

Case Study Series

**SECOND-GENERATION AFGHANS  
IN NEIGHBOURING COUNTRIES**

**From *mohajer* to *hamwatan*:  
Afghans return home**

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Funding for this research was provided by the European Commission (EC) and United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).

**December 2007**



## About the Author

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## About the Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit

The Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit (AREU) is an independent research organisation headquartered in Kabul. AREU's mission is to conduct high-quality research that informs and influences policy and practice. AREU also actively promotes a culture of research and learning by strengthening analytical capacity in Afghanistan and facilitating reflection and debate. Fundamental to AREU's vision is that its work should improve Afghan lives.

AREU was established in 2002 by the assistance community working in Afghanistan and has a board of directors with representation from donors, United Nations and other multilateral agencies, and non-governmental organisations. Current funding for AREU is provided by the European Commission (EC), the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the World Bank and the governments of Denmark, Norway, Sweden, Switzerland and the United Kingdom.

## Acknowledgements

This paper is the result of the contributions, patience and collaboration of many people. Generous funding from the European Commission enabled this study to be undertaken. AREU expresses its sincere appreciation to the central and district offices of the Ministry of Refugees and Repatriation, the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Higher Education for their guidance and introduction to relevant institutions. Gratitude is also extended to the organisations and UNHCR and its sub-offices which, along with community elders and representatives, supported researchers' access to the areas and communities selected as research sites.

We wish to thank those Afghan youths and young adults – both male and female – who participated in this study and shared their experiences with the research team, as well as their families who gave permission for the research team to conduct interviews. For respondents, recalling and narrating their life histories – from childhood when they realised they were Afghan refugees living in foreign countries, to memories of Pakistanis and Iranians, how they returned to homeland and what they found there – was a process that involved confronting their present dilemma in search of a future path. Although they face continued struggles, many respondents voiced what they felt in their own country as emotional “freedom”. These hopes and passions, manifested in many ways, became a key motivation to the researchers involved in completing this work.

Drawing out the internal voices of these second-generation Afghan returnees' was only possible because the skilled interviewers were also Afghan youth, who willingly shared their own stories of growing up over the past decades in Afghanistan as well as neighbouring countries. Anil Ahmad Shaheer was a committed leader of the research team throughout the fieldwork – significantly contributing to the consistently high-quality data. Mohammad Fardin, Batul Nezami, Saghar Wafa, Palwasha Andisha, Somaye Jafary, Khadija Yaqeen, Daud Kohi and Shelly Manalan all contributed to the process of consolidating data with great patience.

We would like to thank Ewen Macleod of UNHCR for his careful review and comments on the report, and his thoughtful support throughout the project. Special thanks go to AREU's support staff and editorial team. Meredith Lewis took time to review this paper, providing creative suggestions and giving it a strong argument; without her contribution, this paper would not be what it is.

Finally, the AREU migration project has been expertly overseen by Dr Paula Kantor. Her extensive technical and theoretical inputs and moral support to the research team enabled the study to be accomplished, even in the ever-changing environment. I would like to also express my personal gratitude to Paula for all the support she has offered me in developing my research and writing capabilities, enabling me to undertake and complete the research for and writing of this case study.

Mamiko Saito, November 2007

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## Glossary

<i>burqa</i>	an all-covering pleated garment which covers a woman from head to toe, with a small netted area around the eyes allowing her to see
<i>chadar namaz</i>	long <i>hijab</i> covering entire body
<i>hamwatan</i>	country fellows
<i>hijab</i>	covering women's head and body; being modest and moral
<i>madrassa</i>	religious school
<i>mujahid(din)</i>	holy warrior(s) fighting in <i>jihad</i> (holy war)
<i>mohajer(in)</i>	refugee(s)
<i>panjabi dress</i>	popular dress among Pakistani women
<i>shalwar kameez</i>	popular dress among Afghan and Pakistani men
<i>wakil</i>	neighbourhood representative
<i>wasita</i>	relations to powerful people
<i>watan</i>	homeland

## Acronyms

AREU	Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit
EC	European Commission
IDP	internally displaced person
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees





## Executive Summary

This report is the final in a series of three country case studies of second-generation Afghan refugees – those living in neighbouring countries Pakistan and Iran, and those who have returned Afghanistan. Funding for the research was provided by the European Commission (EC) and administrated through the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).

This research project, *Second-Generation Afghans in Neighbouring Countries*, was initiated in 2006 and follows on from previous work by AREU on transnational networks undertaken in 2004/2005, which stimulated debate within the context of UNHCR's efforts to formulate and implement a comprehensive policy solution for the protracted Afghan refugee situation and their continuous migratory movements. The earlier research on transnational networks highlighted a gap in information on the experiences and intentions of the large numbers of second-generation Afghan refugees living in Pakistan and Iran – to which this research project responds.

Currently, around 3 million registered Afghan refugees are still living in Pakistan and Iran – the majority of whom are now in their second or even third generation of displacement. In Pakistan, 74 percent of the Afghan population is under 28 years, while 71 percent of the Afghan population in Iran is 29 years or under. Future projections regarding of the third generation suggest that proportion of Afghans under 5 years old will reach 13 percent of all Afghans in Pakistan, while this figure will be nearly 10 percent in Iran.

The sample group for this research on second-generation Afghan refugees was defined as males and females aged 15 to 30 years who had spent more than half of their lives in Pakistan or Iran. This case study examines the experiences of a sample of second-generation Afghan refugees of the same profile who have since returned to Afghanistan and spent at least six months in their homeland.

For second-generation Afghans refugees, returning to one's homeland does not necessarily mean "return", as a majority of them have had little or no experience of living in Afghanistan, while they have profound attachment to Pakistan or Iran – the place they know best. To understand the characteristics and reintegration patterns of this large group of young Afghans who have returned to their homeland is of critical importance to policymaking on refugees and reintegration. This research will contribute to informing the debate about how to facilitate the repatriation and reintegration of returned Afghan refugees to ensure that both Afghanistan and the young returnees benefit from the experience of return, and that the Afghan population remaining in exile and continuous movement across the borders are managed in the best possible ways.

This case study explores the complex process of reintegration, illustrating the difficulties faced by a sample of Afghan youth and young adults now living in urban and rural areas in Kabul, Herat, and Baghlan provinces who have come back with knowledge and ideas formed while growing up in Pakistan and Iran. The report's strength lies in its use of narratives and direct quotes from the purposively selected respondents (48 in total) with diverse backgrounds and experiences, giving life and personal meaning to the challenges and opportunities that reintegration presents.

## Key findings

- The main problems faced by less educated and low-income respondents tend to be in relation to material survival and physical insecurity, while more educated respondents, particularly women, tend to face greater social and emotional contradictions during the reintegration process as they strive for long-term resettlement.
- Living in *watan* (homeland) appeared to give respondents, including those economically vulnerable respondents, a degree of strength to cope with the stress and challenges associated with return by providing a sense of freedom that was not a part of their experience in asylum. However, in cases where the balance shifted dramatically to sheer survival or emotional distress, return to the host country was likely to be considered. That process of individuals associating themselves with *watan* and finding meaning there was one of the key factors in returnees' perceptions of their future prospects in Afghanistan.
- Over a quarter of respondents had retained the ability, potential or expectation to leave Afghanistan again in the future, for a range of reasons. A major theme among these was that the balance of factors – material, social and internal – had reached tipping point. The combination of an economic survival crisis and feelings of social exclusion (internal contradictions, social discrimination and isolation) led this portion of the sample group to consider leaving *watan* once again.
- Conflicting and contradictory attitudes towards Afghanistan and neighbouring countries were observed in all cases – regardless of gender, future outlook regarding re-migration and the degree of previous assimilation in Pakistan and Iran. This demonstrates that returnees' "multiple identities" are subject to continuous renegotiation and they can be easily influenced or motivated to stay or move on to another place, particularly among second-generation returnees who have experienced a place outside their own homeland.

## Recommendations

- **Recognising second-generation Afghan returnees as crucial assets in the country's reconstruction and development.**  
Those Afghans remaining in neighbouring countries have a broad range of skills and knowledge, and experience and awareness of both Afghanistan and life outside their homeland. In this, they have a unique point of view and there is great value to be captured in bringing their external views, qualifications and experience back to the current situation in Afghanistan.
- **Understanding the significance of less visible reintegration challenges to facilitate long-term settlement of second-generation returnees.**  
The importance of external moral support (acceptance, patience, encouragement), regulation and control to minimise discriminatory or unequal treatment (particularly in education and employment), and opportunities for sharing problems and reducing isolation must be recognised and addressed.
- **Ensuring successful material reintegration, particularly for those second-generation returnees in the lower socioeconomic bracket who may be less familiar with Afghanistan and have fewer social support networks.**

It is critical that external material support (access to employment and credit, upgrading of skills and the ability to own land and housing) targeting those most in need (including vulnerable women) is provided – in order to avoid re-migration and the creation or reinforcement of strongly negative return attitudes, in this generation and the next.

- **Improving physical security** in relation to daily life, in order to minimise the frustrations of second-generation returnees who often feel much more marginalised in Afghanistan than they expected to.

For women, addressing their decreased mobility faced in Afghanistan, caused by the fear of harassment, would assist in reducing this gender-based frustration.

- **Promoting access to quality education** beyond the primary level (including in rural areas).

It is crucial that corruption and unequal opportunities in education are recognised as factors negatively affecting the reintegration process – particularly for those second-generation returnees who have returned in pursuit of further education in their homeland. Providing quality education for males and females, including Islamic education at *madrassas* in Afghanistan, could become a key “pull” factor to return.

- **Reducing the challenges associated with “voluntary return”**, in part through providing more opportunities for realistic planning and preparation for Afghans remaining in neighbouring countries.

The option to return gradually, or in stages, should be facilitated (as highlighted by examples of the return patterns of skilled second-generation refugee individuals prior to their family’s return) and ongoing labour migration as a key household livelihoods strategy *supporting* return to Afghanistan must be managed systematically.

## 1. Introduction

This report is the third of three case studies conducted as part of AREU's research on second-generation Afghan refugees living in Pakistan and Iran, and those who have returned from these neighbouring countries to Afghanistan since 2001.<sup>1</sup> This research project, *Second-Generation Afghans in Neighbouring Countries*, was initiated in 2006 and follows on from AREU's work on transnational networks<sup>2</sup> undertaken in 2004 and 2005, which drew attention to the lack of information about the significant number of Afghan youths and young adults currently living in Pakistan and Iran – many of whom were neither born nor grew up in Afghanistan, and have little or no experience of living in their "homeland".

*Second-Generation Afghans in Neighbouring Countries* is administered through the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and funded by the European Commission (EC). The aim of the project is to gain a detailed understanding of the life experiences and return intentions of second-generation Afghans in Pakistan and Iran, as well as the reintegration experiences – successful or otherwise – of those who have recently returned.<sup>3</sup> This case study on second-generation returnees now living in Afghanistan is based on data collected during 48 in-depth individual interviews with respondents in urban, peri-urban and rural locations in Kabul, Herat and Baghlan provinces.

Around 3 million registered Afghan refugees are still living in neighbouring countries (Pakistan: 2.15 million, Iran: 0.9 million). Nearly 80 percent of these people have been in exile for more than 20 years, and half were born outside Afghanistan.<sup>4</sup> In Pakistan, 74 percent of the Afghan population is under 28 years old,<sup>5</sup> while 71 percent of the Afghan population in Iran is 29 years or under.<sup>6</sup> Most of this new generation has grown up in a very different environment to that of their parents; among other things, they have had much greater access to urban facilities. They have also had many different opportunities in exile than those of their generation who have remained in Afghanistan.<sup>7</sup>

Second-generation Afghans returning to their homeland from neighbouring countries can be seen as a crucial asset for the country in rebuilding its communities from the grassroots level. This is particularly significant in rural areas. Some of the returnee respondents interviewed in this study were found to be covering teacher shortages in remote villages. One was asked by other women in her village to teach them to read and write, even though she herself had left school at a very early age. Regardless of

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<sup>1</sup> For this case study, respondents were selected from among males and females aged 15–30 years old who had spent more than half of their lives in Pakistan or Iran before returning to Afghanistan after the Afghan Interim Authority was established in late 2001 (and who had been living back in Afghanistan for more than six months).

<sup>2</sup> See: A. Monsutti, 2006, *Afghan Transnational Networks: Looking Beyond Repatriation*, Kabul: AREU.

<sup>3</sup> Fieldwork in Iran was conducted by the University of Tehran in partnership with AREU; see: M.J.A. Shavazi et al., 2007, *Second-Generation Afghans in Iran: Integration, Identity and Return* (draft), Kabul: AREU. See also: M. Saito and P. Hunte, 2007, *To Return or to Remain: The Dilemma of Second-Generation Afghans in Pakistan*, Kabul: AREU.

<sup>4</sup> UNHCR, 2007, *Finding Durable Solutions for Refugees and Displacement for the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan*, Kabul: UNHCR, p. 1–2.

<sup>5</sup> Government of Pakistan and UNHCR, 2007, *Registration of Afghans in Pakistan 2007*, Islamabad: Government of Pakistan/UNHCR.

<sup>6</sup> Amayesh data 2005, in Shavazi et al., *Second-generation Afghans in Iran* (draft).

<sup>7</sup> Returnees reported both positive and negative aspects of their lives during exile: positives included new skills, education, new social networks and new ideas; negatives included a less peaceful lifestyle, and lack of social relations, property and family (Altai Consulting, 2006, *Integration of Returnees in the Afghan Labour Market*, Kabul: ILO/UNHCR, p. 20).

education level, respondents reported that they had acquired new technical skills while in refuge in Pakistan or Iran. Even among uneducated female respondents, it was noted that they acquired a better understanding of hygiene and learnt communication skills with different types of people. The impact of that period of asylum – simply living in a location other than an isolated village, seeing towns and diverse types of people – is evidenced in the new ideas and ways of managing domestic life that returnees brought back with them. Changes have been observed in the level of violence towards children both among adults and among the community as a whole, compared to previous times. Many respondents interviewed as part of an AREU study of family dynamics and family violence mentioned that the reason for this change was their experience of life in “other places” – either as refugees in neighbouring countries or while internally displaced.<sup>8</sup> Interestingly, highly educated Afghan returnees from nearby Pakistan and Iran seem to be more likely to make a sustained contribution to Afghanistan’s development, as evidenced by that fact that participants in the International Organization for Migration’s “Return of Qualified Afghans Programme” from neighbouring countries are more likely to settle in Afghanistan than those from Western countries.<sup>9</sup>

Since 2002, more than 4 million Afghans have been recorded by UNCHR as returning from Pakistan and Iran through its voluntary assisted repatriation programme, and over 1.2 million Afghans have returned spontaneously.<sup>10</sup> However it is not clear how many of them have successfully settled in Afghanistan. According to a UNHCR survey<sup>11</sup> of returnees from Pakistan in 2004, 15 percent mentioned that they still had a family member in Pakistan – working or studying, or just maintaining a link there in case of the need to move back if security in Afghanistan deteriorated again. Around a third of returnees from Iran in 2004 came back to urban areas, rather than settling in their place of origin. Overall, around 40 percent of returnees have moved back to cities – mainly in northern, central and eastern provinces.<sup>12</sup> These trends highlight two factors. One is the continued perceived need to diversify livelihoods across different locations to reduce exposure to the risk of deteriorating security in Afghanistan. The second is the adaptation of previous refugees to the urbanised environment that most experienced while in refuge and their desire to remain in such an environment on return, even if there are much lower levels of services compared to Pakistan and Iran.

Returnees are usually considered less economically vulnerable than those who remained in Afghanistan throughout the conflict years, because of the education and skills they were able to acquire as well as the financial savings some could accrue.<sup>13</sup> However from the point of view of returnees, particularly those of the second

<sup>8</sup> D. Smith, 2007, *Love, Fear and Discipline: Everyday Violence towards Children in Afghan Families*, Kabul: AREU.

<sup>9</sup> The “Return of Qualified Afghans Programme” (an IOM initiative funded by the European Community and European Union member states) shows that those from European countries (who usually have secured citizenship there) tend to leave Afghanistan again after their employment contract period, while the majority of returnees from neighbouring countries (who often do not hold Pakistani or Iranian national/ID cards) tend to remain (Altai Consulting, *Integration of Returnees*, p. 60).

<sup>10</sup> UNHCR, 2007, *Operational Information Monthly Summary Report – October 2007*, Kabul: UNHCR.

<sup>11</sup> 1,390 interviews during August and September 2004 at three encashment centres (C. Faubert, A. Mojaddedi and A.H. Sofizada, 2005, *Repatriation and Reintegration: An Appraisal of Progress in Afghanistan*, Kabul: UNHCR, p. 6).

<sup>12</sup> Faubert et al., *Repatriation and Reintegration*, Annex I, p. 2.

<sup>13</sup> Faubert et al., *Repatriation and Reintegration*, p. 11. Also, according to Altai Consulting (*Integration of Returnees*, p. 15), the monthly income of returnee households in urban areas was higher than the national average.

generation, repatriation may have meant that their experience of being an outsider was simply repeated when they returned to their “homeland”: in this way their psychosocial vulnerability may have been the same or worse than it was in the place of refuge.

While it has been assumed by many that when physical infrastructure, material assistance and stable security are in place in Afghanistan, voluntary repatriation will occur naturally and successfully, it can be demonstrated that returnees experience varying degrees of psychosocial stress in the initial stages of their repatriation, which can threaten the success of their resettlement. Currently in Afghanistan, the initial conditions for successful voluntary repatriation and reintegration are not in place, so these material difficulties may combine with psychosocial stress to increase the risk of unsuccessful resettlement; it is these issues that are at the core of this case study. What is under investigation here is the extent to which more successful returnee reintegration may be dependent on the degree of the individual’s relationship to, and identification with, his or her “home country”<sup>14</sup> – a critical point when considering the fate of second-generation returnees. Some returnees fail to re-integrate into Afghan society because of the significant distress associated with issues of identity and the meaning of “home” – as well as material and financial hardship – leading them to decide to re-migrate.

Returning to one’s “homeland” for second-generation Afghans does not necessarily mean “return”: the majority have grown up without ever having experienced life in Afghanistan. Empirical studies of young returnees in other parts of the world have demonstrated the emotional stresses experienced after return, primarily in relation to facing “the others”. Tapscott’s observation of Namibian returnees indicated that the manners, behaviour and liberal gender attitudes of young Namibian returnees were perceived as disrespectful towards the local culture, particularly in more religious communities.<sup>15</sup> Similarly, Puerto Rican adolescents rejected their peers raised in the United States – seeing them as “outsiders” who would “contaminate” the existing culture with their different language, accent and physical appearance.<sup>16</sup> In the case of Malawian children, young returnees from Zambia exhibited adjustment stress because their experiences of being “outsiders” did not end after returning to their homeland. Rather, these stresses were combined with a lack of material possessions, education and work opportunities to produce a set of factors that seriously jeopardised their successful reintegration.<sup>17</sup>

The decision by second-generation Afghans in Pakistan and Iran to return to their “homeland” is made among a complex set of push and pull factors, and while meeting the immediate physical needs of this group is highest on the agendas of government, the United Nations and development practitioners in relation to bringing young Afghan refugees home, their psychosocial needs – while much less visible – are possibly no less crucial to their successful and permanent return.

This case study presents an analysis of the process of that less visible social and emotional reintegration of returnees in their “homeland” for 48 selected respon-

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<sup>14</sup> T. Ghanem, 2003, *When Forced Migrants Return ‘Home’: The Psychosocial Difficulties Returnees Encounter in the Reintegration Process* (RSC Working Paper No.16), Oxford: University of Oxford.

<sup>15</sup> G. Kibreab, 2002, “When Refugees Come Home: The Relationship between Stayees and Returnees in Post-Conflict Eritrea”, *Journal of Contemporary African Studies*, 20(1):53–80.

<sup>16</sup> J. Lorenzo-Hernandez, 1999, “The Nuyorican’s Dilemma: Categorisation of Returning Migrants in Puerto Rico”, *International Migration Review*, 33(4):988–1013.

<sup>17</sup> F. Cornish, K. Peltzer and M. MacLachlan, 1999, “Returning Strangers: The Children of Malawian Refugees Come ‘Home’?”, *Journal of Refugee Studies*, 12(3):264–83.

dents, and how this relates to their material circumstances. With a focus on gender, the study looks at the environment in which respondents have found themselves back in Afghanistan, and how they question and resolve their prospects of permanent settlement there. Respondents demonstrate that the attraction to living in one's "homeland" can be strong enough to draw deeply upon self-resilience as well external support from others to overcome the difficulties associated with the move and the necessary economic, social, emotional and lifestyle adjustments. In doing so, these individuals with a wealth of life experience as well as a strong belief in their own country become – and must be recognised as – highly valuable assets who can significantly assist in the development of Afghanistan, if provided the appropriate support and encouragement.

## 2. Methodology

### 2.1. Selecting the research sites

Fieldwork for this qualitative case study was conducted over a 13-week period from late November 2006 to mid April 2007, in Kabul, Herat and Baghlan provinces (see Annex I for location maps). This period included time spent organising the research team, conducting meetings with local governments and related organisations, and identifying and gaining informed consent from respondents, as well as the intensive individual interviews. Fieldwork was conducted by a male and a female team, each comprising two members.<sup>18</sup> The work of both teams was directly managed by a senior research officer and the migration research programme undertaken by AREU in Afghanistan, Pakistan and Iran was overseen by a senior research manager.

A total of 48 individuals were interviewed (table 1), with an average of two interviews per respondent. Compared to the fieldwork conducted in Pakistan and Iran for this research project, the number of respondents was reduced in order to explore in greater depth the life histories of each individual: prior to migration; experiences in the country of asylum; return decision-making; reintegration; and future prospects.

	FEMALE		MALE		TOTAL
	Single	Married	Single	Married	
Kabul	4	4	4	4	16
Herat	3	5	4	4	16
Baghlan	5	3	4	4	16
TOTAL	12	12	12	12	48
	24		24		

*Table 1. Second-generation Afghan returnee respondents*

This study cannot attempt to represent the full spectrum of experiences of all of the second-generation Afghan refugees among the nearly 5.2 million returnees to Afghanistan from neighbouring countries over the past six years. It does, however, aim to understand the reintegration experiences and changing values of a number of individuals from purposively selected groups exhibiting a range of characteristics – from which some important generalisations and insights may be drawn.

The three study sites were selected because they feature relatively high numbers of returnees from both Pakistan and Iran,<sup>19</sup> allowing the identification of a range of second-generation returnees with specific criteria. Based on this requirement of high numbers of returnees, a range of geographical locations were considered: Kabul, as the country's capital,<sup>20</sup> was an essential study location for examining the situation of

<sup>18</sup> One of the two female interviewers changed in each research site due to constraints on travelling, while the male team remained the same in all three locations. One male interviewer had also undertaken fieldwork for the case studies conducted in Pakistan (Saito and Hunte, *To Return or to Remain*) which was of great value in maintaining continuity and data quality.

