking full responsibility for some sick cases of children⁵⁹.

While IOM and War Child are the two main non-government organisations working directly on receiving, supporting, and reunifying deportees at the border in Islam Qala, other organisations such as NRC, Terre des Hommes, and WFP have been working on the periphery and could be better leveraged in filling in gaps. Next stages of programming will involve other actors, established for years in the Western regions, such as the organisation HELP, who have signed an agreement with UNICEF to implement Technical and Vocational Education Training (TVET) for deportees, with War Child providing the beneficiaries. Coordination has been shaky however – an interview with HELP staff in Herat revealed that no direct communication between WCUK and HELP had begun, although WCUK and HELP had both been having bilateral conversations with UNICEF.⁶⁰ This tendency towards bilateralism, as opposed to inclusive and multisectoral conversations, can be detrimental to effective programming and to maintaining clarity on who does what and on what is possible, presenting a threat to effective collaboration.

Coordination with the government. Government actors interviewed for this study highlight a different level of frustration. Interviews with government stakeholders in Herat and Kabul revealed a belief that international organisations are the ones in the driver's seat when it comes to developing and implementing programming, and that government actors must go along, sometimes being informed of a project after implementation has already started.

⁵⁶ KII UNICEF, Kabul. September 2019.

⁵⁷ KII with NRC, Herat. August 2019.

⁵⁸ KII with International Stakeholder, Kabul. August 2019.

⁵⁹ KII WCUK Social Worker, Herat. August 2019.

⁶⁰ KII HELP, Herat. September 2019.

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Some government actors recognise their capacity limits in terms of funding and material ability, but emphasise that being kept in the dark means they cannot be involved at all, limiting the overall impact and sustainability of the project. One DoRR official in Herat described this dynamic: “The government is not ready to implement these programs alone and has limited function at this point. But the impact of international stakeholder programming depends on their effective coordination with government. If they let us know about their projects, we won’t interfere in their work process and we are ready to support them. But when they don’t let us know about their programs, then it narrows the supporting condition for us.”⁶¹

In some cases, this lack of government inclusion has led government actors to observe that programming does not effectively respond to community needs, and to highlight the necessity of actively including government. “If these programs are designed with the cooperation of government, it would have positive impacts,” highlights one DoLSA official in Herat, emphasizing further that “international organisations have taken the community resilience from the people and communities with their short term and temporary supports.”⁶² KII with MoLSAMD and MoRR at the national levels reiterated this sentiment.

Intra-governmental coordination. Government tensions are further exacerbated by the lack of coordination and cooperation between government offices. Tensions between MoLSAMD and MoRR in particular have led to lack of clarity between the two agencies’ mandates and how they can work together. Government to government coordination gaps are clearer when it comes to the involvement of other sectoral ministries or offices. An interview with the Attorney General’s office highlighted a disconnect between their knowledge of the legal context for deportee children and awareness of ongoing programming, highlighting significant gaps in basic knowledge, such as awareness of the existence of the CPAN network, which highlights the isolated way in which government ministries work. The Attorney General Office representative described this disconnect and ensuing frustrations: “we were not informed of [the WCUK] program, we have been asking other organisations that they should pay attention to the legal context of minor deportations and that they should share their programming with us. We do not know what is CPAN, or what case conferences are, or what the MoRR does in this regard.”⁶³

However, some positive examples of government led coordination do exist, mainly at the local level. For instance, according to their office, the Directorate of Economy (DoE) in Herat has been involved with case conferences and support for deportees since the beginning of the program. DoE representatives interviewed for this study highlighted positive coordination between different government bodies, noting that successes in this programme have been greater than the challenges, and suggesting that tensions in coordination between government bodies at the national level are not necessarily replicated at the local level.

⁶¹ KII DoRR, Herat. August 2019.

⁶² KII DoLSA, Herat. August 2019.

⁶³ KII Attorney General Office, Kabul. August 2019.