<sup>19</sup> Nationwide, voluntary returnees from Iran account for 21 percent (854,335) those from Pakistan for 79 percent (3,221,155) from March 2002 to February 2007 (UNHCR, 2007, *Operational Information Summary Report Update, March 2002 – October 2007*, Kabul).

<sup>20</sup> The population of Kabul city increased from 1.7 million in 2000 to around 3 million in 2003 – a result of high refugee return numbers and rural-to-urban migration. The government estimates about 6.4 million people (30 percent of the population) live in cities, and that this will double by 2015



urban second-generation returnees, while Herat was selected for its high proportion of returnees from Iran. In order to capture the picture in a smaller provincial town and its peri-urban and rural surrounding areas,<sup>21</sup> Baghlan was selected. It has a high concentration of returnees and the unique situation of an active textile industry in its provincial centre – Pul-i-Khumri; it is also ethnically diverse and has returnees from both Iran and Pakistan.<sup>22</sup> Other factors considered in selecting the three sites were security and logistics for the research teams undertaking fieldwork.

Around one third of respondents (17) were non-urban (rural and peri-urban) individuals from Herat and Baghlan.<sup>23</sup> The livelihoods of all but one of these were partially centred around livestock husbandry and agriculture, in combination with other types of income generation including labour migration (one respondent in Herat lived in a periphery IDP camp and depended on wage labour in the city). While fieldwork in Kabul focused on urban residents with specific features, the 17 non-urban respondents in Herat and Baghlan provided the point of view of those living in rural and urban periphery areas. Through discussions with provincial authorities and related organisations, Kushk-i-Robat Sangi district in Herat was selected because of its limited access to facilities, its distance from an urban centre and its relatively stable security as a starting point from which researchers could identify respondents with preferred characteristics. Villages in Dushi district in Baghlan were selected for their high concentration of returnees in the valley. Kushk-i-Robat Sangi district was about an hour's drive from Herat city near the Turkmenistan border, with a paved road and local daily transport to Herat. In contrast, donkeys were often used in the villages in Baghlan to get to the main paved road.

## 2.2. Seeking “the ideal respondent” in the field

The main criteria for selecting second-generation Afghan returnee respondents, both male and female, were that they:

- were 15–30 years old;
- had spent more than half of their lives in Pakistan or Iran before returning to Afghanistan after the Afghan Interim Authority was established in late 2001; and
- had returned to Afghanistan at least six months before.<sup>24</sup>

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(Government of Afghanistan and international agencies, 2004, “Technical Annex: Urban Development,” *Securing Afghanistan’s Future*, Government of Afghanistan/Asian Development Bank/UNAMA/UNDP/The World Bank Group).

<sup>21</sup> More than 70 percent of the urban population live in six cities: Kabul, Kandahar, Herat, Mazar-i-Sharif, Jalalabad and Kunduz (Government of Afghanistan and international agencies, Technical Annex: Urban Development). The major return destinations from Iran are: Kabul (27 percent), Herat (15 percent), Farah (7 percent), Balkh (5 percent) and Kunduz (5 percent); those from Pakistan are: Kabul (30 percent), Nangarhar (19 percent), Kunduz (6 percent), and Baghlan (6 percent) (UNHCR, *Operational Information Summary Report Update, March 2002 – February 2007*).

<sup>22</sup> S. Schütte, 2004, *Dwindling Industry, Growing Poverty: Urban Livelihoods in Pul-e Khumri*, Kabul: AREU.

<sup>23</sup> Non-urban respondents include those in Kushk-i-Robat Sangi district in Herat province and Dushi district in Baghlan province (11), and periphery areas/out-of-city IDP camps in Herat and Baghlan (6). Of these, two male respondents had a living space in the provincial centre, while commuting frequently to their families’ villages.

<sup>24</sup> Initially, the team set a target of identifying returnees who returned to Afghanistan at least one year previously. However, some otherwise “ideal” respondents who had returned less than one year but more than six months previously had valuable insights about the current situation, so it was decided to include a small number of these respondents in the study.

It was also important for the sample to include those characterised by a range of variables to ensure that dissimilar opportunities, experiences and future perceptions would be reflected in the study, so the following issues were also taken into account in the quota sampling process:

- location of refuge (Pakistan/Iran, urban/rural/camp, main local language spoken in the area);
- location of return in Afghanistan (urban/rural);
- education level;
- household economic status;
- ethnicity; and
- marital status.

In addition to the above, more detailed criteria were used where possible to further diversify the sample, including: religiosity, positive/negative attitude to Pakistani/Iranian nationals, and mobility of women (those working outside the home versus those who were not even allowed to visit relatives).

Considering the broad selection criteria and their different representations in each province (for example, more returnees from Iran in Herat, see footnote 30), identifying “the ideal respondent” was not a simple task. Before the intensive interviews with respondents began, the research team spent a number of weeks introducing themselves and documenting any second-generation returnees they encountered along with basic information gleaned during these informal talks. After examining the potential respondents, the team then selected those who fulfilled the quota requirements in each province. Where certain criteria in the quota sampling had not been met, researchers continued their attempts to find “ideal respondents”. Where a number of respondents fitting the quota sampling requirements were available, priority was given to those cases which were unique in some way (for example, attendance at school in the country of asylum although the family did not traditionally send girls to school).

The research team ensured that its introductions to potential second-generation respondents came through a range of networks; as only eight respondents were interviewed by each team per province, this process was essential. Both official and informal channels were used to identify potential respondents: introductory letters from the Ministry of Education were valuable as an entry point to selected schools in areas unfamiliar to the researchers. The team then proceeded to acquire official approval from provincial Education Departments, and then also at district and village level. In villages, key resource people included headmasters of schools, representatives/elders, religious leaders and local commanders. The team also made efforts to develop a rapport with local residents, and often spent time walking casually around the areas under study, chatting with locals.

Locating second-generation returnees in Afghanistan, particularly those less educated and poorer individuals who did not have strong networks and would therefore be less likely to be introduced to the research team, proved challenging.<sup>25</sup> Much patience and persistence with informal talks was required to identify 15–30-year-old returnees who had spent more than half of their lives in Iran or Pakistan before

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<sup>25</sup> Where representatives of the community were asked to introduce the team to poorer returnee households (such as those with disabled members, or where a female was working), this sometimes resulted in their own relatives being put forward.

returning during the past six years – especially poor cases. In Kabul, the male team walked around several main road intersections to find daily labourers waiting for work. In contrast to the fieldwork in Pakistan (which targeted second-generation Afghans living there), it was not easy to guess who was a second-generation returnee from appearance.<sup>26</sup> In the case of Kushk-i-Robat Sangi district in Herat, the majority of villagers were returnees, but they had returned during the 1990s – which did not match the research criteria. To find second-generation returnees, the team had to travel beyond the main district village selected as a study site: identification of “ideal respondents” was the main priority rather than confining the study to a community boundary. While the Herat rural area had been selected for its characteristics as a less developed district (in terms of facilities, distance from an urban centre, accessibility), following difficulties experienced there the research team prioritised high returnee concentration from post-2001 in its approach to locating appropriate interviewees in the Baghlan rural study area.

### 2.3. Challenges conducting interviews

Identification of “ideal respondents” who met the quota criteria did not guarantee that the team could conduct interviews with those people. For example, in the case of some uneducated girls returned from Iran who the research team met in a literacy course in Herat city, their families would not give them permission to be interviewed despite the girls’ willingness to do so. Furthermore, appointments with respondents who consented were never firm – the team may only have been able to meet the “ideal respondent” at her house after four attempts to do so because of unexpected family issues (such as visitors or illness). This was especially difficult where respondents had no access to telephone communications. In another case, the “ideal respondent” who the male team finally encountered in a village had gone to Iran for work on their next visit. Accessibility to rural areas in winter also posed significant problems for the research team.

The actual process of conducting formal interviews was also difficult. In the case of a girl engaged to be married and living in a village in Baghlan, the research team had secured informed consent to interview her with her family on a prior visit, but during the interview she suddenly stopped talking and covered her face with her *chador* when her soon-to-be mother-in-law stepped into the room. She turned her covered face away from the mother-in-law, and did not say another word. As the mother-in-law insisted on listening to everything her daughter-in-law said, the team had to find another respondent.

The presence of others during interviews was unavoidable, particularly for young women with whom the researchers were not allowed to talk in a separate place.<sup>27</sup> In one case, the wife of the village representative (an older woman) tried to control the conversation – especially on issues of “our custom”. On occasion the team had to abandon formal interviews and start informal conversations with the women in the room while the respondent herself had gone to do housework. It was challenging

<sup>26</sup> In Pakistan, the team could distinguish Afghan refugees (usually long-term residents) from Pakistanis by their appearance. However, the research team in Pakistan did face the challenge of Afghans in Pakistan claiming, “I am a Pakistani” (see Saito and Hunte, *To Return or to Remain*, p. 8–9).

<sup>27</sup> The influence of others present during interviews was also the case among men. When a teenage respondent was interviewed in a closed room with a friend he had brought with him, he did not disclose that he had another sister when he was asked about his household members. This information came up later during informal, indirect conversation.

to conduct a series of in-depth interviews with a particular respondent within the scheduled timeframe of the fieldwork.

Gathering accurate information about age, migration history and events that happened at the time was complicated, particularly among uneducated respondents. The team often used information stated about historical events (for example, “during Najibullah’s time”, or “when the Taliban came”) to infer these details. The information given by respondents at the beginning of the interview process was sometimes significantly different or contradictory to statements given at other times. In one case, the research team had to find a replacement respondent even after conducting the first formal interview, as they could not be sure that the female respondent really was a second-generation returnee – despite her demonstrating other “ideal characteristics” of the sampling quota requirements.

## 2.4. Research tools

### Semi-structured interviews

An average of two semi-structured interviews with each of the 48 respondents was conducted by a male and a female research team. Interviews covered all of the topics defined in the interview guides – from the period before migration, to life in exile, return, reintegration and future prospects. Each interview took at least two hours. In the case of some “ideal respondents”, especially mobile males who may have been planning to leave the area for work in the near future, or who were only met by chance after several missed appointments, the research team conducted single-day interviews over about five hours. In most other cases, the second interview was conducted after some days or a week. For these, the research team reviewed the first-round transcripts carefully, checking points to be focused on and preparing probing questions to elicit the most productive responses during the second interview. Some females who were identified as respondents in English and tailoring courses only agreed to be interviewed during their course time before they had to go home; in these cases the research team conducted shorter interviews over four days.

In the case studies in Pakistan and Iran, focus group discussions were conducted in order to explore those issues beyond individual experiences, while sometimes individual in-depth interviews were more appropriate for understanding the context and background of the statements made. In this Afghanistan case study, the focus of the fieldwork was on an in-depth exploration of individuals’ experiences in their diverse contexts, meaning that focus group discussions were not as relevant a methodology.

### Observation and interaction with the research team

Observation was a powerful tool that complemented the data collected. The dress, appearance and behaviour of respondents were carefully observed and compared to others in the community, particularly in villages, as a signal of the degree of integration. When interviews were conducted in respondents’ houses, assets and belongings also gave some indication about the economic status of the household. In particular, the team recorded any emotional and behavioural interactions and changes observed during fieldwork, and for this reason the fact that the interviewers were in

the same age group as the interviewees was particularly important for this study.<sup>28</sup> The research team shared personal memories with respondents, which built trust and encouraged them to share their experiences, as the following interview illustrates:

The research team asked the respondent if he was tired from the long hours of talking. He replied, *"No. I'm not tired. It's a great opportunity to remember Kashmir. Since I've been back here, I haven't talked with any one about Kashmir this much. I'm very happy sitting with you and telling stories."*

18-year-old male high school student returned from Pakistan

Later when the conversation turned to the topic of his relatives in Afghanistan, he continued:

*They [my relatives here] tell me to be more interested in Afghanistan, and not think of Pakistan or about return because I'm back. In turn, I told them stories about Kashmir: greenery and facilities, the fact that I was very happy there, while I'm not here in Kabul. Because there is limited access to electricity and water here, and limited recreational and sightseeing places [...] But I can't talk to my maternal uncle like this. He gets angry with me and says that I'm crazy for thinking like this about my own homeland, and it's not good.*

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<sup>28</sup> In Herat, both female interviewees were second-generation returnees themselves. Some of their impressions and thoughts were also used in the data analysis.

### 3. Characteristics of the Sample

This section presents an overview of the basic household and individual characteristics of the 48 interviewed second-generation Afghan refugees who had returned to Kabul, Herat and Baghlan. Although the focus on qualitative investigation meant that the actual number of respondents was relatively small, the sample group was purposively selected using specific, prioritised criteria designed to capture a wide range of characteristics: male and female, rich and poor, educated and uneducated. To follow is a comparison of the characteristics of this study's respondents with other existing data, with a focus on the relevance and limitations of the sample group as a representative case study.

#### 3.1. Household characteristics<sup>29</sup>

##### Location of asylum

The target balance of returnees from Pakistan and Iran was set during quota sampling according to UNHCR returnee data (showing a greater proportion of Pakistan returnees) which differed in the three provinces studied, corresponding directly to the return destination.<sup>30</sup> As a result the final distribution of respondents was: 26 from Pakistan, 19 from Iran and three who had lived in both countries.<sup>31</sup> In contrast to this research project's case studies of second-generation Afghans living in Pakistan and Iran in which the three research areas were fixed in each of the countries (Peshawar, Quetta and Karachi in Pakistan, and Tehran, Mashhad and Isfahan in Iran), the three areas visited in this Afghanistan case study captured information about respondents who had returned from a broad, and not pre-determined, range of locations within Pakistan and Iran (for example, Lahore in Pakistan and Qom in Iran).

Eleven households which had been in Pakistan had lived in camps at some point, either initially before moving to cities or for all of the time they had spent there.<sup>32</sup> In Iran, none of the households interviewed had lived in refugee camps.<sup>33</sup>

##### Timing and circumstances of asylum-seeking

More than half of the households studied (26) first left Afghanistan between 1979 and 1985, as shown in figure 1.<sup>34</sup> This reflects documented trends of Afghan refugees arriving in Pakistan: 73 percent of Afghans in Pakistan arrived between 1979 and 1985.<sup>35</sup> No deviation from this pattern was detected among respondents from either

<sup>29</sup> In this study, a "household" is classified as such if it shares the same pot of food on a daily basis.

<sup>30</sup> 2,863,299 returnees from Pakistan came back voluntarily between March 2002 and February 2007, while 848,126 did so from Iran (UNHCR, *Operational Information Summary Report Update, March 2002 – February 2007*). Each team set an initial quota sampling of eight respondents in each province: Kabul (6 from Pakistan, 2 from Iran); Herat (1 from Pakistan, 7 from Iran); and Baghlan (7 from Pakistan, 1 from Iran). The sampling outcome after fieldwork also included those who had lived in both Pakistan and Iran (3).

<sup>31</sup> Of the three respondents who had lived in both Pakistan and Iran, one male's household moved to Pakistan while he subsequently worked for periods in Iran with his family remaining in Quetta. Two respondents and their households had lived in both countries.

<sup>32</sup> About 45 percent of the Afghan population in Pakistan still lives in refugee camps (Government of Pakistan and UNHCR, *Registration of Afghans in Pakistan, 2007*).

<sup>33</sup> 97 percent of Afghans in Iran live in cities and towns (UNHCR, *Finding Durable Solutions for Refugees and Displacement*, p. 4).

<sup>34</sup> One respondent's father had gone to Iraq in the late 1960s seeking religious education. The respondent was born in Iraq, then later moved to Iran.

<sup>35</sup> Government of Pakistan and UNHCR, *Registration of Afghans in Pakistan*.

countries – most sought asylum during those peak years of the early 1980s. The motivating factors of ten respondents' households to move from their homes were not directly war related, including: medical treatment; hunger; loss of the income-earning household member; marriage; family disputes and religious study.

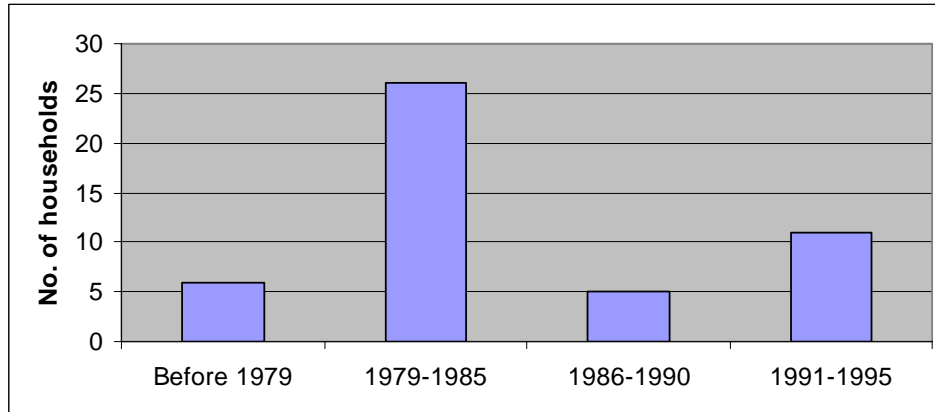


Figure 1. Respondents' timing of asylum-seeking

Some households interviewed left their homes suddenly and without taking any of their belongings because of immediate physical threat, while others had time to make arrangements prior to their departure, such as selling property and saving for travel expenses, or making preparatory trips to the intended destination.

### Temporary return during the 1990s

Eleven of the respondents' households (five from Pakistan, six from Iran) returned to Afghanistan during the 1990s and stayed there for some years. The majority of these came back around 1992 when security became relatively stable, while a few returned in the mid to late 1990s. However, these households left Afghanistan again – mainly because of insecurity and limited livelihood opportunities. Two households had returned from Iran because male household members had been deported by the Iranian government. When the situation in Afghanistan deteriorated again, one of these households went to Pakistan, while the other remained – with the male respondent returning alone to work in Iran in the late 1990s.<sup>36</sup>

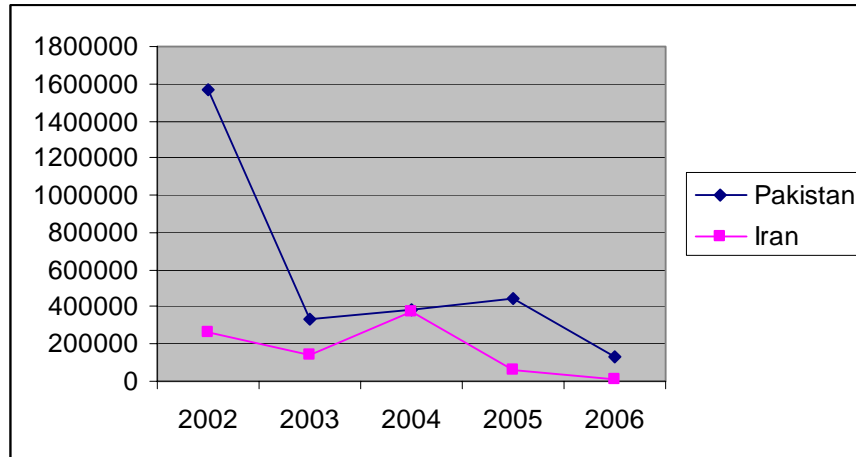
### Year of return to Afghanistan after 2001

The peak period of return among this study's respondent households was 2004 (20), while the rest returned in: 2001–02 (nine), 2003 (seven), 2005 (six) and 2006 (six). There was no noticeable trend in the period of return in relation to the country they had been living in. This pattern largely correlates with UNHCR's published data on returnee numbers over the past five years, with a slight peak in 2004 and decreasing numbers in recent years (figure 2). It should be noted that this data is based on the number of people who received repatriation assistance, so it is likely to include some "recyclers" who accessed this assistance package more than once during the early stages of mass return.<sup>37</sup> There is no published data available on households that

<sup>36</sup> This male respondent decided it was safer for his family to be left in the village in Herat (which was relatively secure at the time) than risk them being left alone in Iran if he faced any further problems with authorities there.

<sup>37</sup> D. Turton and P. Marsden, 2002, *Taking Refugees for a Ride?*, Kabul: AREU, p. 20.

went back to Pakistan and Iran after their initial, temporary return to Afghanistan. However, in this study's sample there were two households which initially returned in 2002, but were forced to go back to Pakistan after facing economic and housing difficulties in Afghanistan. These two households, which were both landless and in the lowest income group, returned to Afghanistan for the second time in 2004.<sup>38</sup>



*Figure 2. Returnees receiving UNHCR repatriation assistance, 2002–06*

Source: UNHCR Kabul, *Operational Information Summary Report Update*, March 2002 – February 2007

### Province of origin vs province of return<sup>39</sup>

Ten respondents' households settled in different provinces when they returned to Afghanistan, a trend which corresponds to an existing returnee survey published by the International Labour Organization and UNHCR.<sup>40</sup> Furthermore, two female respondents moved to a different province because of marriage – returning to their husbands' original provinces.

The trend identified in movements to different provinces is that they were from relatively rural areas to urban areas of other provinces.<sup>41</sup> In addition to those households who moved provinces, two households moved from their original village to the provincial capital. This urban movement may be attributed to the greater availability of facilities such as education, employment opportunities and better security, as well as similar culture with Iran (in the case of Herat) and, in some cases, proximity to the border in case of the need for future evacuation. In some cases the reason for movement was stated as the household having had disputes in area of origin.

### Household structure

The average household size in this study was eight members, with a range of one to 24. The average household size of those who had returned from Iran was 6.6, while

<sup>38</sup> These two households are counted among the 2001–02 returnees in this study. One household living in Kabul is currently expecting to benefit from land distribution by the government, while a male in rural Baghlan went to Pakistan for the third time in 2005 because of lack of livelihood opportunities in his village.

<sup>39</sup> In this study, "province of origin" indicates the area where a household was primarily based and had ties directly prior to seeking asylum in Pakistan or Iran.

<sup>40</sup> 19 percent of interviewed households changed provinces. Altai Consulting, *Integration of Returnees*, p. 17.

<sup>41</sup> Except one married woman who now lives in her husband's village.



for those who had returned from Pakistan it was 8.9.<sup>42</sup> Three respondents (one male, two female) returned from Pakistan and Iran on their own, leaving their family behind, but two of these are now living with their relatives in Afghanistan. Two thirds of the respondents lived in nuclear households, while two households in Herat featured cases of polygynous marriages.

### Socioeconomic status

Household socioeconomic status was one of the primary criteria used in selection of respondents, in order to observe general trends in relation to relative socioeconomic status and to capture a broader representation of returnees. When nominating potential respondents, research teams initially focused on identifying respondents with relatively lower and higher socioeconomic statuses, utilising a range of entry points (for example, walking among daily labourers to find poorer respondents, or asking for introductions among university students to find better-off returnees). Later, research teams also recorded detailed physical observations of the respondent (quality/tidiness of dress and personal belongings) and, where possible, information about household assets. This initial categorisation of respondents was then developed into a more formal framework during data analysis: respondents were classified into five levels ranging from “poor” to “rich” (see table 2 and Annex III for a detailed explanation of the criteria used). The data collected does not include extensive or longitudinal information about household livelihoods, however the classifications allow a socioeconomic status or “level” to be used as a relative variable for comparison.

Level 1: Poor	Level 2: Below average	Level 3: Average	Level 4: Above average	Level 5: Rich
9	12	10	7	10

*Table 2. Relative socioeconomic status of respondent households*

### Remittances

At the time of interview, more than a quarter of households had at least one male family member working abroad who was contributing or intending to contribute to the remaining household’s income – in Iran (ten), the Arabian peninsula (three), and Western countries (two). This is a far more significant number than existing quantitative data would suggest,<sup>43</sup> but this is probably because of the study’s high proportion of respondents in Herat with male household members working in Iran.<sup>44</sup> There was a slightly higher number of households with family members working

<sup>42</sup> Published quantitative data confirms that the average household size of Afghans in Iran is smaller than that in Pakistan (International Labour Organization, 2006, *Afghan Households and Workers in Iran*, Geneva: ILO, p. 43).

<sup>43</sup> According to Altai Consulting, *Integration of Returnees*, 4.6 percent of all returnee households in Afghanistan have migrant labourers in their families, while for all households – not just returnees – this figure is quoted as 16 percent (Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development and the Central Statistics Office, 2007, *National Risk & Vulnerability Assessment 2005*, Kabul: MRRD/CSO p. 39).

<sup>44</sup> Of ten households with male family member working in Iran, eight were respondents in Herat.

abroad from rural areas compared to urban areas,<sup>45</sup> while no households in the “poorest” category had family members working abroad.<sup>46</sup>

### 3.2. Individual characteristics

#### Age

The average age of this study’s respondents was 22 (23 for males, 21 for females). The majority of respondents were either not born in Afghanistan, or moved there before the age of five (figure 3). The average age of leaving Afghanistan was five years old, excluding those born abroad (20). Among married respondents (24), the average age at which they got married was 18 (20 for males, 15 for females). Among females who married at 15 or younger, most were uneducated (five out of seven). There was no such correlation between education and marriage among male respondents.

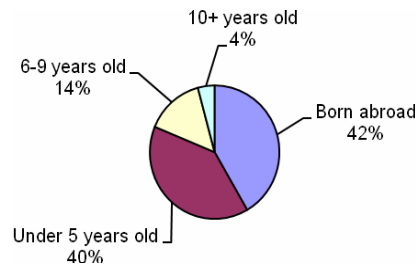


Figure 3. Age of respondents at the time of first leaving Afghanistan

#### Education

As illustrated in table 3, around a quarter of respondents did not receive formal secular education, and most could not read and write properly (11 in total: three males, eight females).<sup>47</sup> Around half of these uneducated respondents belonged to households in the lowest wealth category in this study, but there was also one from the highest wealth category. The household’s socioeconomic situation was not only the reason for respondents not attending school – it also depended on the country of asylum: the ratio of uneducated respondents among returnees from Pakistan was around three times higher than it was for those from Iran.<sup>48</sup>

Three returnee males were selected because they had sought extensive religious education in their location of asylum.<sup>49</sup> Apart from these, around one in three

<sup>45</sup> Across Afghanistan generally, these statistics are: 19 percent in rural areas and 5 percent in urban areas (MRRD/CSO, *National Risk & Vulnerability Assessment 2005*, p. 39).

<sup>46</sup> Poorer households are more likely to move within Afghanistan for employment opportunities (N. Ghobadi, J. Koettl and R. Vakis, 2005, *Moving out of Poverty: Migration Insights from Rural Afghanistan*, Kabul: AREU).

<sup>47</sup> This includes two males who had attended school; one dropped out after a few months, while the other sometimes went to school during the war but the quality of teaching was very poor. Both admitted that they could not read or write. On the other hand, this also includes those who had studied religious education informally – a female who attended a mosque for two years partially recognised the alphabet.

<sup>48</sup> This correlates with published quantitative data: the literacy rate for Afghans in Iran is higher than for those in Pakistan (ILO, *Afghan Households and Workers in Iran*, p. 43).

<sup>49</sup> The respondents in this study comprise a purposively selected sample: each research site contained one male who had a more religious orientation in order to capture the diversity in perspectives among second-generation Afghans. One male in Baghlan had studied at a formal school until sixth grade, then

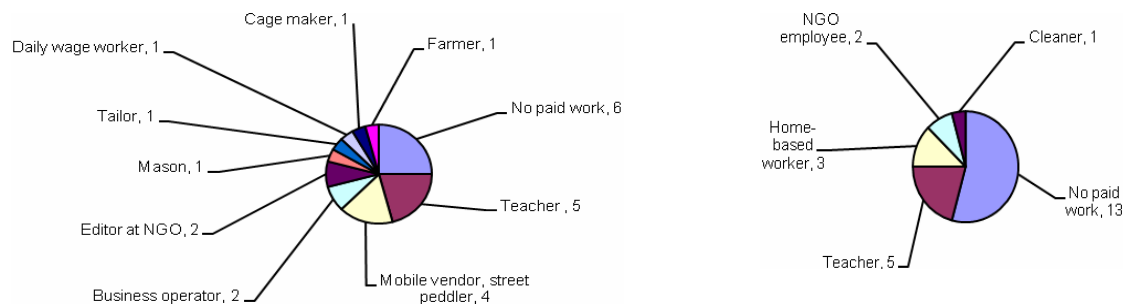
respondents – mostly educated – had received some form of religious education (from a *madrassa*, mosque, private teaching or family).

	Male	Female	TOTAL
No formal secular education	3	8	11
6th grade or less	5	3	8
7th to 12th grade	9	11	20
12th grade and above	4	2	6
<b>TOTAL</b> (excluding three males who studied in the religious school system and are now engaged in a teaching or writing occupation)			<b>45</b>

*Table 3. Respondents' level of education (secular)*

### Occupation

Figure 4 shows the current primary occupation of respondents. Where respondents had several jobs, only their key income-earning activity was considered in this analysis. Students are included in the category “no paid work” unless they were also a teacher or engaged in other income-earning activities. The category of teachers includes those who taught in both home-based and institutional courses, as well as in *madrassas*. Among male respondents who did not work for an income, all were students except one married respondent who was looking for a job. In contrast, female students were in the minority (two) among those who did not work for an income (13). There were two married women who did not work for an income but were highly educated.



*Figure 4. Current occupations of male (left) and female (right) respondents*

### Ethnicity<sup>50</sup>

The balance of ethnicities across the sample does not correspond to that of the total population of returnees to Afghanistan over the past five years.<sup>51</sup> Around half of the respondents were Tajik (26), followed by Hazara (12) and Pashtun (ten). All of the

when his household's economy deteriorated he moved to a *madrassa* where his food, accommodation and some monthly expenses were subsidised.

<sup>50</sup> The establishment of respondents' ethnicity was based on that identified by the respondents themselves.

<sup>51</sup> UNHCR figures for March 2002 to October 2007 indicate the ethnicities of returnees as: Pashtun, 56 percent; Tajik, 25 percent; Hazara, 8 percent; followed by other ethnicities.

Pashtun respondents (except one in Herat) had sought asylum in Pakistan, while the majority of Hazara respondents had returned from Iran. Most Tajik respondents who went to Iran were from Herat. Given that the southern and eastern parts of Afghanistan were not represented in the research sample (see Methodology), emphasis was placed – as far as the selection criteria allowed – on selecting Pashtun respondents. In the case of potential female Pashtun respondents, it was not always possible to secure their families' permission to conduct interviews with them.

### Visits to Afghanistan before return

With regard to visits made to Afghanistan during the period of asylum, there was a clear difference between respondents who had lived in Pakistan and those who had lived in Iran, probably due to tighter border control between Iran and Afghanistan. In the case of returnees from Pakistan, visiting Afghanistan was common during different periods of their residence in Pakistan. Around one in three female returnees from Pakistan had been to Afghanistan at least once (mostly to visit relatives and attend ceremonies and events), while more than half of the males had done so – particularly post-2001 – for different reasons such as arranging housing prior to return, to get married, checking on property or businesses, taking the university entrance exam, or deportation from a Gulf country. These clear differences in frequency and reasons for visiting Afghanistan highlight the contrast between genders in household responsibility and mobility.

None of the female returnees from Iran had visited Afghanistan, except one married woman who had travelled back on a family matter along with another female relative after the new government was established in late 2001. It was more difficult for men to acquire the necessary passport and visa documentation to leave and return to Iran after 2001 because of stricter border control by the Iranian government. Similarly, only two male returnees from Iran had visited Afghanistan during their period of asylum there: one during the Taliban period for his marriage, and another after 2001 to check the situation in Afghanistan prior to arranging return. Further to these two cases, one male was repeatedly deported from Iran and came back to Afghanistan several times for this reason. One notable difference among returnee respondents from Iran is that although they rarely visited Afghanistan, many of their fathers had often commuted to Afghanistan to visit relatives, arrange marriages, attend funerals, check on property and to work – as *mujahid*.

### Language

A striking difference between returnees by country is their knowledge of languages. In the case of returnees from Pakistan, the majority of respondents (although fewer females than males) spoke both Pashto and Urdu. Around one third of them were familiar with English having attended courses in Pakistan, while a few respondents also spoke Arabic and other local languages. Most notably, two respondents who had lived in Pakistan were not familiar with Dari: one had lived in an all-Pakistani (Urdu-speaking) area, while another had lived among Pashtuns.

In contrast, only three returnees from Iran could now speak Pashto, and two of these learnt the language primarily after their return to Afghanistan<sup>52</sup> (in the other case it was his mother tongue). Only a few returnees from Iran had attended English courses

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<sup>52</sup> One was familiar with Pashto from her father talking with other Afghans in Iran, then from studying it after returning to Afghanistan; the other lives in Herat but frequently travels to Kabul for business and has picked up Pashto this way.

there, unlike returnees from Pakistan where English language skills are highly valued and associated with better (non-labour) job opportunities, which is not the case in Iran. Some of the study's respondents from Iran had studied English after returning because of the demand for English in the better jobs in Afghanistan.

## 4. Key Findings

### 4.1. Setting the scene

The outcome of Afghan refugees' return experiences – whether they remain and settle in Afghanistan or choose to leave their homeland again in either the short or the long term – correlates to both the quality of life that they experience on return (their economic and physical environment) and their psychological wellbeing there. An existing study on Afghan returnees has found that highly qualified returnees from Western countries, and also some of those from urban centres in Pakistan and Iran (such as high-level officials and young professionals in new sectors – information technology, media, NGOs), tend to be particularly concerned about the conservative environment, the lack of access to entertainment facilities (swimming pools, snooker clubs, cinemas, cafes and restaurants) and their limited freedom of movement because of security constraints. Life in Afghanistan seems boring to them. Those who are able to travel for short periods abroad tend to “escape” from time to time to feel that sense of “freedom” they had while in refuge.<sup>53</sup>

It is difficult to generalise about the reintegration experiences of individuals when they are influenced by so many diverse factors: individual personality and profile, pre-flight experiences, forms of displacement, experiences in exile, social networks, conditions of return (both domestically and politically) and their own interpretation of home and belonging.<sup>54</sup> However, it is clear from this study of the reintegration processes of 48 individuals that re-entry difficulties can potentially be mitigated by more effective tapping of external support and encouraging an environment in which the strengths developed as refugees, such as self-resilience, are extended and capitalised upon in repatriation.<sup>55</sup>

Figure 5 shows this complex reintegration process leading to different outcomes – falling somewhere on the continuum between wanting to remain in Afghanistan and wanting to leave again. This process has three dimensions (material, social and internal), all of which are influenced by individual backgrounds, experiences in Pakistan and Iran, and experiences after return to Afghanistan. The outcome of the process is further influenced by how individuals respond to different ideas and their path to eventual adjustment,<sup>56</sup> adaptation (full reintegration) or rejection. There is no doubt that basic material needs for survival must first be secured, but the degree of social acceptance of returnees exhibited by those Afghans who remained, and by Afghan society more generally, also affects the returnee's situation considerably. Furthermore, there is another dimension to the process if it is to lead to long-term settlement: internal fulfilment, or whether the returnee feels at ease and that they “fit in”. Material needs, social acceptance and internal fulfilment are all interlinked, and a critical balance of all of these factors – with none extremely lacking – is crucial for successful reintegration in the long term.

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<sup>53</sup> Altai Consulting, *Integration of Returnees*, p. 97.

<sup>54</sup> Ghanem, *When Forced Migrants Return 'Home'*, p. 24–5. See also: E.F. Kunz, 1981, “Exile and Resettlement: Refugee Theory,” *International Migration Review*, 15(1/2):42–51; and Altai Consulting, *Integration of Returnees*, p. 68.

<sup>55</sup> Z. Majodina, 1995, “Dealing with Difficulties of Return to South Africa: The Role of Social Support and Coping,” *Journal of Refugee Studies*, 8(2):210–27.

<sup>56</sup> In this case study, “adjustment” implies that respondents socially or physically modified their appearance or behaviour in order to fit in their new context – although they did not necessarily agree with the values these changes expressed. It also has the sense of a short-term, temporary measure. In contrast, “adaptation” connotes long-term changed values and ideas.

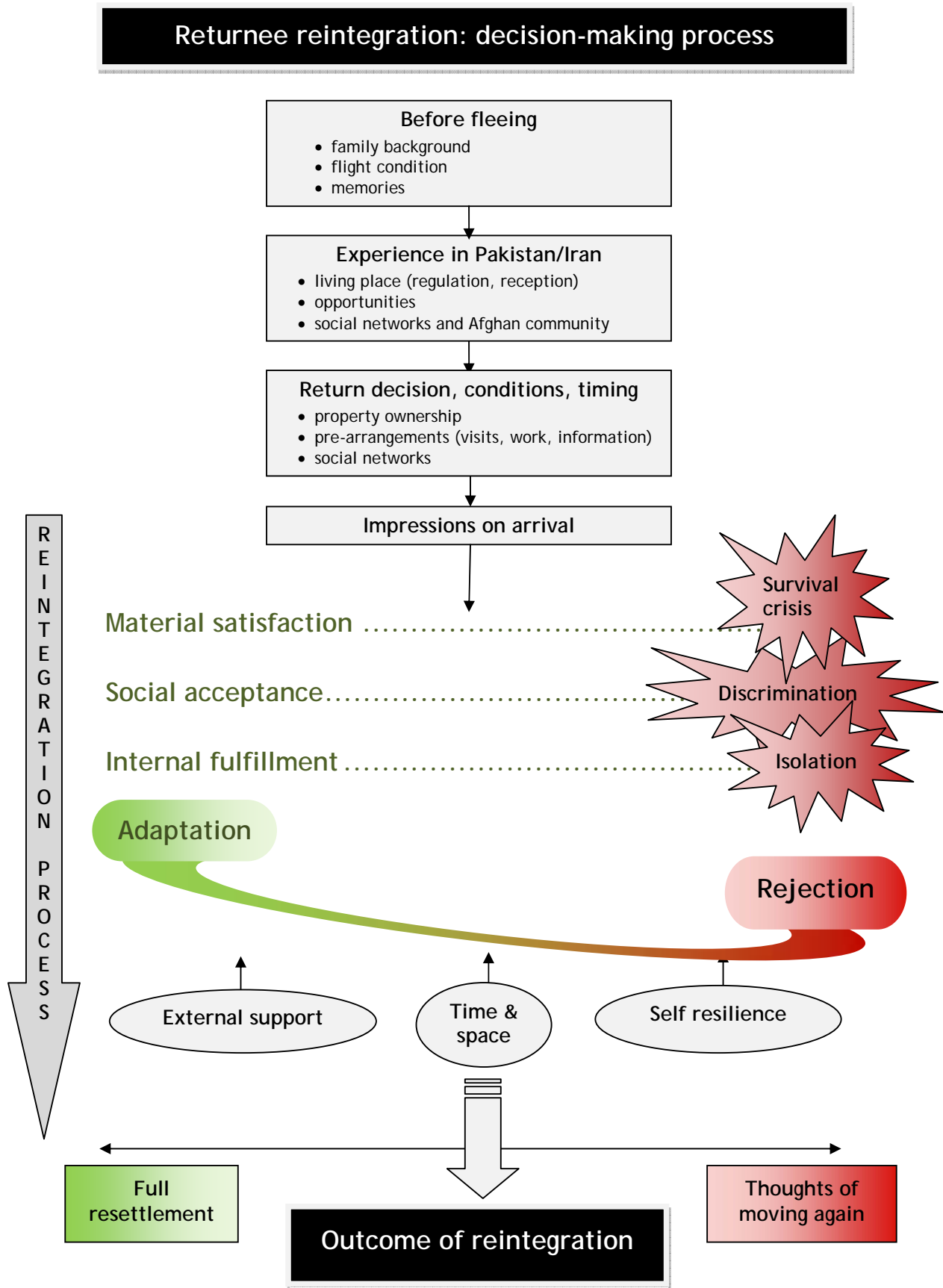


Figure 5. Returnee reintegration

How individuals make sense of *watan* (homeland) in relation to their own identity is a key factor in the outcome of the return process.

### ***Watan*: a key pull factor to return and remain in Afghanistan**

Attitudes towards homeland, and their effects on the fragile balance of push and pull factors, are among the most significant factors influencing pre-return decisions and post-return reintegration outcomes among second-generation Afghan refugees. For second-generation Afghans, the sentiments surrounding return to *watan* – an idealised motherland created through past nostalgia, less through direct experiences of life in Afghanistan than through stories from parents and other sources – are likely to be dissimilar to those of their parents who left their loved ones and memories behind. Nevertheless, this study found that the idea of *watan* was a key pull factor in bringing even young Afghans back from neighbouring countries, as well as being very important after return, helping them to confront difficulties during reintegration and motivating them to remain in Afghanistan.

Despite having grown up in neighbouring countries, the majority of respondents in this study held on to some kind of emotional ties to Afghanistan while in exile, except a few females who persistently rejected the idea of returning to Afghanistan (these respondents were highly assimilated into the host society or had feelings of hatred towards all Afghan men and Afghanistan). Some respondents also showed neutral or less emotional attitudes to their homeland before returning, because of the fact that they had never visited or seen Afghanistan, regardless of the amount of information they had received about it.

Perceptions of *watan* among respondents during their time in exile were created both from the internal Afghan sphere (stories from family, Afghan community, relatives from Afghanistan, etc) and from the external Pakistani/Iranian sphere. These perceptions changed over time as the young Afghans grew and encountered new experiences. Learning about Afghanistan in neighbouring countries was not a simple process; many respondents had conflicting perceptions toward their own country – having both positive and negative concerns at the same time. Attitudes towards *watan* were further questioned when they experienced the sense of non-belonging in Pakistani/Iranian society, regardless of the degree of assimilation into the host society. This was accentuated when the respondents, particularly those rejecting the host society, felt that they had been deprived of rights or insulted for being “inferior” residents. These individual experiences from both the internal and external spheres in neighbouring countries, along with the balance of other push/pull factors, affected perceptions towards homeland and, in turn, return attitudes.

Due to these complex emotions towards homeland, and the fact that they were *mohajer*<sup>57</sup> (refugees) in neighbouring countries, respondents had commonly viewed

#### ***Watan*: “homeland”**

Something treasured and vulnerable, something which has to be defended like the females of a man’s family.

The notion of *watan* relates primarily to a limited geographical area in which individuals are well known to each other, however it expands in the diaspora context: any Afghan becomes a *watandar*, or belongs to the same *watan*.

*“A geographical and social area where I feel at home, where I belong, where my family and my relatives live, where I can rely on the people, where I feel security and social warmth.”*

B. Glatzer, 2001, “War and Boundaries in Afghanistan: Significance and Relativity of Local and Social Boundaries,” *Weid des Islams*, 41(3):379–99

<sup>57</sup> The terms *mohajer* (refugee) and *mohajerin* (refugees) imply those who seek asylum for religious reasons, originally used as an honourable term: “when the regime in power does not allow the free



their lives in exile as non-permanent and accepted the inevitability of return. However, some respondents expressed their return attitudes as not absolute and pre-formed – they expressed interest in going back at least once and seeing Afghanistan, but if it did not work out they would re-migrate again. This optimistic attitude to return, which included a certain curiosity to see their homeland at least once, cannot be underestimated, especially among second-generation Afghan refugees who had also created extensive links and emotional ties to the locations in which they grew up. They are open to further options of re-migration to neighbouring countries, probably with less difficulty than previous generations (though with considerable variation in the ability to actually do so within the group studied).

The way in which respondents found meaning for themselves from living in their own homeland was crucial for tipping the balance in favour of returning and remaining in Afghanistan for the long term. One of the key motivations for refugees in deciding to go back to their homeland was the mental satisfaction they expected to feel in their homeland, although they were often aware of the material difficulties they would experience there.<sup>58</sup>

*This is my country, and even if I stayed for a hundred years in Pakistan, in the end I would have to return to my homeland. [...] I feel at home in my village. Sometimes, even when I go into Pul-i-Khumri city I don't feel at home. I have relatives, schoolmates, friends and villagers here, and if I am away from them I miss them.*

29-year-old male teacher in a Baghlan village, returned from Pakistan

The sense of “freedom” (*azad*) was repeatedly mentioned among the majority of respondents, particularly when they talked about their lives back in their homeland. This internal fulfilment experienced in one’s *watan* acted as a key force in motivating the majority of respondents – aside from some of those Afghan returnees who were highly qualified and occupied the upper strata of urban society – to confront the material and psychosocial hardships of their reintegration process. *Watan* is an important “pull factor” in keeping them in Afghanistan – providing inner strength in the face of the difficulties experienced in re-settling. The sense of *watan* often seemed to ease the pain of material and emotional hardship to some extent, as long as their actual survival was not under threat.

Internal fulfilment gained in one’s homeland has been seen as a key tipping point in other empirical studies on young refugees. For example, among Eritrean refugees in Sudan, the stresses experienced during their time as refugees are reported to have resulted from inequitable access to social services and insulting treatment by host communities, similar to that experienced by many of this study’s respondents while living in Iran and Pakistan. Farwell reports that for some, the fact that they were not given equal rights as citizens or nationals was the most stressful and traumatic aspect of their exile. That inherently inferior position forced them to draw upon patience, tolerance and self-control, and this formed part of their coping strategy as

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practice of Islam ... who voluntarily goes into exile, and who has severed the ties with his own people and his possessions to take refuge in a land of Islam,” (P. Centlivres and M. Centlivres-Demont, 1988, “The Afghan Refugee in Pakistan: an Ambiguous Identity”, in *Journal of Refugee Studies*, 1(2):141–152).