5. Possibilities for Sustainable Programming Frameworks

5.3. PROGRAMMING: EVOLUTION , GAPS, and THREATS

Evolutions since 2016: Improving the response at the border

Since 2016, improvements have been made to support a more structured and tailored approach to arrivals of deportees at the border. Prior to 2016 few support mechanisms and practically no funding was available for supporting deportees entering through Western Afghanistan. Some of the most notable changes and improvements include the more structured reception process at the border and the transit centre run with the support of the government, IOM and War Child, as well as the NRC-run screening centre.

The team of social workers provide individual support to specific deportee cases, accompanying them from arrival to reunification. These initiatives provide insights into what types of support might be most effective in a context where capacity to react is limited.

The transit centre, also known as Ansar ‘camp,’ serves as a physical structure which allows for a safer, more orderly transit and transition back into Afghanistan. Within the centre, IOM and War Child UK work together, with War Child taking the lead on psychological interviews, evaluations, and support, as well conducting family tracing. IOM supports the provision of food and clothing at the centre, and works jointly with War Child to support medical needs where relevant. The centre hosts children for an average of two days, and provides food and drink as well as child friendly spaces for them, including a playground, games, a volleyball court, ping pong tables, and other child equipment for those being hosted to occupy themselves in a safe and age appropriate manner.



Photo - Playground at Ansar Transit Centre near Herat

Stakeholders spoke positively about the transit centre, highlighting the value of having a clear and visible area where people can ask for help; one international stakeholder emphasised that these are the sorts of initiatives that should be encouraged, and that the institution of a “calm arrival” at the border was central to ensuring effective support to deportees as well as to mitigating stress, anxiety, and ensuring that those who needed help sought it.

5. Possibilities for Sustainable Programming Frameworks

However, Samuel Hall's previous 2016 research reveals that minors do not always agree with being treated as "children", highlighting the tensions between their willingness to affirm their agency, and determine their own course of action, and the structured, and often inflexible, assistance process they go through. For instance, some do not understand why they need to be escorted home or why they need to wait at the camp before leaving. **Careful consideration needs to be given to programming that does not defy deportees' own sense of agency and their ability to self-determine what is best for them.**

In Kabul, the establishment of a transit centre in 2018, managed by MoLSAMD, alleviates pressure on deportee children and the social workers accompanying them to have to stay in potentially unsafe hotels and to transit without a formal support system while journeying back to deportee families in provinces. WCUK has supported and contributed to the improvement of material facilities at the centre, ensuring that safe and child friendly standards are met.

Children normally stay in the transit centre for only a night – child friendly equipment, meals, and safe accommodation is provided. Children staying at the centre in Kabul are also provided with additional counselling, and are able to attend classes with the transit centres trainers and teachers. Educational activities include traditional educational activities according to grade level, as well as religious and life skills training. WCUK social workers accompany the child and stay at the transit centre with the child while travelling to the child's family.



Photo - Basketball Hoop in the child friendly space/ game room at Kabul Transit Centre

The establishment and development of this team of WCUK social workers, who provide support to individual children and implement a case management approach has been a significant innovation since 2016. War Child social workers accompany child deportees received at the transit centre through every stage of the reunification process, from arrival to reunion with their guardians, parents, and families. As the persons most in contact with deportee children, social workers can be key frontline workers to ensuring that support effectively responds to children's needs, as well as to identifying changing trends and emerging issues. They also serve as initial mediators between children and their families where needed, in particular in cases where parents are upset, confused, or reluctant to embrace their child's return.

5. Possibilities for Sustainable Programming Frameworks

The social workers' position is multi-faceted, serving at once as mentor, teacher, and mediator. One social worker interviewed described this element of their job: *"As a social worker, I feel that I am more -- actually, I feel that I am a social trainer. You know, we work with children, and we encourage them to get an education or to work or to get some skills for work. And informally we train them where they have no training, we share our knowledge on health, we encourage children to go to school, to not re-migrate. We deal with children not as a stranger, but as a father or a teacher. We talk to them about the value of education, of your homeland, and also about social, ethical, and moral ideals, like about democracy or family."*⁶⁴

Challenges and Gaps Faced

Social workers are challenged by the number of cases assigned to them. The numbers of social workers need to be increased to be able to tackle more seriously the caseloads of minor deportees. Social workers interviewed for this study highlighted managing over 6 cases at a time, and sometimes 40 a month, especially as numbers increased. Given the time social workers spend travelling, in these circumstances, following through with a comprehensive case management approach, one which contains systematic, personalized, and long term follow through beyond the return moment and at the reintegration level is difficult.