<sup>58</sup> Ghanem, *When Forced Migrants Return ‘Home’*, p. 36. See also J. Bascom, 2005, “The Long, ‘Last Step’? Reintegration of Repatriates in Eritrea,” *Journal of Refugee Studies*, 18(2):165–80.

refugees in exile – characteristics that could also be subsequently drawn on upon return.<sup>59</sup>

Similarly, many respondents interviewed in this study used the patience and resilience they had learnt as refugees in their determination to adjust to life in their homeland, and in return they achieved the sense of “freedom” they had sought in *watan*. A 21-year-old male university student, born in Iran, who had attended English and computer classes in an up-market, fashionable area in Tehran and used to go to cinemas and on picnics with many Iranian friends, tells of his sense of freedom in *watan*:

*In the past my grandfather had not had electricity in Afghanistan – in winter they used only fire. [...] While in Iran, by turning switches on and off, we had electricity. [...] But when I came to Afghanistan, I felt comfortable, as though I had been born there. It is true that there are much better facilities in Iran, but in Afghanistan I have independence of thought and behaviour. Human beings must lose some things in order to gain others. Here I am not afraid of what is around me. [...] before I acted Iranian, and while I did not experience any problems, there was an uneasiness in my feelings.*

This respondent’s Iranian school friends knew he was Afghan, but not others in his neighbourhood. In talking about those times of pretending to be Iranian, he said,

*On one hand I used to hate myself, but on the other I told myself that if I was an Iranian, what was wrong? I felt internally conflicted.*

In contrast to the above educated respondent who could easily assimilate into Iranian society, a 19-year-old Tajik mobile vendor had worked since his childhood in Pakistan. When he went to the bazaar, Pakistanis would bother him: “*You Afghans are not Talib, you are from northern areas of Afghanistan and supporting Masoud.*” For him, *watan* was the place where his emotional attachment was and where his legal rights were protected – as long as he could survive economically:

*If employment opportunities are good, I feel comfortable in Afghanistan. Because here Afghanistan and my village is our watan. Pakistanis were annoying Afghans a lot, but nobody disturbs you here. If you rented a house in Pakistan, the owner would take you out if you didn’t pay your rent on time, while in Afghanistan, you can argue with him that we would pay later. In Pakistan, you would feel very vulnerable – because you don’t have your homeland and you are like a homeless person.*

Returning to homeland raises the hope of elevation one’s social status from subordinate refugee (*mohajer*) to respected Afghan – where all other people in society are Afghans, and where one serves one’s own people in working towards a long-term, prosperous future. These hopes were a far greater “pull” for second-generation Afghan refugees than actual emotional or social connections there: for them, unlike their parents, leaving Iran or Pakistan meant leaving their friends and the primary – or only – “home” they had known. However, this crucial pull factor of second-generation refugees prior to return – to live in their homeland, to be freed from the feeling of non-belonging and inferiority related to their refugee status – continuously evolves in the face of unexpected difficulties experienced after return (table 4). The experience of being “outsiders” again in *watan*, echoing the exper-

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<sup>59</sup> N. Farwell, 2001, “‘Onward through Strength’: Coping and Psychological Support among Refugee Youth Returning to Eritrea from Sudan, *Journal of Refugee Studies*, 14(1):43–69.

ience of their refugee status, hinders psychosocial reintegration for some, and in some cases where that process does fail, second-generation returnees are likely to experience a strong desire to go back to the country where they grew up.

	<i>Mohajer</i> in Pakistan/Iran	Expected life in <i>watan</i>	Actual life in <i>watan</i>
Legal rights and official status	no rights, limited opportunities in education (particularly higher education) and occupational choice, unequal access to services, lack of legal status	rights and legal status, property ownership, access to services	expected life achieved, particularly emotional state of feeling "freedom", internal peace, comfort of living in <i>watan</i>
Social position and definition of being Afghan	inferior, subordinate resident, outcast, insulted (called a "terrorist" or "criminal") <b>but</b> all Afghans are refugees and experience some solidarity in this	member of a nation where all are Afghans, honour associated with being Afghan	<b>but</b> continued ostracism and discrimination (as "returnee", and on the grounds of ethnicity, religion, politics, gender, <i>wasita</i> , economic status), realisation of differences to "others" (other Afghans and Afghan values)
Emotional state	weak, afraid, worried, uprooted, constant need to defend honour, internal complexity; although highly assimilated, still cannot avoid title and connotations of "refugee"	end of fear, worry and complexities, free from harassment, abuse, and negative labels	

*Table 4. Second-generation returnees' expectations of status change in watan*

### Leaving *watan*: the failure of reintegration

Over one quarter of this study's respondents (six males, eight females)<sup>60</sup> had hopes or expectations of leaving Afghanistan in the future.

In cases where refugees are significantly disappointed by their situation on return, they may experience a sense of being betrayed by their beloved *watan* – leading to even more pronounced negative perceptions of homeland. If returnees fail to reintegrate successfully and decide to re-migrate, they are likely to be much more critical of possibilities for future return, as evidence of two respondents whose households actually left Afghanistan after initial repatriation in 2002 shows. For

<sup>60</sup> 14 respondents expect to leave Afghanistan in the future. This includes four males who are considering labour migration abroad and one female respondent who will leave Afghanistan for a transnational marriage.

example, a 19-year-old village shopkeeper who had not gone to school in Pakistan, and had been the breadwinner in his family since his father died when he was young, would not have come back to Afghanistan again except for the external support received from relatives – due to a failed resettlement attempt in 2002 because of economic difficulties. His family re-migrated to Pakistan after their initial return, due to crisis of survival – the emotional benefits of living in *watan* could not outweigh their extreme material deficiency:

*When I was in Pakistan, my family and relatives sometimes talked about Afghanistan, its nice weather and what a good place it was. I used to insist to my mother that we go to Afghanistan, to visit and see for ourselves how it was there. When we returned for the first time [in 2002], it was the collective decision of the elders of the community, and I didn't feel that anything could go wrong. I was also interested in coming to Afghanistan. But after one year of being back in my village, my family headed back to Pakistan because we didn't have bread to eat. I made that decision. Other relatives remained because they had agricultural work and land, and breadwinners and workers, neither of which my family had. When we went back to Pakistan for that second time, we hadn't planned to return to Afghanistan – until the death of my maternal uncle and being asked to return and stay with his family. Another maternal uncle provided the necessary expenses [for living in a village].*

Individuals' mental satisfaction with their return experience warrants further attention because it also impacts on the decisions of others to return. For example, a female who has no decision-making power in the household may still tell negative stories to her children and other relatives – influencing their perceptions of potential return prospects. Even some among those who currently view their future long-term place of residence as Afghanistan still advise their relatives remaining in neighbouring countries not to return to Afghanistan, primarily due to the lack of employment opportunities but also because of disappointment with their current situation.

This chapter looks in detail at how respondents in this study – second-generation refugees who have returned to Afghanistan – have experienced reintegration. In particular, links between material, social and emotional conditions are examined, as well as the ways in which different external support and self-resilience coping mechanisms have affected the outcome of their attempts to resettle in their homeland. The notion of *watan*, and how respondents find meaning in *watan* in relation to self, is a crucial factor throughout the reintegration process in deciding where their future place of residence will be, and in levels of contentment that can be achieved if options for further movement are unavailable.

The structure of the analysis is as follows:

- how respondents returned, complex patterns of household movements and the meaning of “home” for second-generation refugees – many of whom have not actually experienced life in Afghanistan;
- impressions on initial arrival and how these have changed over time;
- the process of adjustment and adaptation, or re-migration – interlinkages between material satisfaction, social acceptance and internal fulfilment and the crucial balance of these factors for positive reintegration outcomes.

The purpose of this analysis is to contribute to effective policymaking in relation to second-generation Afghan refugees returning to Afghanistan, by influencing those factors which can support more successful reintegration for this group. Ideally, in

time the increased success of returnees may also contribute to improving the perceptions of return potential among second-generation Afghans remaining in Pakistan and Iran, and improved support structures may minimise the onward movement of those who have chosen to return.

## 4.2. Complex patterns of return

About a quarter of the respondents in this study (two males, ten females) indicated that they had not been happy with their household's decision to go back to Afghanistan. At the same time, a few male respondents also showed neutral or less emotional responses to household return decision-making – stating that they could easily go back to neighbouring countries if they did not like Afghanistan. Among those who disagreed with the decision to return, most were females – many educated, although a few less educated also felt this way. Around half of this group reported that they had argued against the decision and tried to persuade the power-holders in the household to change their minds. For the other half, despite being unhappy with the decision, it was not possible to voice their disagreement because of their position in the family.

Major factors leading to strong negative return perceptions among respondents were the unfavourable timing of return and the degree of attachment to the place where they grew up compared to *watan*. For some respondents, return meant disruption to, or discontinuation of, their education, and denial of further educational opportunities that might have been available to them in the place of asylum. Besides this, their social and emotional attachment to Pakistan and Iran, even though they knew that their stay as refugees could never be permanent, was another key negative factor influencing their return attitudes. Returning to Afghanistan brought pain and sadness in leaving the one place they knew best and the opportunities for education or religious learning available there – perhaps similar sentiments that their parents had felt on leaving Afghanistan years earlier.

*In Iran, my Afghan teacher said, "It's time for the reconstruction of Afghanistan. You have to go back. The purpose of your study is to help re-build your own country because you're educated and can work. In Afghanistan, no one is educated. Why do you want to stay here and have Iranians insult you, 'You Afghani! Kesafat!'" Your homeland is Afghanistan." [...] I thought if we went back to Afghanistan, it would be difficult for me to leave my [Afghan] friends, neighbours, school and teachers in Iran. On the other hand, if we didn't go then, we have to go back some time. [...] I wanted to complete my education to 12th grade then come back to serve our people. I wanted to be a doctor. [...] In the last two weeks before leaving, I cried a lot. It felt like we were leaving everything to go back. It is true that we were refugees in Iran, but we stayed there for 14 years. [...] It was very hard to say goodbye to everyone.*

17-year-old female teacher who had strong ties with Afghans in Iran, Herat  
(attended a self-regulated Afghan school in Tehran until 7th grade)

In comparison to first-generation refugees, who have their own memories of Afghanistan and whose loved ones are often still there, the younger generation tend to face a greater degree of emotional complexity in the process of return and reintegration in Afghanistan – even those who are happy to go back. The emotional attachment to the location of home and its people, and its available opportunities compared to Pakistan/Iran, crucially affect attitudes to return. In this study, those

respondents who had someone close in Afghanistan waiting for their return (for example, the mother of a married respondent) experienced a strong “pull” factor to go back, and were motivated by the prospect of seeing their own family and relatives again.

In addition to the generational context, where there were differing degrees of this kind of emotional attachment to locations and social connections within a household, the decision-making in relation to return was much more likely to be clouded by disagreement. This study found many cases of difference in inclination to return because of the location of maternal and paternal relatives: a mother (of a respondent, as well as a married respondent herself) might want to go back because all of her relatives lived in Afghanistan, while the father would be reluctant to do so as his were in Pakistan.

In contrast to elder generations, for many of this study’s second-generation respondents the degree of emotional attachment to Afghanistan was more about their (imagined) *watan* and a passion for their “own” country (“*love for watan made me crazy,*” said a 30 years-old male teacher returned from Iran to Baghlan) than the family and social connections – who they may not have met – living there. This was particularly the case for those who only had a hazy impression of *watan* from visiting or temporarily living there during the conflict years (ten respondents), and even more so for those who had never seen it at all (25 respondents) having left either at a very early age or been born in exile.<sup>61</sup> For many respondents, *watan* existed purely in their imagination, informed and embellished by memories inherited from the generation that had fled war in Afghanistan or their vague images – if they remembered it at all. This sense of an unknown but imagined homeland fed their curiosity and desire to see and experience life in their own cherished country – to know and understand where their ancestors had come from.

An 18-year-old woman who was born in Peshawar and was engaged when she was just 6 years old, remained uneducated, and had almost no interaction with Pakistanis, was curious to go to Afghanistan:

*I was keen to see Afghanistan because I had heard such nice things [from my mother and husband’s grandmother], I wanted to see it for myself. But at the same time, I didn’t have any special feelings about my country, because I was young and didn’t have a strong sense of the differences between Afghans and Pakistanis. My father-in-law made the decision that we should go back to Afghanistan because it was finally peaceful there, because it is our homeland, and because we would not be mohajer in Afghanistan. I was very happy that I would see Afghanistan for the first time; I felt that I had a homeland by the name of Afghanistan.*

While attachment to *watan* affected the decision to return for some, perceived risks of return reduced this pull factor for others, who engaged in a strategy of diversification to reduce these risks by leaving some household members behind in the country of refuge. In some cases this meant one or more members returning first in order to prepare the way for the rest of the family to arrive at a later point; in others some household members planned to remain in refuge for a medium to longer term to diversify livelihoods and provide a potential safe haven in future. This

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<sup>61</sup> In addition, seven respondents did not visit Afghanistan until late 2001. In contrast, six respondents had more memories about Afghanistan because they had lived in Afghanistan for a relatively long time during the 1990s, and at that time the respondents were old enough to remember the experiences.

phased return has frequently been used as a way of supporting economically sustainable return, but it also happens for reasons of security: in case of the situation in Afghanistan deteriorating again there would be connections in place for seeking refuge again.<sup>62</sup> Some educated individuals (including females) left their household in Pakistan and returned alone to secure employment, most frequently with the United Nations, an NGO or a private business. From Iran, it was more common that individual males continued to work in Iran to provide an income while their family members returned to Afghanistan.

Among the respondents' households, it was sometimes disagreement in relation to return that resulted in one individual going back to Afghanistan alone to pursue opportunities in higher education or work. There were cases of both male and female educated respondents doing this, with relatives in Afghanistan assisting them with accommodation and information. Disagreement surrounding the decision to return caused the split of one household that used to share the same income – leaving part of the family in exile and severing financial ties.

In another case of a household splitting their time of return, the elder married brother of a 20-year-old female respondent (who had studied to 12th grade in an Afghan school in Islamabad) remained in Pakistan, while she and her father's family returned to Afghanistan. She recalls her mixed feelings when she tried to defend the image of her beloved *watan* against taunting in Pakistan – despite having good relationships with her Pakistani neighbours, occasionally unknown Pakistanis would insult her family for being Afghan:

*When I was in Pakistan, I really loved Afghanistan even though it had been destroyed by war. I didn't compare it with other developed countries because watan is where you can live without any tension, and no one tells you that you are a mohajer or a Kabuli. [...] I remember one day my friend and I went to the bazaar with long shirt and trousers [not the three-piece Panjabi dress preferred by Pakistani girls]. On the way, two Pakistani college girls said in Urdu, "Look their style – Afghanistan is not developed and everywhere it is destroyed, but Afghans dress well and forget about their devastated country." I stopped and said to them, "Even if our country was destroyed, things are improving there now. We Afghans are not like what you see on TV and the news." I was sad when I heard comments like these from Pakistanis and became angry for our people. Why is it that we have such good people and a distinguished history, but our country is on the world's blacklist?*

A year later, when the respondent's father asked her married elder brother and his family to join them in Kabul, he did not agree:

*My brother, his wife and their children like Pakistan a lot. He has a shop there and his children go to a Pakistani school. I think they also wanted to live separately from us. I don't know the reason, but we accepted that my brother was happier living in Pakistan. [...] So we agreed, and my father said, "Wherever you and your family are happy, stay there. We won't disturb you and we won't interfere in your life."*

<sup>62</sup> K.B. Harpviken, 2006, *Networks in Transition: Wartime Migration in Afghanistan*, Oslo: International Peace Research Institute, Oslo University. Harpviken points out the different patterns of gradual return among returnees from Pakistan and Iran, and notes that "gradual returns, perceived only as short-term measures, often take on a semi-permanent character" (p. 290).

In relation to the time and corresponding conditions of repatriation, some patterns among this study's respondents emerged. Among recent arrivals (2005–06), many (eight respondents) were well prepared for return: they made arrangements for work in advance and/or returned with enough savings or strong social networks to support them. The return of some others in these recent years occurred under more forced circumstances related to strong "push" factors from Iran.<sup>63</sup> In contrast, earlier arrivals (2001–03) were mostly those in the middle to lower economic group who had made fewer plans for employment,<sup>64</sup> along with a few well-off households who were responding to strong "pull" factors (political links, government networks, strong social and family networks) to Afghanistan. More than half of these "early" returnees had land in Afghanistan, while among "recent" returnees the level of land ownership was lower.<sup>65</sup> In general, it could be said that for those refugees remaining outside Afghanistan – with fewer social networks, worse economic status and lack of land – the prospect of voluntary return and successful reintegration is lower.<sup>66</sup> In recent years, it is those who have had the capacity to take on the risk of return and potential problems associated with reintegration who have tended to return voluntarily.

Support from relatives and other networks in Afghanistan is crucial for acquiring the information needed to make the decision to return, as well as for providing assistance on arrival.<sup>67</sup> This broad support includes telephone or letter communication prior to return, looking after property, providing information about access to employment, facilitating return visits and physical support on return such as accommodation. For those without their own accommodation, it was common to stay with relatives temporarily – from a few weeks to even a year – while they built or found permanent housing. For those who did not make any arrangements at all before returning, their savings were crucial for survival during the initial stages of re-settling.

For many respondents – with their varying degrees of attachment to Pakistan and Iran – the day of return became a major turning point in their lives. Some reported that they could remember the exact time that they crossed the border, along with many minor events on the way. Some had staunchly resisted return, while others had come back willingly and harboured very negative feelings towards their place of refuge. But for all of them, their feelings about the process of return evolved over time during actual movement, along with encountering the stories of others who had returned and those who had remained since before return.

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<sup>63</sup> "Recent" returnees (12 respondents in 2005–06), excluding those who were "passive" in their return (four), were all categorised economically in this study as "above average" or "rich" (except two female respondents who returned and joined their husbands' families already living in Afghanistan).

<sup>64</sup> Of the "early" returnees (16 respondents in 2001–03), 11 were categorised economically in this study as "average", "below average" or "poor". Two households subsequently left Afghanistan again because of economic hardship, returning once more in 2004.

<sup>65</sup> Of the 16 "early" returnees, nine households owned land, mostly in their villages, compared to four of the 12 "recent" returnee households.

<sup>66</sup> Harpviken, *Networks in Transition*, p. 282. Land ownership is a key factor in the decision to return, and in the success of reintegration – regardless of drought or the failure of a harvest. Landowners occupy a high status in the community, both materially and socially.

<sup>67</sup> 26 respondents received UNHCR support during return, while 14 respondents (spontaneous returnees) did not; for eight respondents there is no data on this. Among those who did not receive support, some reasons mentioned were: difficulties waiting due to crowds; had sufficient funds themselves; and deportation.



A 21-year-old educated male who had lived in Tehran and assimilated with his Iranian friends explains the emotional transition of returning “home” for a second-generation refugee:

*When a person grows over time, the question must be posed: Who am I? Where do I belong? Where did my grandfather come from? I asked my family these questions. I can't express the feelings we had [when we returned]. It's true that Iran was not our country, but I grew up there, I was familiar with the environment there. [...] I worried about what would happen when I went back, what work I would do, whether it would be the right decision to return to Afghanistan or not. [...] After I crossed the dusty border into Afghanistan, I felt pride and a sense of possession, I had found a feeling that I can't explain to you, and I wanted to cry. I was sad that I had left my Iranian friends and comfortable facilities, but I was happy to see new things and places. My relatives waiting to receive me were new for me. [...] When I first saw Afghan dust [at the border], there was a sort of fear: the style of the people was different, especially at the border, with their long beards and different clothes blowing in dusty winds.*

#### 4.3. Impressions on return

When second-generation Afghan refugees return to their homeland, it marks the start of experiencing a new world any of our respondents gradually learned new ways of living and interacting – as the example in the above quote shows of the young male adult who was not even familiar with *shalwar kameez* (popular male attire in Afghanistan) and for whom the appearance of his countrymen was new. Many find differences in their new environment and in other people that they had not expected. What is taken as “common sense” by their native compatriots does not necessarily seem normal to them, even though they have returned from countries that are geographically close to Afghanistan. This is the case particularly among those who had left Afghanistan at a very early age or who had been born in exile, then not visited Afghanistan until they returned. The process of return involves these Afghans renegotiating values about society and people, comparing different ways of living and ideas in their homeland to those they knew in Pakistan and Iran, and developing new understandings of “home” and their future within it.

Not surprisingly, for many refugees of the second generation who were used to better urban facilities, the less developed conditions in community and home life left them feeling deprived of what they had had in asylum. Differences in material aspects were usually noted first, then social interactions and later they discovered less visible values through communicating with people – all of these factors and degree of adjustment to them linking in with subsequent reintegration outcomes. During the reintegration process, many respondents gradually learned new ways of living and interacting – getting by with fewer facilities and the “new” social rules, norms and values of their countrymen. Some adjusted or adapted to the environment over time without significant stress while others failed to do so, continuing to question their future in their homeland.

Linguistic differences were also critical to the process of integration, adaptation and adjustment on return: for Pashto-speaking returnees, re-settling in a Dari-speaking urban area represented an alienating and stressful factor, particularly if they were not welcomed by their fellow Afghans. There were a few Dari-speaking respondents who could not even understand the local Dari accent and some vocabulary that was

different to what they had been used to as refugees. In addition to linguistic differences, confronting a very different social context compared to life in exile also made them feel like they did not fit in after all, so they could not find the internal peace they had been seeking. For instance, for returnees to Kabul who had lived in more traditional, religious environments in exile, the freer way of life that has characterised recent years in the capital city was a daunting and alien to their own experiences.

The following quote from a teenage girl who grew up in urban Abbottabad, Pakistan, without formal schooling illustrates her shock at the lack of material development in her native village in Baghlan. Once they had travelled by vehicle as far as the main road could take them, they unloaded their luggage onto donkeys to be carried to their village – she did not know that people used donkeys as transport in her area:

*As I didn't know Afghanistan before, I was excited to see it and thought if it's not suitable for us to live there, we can re-migrate to Pakistan. When we arrived at our village, it was like being dropped into a desert. In Abbottabad, where we lived in Pakistan, there were roads and streets. But here it's just one big desert and nothing else – all the houses are mud, and there is no drinking water or electricity. [...] We spent the first three months at our paternal uncle's house where there was no door, and I worried during the night that someone would come in to our room. When it got dark in the evening I was afraid, even of going to the toilet. We had good, lit toilets with tubs in Pakistan, but here there are no facilities like that at all.*

Another respondent, a female with 8th grade education, reported that her family arrived back in Herat without having made any prior arrangements. They had to stay the first two nights in a UNHCR encashment centre after failing to locate their relatives who had lived in a Herat neighbourhood. They then went to an IDP camp on the outskirts of Herat where they knew some villagers and where the father's paternal cousin lived, and stayed with his family there. She recalls the differences in the appearance of, and social interaction with, these relatives who she had not met before:

*When our car passed the entrance of the camp, I saw some men with long beards and big turbans. I was surprised and afraid to see them. [...] Later we found some people we knew – my mother's childhood friend from her village, Daikundi – and went to their house. My mother and her friend were very happy to see each other after such a long time, but I was sad and crying because all my friends were in Iran. The next day, my father's paternal cousin and his two sons came to meet us. Those boys were unknown to me and their behaviour was different. I can't explain it very well, but they were wearing long dress, and had long, dirty, untidy hair. They were very impolite – staring at me as though they had never seen someone like me before. I felt very bad, and came out of the house and washed my red face in anger. The elder boy came outside and said, "What's happened to you – a Tehrani girl? You don't like it here?" I told him, "It's none of your business!"*

In general, the more respondents had integrated into Pakistani and Iranian society and the way of life there, the more they tended to notice differences and contradictions with life in their homeland – particularly at the early stages of reintegration. However, this was not always the case: for example, those who had lived in an Afghan enclave or camp in Pakistan – not integrating at all with Pakistani lifestyle – would still not have had the chance to learn about agriculture and livestock hus-

bandry as it was practised in Afghanistan. A 30-year-old housewife without education who lived in a refugee camp in a tribal area in Pakistan remembers her early days in her native village in Baghlan:

*I was very young when I left for Pakistan. In Pakistan, we had no livestock, so I didn't know village life. When I came back to Afghanistan for the first time, I didn't know it. We firstly rebuilt our house, and after sometimes, we bought goats – although I didn't know how to keep them. But gradually I learnt through looking elders how they do. Then I came to understand how to keep animals.*

In contrast, there were some respondents – mostly males (nearly one in four), especially among those who had maintained close contacts with family and/or had returned to returnee-concentrated areas – who found the environment in Afghanistan more or less the same as what they had been used to in Pakistan or Iran. While some things were unfamiliar, there were many obvious similarities as well. The degree to which this was the case depended on the respondent's background and context during exile as well as their return destination. If they had lived among close-knit networks of Afghans from their own area during the period of asylum or had visited their village frequently, their ties to their old way of life would have been robust. Furthermore, if the return location was also characterised by many residents from extended family and social networks who had also been in asylum and subsequently returned, or the people and way of life closely reflected that of their place of refuge (for example, Herat city is more similar to Iran than Kabul), there was more chance that fewer differences would be felt.