Transit centres face similar challenges providing long term support. Overcrowding at the transit centre in Herat is common, especially as deportations increase. The centre is built to house 50 children, but sometimes finds shelters upwards of 60 a month. *"We do not have enough beds for them,"* describes one transit centre worker in Herat⁶⁵. By definition the transit centre serves as a temporary place for children to being given care in prior to re-joining their families. The majority of child deportees who transit through the centres stay for 1 or 2 nights maximum.

While staff and transit centre social workers care deeply about the children and have made great efforts to provide an environment that is safe and welcoming, the transitory nature of these cases means that efforts to provide educational and psychological support would be better invested in the locations of return. The benefits provided by supporting children at the transit centres could be better leveraged and connected with future reintegration support back home.

"Our project ends with reunification," stated one transit centre social worker in Herat interviewed for this study; transit centres, while not involved in the long term work of reintegration, serve as a first stepping stone along that journey, ensuring a smooth and safe transition towards return and laying foundations for stability in reintegration.

⁶⁴ KII with WCUK Social Worker. July 2019

⁶⁵ KII GTC Staff, Herat. August 2019

5. Possibilities for Sustainable Programming Frameworks

Funding limitations and misconceptions

Budget limitations have meant that addressing needs of large amounts of children is sometimes difficult, and War Child has had to dig into other internal budgets, for instance to cover flight tickets for children during months where travelling by road would be dangerous or irresponsibly insecure. Transit centre staff in Herat described this dilemma, and noted that War Child has included the construction of extra rooms and beds in their new proposal for the next phase, in order to account for possible increases in deportations and mitigate overcrowding.

Increasingly since 2015, there has been a significant discrepancy between funding for returnees from Pakistan and those from Iran. A presentation at the European Union delegation in 2016 revealed the lack of knowledge of the return dynamics from Iran, and the obstacles in collecting and sharing information of the situation at the western border. The lack of data, monitoring and field assessments, alongside the lack of visits to Islam Qala or to Nimroz, mean that the aid community is disconnected from populations in need.

While funding has increased very slightly since 2016 – 3% of IOM's funding now goes to support these deportees, versus a non-existent budget in 2016 – the disparity between money and support needed remains enormous. Greater advocacy is needed to combat donor misconceptions of migrants to Iran, and to clarify that if reintegration funding is to be sustainable it needs to be available in the long term.

MONITORING, EVALUATION AND LEARNING

Framework and Limitations of Current MEL Systems

Current monitoring and evaluation frameworks are limited but can be reinforced taking this study as a baseline. War Child conducts follow ups with reunited families three months after their initial reunification. Conducted in person when security allows, and by phone for more volatile or distant regions, this outreach informs WCUK's reporting and coordination with UNICEF. These follow up interviews take place with either the child directly, or a parent, guardian, or other family member.

War Child uses two categories of indicators when reporting project outcomes: programmatic progress indicators, and a limited set of reintegration indicators (table 6).

Table 6: Current M&E Indicators used by War Child

Programmatic Progress Indicators	Reintegration Indicators
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• # of children screened• # of children reunified in total• # of children reunified with the support of CPAN• # of children who have re-migrated	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Sectors of work for children• Child's plans to leave Afghanistan• Reasons for a renewed departure from Afghanistan

These indicators provide very limited capacity to evaluate reintegration needs and the impact of support provided, or to adjust and adapt programming that could have an impact on child protection. Questions do not probe into the child's education, work conditions, family situation, emotional and physical health, legal or financial situation. In other words, the monitoring framework does not follow the IASC dimensions presented in this study. While social workers may include follow up questions on these topics at their discretion, there is no systematic or formalised framework in place to identify or address these.

In addition, research conducted for this study **uncovered several flaws within the database used to record and track beneficiary contact information for follow up.** In many cases phone numbers were no longer working or attributed to the correct person, but this was not reflected in the database. A reflection will be required – with information, communications and technology (ICT) counterparts, to provide other means to stay in touch with deportees and beneficiaries.

Some beneficiary information – including age, region of origin, language, and ethnicity – was revealed to have been registered incorrectly during our research team's phone survey calls.

MONITORING, EVALUATION AND LEARNING

In one instance, a beneficiary interviewed registered as being 17 years old stated that his age was 23 years old, and explained that he had been told to mark down his age as under 18 in order to access support. The disorganized, short term, and often inaccurate nature of follow ups and tracking on beneficiaries limits capacity for effectively supporting the reintegration needs of child deportees.

How to improve MEL

There are ways in which these MEL activities could be strengthened and weaknesses addressed.

1. **Developing a holistic, multi-dimensional, and formalised set of indicators to examine the reintegration process.** These should include material, physical, and legal protection categories, as well as elements on community as well as individual perspectives. Any MEL framework will need to be built on the IASC framework on durable solutions. These should include both objective and subjective indicators. For instance, when speaking of child protection, indicators including levels of safety and security should be measured alongside access to education, quality of education and type of community/recreational activity available. Participation in community activities and instances of discrimination should also be included, alongside signs of distress and availability of support networks.
2. **Developing a comparative method to prioritise aid beyond the standard return package.** In 2016, Samuel Hall piloted with the Reintegration Working Group (now Durable Solutions Working Group) the Multi-dimensional integration index (MDI) which includes both objective and subjective indicators for reintegration. Based on a review of all stakeholders' post-return needs assessments, and the academic literature, the MDI provides an add-on tool that can be joined to any assessment to specifically measure, over time, integration patterns. MDI measures differences between returnee and other households in a locality, to assess levels of integration in a specific community, and inform stakeholders of households that still suffer from displacement-related vulnerabilities.
3. **Adopting a longitudinal approach to MEL and agreeing, with the beneficiaries, of specific times in the year when they will be reached out to, for a dialogue to be established and for expectations to be clear.** Previous research in Afghanistan⁶⁶, including the design of tools such as MDI, follow ups need to take place at several time points over a long term period of at least one year. Follow ups need to happen regularly and cannot be one offs.

⁶⁶ Samuel Hall/IOM (2017) Setting standards for an integrated approach to reintegration. This report highlights the ups and downs of the reintegration process: it is not a linear experience, and child protection needs may vary over time, negatively impacted by shocks at the household, community or structural level.

MONITORING, EVALUATION AND LEARNING

4. **Learning should be integrated in a monitoring and evaluation framework, to allow for adaptive programming to effectively take place.** Currently, the social workers' capacity to support beneficiaries is limited due to access and resources, further limiting the ability to bring about bottom-up change in the design of programmes. Any funding should include a learning partner to conduct effective follow ups and M&E, independently and in the long term, over at least a year long period. While the data can be collected by, in this case, WarChild, the analysis will need to be supported by a learning partner and across a wider range of actors.

The above can most effectively be done if **funding bridges humanitarian/development divides. Donors such as the EU's DEVCO (development) and ECHO (humanitarian) can rely on a common learning partner** to include provisions for learning and dissemination of M&E findings, advocacy (public and/or private) with partners, government and donors, and measurement of impact and reintegration, to address the coordination gaps and adaptation gaps highlighted above.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The migration and deportation of minors in the west of Afghanistan has to a large extent become normalised, a coping mechanism for families in the face of conflict, disasters, and poverty. This cycle that leads families to resort to child migration can be met with programming that goes beyond the border, to look into the support that families and their children may need before migration and upon return. This final section concludes on opportunities for programming and policy to better protect children and their families.

Families' knowledge, attitudes and practices. The knowledge of families and children of the risks, especially on the journey, is clear. They are well informed of the risks, yet feel that they have no choice but to resort to a child's migration. In some cases, families have been displaced previously, tried to leave rural for urban areas, unstable provinces for more stable ones; in other cases they have been displaced against their will. For the majority, families see their neighbours relying on their children's migration and the financial remittances to overcome their inability to find decent wages or work at home.