Nevertheless, there was no clear-cut trend in feelings on this among respondents. A few respondents who returned to their native villages spoke of less one-sided impressions at the beginning. While they found themselves to be different from, or more open-minded than, other villagers, at the same time they found some similarities:

*I was also feeling similar [to my villagers] as I was wearing the same clothes, and being Afghan – having a sense of Afghans.*

10th grade male student from Pakistan, returned to his village in Baghlan

There was no single emotional response to return among second-generation returnees. Initially it was mainly difficulties that were identified in the adjustment to life in Afghanistan, but there were also many positive anecdotes, and their own perspectives clearly changed over time, showing willingness to adapt and assimilate. This 26-year-old female, who had left Kabul at three years old and graduated from a university in Iran, then travelled alone to Kabul to seek career opportunities, recalls her journey. For her, the internal fulfilment gained in *watan* was a far stronger factor compared to other challenges:

*I came back from Tehran with my father's friend. The morning after we arrived in Herat, he bought a plane ticket for me and I came to Kabul alone.[...] When I crossed the border from Iran to Afghanistan, I saw old and dirty camps, and shopkeepers and tea shop workers who looked like they hadn't washed for years. I felt sad and disappointed because I never thought Afghanistan would be that dirty. When we had arrived in Herat city, it was totally different – clean and shining lights. It was like Iran – big roads, supermarkets, even the accent of the local people was the same. I had felt very happy and thought that Kabul would be better than this, because it's the capital – but when I saw Kabul I was very sad, it was very dirty. Herat was beautiful, but at*

*the same time I was uneasy because I felt like I was still in Iran. When I arrived in Kabul, I felt like I was in Afghanistan, and I felt comfortable. In Herat, there was 24-hour electricity, but in Kabul we only have lights for one night, and not the next day. [...] In the beginning, when I decided to come back to Afghanistan, I was a bit sad and afraid of missing my family and Iran – the place where I grew up. But when I got in the car on the day I left, I was calm and didn't have any feelings of regret. I was happy to leave Iran – I had some very bad memories of Iranians and Iran.*

#### 4.4. From *mohajer* to *hamwatan*: the reintegration process of second-generation refugees

In many cases returning to Afghanistan is accompanied by unfamiliarity or dissatisfaction with changed material, social and emotional circumstances. These initial impressions, however, can evolve during the reintegration process through learning new ideas, comparing one's own existing values and finding new meaning and attachment in *watan*. While many of those returnees who found an unfamiliar context in Afghanistan showed relatively flexible attitudes towards the adjustment and adaptation process (sometimes along with significant stresses), some of those who could not adjust to the new environment continued to question their future. It is not only changes over time that matter to reintegration outcomes; also of critical importance are the availability of appropriate external support (understanding, acceptance, caring and access to services, information, networks and material aid) and the returnee's own internal resilience – fuelled by living in *watan* – as a coping mechanism against challenges. Many of the respondents in this study who showed internal resilience and tolerance in their new setting were rewarded with a sense of freedom in their own country, as long as the balance of material, social and internal factors did not shift across the tipping point and lead to thoughts of leaving again.

##### Learning to cope: material adjustment and fulfilment in *watan*

One notable feature among the respondents in this study is that it is those who are more educated (both males and females) who have tended to face greater social and emotional contradictions during their process of reintegration – with a few exceptions. Among those who were less educated and of a lower economic status, their primary struggle was against material deficit and physical insecurity,<sup>68</sup> which correlates with Maslow's hierarchy of needs – if one is materially comfortable, other issues take precedence.<sup>69</sup> Still, being in *watan* did provide some of these more vulnerable respondents with inner strength that assisted in coping with material difficulties.

An uneducated woman whose husband is a farmer in Baghlan hopes that she will not have to go back to Pakistan, driven by her household's economic struggles following return. Her identity as an Afghan was formed through the stories and experiences of family members while living in a tribal area in Pakistan, and she does not want to be a refugee again:

<sup>68</sup> A recent quantitative survey of 11,186 individuals living in mostly rural areas across Afghanistan, among which 74.7 percent were returned refugees and IDPs, showed that 16.7 percent of returnees were dissatisfied with their return. The main reasons cited were lack of job opportunities (48.4 percent) and lack of housing (35.4 percent). Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission, 2007, *Economic and Social Rights in Afghanistan II*, Kabul: AIHRC.

<sup>69</sup> A.H. Maslow, 1943, "A Theory of Human Motivation," *Psychological Review*, 50:370–96.

*In Pakistan, women didn't go out so I had no contact with Pakistanis, but our men told us about them at home. One day, when my father was selling vegetables in a bazaar, a Pakistani abused him, "Why are you selling such expensive vegetables to us?"[...] There, we faced lots of difficulties – what we earned was barely enough for food. Now, physically, life in Afghanistan is more difficult than it was in Pakistan. Everything is more expensive, and there are no vegetables available in this village. But still, I don't want to go back to Pakistan.[...] Since my only son was in an accident caused by a Pakistani driver, I haven't let him go outside – even now I don't send him to school here. My son was hospitalised for 20 days, and we didn't ask for any money from that Pakistani driver. He was a poor person and we were also scared that if we complained, we would be in trouble.[...] We were refugees in Pakistan.*

Now in her homeland, however, her problems continue. She wants to live in an urban area in Afghanistan, but since her family has returned she has only seen the city of Pul-i-Khumri twice – when she needed to go to a doctor.

*When I saw the neglect of Pakistanis and their government toward us, I thought it was because we were Afghans. But now in my country, our government also neglects poor people, so how should we feel? [...] I have to raise my children here, but I wish we could live in a city like Pul-i-Khumri or Kabul. But we can't – we have no house, no land, and we are mountain people. We don't know life there. When we go to the city we must be careful – make sure cars don't hit us and bad men don't touch us on the street.*

In contrast, another housewife without education in Kabul whose family makes bird cages could not survive a cold winter after returning in early 2002, and her family was forced to leave again. After two years in Peshawar, when her relatives told them about land to be allocated by the government, her father-in-law decided to try going back again where they have since had a more successful experience, due largely to the availability of some government support. The respondent initially resisted a second return: "I was very sad, and didn't want to come to Afghanistan for a second time, because we experienced all those bad days without house and money, living in a tent." However, her attitude has now changed after receiving temporary government-funded housing and food assistance. They are now waiting to move to a suburb of Kabul, where the government has allocated them a plot of land.

*I don't want to go back to Pakistan because Afghanistan is our own watan. We are free and not mohajer in our country. Besides that, our government gave us land in Shamali and we will move there soon. We are all happy now, we have survived very tough times, but soon we will be landowners and we will build our own house there. We know that life in Pakistan is better than here – a nice house, gas, electricity, and tap water – and we earned more, people bought many bird cages there. But now I'm happy here.*

Many respondents faced material constraints after return, particularly compared to what they had during exile. Nevertheless, they are willing to remain in Afghanistan, showing resilience to challenges – because of being in *watan*. This would be further encouraged through the provision of appropriate external support (from government, community and relatives). However, if the balance shifts dramatically to a point where sheer survival is difficult, they have no other coping strategies and cannot remain in *watan*, it will require even greater pull factors for them to return to Afghanistan a second time.

### Ongoing migration for survival: a material reintegration strategy

For those trying to adjust to living in their homeland – coping with material difficulties and choosing not to re-migrate with the entire household again – labour migration is often used as a livelihood strategy,<sup>70</sup> as shown particularly among the average and below average income respondents in this study.<sup>71</sup> Facing unemployment and survival crises, some households have no option but to send males away for work – even though it can be illegal and dangerous.

An uneducated respondent, who acquired masonry skills in Iran, has repeatedly travelled between Iran and Herat since his father died when he was 12 years old. When he comes home, it is either to see his family or because he has been deported. He came back to his village in Herat in 2002 in order to marry and live there; however, he has been to Iran three times since then:

*I want to work for my country. If I could earn enough for three meals a day here, then I wouldn't return to Iran. Until then, I have to be away from my home. My family is concerned about my safety, about unexpected incidents on the way to Iran. Life here is OK, because nobody interferes with us. I go to Iran to earn money and then I return here to spend it, that's our life! [...] I feel at home in my village in Herat, since I own a house, I have relatives there and the climate in summer and spring is pleasant. [...] The majority of people here go to Iran either using official visas and passports or smuggling – mainly because of unemployment and security issues here. A few days ago, a smuggler collected a number of people here and took them to Iran. They usually take risky routes passing through Nimroz. I also plan to do this if I can't get a visa.*

An unmarried male with 6th grade education whose family is in the *hawala* business (informal money transfer system using strong social networks between countries) tells of the situation in his Herat village:

*In this village, the majority of youth are jobless. Those who have saved enough money can open a shop, but others without capital are unable to do so. [...] Before, people used to cultivate poppy, but now since it's forbidden by the government they have to go to Iran for work.*

In a periphery area of Pul-i-Khumri, an unemployed jobless male had recently left his family in search of work for a year. He had grown up in an Afghan camp in a tribal area of Pakistan, dropping out of school in 6th grade because of his father's ill health. His cousin explains:

*My cousin left for Kandahar early today. They were ten people going together in search of work. If they could find poppy work,<sup>72</sup> they would do that. If not, they would go to Lahore or Karachi – collecting rubbish on the road to sell. They are going to work for a year. They took money for their travel expenses. If I had money, I would have joined them. But I have to support my father,*

<sup>70</sup> Monsutti, *Afghan Transnational Networks*.

<sup>71</sup> See page 17. Of ten households with at least one male member working in Iran, half were categorised in this study as being “below average” economically, while three households were in the “average” socioeconomic category. According to a case study of villages around Herat, many skilled returnees from Iran are unemployed and seek daily wage work in Herat city, while some who can afford the travel expenses go to Iran (UNHCR, 2006, *Location of Returnees*, Herat: UNHCR).

<sup>72</sup> Following the ban on poppy cultivation, among those households who were not able to diversify their livelihoods in Nangarhar there has been an increase in the number of families who have left for Pakistan permanently in search of alternative economic opportunities. D. Mansfield, 2006, *Opium Poppy Cultivation in Nangarhar and Ghor*, Kabul: AREU.

*working on the land and taking care of the sheep. My cousin's father has been sick, and they don't own any livestock or land to work on. So he left to earn money to support his family. He borrowed some money from his friend to cover his travel expenses, and he will repay it when he comes back.*

Choosing labour migration is a way of adjustment that allows a household's members to remain in Afghanistan and have their material needs fulfilled. Those who migrate for work must at least have external support (credit, someone taking care of remaining family, networks/information to find employment) and the ability to cover travel expenses – if these are not available, and material difficulties persist, the desire to remain in *watan* may decrease along with living standards.

### **Time and learning: material adaptation**

A returnee's adaptation to his or her new environment in Afghanistan includes learning and changing ideas as well as an unconscious transformation of values over time. Changes occur naturally through becoming familiar with people and the environment, and this may deviate substantially from the returnee's initial impressions. Among younger male respondents, the transformation of habits and appearance to fit in with the local context took place more readily. For example, a returnee male with 6th grade education who is now running a local telephone shop in rural Herat noted mostly similarities and one main difference compared to locals when he returned – and this has now changed:

*In Iran, I used to take a shower every day, while here they don't shower more than once in three days. At first, when I was taking a shower every day, I looked at others and felt different. But over time, I've changed because of being busy, and accepted their ways, so I usually only wash once a week now.*

With time, many respondents became used to living in an environment with fewer facilities (cooking with fire, bringing water from the well, using a lamp for electricity), with some few exceptions who still categorised themselves and their values as different from others.

## **4.5. From *mohajer* to *hamwatan*: social rejection or acceptance by others**

### **Social rejection of returnees**

In addition to material reintegration, the second-generation Afghan refugees interviewed in this study reported encountering unexpected values and ideas that were inconsistent with the understandings they had formed while in exile. Around a quarter of respondents (three males, nine females) – returnees from both Pakistan and Iran – shared experiences of being rejected by fellow Afghans that were either their own or the stories of their family or friends. More than half of the respondents in this study, both male and female, also spoke of their concerns about being treated unequally and the different forms of discrimination they had experienced on return to Afghanistan.

Social rejection by other Afghans who had remained through the conflict years was particularly difficult for second-generation returnees, as the motivation to go back was in many cases related to their negative experiences as "outsiders" among the majority populations of Pakistanis and Iranians. An interesting point to note when considering these accounts of being ostracised on return is that the respondents who

spoke of these incidents were primarily single, educated and female. Their appearance and behaviour betrayed what was expected of Afghan women socially, and made them easy targets for harassment and insults by their peers – both men and women. Returnee women are relatively easily identified by what they wore: they had often been required to modify their style of dress during exile to maintain a low profile and assimilate with the local community there.

The primary reasons for rejection by those who had remained were obvious differences in appearance and social interaction which clashed with local cultural expectations and social codes around gender. Some examples of conflicts reported were:

- a young male in white jeans was described as looking “naked” by a village elder;
- a male’s social contact with a female Iranian friend (among many other social connections) was disapproved of by people in Herat;
- a female with short hair was said to look like boy by a village girl; and
- women not wearing the appropriate *hijab* for their region or community were publicly harassed (dress and acceptable appearance are very location-specific – what is normal in Herat and Pul-i-Khumri is not necessarily accepted in urban Kabul, and so on)

When returnees had been highly integrated into the Pakistani or Iranian way of life, and could not do, or did not know, what was “normal” for Afghans, they were perceived with contempt as “spoiled”, “loafers” or “not Afghan”. For example, siblings who hesitated to eat food with their hands were scorned by their relatives (“*You have raised your children in a very spoiled way!*”), and a student who was not fluent in Dari was told by her teacher: “*Shame on you. You forgot that you are an Afghan!*” This respondent, now an English teacher in Herat, was not used to wearing the long *chador* favoured in Herat – in Peshawar, she had tried to blend in and look Pakistani when she worked in a health clinic by wearing *panjabi* dress (neither too strict nor too open such as a short, tight *panjabi* dress). Now, in Herat, her relatives regard her as “totally Pakistani”.

*In my uncle’s clinic in Herat, where I was working before, there were two Pakistani men who only spoke Urdu. So I was like a translator. When I talked with them and sometimes laughed, others [patients and colleagues] would say, “Look that girl – she speaks Urdu and is friends with men. She wants to be a girlfriend of Pakistani men.” At that time, my uncle said, “This is Afghanistan and you are an Afghan. You understand what you must do, how to speak, how to dress, how to behave.” Afghans here might not have seen women and men work together, but this was normal in Pakistan. I even had some male classmates in a course I attended there. It was normal for me to talk and work with men. [...] I was born there, grew up there, was educated there, and I was relaxed there. It was my country. Not here in Afghanistan: here I don’t feel relaxed.*

For those women who had returned from Iran to Kabul, their adoption of the tight, Iranian-style *hijab*,<sup>73</sup> which is not common among Kabuli girls, was considered a mark of being an “outsider” by locals. A 26-year-old female returnee from Iran who wore this style of *hijab* in Kabul reported that her applications for jobs were refused by a

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<sup>73</sup> Covering a woman’s head tightly without showing any hair.



number of offices and organisations, which she attributed to her style being different to that of Kabuli women:

*In Iran, if a woman covers herself and keeps good hijab, she's highly respected. Especially in government, women with good hijab are more likely to be employed. But in Afghanistan, a girl who wears modern clothes [and who speaks English and has computer skills] easily gets a job now. We have lost our culture. [...] People ask me why I wear this kind of dress, but I like the Islamic style and don't like to wear pants and a shirt and show my backside to men. [...] But with this dress I feel that I am not valued and that people think that I'm from a village. Here, when someone comes back from a Western country and wears European dress, we respect her a lot. I am sad at the idea that my people have lost their culture, but now I don't care about that and I want to be respected for my knowledge, not because of my dress.*

In addition to ostracism based on physical and social differences, there appears to be a general hostility towards returnees, who are seen to have abandoned their country, fled war and enjoyed a prosperous life in exile – while those who remained sacrificed their security and quality of life to defend their homeland. Some respondents faced these criticisms, not only among relatives who they knew well, but also within the public sphere (such as in school or government):

*You didn't experience hardship and you were out of Afghanistan during the war, while we were under rocket and bomb attack. Now you come back and want to have good education and everything you want?*

A government clerk's remarks to an 11th grade female student in Kabul from Pakistan

Similarly, those Afghans who remained during the war often expressed their envy of the educational and economic opportunities that returnees had – which is then compounded by the enhanced opportunities some experience on return (such as better job opportunities in NGOs).

There is also insecurity and fear related to competition for resources: for those who have remained, their "territory" in education, work and property ownership is threatened by the large-scale return of refugees who are often likely to be in a better socioeconomic position than those who remained. For example, a male student whose father has been a *wakil* (neighbourhood representative) in Kabul related that his uncle – who had acted as a *wakil* while the father was in Pakistan – told lies about his father when his family returned to Kabul to denigrate him among members of the community.<sup>74</sup> Another respondent, who had grown up in Haripur refugee camp with no Pakistani neighbours, describes the situation of land ownership among refugees and those who had remained in his village in Baghlan:

*In our village there are many people who own land, but some are living in Pakistan while their land is looked after by their relatives here. These relatives are advising landholders not to return to Afghanistan due to insecurity and other unknown issues, but this is actually to take advantage of the land and crops. If the landholders returned, they would be deprived of these benefits from the land.*

<sup>74</sup> 32 percent of respondents in Altai Consulting's 2006 study said they had lost social relationships during their period in asylum (p. 20), and some reported lost or weakened family networks on return (p. 71).

The “survival guilt”<sup>75</sup> of returnees associated with leaving their relatives and friends may be more applicable to the first generation of refugees who actually left behind their loved ones. For many second-generation refugees, who may have few links with their homeland, their lives began as subordinate refugees, suffering the harassment that went along with that. However, from the perspective of their peers who stayed in Afghanistan, second-generation returnees may be seen as annoying intruders (“falling down like a parachute!”), especially if their experiences in Pakistan or Iran left them with better education, skills and economic security.

Among those respondents who experienced ostracism on return, many had been highly assimilated into Pakistani and Iranian society, but there were a few who were uneducated and/or had strong negative feelings about their experiences as refugees. An 18-year-old returnee from Iran, who is currently attending a tailoring course, had dropped out of school in Tehran after 1st grade because she did not have a legal identity card. She had not liked to go outside in Tehran because of teasing by Iranian neighbours. Now, in her neighbourhood in Herat – despite dressing conservatively and appropriately for Herat (with a tight, Iranian-style *hijab*) – she encounters negative stereotypical perceptions about returnees simply because of having coming back from Iran:

*I have a friend in this course. She grew up in a village, but her family moved to Herat. Her mother doesn't like me and said to her, "Don't go out with this girl. They came back from Iran. Maybe she's not a good girl. You might learn [immoral ideas and behaviour] from her." I like my friend and visit her house, but she never comes to my house.*

### **Discrimination and social exclusion: the Afghan context as a source of unease**

The feeling of uneasiness in *watan* experienced by some returnees is not only due to their own expectations and experiences as refugees in Pakistan and Iran, it is also related to the context of Afghanistan itself. Many respondents, regardless of education and gender, spoke of their feelings of dislocation and a degree of exclusion from society – but their status as returnees was only one of the discriminating factors that they came to understand and experience on return. For second-generation Afghan refugees (with limited understanding of their homeland and experience of life outside Afghanistan) who come back seeking a place of protection, many non-material contributing factors can lead to a negative analysis of life in *watan* in comparison with their lives in the place of asylum.

### **Ethnic and political tensions**

For second-generation Afghan refugees, the emergence of ethnic identity in exile follows a similar path to that of their identity as refugees. Both identities are formed by encountering differing values over time. It is a common feature of respondents' childhoods that they played with many different children without taking into consideration ethnicity or nationality. Respondents' ideas about ethnicity and diversity among Afghans were often not fully informed while they remained in their location of asylum. For example, a student who had returned from Tehran only came to know of the Pashto language at school back in Afghanistan, and an uneducated married male who had returned from Peshawar discovered Uzbeks speaking their own language for the first time when he came to resettle in Kabul. As refugees born

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<sup>75</sup> Ghanem, *When Forced Migrants Return 'Home'*, p. 44.

or brought up in Pakistan and Iran, Afghans' national identity tended to overshadow other ethnic, religious or political divisions.<sup>76</sup> Although they would have certain inherited perceptions of these divisions from their parents, the more dominant feeling of "difference" was – as refugees – the sense of being residents of an inferior status to the citizens of that country.

When second-generation Afghan refugees then return to Afghanistan and find discrimination based on ethnic, religious and political grounds, this – as a less familiar concept – is experienced more intensely than among those first-generation refugees or Afghans who remained and are used to these internal tensions. A male student who had studied in an Afghan school in Karachi initially returned to his native village in Parwan province – where his family has a house and land – despite his father's concerns over the family's security in that area. Faced with rejection by fellow Afghans there based on ethnic and political grounds, his family eventually left their village and settled in Pul-i-Khumri. This respondent had shown some determination to return to his family's place of origin, but while he had heard about ethnic and political discrimination there, and his father and mother had both expressed their concerns in this regard, he had underestimated its severity.