Community support – transnational and upon return. Most of the families interviewed have relatives, friends or neighbours who now live and work in Iran and who can guarantee provisions for safety and work upon the child's arrival in Iran. This network is often a tipping point, making migration possible. The decision making process for this migration is extremely complex – it can stem from the child himself, then later approved by the adults; or it can be a request from parents, and accepted by children as part of their household responsibilities and a rite of passage. Even when their migration fails, the immediate return is often a welcoming one. Minors are met with open arms and empathetic responses by community members. Interviews reveal a strong sense of belonging, and wanting to stay in Afghanistan. They are not jumping at opportunities to leave, but at opportunities to have a good life, to contribute to their households and communities in Afghanistan.

Immediate aid vs. protection or reintegration support. Information gaps do not concern risks, but opportunities, referrals and services that children can access upon return. Families all want their children to enrol in some form of education, but do not find those opportunities locally, or they may be at odds with the need to work. Families lack preparedness and information on options available. The assistance framework currently provides for aid to be distributed in a top down manner, but it does not provide for resilience. Evolutions in the assistance to minor deportees have taken place in the last three years, with a stronger, more protection-sensitive reception framework at the border and in the family reunification process. Not all children deported wanted to be part of the assistance framework, but those who do are appreciative of the immediate help they receive – food, clothing, family reunification. Their families are often also grateful for the food and non-food item in kind packages received within months of the child's return. Families have frequently put their limited financial resources in their child's migration, often at the expense of their own food security.

Conclusions and Recommendations

These dimensions are critical to the recommendations that follow. From a protection perspective, the multi-dimensional needs among minor deportees – physical safety, material safety and legal safety – need to be understood as part of a process, and not as distinct parts. This section reviews key findings and programmatic areas that can be explored to better assist minor deportees and their families. It concludes on changes needed on monitoring, evaluation and learning, and finally, on the need for a collective vision and coordination needed to make the needs of these families better known and accepted, and ultimately, mainstreamed in policy and programme responses.

Conclusions and Recommendations

1. TARGET THE MULTIPLE DIMENSIONS OF REINTEGRATION

Research findings reveal specific needs across physical, legal and material safeties that require adapted responses. These responses are not the responsibility of one organisation alone, but can be the basis for operational plans – through CPAN and other coordination mechanisms.

Table 7: Sector-specific recommendations

Dimension	Issues identified	Recommendations
Housing Land and Property	Tenure insecurity / high rentals Poor shelter quality	Any reintegration assistance for minor deportees should integrate a HLP component. A pilot could be implemented – in urban areas – around rental subsidies, that decrease with time, and in conjunction with livelihood support.
Food and water	Food insecurity	Families who benefited from the food and non-food item in kind packages were faring better than those who did not. Systematic beneficiary selection, validation and verification should be done as part of a third party monitoring effort to ensure all minor deportee families benefit from the support package.
Livelihoods	Job insecurity Low wages Work conditions	Children are put back to work after their return. Arrangements should be made with specific sectors – agriculture and construction – to ensure that hours worked ensure possibilities for children to enrol in school, and to stay within permissible conditions and legal parameters.
Education	School drop-outs Barriers to re-integration in the education system	Discussions with the Ministry of Education can lead to the design of a system to integrate school drop-outs back in the education system. NGOs – such as Aschiana in Kabul that provide schooling to child labourers and adapt to their work obligations – can also be sensitised to the needs of this particular group. Whether formal, NGO-led or private educational opportunity arrangements need to be tailored to allow children to work and go to school.
Health	Mental health needs Parents' health needs	Health referrals established at the transit centre can be expanded, through the social workers and psychosocial service providers, to include support within families upon return to avoid domestic tensions, and children becoming introverted or keeping to themselves as a result of their trauma.
Safety	Mobility upon return Social cohesion	Community structures – youth associations, and councils – are often praised by minor deportees as offering them a sense of purpose and belonging. Exploring the inclusion of minor deportees in community structures and expanding social cohesion activities around their participation can be done in coordination with community councils and UNESCO.
Legal	Documentation Political participation	NRC's information, counselling and legal assistance (ICLA) programme should be learned from, adapted and included in programming to equip minors and their families with documentation. Arrangements then need to be made with the MoRR and MoLSAMD to ensure that, with the documentation, specific services can be accessed for deportee minors and families at the local government offices.

Conclusions and Recommendations

2. ESTABLISH A TWO-WAY COMMUNICATION BETWEEN DEPORTEES/BENEFICIARIES AND AGENCIES

In addition to the above sectoral and dimensional needs, communication and information channels need to be improved between agencies and beneficiaries. **The current mode of communication is a one-way channel from agencies to beneficiaries, rather than a two-way channel.** To remedy this, ICT solutions need to be thought about to support the reintegration process: from call centres, to free phone calls/SMSs to be negotiated with telecom companies, there are options – to be mapped out and studied – that can be developed by Afghan companies and made available to this population. This can be an opportunity for deportees to ask questions, obtain information, in order to make informed decisions about their return. **Before family reunification, an opportunity for information, counselling and legal assistance is required.** Organisations such as NRC have long established ICCLA programmes that could be brought under the fold of reintegration assistance much more strongly.

Social workers should be recruited locally and trained to ensure that they do have access to communities of return. The current number of social workers and their limited access limits their effectiveness. It is not possible for social workers to do proper follow up of cases when they are 11 across 18 high return provinces. The issue of access needs to be at the heart of the selection of social workers, and a strategy to scale the presence of social workers will be needed. How can partners ensure that a social worker can reach a disabled woman of seven children in a Taliban area? How to ensure that social workers reach the most in need?

3. BUILD COMMUNITY-BASED APPROACHES TO REINTEGRATION SUPPORT, IMPROVE MONITORING AND LEARNING

To avoid creating tensions between minor deportee households and non-migrant households, and to also tap into the support that communities provide, stakeholders such as War Child UK **will need to develop – beyond border assistance or individual assistance – community level relays, and outreach efforts, which can include CPAN networks and other stakeholders involved in programming.** These relays can target specific vulnerabilities, while also identifying, with the support of a learning partner, links to development programming. Developing community and service mappings, built in collaboration with youth and their families, are a crucial tool to identifying support systems that go beyond formal or international programming. Identifying these systems, as well as developing community level relays, will facilitate the work of social workers who are currently limited in their resources and capacity to access communities of return. Specific focal points will be needed in communities to work closely with social workers on programming needed, and with CPAN on the prioritisation of responses.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Community-level monitoring is needed to ensure that displacement-related vulnerabilities are better assessed but also that reintegration levels are monitored. Existing tools can be adapted and learned from. Tools such as the multi-dimensional integration index (MDI) with its set of 40 questions already tested, piloted and jointly created by UNHCR and Samuel Hall, with the validation of the government and NGOs, can be used on a rolling basis in specific communities to better populate and improve on the database that War Child maintains.

Families are willing to participate in monitoring efforts. This needs to be part of an agreement with them, and associated with information, referrals and greater awareness on support that can be provided and accessed. This will require a stronger coordination at three levels, as seen in this report: between implementing partners, with the government, and within the government.

Last but not least, **a learning partner is required to measure outcomes and identify linkages with development programming,** as part of any future work on minor deportees' areas of return. The current model of measuring outputs needs to be supplanted by a model where monitoring ensures stronger beneficiary selection and distribution processes, and that an approach towards learning measure outcomes on children, families and communities and results in a 'nexus' programming.

4. IMPROVE COORDINATION THROUGH A JOINT HUMANITARIAN-DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME : A PILOT INITIATIVE IN HERAT AND/OR BADGHIS

Key actors needed to engage in a dialogue around a collective vision and division of responsibilities:

- Donors – DEVCO and ECHO
- Government – MoRR, MoLSAMD, Ministry of Education and DiREC
- UN agencies – UNICEF, IOM, UNHABITAT
- NGOs – WarChild, HELP, Save the Children, NRC, DRC, IRC
- CPAN networks
- Research and learning partners – Samuel Hall, ADSP

Starting with this group, a set of commitments can be made. Humanitarian-development funding for a joint, multi-funded, multi-year programme on child protection and reintegration can be a first commitment to go beyond protection response at the border. Within this joint funding, organisations can divide up their responsibilities across dimensions, and work towards a post-return protection framework and reintegration monitoring.