*In my village, the school principal [who belonged to the rival political group to my family] was very cruel with students, and especially with me. Everyone in the school was in support of each other, while I defended myself alone. [...] I thought to myself that I'd made a big mistake coming back from Pakistan. At night I couldn't sleep and even thought of returning to Pakistan. Many times, the school reported to the government that my family had weapons. I used to sit besides a stream, remembering Pakistan, and I would not eat. One day, one of the neighbourhood boys who used to beat my tribe's children started an argument with me. So I beat him and he was unconscious for three hours. I could not tolerate his cruelty towards my tribe. The school principal then expelled me for that fighting. [...] For the moment, I don't feel at home anywhere. When the problems of poor are solved, I will feel at home in Afghanistan. The Taliban is still active; there is bribery and no construction for the poor. When our government operates under a stable constitution, I will feel at home.*

### Unequal opportunities: access to power and social exclusion

Many respondents in this study expressed feelings of being marginalised in their homeland by the bribery and *wasita* (relations to powerful people) associated with accessing education and work opportunities. Corruption in the context of school exams, university entrance exams and scholarships was reported by educated respondents, who said that only those who had power and money could access the better positions, and that this was not based on actual ability. A 19-year old female who studied at an Iranian school to 12th grade and returned to Herat recalls the day when she took a university entrance examination. Although seats for Afghan students in Iran are extremely limited, she still thinks that the situation in Iran is better than that in Afghanistan:

<sup>76</sup> It has been claimed that one Afghan identity emerged during their extended periods of exile and through the experience of external threats to Afghanistan. N. Dupree, 2002, "Cultural Heritage and National Identity in Afghanistan," *The World Quarterly*, 23(5):977–89; P. Centlivres & M. Centlivres-Demont, 1998, "State, National Awareness and Levels of Identity in Afghanistan from Monarchy to Islamic state," *Central Asian Survey*, 19(3/4):419–28.

*On that day, I was very angry. I asked myself, "Why did I even try for the exam? There is no seat for me." Seats are only for those who have money or wasita. I know that whatever we do, our voices won't be heard. We are not allowed to bring our mobile phones into the exam room, but if I could have, I would have taken a photo of that teacher and that girl [who cheated]. [...] I've heard about this in Kabul, but not so much in my area. I won't take exams any more. When we see this kind of thing, we lose interest in studying. What is the point of university? It's better to start working. For example, I knew a female engineering student who did not know how to answer easy maths problems – just multiplying some numbers. This is the future of Afghanistan. What is the point of studying?*

Another male high school student, having been welcomed by his classmates (including other returnees from Iran), lost interest in studying when he observed that being educated had no advantage over having *wasita*. He feels that educated Afghans who do not have strong networks or money rarely find work in their own homeland; he has advised his relatives in Iran not to return to Afghanistan, and he wants to join his relatives in Dubai for work rather than continue studying in Afghanistan. Simply being socially accepted by others is not always enough for full reintegration; other hindrance factors such as disappointment over corruption may push returnees over the tipping point to decide to leave Afghanistan once again.

Given the fact that second-generation Afghan refugees mostly found it difficult to secure satisfactory work during their time as refugees, this apparently – and unexpectedly – unequal situation in their homeland sometimes left them feeling despondent. Clearly, for returned second-generation Afghan refugees looking for employment (especially those unfamiliar with the local environment), their lack of networks in their new environment is a formidable obstacle:

*My brother learnt masonry in Iran and he built our house himself. But in Herat, he says that there is no work for him because it is dominated by groups of construction companies. If you don't know anyone in those groups, you can't find work. It doesn't matter if you're a returned refugee or not, you just need someone who knows you. Skilled people can't find work alone. There are groups of painters, masons, carpenters etc, and in Iran my brother belonged to an Afghan group. The members were all skilled and they were relatives or friends. Some had professional relationships with Iranians, so they could find work.*

A single female with 12th grade education from Tehran, working in offices in Herat as a breadwinner of her household

Familiarity with the work situation and job networks in a new context is a crucial factor in finding employment, even when returnees have had experience of self-employment or other work during exile. The relative of a female teacher in Baghlan returned to Pakistan recently:

*In Pakistan, they collected and sold scrap metal, and wanted to continue the same work in Pul-i-Khumri. But they couldn't make any money because they didn't know how to work here. In Pakistan, they had strong networks with different shopkeepers.*

To be successfully self-employed, some kind of guarantee, connections with a partner and/or capital is needed. In contrast, respondents who were wealthy and had

strong extended family networks did not mention serious concerns about employment.

### Social acceptance by others

In contrast to returnees who felt rejected by those Afghans who had not fled the war, some respondents (twelve males, two females)<sup>77</sup> said that they found social acceptance and a welcoming attitude at a relatively early stage of reintegration among the receiving population – whether or not they themselves felt that they “fitted in”.

One of the key factors for this acceptance was pre-existing social relationships or status markers maintained by returnees, affecting the responses of those who remained towards returnees. If a returnee was in a position of influence (a relative of the headmaster, the son of a district government official) or could bring benefit to others (“*I was a talented student and helped other students with their problems in all subjects,*” said a 20-year-old female student returned from Peshawar to Kabul), they were less likely to face harassment due to being a returnee. Those who had maintained strong ties with their relatives during their time in exile were also more likely to be accepted on return (“*All the villagers are our relatives and they had also been to Iran for either short or long periods,*” said an 18-year-old male shopkeeper with 6th grade education returned from Iran to a Herat village). A socially respectable person, such as a religiously devout man, may be respected without question by his community, even during his exile. Relationships depend on who is in the shared space: who the returnee is (such as not being an obvious target for harassment, or physically not fitting in to the local context) and who those who have remained are (compassionate, patient and understanding towards newcomers, or seeing some benefit to be gleaned from the returnee) in the local context.

#### *Box 1. Social acceptance: support from Afghans who had remained*

A young married woman who had studied until tenth grade first returned to her native village from Mashhad, Iran, six months ago with her husband. Her own family remained in Iran for her younger sibling’s education. She feels different to the villagers in Afghanistan (“they say whatever they want without thinking and laugh too much, and I’m not like them”), but she also feels accepted by them and that they understand her situation:

*I’m still speaking with an Iranian accent, but I don’t feel this is a problem since no-one says there’s anything wrong with my accent. They realise that I was born in Iran. My husband’s family treat me like my own father and mother do, they are very sympathetic. Although there’s no access to facilities like in Iran, I like it here. Mentally I feel comfortable and free here, since it is our homeland. I was also free in Iran, but here I feel more comfortable because I’m not ashamed of being Afghan.*

Regardless of returnees’ social status, crucial external support to returnees may be provided simply through the generous understanding of others, often because many of the receiving population also experienced displacement over a shorter or longer

<sup>77</sup> Not all respondents found themselves either “accepted” or “not accepted” – their experiences are not clear cut in this way, and were sometimes expressed as more vague or neutral feelings.

period. A Pashtun student in Pul-i-Khumri who had returned from a refugee camp in Pakistan and felt socially isolated by his lack of fluency in Dari was able to overcome the difficulties he faced through forming friendships:

*When teachers gave classes in Dari, it was so difficult for me and made me upset. One day I was sitting at the back of the classroom. One of my classmates came and asked me why I was quiet. He spoke in Pashto and said, "I'm like your brother, so whatever problems you have, please ask me and I will help." Now I have made many friends, however I have only two best friends with whom I spend most of my time. My best friends didn't flee anywhere during war. I don't tell my migration history to them as they are good friends and they may get upset about my story. They also don't ask me, as they have relatives in Pakistan and are aware of migration and war stories.*

The positive influence of those in positions of some authority over the receiving communities adds to this external support of returnees, particularly in limited social spaces (such as a school or village). For example, if teachers introduce returnee students positively to their classmates (" *This student is from Pakistan, don't fight or make arguments*"), give equal punishment for misbehaviour and show acceptance of diversity, respondents are more likely to feel, and be, accepted.

### **Learning to cope or leaving: internal fulfilment or social rejection in *watan***

The range of discrimination experienced by second-generation refugees on returning to Afghanistan – on the grounds of being returnees, ethnicity, political ties, religion, access to power, economic status and gender – combines to hinder social reintegration. Among over a quarter of respondents who still have hopes or expectations of leaving Afghanistan in the future, many (two male, seven females) have experienced social exclusion or isolation – not only due to being returnees, but also due to other forms of discrimination and inequality that exist in Afghanistan. It is important to recognise that this significantly affects the psychological reintegration of returnees in their homeland – where they had expected their subordinate status as outsiders to end.

However, the outcome of reintegration is not usually based on a single factor, rather a balance of various factors: material satisfaction, social acceptance and internal fulfilment – none of which can be significantly lacking if return is to be successful. Therefore, while facing ongoing social rejection and disappointment, there are still other factors that can encourage returnees to remain in Afghanistan. Of particular importance is the extent to which they can identify themselves in relation to *watan*. Different levels of identification to and relationship with homeland can produce very different reintegration outcomes.

A 26-year-old female from Iran now settled in Kabul stated that she had job applications refused by offices and organisations and had her Iranian university certificate rejected. She was also concerned about ethnic discrimination and women's status in Afghanistan. With this range of stresses associated with return, she became depressed, stopped going out and lost weight – before deciding to fight back. After some time, she decided to start taking English and computer classes. This was made possible both because of encouragement from her aunt and uncle (external support) and also because of the internal resilience she drew upon in situating herself in relation to *watan* and Iran.

*Physically I'm failed, but mentally I'm a success. It doesn't matter that I can't find work and can't get permission to take an entrance exam for university – I don't regret coming back to Afghanistan. There are lots of problems here but I try to solve them – it will work out. This is life. I'm more relaxed in my homeland than in Iran. [...] I think 80 percent of Iranian culture is positive. Because they know the women rights and respect women. They don't use foreign languages [unlike here in Kabul]. They know how to interact with people in the society, and have established law. [...] but] they are nationalists and that law is only good for their own people.*

In contrast, another woman from Peshawar who has faced pressure from her relatives to change her behaviour still dreams of a future away from Herat. This respondent still had significant attachment to Pakistan. Her family does not talk about Pakistan in front of her, because she argues with them if Pakistan is criticised: *"If you curse Pakistan, I feel like I am cursed."* However, she has gradually become more attached to Afghanistan in the past two years. She has received social support and acceptance among returnees from Iran at a course with whom she can share her problems. She continues to be weighed down by the complexities of her situation and pressure from relatives; she still prefers Pakistan, and ideally wants to raise her children outside Afghanistan – *"I don't know about myself, but others tell me that I'm different."* During conversation, her ideas appeared to be confused. When she was asked if she was an Afghan or a Pakistani, she replied with laughter:

*Yes, now I'm Afghan but in the future I don't know. If my parents have me marry one of my relatives, I'll be a complete Afghan. I'd like to get married to a Pakistani, but which is not possible now. [...] I want to live in Kabul first [where my married sister is living]. If I can't I want to live in Herat. I like Kabul more than Herat, because Herati people are very jealous and always say bad things about others, while Kabulis are not like this. But actually, I wish to have three houses – one in Pakistan, one in Kabul and one in Herat. [...] Now I have to stay, get used to the life in Herat. But still I sometimes remember life in Pakistan – I grew up and studied there. Everyone who is born somewhere likes that place more. If I had not lived in Pakistan, if I was not raised like this – who would I be now?*

These two respondents both were rejected by others due to their obviously different appearance, but the two ended up with different reintegration outcomes – the result of different external encouragement, time, self-resilience and identification with *watan*. The former respondent even now tries to bring her younger sister to Afghanistan although the other family members are not willing to go back. The latter respondent continuously questions herself and her future in Afghanistan because she does not feel that she "fits in".

#### 4.6. From *mohajer* to *hamwatan*: internal self and fulfilment

##### Returnee perceptions of Afghans who remained in Afghanistan

Whether returnees are socially accepted or not does not necessarily mean that they feel they "fit in" within the context. Interestingly, nearly all respondents – regardless of education and gender, extent of material difficulties or level of social acceptance or emotional contentment – expressed a generally negative, stereotypical image of their Afghan counterparts who had grown up in Afghanistan (see figure 6). Because of these contradictions, in which the internal self feels estrangement among others, being socially accepted is not necessarily enough for full reintegration

(including internal fulfilment) – although a more gradual onset of internal satisfaction also occurs for some. In general, respondents saw themselves as more open-minded having experienced new people and cultures – while their compatriots had experienced only war. This religious man who had studied in a Pakistani *madrassa* before returning to Afghanistan said:

*One thing that has filled our people's brains is always to pay attention to war. For example, they say if you make a house it should be up a hill where you can see everything and keep it under your control – so if there is a bird you can shoot the bird easily. They are always thinking of fighting. Those who grew up in Pakistan are more likely to think that you have to build a house where you can easily get to shops and markets nearby.*

Similarly, a 22-year-old male who grew up working in Pakistan and Iran (and continues internal labour migration to Mazar-i-Sharif with his villagers because of the lack of livelihood opportunities in his village in Baghlan) and did not even study at a mosque, compares himself to his villagers:

*Obviously, they [village youth] are different from me. People who grew up in Pakistan are more educated compared to here [like my educated cousin in Pakistan]. I seem brighter and fresh, while they seem faded and weak, although they stayed in their own homeland while we were in exile. They own weapons, and even their small children know how to shoot a gun. They have not seen towns, while I have. [...] I feel like I grew up in the city, while they were in the village. Our accent and way of speaking is different.*

On the other hand, there were not only positive remarks noted by returnees; they also noted some weaknesses. Confusion over self-identity is seen as a weakness by some returnees interviewed, particularly those more educated ones, but also some less educated as well. This 18-year-old female with only 1st grade education from Tehran said:

*I think those who have grown up in Afghanistan are better than me. They have grown up in one country, so have completely Afghan characteristics. But me, I have lived in two countries, and I am now confused between the two. The youth who have returned from Iran are Afghans, but we don't like Afghan food. We know other food, and like that more. But Afghans grew up here – they only know Afghan food and they like it. It's true that we are more open-minded compared to girls here. My relatives [girls] who didn't go to Iran are shy. When guests come to their house, they don't want to speak to them. But me, I'm very open and speak a lot with everyone.*

### **Time, learning and maturing: adaptation of internal self**

Nearly all of this study's respondents differentiated themselves as having grown up in Pakistan or Iran, compared to their compatriots – “other Afghans” – who grew up in Afghanistan during the war. They often applied stereotypical images to these “others”, implying that certain contradictory values existed in Afghanistan. However, respondents' longer-term responses to their fellow Afghans and Afghan values were not all the same.



Afghans who grew up in Afghanistan	Afghans who grew up in Pakistan/Iran
<p>Aggressive, focus on war culture, rude, short-tempered, fighting attitude, use offensive words</p> <p>Uneducated, close-minded</p> <p>Naughty, teasing, ill-mannered</p> <p>Hygiene not attended to, physically dirty</p> <p>Material interests (livestock, embroidery, music, fashion, dress)</p> <p>Jealous, talking about others behind their backs, thinking only of self-benefit</p> <p>Lazy</p> <p>+ Proper/complete Afghan, more aware of Afghanistan</p> <p>+ Tough worker, busy with work (rural life with fewer amenities/facilities)</p> <p>Strict gender codes</p> <p>Non-Islamic, free women, immodest <i>hijab</i></p> <p>+ Better economic status, better educated, knowledge of computers and English</p> <p>Shy, not sociable</p> <p>No knowledge of the world outside Afghanistan</p> <p>+ Hospitable, friendly</p> <p>Low economic status</p>	<p>+ Educated, open-minded, world-wise</p> <p>+ Soft manner, polite, moral, not interfering with others</p> <p>+ Respectful (elders, women, parents)</p> <p>+ Physically clean, knowledge of hygiene, neat and tidy</p> <p>+ Internal interests (study, work, self-improvement)</p> <p>+ Sociable with others</p> <p>Confused identity, dual identity, not fluent in the national language</p> <p>Opium-addicted, wine-drinking</p> <p>+ Knowledge of other languages</p> <p>+ Knowledge of computers and technology</p> <p>+ Economically successful</p> <p>Pampered, spoilt, no life or housework skills</p> <p>+ Islamic, simple, not interested in fashion</p> <p>+ Thinking of public benefit, country</p> <p>+ Financial problems</p>

Figure 6. Returnee perceptions of Afghans who remained in Afghanistan

As well as material and social adaptation over time, the internal self also shows adaptation as time passes. Returnees and those around them become accustomed to each other, and even have some influence on each other. To what extent returnees come to share their identity with other people in that environment, and find that place socially and emotionally comfortable to be in, influences their process of adaptation. Among respondents who felt unfamiliar with the different habits and behaviour of their peers (figure 6), more educated respondents tended to keep some distance from others at the beginning, but in many cases this gradually changed over time. A 25-year-old male returned from Mashhad in a Herat village with 10th grade education, who was running a construction company using skills acquired in Iran and from extended family networks, talked about his early days back in the village:

*People I found living here were very different to me, I didn't want to talk with them. They were so naughty, teasing everyone, and they didn't know the meaning of respect. I was a silent and quiet type compared to them. I couldn't understand them properly, but now I can, as I've learned their habits.*

In addition to gradual adaptation over time which occurs through facing different challenges, gradual adjustments in behaviour through maturation may also influence a returnee's values and support their internal coping mechanisms. A male university student in Herat acknowledged that he had become more flexible than he had been in Iran when faced with new challenges:

*In Tehran, if my favourite dish was not on the table, I used to go out and buy other food. But here, I've seen many people who are very poor, who don't have dinner at all. I really feel pity and sympathy for them. I thought, "How I can ask my parents to make other food for me?" [...] I have to adjust myself to the environment. My family is struggling here, our economic status is not as good as it was before. My father only earns enough for household expenditure, not extra for saving. My patience with problems has improved. In Iran, I tried to solve my problems through friends' connections and money, while here I have to solve them through patience and tolerance. I've also changed some of my social interaction. For example, here I've learnt to address elders as "sahib" [sir], while I didn't use this term much in Iran. I usually observe interactions and try to learn how to treat different people here – like doctors, engineers and labourers – in order to get on with my work smoothly and have good interactions with other people.*

Like the above case, some respondents' values changed and new ones become the norm for them through learning from others in Afghanistan. Time was an important factor in absorbing and accepting what they had not learned about while growing up outside their homeland. A 19-year-old woman working in an office in Herat told of her emotional journey back to *watan*. She did not know of the existence of "other Afghans" while growing up in Iran:

*We came back with UNHCR support. Some passengers in the bus were good [polite, clean, decent], while some others were "kheili Afghani" [very Afghani]. There was one woman with full nail polish, full make-up – but so dirty. Her clothes were untidy and all three children were crying, messy and had runny noses. I told myself – these people are "Afghani". I have to live with these kinds of people. I didn't understand at that time, but now I've learnt that I should not wait for others to adjust to my way of life. I have to adjust myself to fit in with them, whether they are educated or not. Before coming back, I was extremely worried and I did not agree with the decision at*

*all. But now I don't want to go back to Iran. [...] Now I like my country. This feeling is new for me. I hated it before I arrived and when I first got here. When I came back here and learned how people are living, and started working here, I got used to living here. Now I feel that I am an Afghan. In Iran, I couldn't work.*

### Contradictions to internal self: social norms and adjustment

It was common to hear criticism of the “lower” material culture of those Afghans who remained in Afghanistan among educated returnee respondents. Based on their values and judgements constructed in neighbouring countries as they grew up, they were more able to critically evaluate the situation in Afghanistan from an outsider’s perspective. In particular, women who have returned from Iran tend to see many of their female peers in their homeland as un-Islamic, even in Herat where women usually cover themselves with long *chadar namaz* or *burqa* in public, which is not always the case in Kabul city. An NGO worker who returned from Mashhad talks about women wearing *burqas* in Herat:

#### Learning to be Afghan in *watan*

When I returned to my village in Afghanistan, I came to know about Afghanistan and being a real Afghan. I had heard the name “Afghanistan” and I knew that I belonged to it. When I was asked where I’m from, I would say Kabul, but I had only heard of Kabul as somewhere in Afghanistan. I didn’t know about other things there.

An uneducated male shopkeeper, returned from Abbottabad, Pakistan

*I think that girls from Iran are more careful with their hijab, compared to girls who have grown up in Afghanistan. It's true that they wear the burqa, but when they go inside a house or an office, they take off their burqa and wear a very small scarf and short dress. They wear a lot of make-up, and their hair is obvious. Women from Iran are not like this. We keep a tight hijab, and wear simple clothes and no heavy make-up. So our hijab is complete. [...] I'm not saying all of them are like this, but most are.*

A married woman with 12th grade education from an Iranian school who had returned from the outskirts of Tehran says:

*My sister-in-law, who grew up here, is studying at Herat University. She's different and less cultured than me – always following fashion, make-up, and dress. When she goes out for a party, she spends a lot of time decorating herself with lots of gold. She likes to show herself off, but I'm not like her. I want to spend money in other ways – such as learning new skills and improving my knowledge. [...] This is because I grew up in another culture, had interactions with other people, and learnt a different way. People here always try to show off their attractive appearance, because they don't have much knowledge or thinking inside – they try to cover the inside so that others pay attention to them. For me, I can attract attention through my ideas.*

This respondent admitted that the focus on appearance in Afghanistan is a result of social pressure. When she attended a funeral ceremony, the female workers at the ceremony hall treated women differently according to their appearance. She condemned the situation, but physically she had adjusted to it. Her process of adjustment – to assimilate with others in order to be socially accepted in the context – was done through changing her external self as presented to the public in response to pressures and social norms; however, her internal self did not necessarily agree with these Afghan values:

*We have a lot of relatives here and there are many marriage parties. We didn't have this in Iran. Here, I have to show myself to be like my female relatives – wear expensive clothes, heavy make-up and a lot of jewellery like them. I never did this in Iran, but if I don't do it like them now, they will laugh at me, "Oh, you poor woman, your husband doesn't have money to buy a dress for you. Oh, what a poor husband, he doesn't have work!" If I don't follow local expectations, our family honour will be damaged. [...] Now I spend around 500 Afs at the beauty parlour each time there is a party to go to. In Iran, I never paid this much. That's why our country's economy won't improve.*

Many respondents who found striking differences in behaviour in those who had remained in Afghanistan gradually adjusted their own actions to fit in with their environment – this was a process that occurred naturally over time or intentionally due the pressure of social norms. Some changed and adapted their ideas with less stress as time passed, while others adjusted their behaviour externally to be accepted – while holding onto their own internal values, which sometimes created a sense of internal dissatisfaction. This process of readjustment to life in a returnee's "homeland" is about continuous learning, interaction with peers and questioning values – and the outcome of this process becomes the basis of a returnee's longer-term future.

*If you don't want to be disgraced, you should be like the community*

19-year-old female student in Pul-i-Khumri, returned from Iran,

### **Contradictions in *watan*: coping for the sake of *watan***

The stresses and contradictions that respondents felt during the process of adjustment to their homeland, may, if they existed along with other negative factors, have reached a critical tipping point that led some to leave again. This is a critical point: second-generation returnees may be staying in Afghanistan for now, but they may not necessarily be happy nor feel that they "fit in" to the place where they are supposed to stay for the long term – leaving the potential future movement to a place where they may find internal contentment among different types of people. For example, a senior magazine editor, who had not liked Iran, had not faced any serious personal ostracism since returning to Herat in late 2001. However, he nonetheless felt estrangement among Afghan "others", particularly relatives in his family's native village, Jhogri, in Ghazni province. This sentiment is one of the reasons he chose not to return to Ghazni, which he had known about only through stories from his parents and interactions with visitors from there during the family's period of asylum in Iran.