Conclusions and Recommendations

- A pilot approach building on specific communities of origin and return in provinces of high return – such as Herat and Badghis – can allow for the testing of such a model to support deportee reintegration. The roll-out of multi-sectoral programming that covers housing, health, education and livelihoods, can ensure a strengthened outcome with ripple effects beyond families to communities. It is recommended that such a pilot can be developed and tested out in 2020, with sufficient monitoring frameworks in place from the start.
- This pilot will require an exit strategy – to have a time bound strategy that handovers the responsibility to the network of organisations under CPAN and to the Government of Afghanistan through MoRR and MoLSAMD, as well as line ministries such as the Ministries of Health and Education. The role of DEVCO-ECHO partnering on this model can be a transitional one: setting up the basis to learn from and to then develop further initiatives across the country.

5. DEVELOP A STRATEGY FOR MINOR DEPORTEES AT THE GOVERNMENTAL LEVEL

The Government of Afghanistan is responsible for reintegration programming, and of linking the question of reintegration to child protection and social protection in Afghanistan. This conversation needs to be strengthened, bringing together these ministerial representatives to agree on the priorities to be tackled. As reviewed in this report:

- A balance between child labour and education is required to support deportees and their families in the reintegration phase. The education system for them requires flexibility.
- Referrals are needed, mapping out organisations able to provide food support, then beyond the three months, other sectoral support.
- Programmes can be tested – including the development of youth councils in high return areas, rental subsidies programmes, and greater attention to the link with the work of ANDMA as lead on disaster related displacement.

6. COMMITMENTS MADE TO IMPROVED PROGRAMMING AND COORDINATION – November 2019

On November 7, 2019, a validation workshop was held in Kabul, at the UNICEF office, with key stakeholders, to discuss the findings of this research and the recommended ways forward. Among the participants were representatives of the Government of Afghanistan (MoRR and MoLSAMD), UN agencies (UNICEF and IOM), and NGOs (War Child, the International Rescue Committee (IRC) and Help).

Conclusions and Recommendations

Stakeholders agreed on key take-aways and action points forward, including:

Theme	Action Point
Coordination	<p>Formalise existing coordination mechanisms, strengthen and revise existing agreements, with further updates to be planned within six months</p> <p>Establish formal, regular, and inclusive check ins and conversations with MORR and MoLSAMD at the provincial level</p> <p>Incorporate advocacy into existing coordination discussions by inviting the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) to be a part of coordination groups and mechanisms, in order to strengthen cross border advocacy and diplomacy</p>
Food and water	<p>Conduct community mappings in consultation with communities, and combine these with existing UNICEF services mappings, to be shared with all partners. Community mappings to be defined at the village, district, and provincial levels. Include both formal and informal structures – to be rolled out in one district first, in order to identify how best integrated in programming.</p> <p>Support a CPAN capacity building pilot programme: integrate best interest determination and reintegration technical capacity into ongoing UNICEF led CPAN trainings. As part of these trainings, establish partnerships between specific CPAN members and communities in order to build communication that can inform longer term M&E</p> <p>Incorporate communities themselves in the development of programming, through regular and ongoing consultations with youth groups, schools, and other key community locations. To be done through CPAN and linked to training above.</p>
Multidimensional Aspect	<p>Revise M&E frameworks and tools to include longitudinal and multidimensional indicators, and to be rolled out over time. This can be done in pilot form first, within one district before being scaled up</p>

These commitments and ways forward provide a basis to continue the much needed conversation on supporting the return and reintegration of minor deportees in the Western region. While significant advances have been made since 2016, more needs to be done to ensure that the transition from the border, to the homes, from the homes, to a 'good life' in Afghanistan is within reach for the thousands of children and youth deported every year.

⁶⁶ Samuel Hall/IOM (2017) Setting standards for an integrated approach to reintegration. This report highlights the ups and downs of the reintegration process: it is not a linear experience, and child protection needs may vary over time, negatively impacted by shocks at the household, community or structural level.

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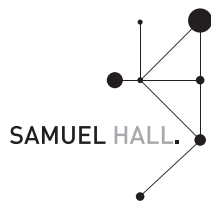
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