*In Iran, we used to exchange cassette tapes with our relatives in Afghanistan. When my uncle came to Iran and stayed with us for a month, I saw his clothes and heard his Hazaragi accent. It was then that I learnt we belong to Afghanistan. [...] My family used to tell me about Jhogri – snowy mountains, cold weather, delicious food and meat, and partridges. My father explained that it is so cold in winter that when you touch the door it sticks to your hand. My grandmother told stories of their migration, and through these I came to know that I'm Afghan. But I didn't have any particular emotion about Afghanistan since I hadn't been there. I actually didn't want to go because they said that there is no TV in Afghanistan. We were children and liked TV very much.*

Of this respondent's three "homes" – Jhogri, Iran and his new home in Herat – he considered his family's native village least as his true home. His adjustment in order

to settle in *watan* was achieved through keeping some distance from his native place. Being a respected Afghan, and not having refugee status in *watan*, motivated him to stay in Afghanistan – particularly because of his more stressful experience of being insulted as “Afghani” in Iran. He is now living in *watan* but outside of his original homeland in Jhogri:

*[Now] we have contact [with relatives in Jhogri] only for ceremony-based occasions, because our culture and way of thinking is very different from theirs. In Jhogri, they usually have to obey whatever the family elders say. It's a kind of dictatorship environment. In Herat, young people usually state their views, participate in decision-making and take a part in affairs. [...] I feel at home in Herat, because I have had good experiences here – my marriage, my father's work and my own work, and I'm respected in my community. There is no-one to tell me whether I did right or wrong, like we were punished in Iran.*

Although this respondent was not treated as a newcomer or outsider in Herat, he still felt himself to be different from others:

*[In Iran] I thought that all people in Afghanistan were the same. [...] But when I returned to Herat, I saw the ethnic discrimination here. I felt very disappointed, telling myself that these people are so ignorant. [...] I didn't feel very different to them, only in my accent. At first, I wasn't familiar with the local dress and thought that people were wearing a very old style of dress but with new material. When I saw mullahs, I thought they were beggars and wanted to offer money to them – while later I learnt to recognise them. [...] I feel like I've regressed back to childhood. In Iran I was dealing with books and knowledge, while here I don't. If things go on like this, all my knowledge will be gone in five years.*

In contrast to the above married male who found his relatives in Ghazni “backward”, the single male quoted below felt uncomfortable among his classmates and people in Kabul because of their “non-Islamic” behaviour. Both respondents demonstrate discordance with the values of fellow Afghans, albeit in very different ways. This teenage student’s family returned from Kashmir to Kabul in 2006 rather than to their native province of Kunar primarily because of the greater access to urban facilities and the relatively stable security situation in the capital. He was welcomed by kind teachers and classmates, yet he continues to be keenly aware of differences between his values and the lifestyle he had in Kashmir (where he still has many good Pakistani friends) and those in Kabul:

*At school, the boys are so naughty – standing on the desk, sitting on the teacher's chair. In Pakistan, students didn't do that – they respected teachers and books. I don't have close friendships here, because they fight quite a lot and don't understand respect. [...] On Eid days, people here wear clothes like a film star – short coats and jeans. I was so uncomfortable about this, as we are under an Islamic constitution. [...] I feel that I am weaker [mentally and physically] now, I was happy in Pakistan while I'm not here. I was not familiar with things here – Dari language, people, lack of work, poor supplies of electricity and water, polluted air, no places for sightseeing etc. And when I watch TV, I see many absurd and rude things in movies like uncovered bodies – I didn't see these in Kashmir. [...] There is a habit of wine drinking here, going to parties. Women who work in organisations are too free. Afghan women should not control men. Afghan men should not destroy our country. [...] They*

*should respect and never tease women, because everyone has his own mother and sister at home.*

At the same time, this respondent also felt many similarities to his fellow Afghans: *"They are all Muslims, they belong to Afghanistan, and some also speak Pashto."* His desire to be in *watan* was his primary motivation for staying in Afghanistan – although he continues to question personal contradictions faced there:

*Wherever I am, I want to have a peaceful life. Afghanistan is our homeland. If I was abroad, one day the citizens of that country would say, "You don't belong to our country." [... But] the current situation is not so good – I mean the police themselves are involved in corruption and they are wine drinkers, so how they can maintain security for the people? There is no stable security, few basic amenities, and Islamic rules and regulations are not adhered to. [...] When my family visited here, my younger brother saw the situation, and then when he had problems with the Ministry of Education, he was disappointed and said he wouldn't be staying here.*

For this respondent, mental dissatisfaction with his the current situation was overshadowed by his desire to be a member of the nation of Afghanistan – at least for the time being. However, he continuously sees himself as not completely fitting into the environment – as having a "different social self". This opens up the potential for moving back to Pakistan if the situation changes, especially as half of his family is still living there.

A 16-year-old girl living in a village in Baghlan has tried to convince her mother to re-migrate to Pakistan. When this respondent came back to Baghlan, village women said to her, "you are from our country, so you should adapt yourself to our customs and environment", but she resisted and tried to change the dress code in the village. "I hate the traditional trousers, because I feel as if I'm naked." Now some village girls follow her style, and her father sometimes takes her side – but her mother tells her to be similar to other girls.

Not only physical differences are problematic for this respondent; she also senses lifestyle differences with other girls, even after living there for two years. She is not interested in talking about livestock like other girls, nor is she able to get milk from goats. She criticises the impoliteness of others and that village girls are rude to their elders. All of these issues contribute to her feelings of "not fitting in", and the balance of these factors – isolation, decreased mobility, fluctuating meaning of *watan*, along with material reintegration challenges – affect her intentions towards re-migration. Her conflicted identity, as a second-generation Afghan who also has a strong attachment to the place where she grew up, adds to her confusion.

*I'm sad and feel alone here all the time, and more so when my mother gets upset here. This is all sadness and stress for me. My brother lost his opportunity to get a good education and my father got an eye problem here, I have stress and cannot concentrate here. [...] In Pakistan, I used to be a very active girl, but here I only sleep. In Pakistan, all of my days were spent at my relatives' houses with my friends. But here I can't go outside and must just stay at home.*

During the conversation, her opinions appeared to be inconsistent, showing contradictory attachment to her *watan* and Pakistan. She still says, "I'm a Pakistani" – she likes to live there and to be like a Pakistani girl.

*In Pakistan, people asked us "Pakistan isn't your homeland, you're migrants here. When are you going back to your homeland?" Now I think that it's true that I was born and like Pakistan, but I think it's not forever, I can't be there forever [..., but] I would like to raise my children in Pakistan because good meals and good education are available there. Here, children change clothes six times a day they still don't look clean. They're thin and never get fat. There are no good meals here – no fresh vegetables and fruits, and no shop in this village.*

### **Box 2. The impact of war and insecurity on women's mobility**

The mother of the teenage respondent above compared women's mobility in her village in the past to the present. They had lived in urban Abbottabad, Pakistan, where the majority of their neighbours were Urdu-speaking Pakistanis, and her daughter had attended a Pakistani mosque for two years.

*The war has changed all our customs. When I was young in this village, even elder daughters went to mosque to learn the Quran and religious books, but now it's changed. During the war, women became very worried, even the men were concerned for us. We were worried that something bad might happen to women and girls – it would have brought great shame on our family, relatives and the village. Still now, this fear remains – people don't feel safe and secure. If a mullah comes to our village now, I wouldn't send my daughter to learn the Quran because I would be afraid.*

### **Gender and reintegration: Afghan values, internal self and marriage**

Three female respondents from Pakistan, who had not had formal schooling, had almost never talked with the host population during their period of asylum because of their families' ideas and/or language constraints – although not all of them lived in an isolated camp. In two cases their mobility had changed<sup>78</sup> because of marriage, rather than because of returning to different circumstances in Afghanistan. A 30-year-old-woman who grew up in Peshawar then Lahore was first allowed to go to the bazaar when the family moved to Lahore: in Peshawar her family had lived among conservative Pakistani Pashtun neighbours and a large network of relatives. However, after marriage in Lahore, she was made to wear a *burqa* even though Pakistanis mocked her. She has now lived in Kabul for two years, and has never even visited her married sister's house: *"Now after marriage, whether it is Afghanistan, Pakistan or abroad, it doesn't matter for me. My husband doesn't let me go outside."* For her, girls and women in Kabul appear enjoy "freedom" and some rights, which her husband does not allow her to do.

*When I visit only my parent's house, I see school and university girls on the way. I know that these girls will have good life and complete freedom now and in the future also. I think they're really lucky. I pray for them that they won't marry such men [like my husband]. I would love to dress like them, no burqa. When I cross the university street, many women are free, laughing, chatting on the street. I wish I was like that. [...] My first baby, a girl, died after five days of delivery. I was sad at that time, but now happy that she died. Because she*

<sup>78</sup> The life of another female respondent has remained the same before and after marriage. This Tajik woman did not even have interactions with other Afghan neighbours while living in a camp in Pakistan because of language constraints.

*was a girl, and my in-laws, especially my husband, do not give rights to women. So I'm happy that my daughter died. If she was alive, she would have faced a lot of problems like me.*

For these women who lived in an Afghan enclave in Pakistan/Iran<sup>79</sup>, their return to Afghanistan may not have significantly reduced their mobility compared to life in the place of refuge. The above-mentioned woman's uncle-in-law's family returned from Iran, and his young daughters are living in the same compound with her in Kabul. She says that there is no difference between returnees from Iran and Pakistan – her female relatives are the same as her, while their brothers attended Iranian schools. Where she does see and feel differences is between Pakistan and Afghanistan, with her urgent wish currently being material reintegration. However, although she faces material difficulties, the sense of living in her *watan* gives her the strength to face these frustrations:

*Pakistan was much better than Afghanistan because if we paid money for rent, we had our own house. No-one asked us to get out of the house or insulted us like my grandmother-in-law does now. I personally like Pakistan and life there, because every type of facility was there, and there is less problem and stress for women. Only men did hard work and earned money outside, while women ate and stayed at home. Now I'm sick because of stresses and problems that I face in my family [... but] I don't want to go back because Afghanistan is our country, and we're not mohajer here. So I want to live here, but I only wish that my husband would find a job. I want our own house and to live separately [from her grandmother-in-law].*

The change in life after marriage – either negative or positive change – affected respondents regardless of their education level.<sup>80</sup> Particularly for women, being married can have a more powerful effect on their behaviour and mobility than the change in physical context on return to Afghanistan. A woman with 12th grade education who grew up in Islamabad used to wear a short *panjabi* dress – even in Kabul – before marriage. She had recently visited Islamabad to apply for a British visa as her husband was waiting for her to join him there. But there in Pakistan, she did not find the same “home” as where she grew up. Places and personal responses to refugees and returnees are in a constant state of change:

*A Pakistani policeman asked me to show him my passport, which was the first time I had ever been stopped by the police in Pakistan. I didn't have my passport with me as I had applied for a visa extension. The policeman said, “You have to give me 1000 Pakistani rupees because you don't have your passport and a registration card.” I told him that I was just visiting Pakistan so I didn't have a registration card. I wanted to maintain my stand, but my father-in-law told me to pay.[...] The policeman had stopped me because of my dress, which was not like a Pakistani woman: I was wearing a long black hijab.[...] Pakistan was not as enjoyable and interesting for me as it had been when I*

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<sup>79</sup> There were three female respondents returned from Iran who had had limited interactions with Iranians, and dropped out of school at second grade. One woman without schooling had never visited her Iranian neighbours' houses, however some Iranian neighbours had given her tailoring work. Language problems were not mentioned because they shared Dari/Persian as their mother tongue. Purposive sampling for this research would ideally have included a Pashtun woman with little education returned from Iran, however this was not possible due to the constraints mentioned in the Methodology.

<sup>80</sup> For male respondents, being married appears to influence their lives as well, particularly taking on the responsibility of the household and children – which sometimes caused a reduction in time for socialising with friends. A few male respondents noted that their wives were their best friends now.



*was living there. Before, I used to go to school and attend courses, I had many friends. That time, I felt bored.*

As well as changes in marital status, the change in location associated with returning to Afghanistan also has a significant impact on many second-generation Afghan returnee women, especially those who had enjoyed relatively greater mobility in both Pakistan and Iran. This changed status along with gender norms in their homeland sometimes brought deep contradictions among respondents who grew up in different contexts, and became one of the reasons motivating them to go back to neighbouring countries. Some women could gain permission from their families to maintain relatively high mobility in Afghanistan, while for others the situation changed on return – due to pressures related to women’s *purdah* primarily exerted by extended family members. A 20-year-old female who went to an Iranian school until 9th grade was highly assimilated into Iranian society and did not suffer from harassment in the street there (probably due to her physical likeness to Iranians as a Tajik, in contrast to Hazaras). This respondent had a strong desire to return to Iran, as in Tehran she could visit her relatives’ house alone by taking a public bus, which she cannot do in Kabul:

*I really want to go to school here because it’s very close to my house and there is no fee – but I can’t. My grandfather and other relatives [who live in Kabul] told me that I couldn’t go – it’s not our culture that girls go outside, and the situation in Afghanistan is not good. If my father doesn’t listen to others, relatives will call him bi-ghairat (weak). [...] I really want to go back to Iran because it’s my real homeland. We had a good life with amenities, a good job for my father, and my sisters and I went to school and had friends there. I don’t have any close friends here because I am always at home. Security in Iran was good for women so my father let us go outside, and even sometimes we went to parks – we were very happy in Iran. No-one disturbed women walking alone, and even at night women could go outside to do shopping or other chores. Iranian men respected women and didn’t bother them – they are cultured people, and there were policewomen on every street in case of any problem. But if a young girl walks alone in Kabul, all the men will watch her and disturb her. If she goes out late at night, she will be kidnapped and killed – my father tells these kinds of stories all the time.*

Reduced material satisfaction, restricted external social contact, discrimination and harassment of women in public, and this respondent’s longing for her “real homeland – Iran”, all fuel her intentions to re-migrate. Although she accepts her father’s word and does not go outside – adjusting herself outwardly to Afghan values – her internal contradictions mean that she is looking for the chance to join her married brother’s family and single brother in Iran.

*When I first came to Afghanistan, I was very sad and felt that I was a mohajer here, and that my watan is really Iran. Gradually I have got used to living here, and my feeling of being a mohajer is less – no-one calls me “Afghani” or “mohajer” here. But still I’m not happy here and pray to God that we will soon go back to Iran.*

This difference in mobility for women in Afghanistan – issues of security, accepted social norms and available facilities – exemplifies the unfavourable environment for some women in comparison with Pakistan and Iran. If a young woman goes out alone in Afghanistan, people in both urban and rural situations perceive her negatively. A 26-year-old widow living in Iran was sold into a second marriage by her uncle – due

to being divorced by her first husband and having no living parents – and taken to her husband’s village in Herat where she found he already had one wife. She felt very isolated in the village, and bore the brunt of severe ethnic discrimination from her co-wife and neighbours. In Iran, she had earned an income doing tailoring at home. She compares women’s mobility in Iran to her current situation, showing how material constraints coupled with restrictive gender norms could push some women to leave Afghanistan:

*In my neighbourhood here in Herat, there was a widow with three married daughters. A year ago, this woman went back to Iran with two of her daughters, leaving her two sons-in-law, who were addicted to opium and couldn’t earn money. In Iran, at least she and her daughters could wash clothes and earn some money. In this village, people don’t like women to work outside. [...] Iranians are busy with their own affairs and don’t interfere with others. But here, neighbours gossip, talk behind each other’s backs and interfere in the affairs of others. [...] I was doing tailoring at home in Iran, but I can’t do it here. It’s shameful for women to earn money in our neighbourhood – that is the tradition. Last year, a group of people from Department of Health came to our area – they needed some women to train in the distribution of medicine for tuberculosis to villagers. My husband allowed me to do the training but others scorned me. So I quit the training.*

Another example shows how adjusting to the restricted mobility can in some way save a woman’s self autonomy, rather than choosing to give up her identity to compromise with Afghan values. This 11th grade female student from Iran had a different response to the social pressure to change her style of dress: she chose not to, and in doing so chose a life constrained to the limited sphere of home and school.<sup>81</sup> Having lived in Herat for a year before moving to her current location in Pul-i-Khumri, she now wishes to live in Herat again in the future – where she felt comfortable because to its cultural similarity to Iran:

*When my relative asked me to go to the bazaar in Pul-i-Khumri, my cousin told me to wear a burqa because otherwise boys would tease me. The first time I went without a burqa because I wanted to see if this was true. Boys did say rude words to me and shopkeepers stared at me. [...] The second time, I wore a burqa because my cousin forced me to – otherwise he wouldn’t have let me go. [...] Wearing that burqa, I couldn’t see properly and was disappointed not to able to choose what I needed easily. I want freedom and independence under an Islamic constitution. Wearing a burqa is like being a caged bird. [...] Now I don’t go to the bazaar. When I need something, I ask my brother to go instead. My mother goes to the bazaar with a burqa. [...] If a girl wears a burqa for one year and decides not to later, she will be teased. So I will never wear it.*

**A question of Afghan values**

If people backstab about me, I don’t care. There’s a proverb that says, “If you don’t want to be shamed, be like everyone else”. But if you throw yourself in the well, should I also follow you?!

21-year-old male student in Herat, returned from Tehran

<sup>81</sup> The mobility of girls and women – either when living in neighbouring countries or in Afghanistan – is often restricted to limited spaces where it is considered respectful, honourable and safe for Afghan girls and women to be. For example, a female may be allowed to work as a teacher, but she may not be allowed to go to places considered “non-honourable” (for example, taking a job as an assistant in a clinic or visiting neighbour’s house).

Finally, there may be a complete denial of Afghan values and a correspondingly strong determination to re-migrate. For the following uneducated woman, who suffered severe gender discrimination within her own family network leading to strong feelings of hatred for her own mother and brothers, Iran was perceived as a "safe haven". She had fled from two forced marriages and an attempt at a third, and did not even know her native province in Afghanistan. Through these experiences while in asylum she had formed intense feelings of hatred towards Afghans and Afghanistan, believing instead that Iranian men generally behaved respectfully towards women. While living together with other vulnerable women supported by a social organisation, she felt depressed and isolated and wished to go back to Iran to open her tailoring shop, because "*Afghanistan doesn't care for me*":

*Afghanistan has bad people. I would prefer to live in an Iranian jail than here. I have lost myself – I don't know whether I'm Afghan or Iranian. I feel like I had fallen in waste water, and can't breathe. It's true that I don't have good memories of Iran because of my family and relatives – that is because I am afraid of living with them and don't want to see them again. But I don't want to stay in Afghanistan either. There is injustice against women here. Afghan men are not merciful. There is no law – it is marred by abuse of power and bribery. Those who have power and money can make decisions and order others around. [...] Afghans will never change – they have been like this for a long time. [...] Sometimes I was thinking if I was an Iranian, if I had good parents, my life would have been better now. If I could make decision of my marriage and life, my fortune would not have been like this. [...] My brothers and relatives hit me a lot on the head, so now I can't lean well. I think all of this was because we are Afghans – my parents, my brothers, my husbands, my relatives. Afghans are uneducated, while Iranians are educated. [...] When I was in Iran, I suffered a lot at the hands of my family and relatives, not from Iranians.*

For second-generation returnees, adjustment is often fed by a sense of obligation to do so – regardless of their personal ideas which they learnt and adopted growing up in neighbouring countries. Through this adjustment process, although compromising with those Afghan social norms in their *watan*, they faced internal tensions. Respondents spoke of their values conflicting with those they found in Afghanistan, despite being physically adjusted and resettled. The kinds of modifications made by returnees in their quest to be "Afghan" in their homeland included: adopting different styles of dress, living with limited amenities, having limited social interactions according to expected gender-related norms, learning to understand a different language and accent, and taking on new types of behaviour to blend into their new context.

In general, women reported more profound emotional difficulties on return to Afghanistan because of social norms and expectations of their behaviour. The new situations they faced were often very different to those experienced in Pakistan and Iran, particularly in relation to their relatively higher mobility there – except for those who had lived in an Afghan enclave and some of those whose mobility changed after being married. The same behaviours may be perceived as too "free" as a woman in Afghanistan, where the reputation of the family is dependent on the behaviour of their women as "honourable" and "Afghan". In a changing society, women are expected to transfer knowledge of their culture to the next generation, so

appearance and attitudes which are perceived as “foreign” are often used as evidence of women having “abandoned their culture”.<sup>82</sup>

Return to homeland for second-generation refugees means that they are expected to become honourable members of their communities according to the local context and expectations – which may contradict their understandings and behaviours formed while refugees in asylum. Among peers who understand the context in which returnees were living, there is more opportunity to express those values formed in the location of asylum, providing a valuable outlet for release of some of the tension experienced around fitting in.

#### 4.7. Outcomes of reintegration

Table 5 shows the future intentions of the 48 second-generation Afghan refugees in this study who had returned to Kabul, Herat and Baghlan provinces. As already described, there is no clear-cut pattern to their emotional responses during the reintegration process. Even among those who share the desire to stay in their current place, there is great variation in the detail of that emotion – some have struggled enormously just to manage to live in their current place so far, and advise their relatives in exile never to come back to Afghanistan, while some others are highly satisfied with their current situations. Furthermore, not all respondents are fixed about their ideas and future intentions. Even while being interviewed, some of their opinions and ideas appeared to be contradictory – showing their internal struggles and confusion. This study is based on data collected during just a few interviews over a short time: it is based on respondents’ ideas and social environment at the time of the research – a snapshot of their feelings at that time, in that place. It is difficult to classify respondents in terms of their future intentions, however, it can be said that nearly half of the respondents intend, at present, to remain in their current places.

<i>Intention to stay in Afghanistan</i>		<i>Intention to leave Afghanistan</i>		
Remain in current place	Urbanise, move to another city	Labour migration <sup>83</sup>	Pakistan/Iran (or elsewhere in Afghanistan)	Transnational marriage
26 (15 M, 11F)	8 (3 M, 5 F)	4 (4 M)	9 (2 M, 7 F7)	1 (1 F)

*Table 5. Return intentions of respondents*

For the eight respondents who have expectations of living in urban areas, the primary reason for this is to have access to facilities, services and employment. Three male respondents who were living in urban areas had left their villages in order to pursue further education. This is one of the primary reasons that rural respondents (both educated and uneducated) gave for preferring to settle in cities – to have access to education for their children beyond primary school.

<sup>82</sup> Among second-generation Indian-American immigrants, daughters are expected to learn Indian classical dance, and dating is limited by their parents with night curfews, while sons do not face the same expectations and limitations. A. Rayaprol, 2005, “Being American, Learning to be Indian: Gender and Generation in the Context of Transnational Migration”, in M. Thapan (ed), *Women and Migration in Asia, Volume 1*, New Delhi/Thousand Oaks/London: Sage.

<sup>83</sup> The four cases of male labour migration only are drawn from the 24 male and 24 female respondents; this does not include male family members of respondents who are currently working abroad.

Over one quarter of respondents (six males, eight females) still have hopes or expectations of leaving Afghanistan in the future, with large contextual differences across the cases in the reasons why and the places they wish to settle. However, second-generation women are more likely to face emotional reintegration struggles due to contradictions between Afghan values and expectations in Afghanistan, and their personal understandings and values.

Some respondents changed their perceptions during reintegration, compared to what they had thought before return. Some respondents who resisted returning to Afghanistan then found a satisfactory life there, primarily because of finding a solution for their own particular problems or finding a path of self development. In contrast, three of those who were willing to return to Afghanistan now think of leaving, mainly because of disappointment related to corruption, isolation and limited work opportunities.

In this last section, different reintegration outcomes of siblings will be described, to illustrate how a female respondent found satisfaction in Afghanistan, while her brother chose to leave again for Iran. These examples highlight the individualized nature of reintegration success and some of the factors that can help to make reintegration more successful.

### ***Watan* as a place for self-improvement**

A 17-year-old married teacher returned from Iran and spent a year in her native village in Hazarajat before settling with her family in Herat. When she first arrived in the village, she could not eat the local food or communicate with the villagers, and wanted to go back to Iran. While her maternal uncle encouraged her to teach at an informal school, she didn't want to do this because of her difficulties understanding the local dialect. However, her uncle insisted that she do this so she would learn the dialect through interacting with the students. Encouragement from a liberal relative, even in the face of initial community resistance, gave her the initial way to go forward:

*At first, the villagers objected to a woman teaching at a madrassa. But gradually they saw that I was practising good discipline among the students – checking children's nails and making sure their hair was combed. I let a student read the Holy Quran before starting lessons, and taught them using the methods I learnt in Iran. [... Later] the community elders were happy and encouraged us to stay in the village so that I could continue teaching – because there were no other female teachers in the madrassa.*

Through interacting with the villagers, she gradually became involved in community activities. Along with other returnee women, she started teaching village women about the role of women in Islam:

*We taught women for one month, and after that those women went to other villages and spread their knowledge to others. I had a good relationship with the elders in the village. They invited me to attend ceremonies and consulted with me on various matters. So I gradually stopped thinking about Iran and wanting to go back there. I realised that if I wanted to improve myself, I could do it here.*

She became more active over time, and even participated in a local election campaign. Despite initial resistance from the community, she gradually experienced social reintegration as she was accepted by others. Then, because of fighting in the

community, her family left and resettled in Herat. Of the three different homes she has known (Iran, Hazarajat and Herat), she prefers the remote village in Hazarajat:

*My village is best for me. I was different from the local people there – more educated. My family didn't have much livestock to take care of, so we didn't have as much housework as others. I didn't work on the farm, only my father did. Other village girls used to work on farms, while I was busy with teaching and the women's group. When I came back at night, I cooked dinner. I was very busy there. I liked that village more because I learnt how to get the most out of the few resources and facilities that we had. I could also participate in political activities through the election process. I was very active, and I was listened to by others. When we left, I was very upset. I had come to understand that I needed different types of people around me in order to improve myself. Different opinions made me a better person. Although life in Afghanistan is tough, I never think of going back to Iran. In Iran, I would only ever be just an Afghan girl.*

She found herself useful to others, capitalising on the best of her experiences. She thinks that her internal reintegration can best be achieved in a place where she finds herself meaningful in relation to others. Understanding this, she felt she best contributed in the village, where the villagers also benefited from her experiences. On the other hand, her educated brother, who also studied in the same Iranian school, left for Iran seven months ago and now is working in a shop there. While the female respondent had adapted herself through gradually interacting with villagers, he had become more isolated:

*My brother couldn't adapt himself in these circumstances. No-one understood him. He didn't have any friends here in Herat either. He just had a friend, my father's maternal cousin; everyone told this cousin, "this boy works illegally". But this boy and my brother were very close, regardless of what people said. When my brother attended an English course last winter in Herat, he found a new friend, and shared all his stories with him. This friend told my brother they should go to Iran together, and that he would pay the money for smugglers and my brother could work there with him and return the money. After that, my brother spoke with my mother, and finally my mother finally agreed. But he didn't share his decision with my father. If he told to my father, he wouldn't have been allowed to go. At that time, my father was working as a daily worker and came back home once a week at the weekend. In the end, my brother left for Iran with his friend.*

The differences which divided these siblings, who both had the same quality education in Iran, were the degree of each one's social and internal reintegration within their contexts. The brother remained in isolation, even from family ties, and sought a safe place with a new friend who took him out of Afghanistan by illegal means. In contrast to his sister, who overcame her initial hesitation to teach at an informal school, the brother continued to not interact with others, and his abilities were not utilized; instead he became de-motivated. Although personality and individual resilience are important in this comparison between sister and brother, the isolation and failure of psychosocial adjustment are also critical points to note. These could be potentially mitigated through external relationships and support, including the opportunity to participate among others and share internal struggles and experiences.

## 5. Conclusion

The aim of this case study was to understand the complex process of reintegration for second-generation Afghan refugees recently returned to Afghanistan, and to illustrate the struggles that exist among these Afghan youth and young adults who have spent most of their lives in Pakistan and Iran. The vast majority of Afghans in neighbouring countries are second-generation refugees. They have grown up in a very different environment to that of their parents and they have had a greater range of opportunities in exile compared to those of their generation who remained in Afghanistan during the prolonged years of war.

Second-generation Afghan refugees returning to their homeland from neighbouring countries can be seen as crucial assets for rebuilding communities from the grass-roots level, in particular in rural areas. Regardless of education level, respondents in this study reported that they had acquired different skills, knowledge and new ideas while living outside Afghanistan. Many of them were keenly aware of the significance of living in one's own home country because of having lived in other countries as refugees who did not belong to the mainstream population. *Watan* – one's own territory, one's ancestors' place of origin, where all are Afghans, where one can feel a sense of psychological freedom, and where one's legal rights should be assured as honourable citizens of the nation – was of crucial importance to many of them.

With their range of experiences and ideas, and if their inner strength and commitment to live in and contribute to their *watan* can be fostered, this significant group of young people – second-generation returnees and those still remaining in neighbouring countries – could be called upon to play an important role in the reconstruction of Afghanistan, at individual, family and community levels, as well as at the broader national level.

However, return to Afghanistan for second-generation Afghan refugees does not necessarily mean "return", as the majority have grown up without ever actually having experienced life in Afghanistan. Many also have a profound attachment to the neighbouring country in which they grew up – the place they know the best. In this way, for some of the respondents in this study who were highly assimilated into their host societies, Pakistan or Iran is their "real homeland". The decision by second-generation Afghan refugees in Pakistan and Iran to return to "home" is made amid a complex set of push and pull factors, which entail significant psychological stresses and emotional struggles.

The reintegration process among second-generation Afghans is complex: it involves continuous learning and renegotiation of values and the meaning of homeland, both of which were originally formed in exile. There is no doubt that the basic material needs for survival must first be secured, but the degree of social acceptance by fellow Afghans and Afghan society (and the extent to which they face discrimination and unequal situations) as well as internal fulfilment (whether the returnee feels at ease and that they "fit in" with their new environment) can be similarly crucial, particularly if return is to lead to long-term settlement.

The future outlook and intentions of this study's respondents, which are influenced by their individual backgrounds, experiences, ideas and conditions during exile and actual return, are further affected by how they travel along the path of material, social and internal reintegration. These reintegration factors are interdependent, and a balance of all three – with none extremely lacking – is crucial for sustainable reintegration in the long term, particularly for respondents who are uniquely able to

evaluate the situation in Afghanistan with some degree of objectivity. How individuals think about and find their own meaning in *watan* has immense influence on all three of these aspects of the reintegration process. Many of this study's respondents were able to cope with the various challenges they faced largely because of the sense of freedom they felt in *watan*, compared to their sense of being subordinate refugees in Pakistan or Iran. That sense of freedom can be so great that it outweighs other frustrations and challenges. External support, such as acceptance, understanding and encouragement from others, along with appropriate material support to cover basic needs, also profoundly affects the outcomes of reintegration.

In general, for less educated and lower income respondents, the primary struggle was against physical insecurity in their quest to simply survive materially. Educated respondents tended to face greater social and emotional contradictions, rather than material challenges, during the reintegration process. Women showed greater emotional stress associated with meeting the social expectations of being "honourable Afghan women" in their new-found communities and local contexts, which in many cases conflicted with their personal values and behaviours formed while in exile. Despite this, living in their homeland gave many respondents, including those who were economically vulnerable, the strength to cope with stresses and difficulties – unless the balance tipped dramatically to sheer survival or emotional distress.

Over a quarter of respondents still held the hope or expectation of leaving Afghanistan in the future, for a range of reasons. Dominant themes among those thinking of leaving included the lack of material resources pushing them to the point of a state of economic crisis and, in other cases, the feeling of social exclusion and internal dissatisfaction simply overwhelming the desire to live in *watan*. Despite deportation threats from neighbouring countries, those who had no alternative means of earning a livelihood had no choice but to continue to migrate seeking labour. To secure livelihoods within Afghanistan, capital and social networks are clearly key factors. Many educated respondents had concerns about the roles of *wasita* and corruption, particularly in access to education and work, leading to disappointment and sometimes the desire to leave their homeland again.

Although few women have much power over the household's decision-making about return, it must be recognised that women do have the potential to pass on their negative perceptions of homeland to the next generation and to other relatives still in exile. Some of them also have the potential to escape to other countries for transnational marriages. Although many respondents in this study currently saw their future in Afghanistan, some of them who were not happy in their current situations said they had advised their relatives in neighbouring countries not to return to Afghanistan. The internal fulfilment and psychosocial wellbeing of *all* second-generation returnees cannot be neglected as playing a role in the broader picture of refugees' decision-making and reintegration.

Conflicting and contradictory attitudes towards Afghanistan and neighbouring countries are often voiced by returnees – regardless of gender, future outlook (the intention to stay in or leave Afghanistan) and attitude to the host society (highly assimilated into, or rejecting of, the host society). This shows that their "multiple identities" are under continuous renegotiation, and individuals are open to be influenced or motivated to stay or move to another place, particularly among second-generation Afghans who still have links to a place outside their own homeland – one that, as the second generation of Afghan refugees, they may well know better than *watan*.



## 6. Recommendations

### Returnees as human capital for Afghanistan

- Second-generation Afghan returnees and those remaining in neighbouring countries can be seen as important assets for Afghanistan. The State, supported by the international community and facilitating partners, needs to develop ways of productively absorbing and effectively utilising this human capital for rebuilding the nation in both rural and urban areas. This could be begun by employing returnees as teachers, literacy trainers, health workers and in other positions in community organisations where their previous exposure to new ideas while in refuge may have a positive effect on local communities.
- Those second-generation Afghan returnees who are highly educated and skilled – who understand not only Afghan values but also those of other countries – should be assisted in taking up key, long-term roles in the State, particularly if their motivations to serve their own country can be built upon and developed. This could be achieved through affirmative action recruitment systems which support more socially isolated returnees who may not have the social connections to obtain such positions.
- The idea of “homeland” should be encapsulated in communication strategies that motivate young Afghans, particularly those in Pakistan who tend to have a more positive view of *watan*, to return home.

### Understanding vulnerability: providing emotional security

- The availability of emotional support for second-generation refugees returning to Afghanistan is a significant factor in the success or failure of their reintegration. State and international actors should fund programmes which educate Afghan service providers and others at different levels (family, community, school and national levels) about the importance of showing young returnees understanding, acceptance, patience and encouragement as they adjust to different values and behaviours and adapt to being “home”. These activities could target a broader audience than just returnees, as part of raising awareness of non-discriminatory policies more generally and promoting solidarity among all Afghans, with particular focus on adolescents whose sense of belonging to others is of such emotional importance.
- It is important to reduce the risk of isolation and loneliness among second-generation refugees returning to Afghanistan, particular for those who have fewer existing networks there. This could be achieved by supporting NGOs in the formation of community groups, such as youth *jirgas*, through which young female and male returnees can meet, share experiences and have opportunities for self-development through serving their community. This would also involve engendering support for these groups among family members to ensure that girls and women are allowed to participate.
- The process of returning “home” for many second-generation Afghan refugees is often accompanied by significant emotional stress (particularly among females), significantly threatening successful return. International actors and the State should establish and fund more psychosocial support programmes,

including professional training programmes at universities for Afghans to be able to provide these services.

- Information campaigns should be developed that advocate for social acceptance and non-discriminatory treatment (including returnees as focus issue) particularly in the public sphere such as in schools. These campaigns should target adolescents, who are easily influenced by others and whose emotional security and identification with their own country could play a key role in the development and stability of Afghanistan. Those in positions of community influence (such as teachers, headmasters and mullahs) would benefit from education programmes that promote the equal treatment of all people. Community-based mechanisms to regulate discrimination against returnees could be developed.

### **Understanding vulnerability: providing material security**

- The transparency of processes for obtaining work should be improved in order to reduce the difficulties faced by those who are unfamiliar with Afghanistan or who have returned to places away from their relatives and social networks. The outreach of existing employment service centres should be extended to districts and rural areas, and postings provided in local languages and for a wider range of positions (unskilled, semi-skilled and skilled). Incentives should be provided for employers to post positions at newly established centres.
- Second-generation Afghan refugees of lower socio-economic status and without strong connections who have returned to rural and urban areas should be specified among the key beneficiaries of programmes providing material support to those in need, including the provision of labour-intensive work (such as water and sanitation programmes), skills training matching market needs (such as the National Skills Development Programme), priority access to housing and land allocation, and micro-credit and business development services (such as the Microfinance Investment Support Facility for Afghanistan and the National Area-Based Development Programme). In some cases, programme requirements may need to be adjusted to ensure that returnees qualify, such as for loans through microfinance institutions.
- Property ownership is one of the key “pull” factors drawing refugees back to Afghanistan, even for second-generation Afghans who have less physical connection with their country prior to return. Although it is challenging, prompt land allocation to qualifying returnees, along with the provision of access to health, education, transportation and livelihoods in newly developing townships, must be ensured. To learn from similar challenges faced and overcome in other relevant contexts, international agencies should fund a review of best practice in land allocation schemes undertaken in other countries to inform the planning stage of similar activities in Afghanistan.
- Survival crises for vulnerable female returnees can heavily influence their intentions to re-migrate to a place where they can earn some income for themselves. The Ministry of Women’s Affairs, along with the Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs, Martyrs and the Disabled, and NGOs, should improve on existing efforts to provide more market-oriented, culturally sensitive livelihood opportunities for economically vulnerable women in rural and urban areas, particularly returnee women who previously had the opportunity to do

productive work in neighbouring countries and learnt new, marketable skills there.

### **Understanding vulnerability: providing physical security**

- Fears over deteriorating security, particularly in the southern parts of the country, are pervasive among Afghan returnees and refugees considering returning. Concerns about smaller crimes (such as robbery and theft) and uneasiness that police cannot be relied upon because of corruption were also commonly heard among respondents to this study. These frustrations among second-generation Afghans who have returned to their country and who feel marginalized there – especially in contrast to their belief that their legal rights should be ensured in their own homeland – cannot be neglected. Dissatisfaction with the situation in Afghanistan among returnees also influences the return perceptions of their relatives remaining in neighbouring countries. In order to improve police performance and their public image, the Ministry of Interior Affairs and the international community need to increase the pace of ongoing police reform and enforce the consequences of corrupt behaviour.
- Along with the prevailing social norms of Afghanistan, the lack of appropriate facilities such as reliable, secure public transportation for women and fears of kidnapping, harassment and teasing significantly reduce women’s mobility, which is major frustration voiced by many female young returnees. Returnee women, particularly from Iran, said that stronger State social control, such as the presence of policewomen in Iran, helped to reduce harassment against women in public. The Ministry of Interior Affairs and the international community need to strengthen the commitment to recruit female police officers and increase provision of effective and relevant gender training for all police officers.

### **Understanding a crucial concern: education**

- One major reason for second-generation Afghan refugees not wanting to return is where this would result in the discontinuation of their education. The fear of losing the opportunity for quality education must be addressed, through continuing to improve access to quality education in Afghanistan, particularly beyond the primary level in rural areas. Major reasons among some of the respondents in this study (including those who were less educated) wanting to move to urban areas included better access to facilities and opportunities for educating their children beyond the primary level.
- Access to quality, post-primary education for rural residents could be facilitated in the short term by supporting secure transportation and dormitory facilities. This would help to keep young Afghans in Afghanistan, while lessening the need for rural-to-urban migration.
- Opportunities for higher education, which are not readily available to Afghans in neighbouring countries, are strong “pull” factors in bringing refugees back to Afghanistan. The Afghan Government should ensure that there are equal, corruption-free opportunities for higher education in Afghanistan, invest in scholarships for returnees, and improve the governance of the systems in place to allocate university places, reducing the perception and reality of corruption in university admissions.

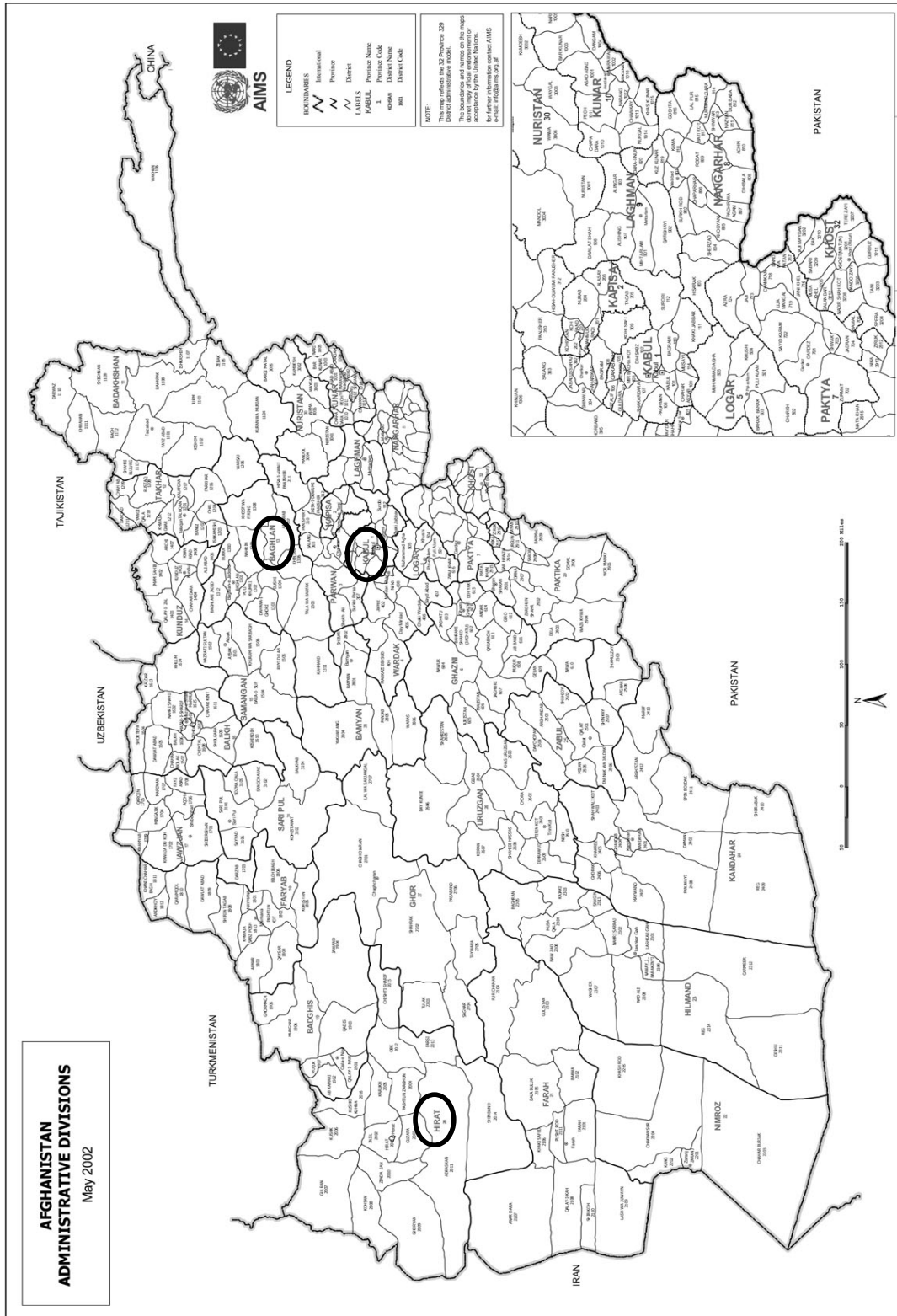
- There should be clearer and more accessible procedures for the approval and acceptance of certification from schools and universities in Pakistan and Iran. There is currently a lack of standardised, accessible information about how to do this, and there are many reports of procedures being affected by bribery, which contributes to returnees' negative perceptions of their homeland in relation to the pervasiveness of corruption.
- Islamic education from *madrassas* has a strong influence on young Afghans, both among Afghan refugees in neighbouring countries and those in Afghanistan. Many of the respondents in this study who did not have formal schooling in Pakistan received some Islamic education, including girls whose family regarded formal schooling as unacceptable for them. One of the "pull" factors towards Pakistan is the availability of quality religious education, including for females, so improving Islamic education in Afghanistan could become a pull factor for return. *Madrassa* reform, led by the Ministry of Education's Islamic Education Department, needs strong support from the international community. This includes the commitment to establish at least one higher secondary *madrassa* with a dormitory in all 34 provinces, with appropriate financial provisions for materials and development and implementation of a new curriculum. Recruitment of quality instructors is crucial in order to ensure outreach of Islamic learning in rural areas. The Ministry of Education's initiative of certificate approval of cross-border *madrassa* education by examination needs to be better communicated to those young refugees remaining in neighbouring countries.

### Ensuring voluntary return

- The risks associated with "voluntary return" can be reduced through improving opportunities for realistic resettlement planning for those remaining in neighbouring countries, particularly for those with fewer social networks and other assets to support themselves after return. This could include providing accurate information through trusted sources on support systems available to returnees in Afghanistan (such as land allocation, employment services and the National Skills Development Programme) and on recent returnees' experiences in Afghanistan. Radio and other media could be used effectively to convey this information. In Iran, realistic resettlement planning could be supported by ensuring that the recently established permission for reconnaissance visits (without needing to surrender legal refugee identification documents) is maintained and enforced at the border with Afghanistan.
- The staged return of households is a common strategy used by Afghan families in the short term to mitigate the risks of reintegration. Single return particularly among second-generation Afghans, including females, is another household strategy used. Neighbouring countries, supported by international agencies, need to support these strategies by providing re-entry visas to those who go back to Afghanistan on planning visits, while maintaining support to vulnerable households remaining in the host country – both of which would help to facilitate the full household's return in the medium term.
- A focus on managing rather than limiting or prohibiting labour migration is necessary to support the successful return of Afghan households. Efforts to

reduce labour migration by creating difficulties in accessing formal passports and visas and by deporting undocumented Afghans simply end up driving people into illegal migration. The tripartite dialogue process (between the UNHCR, the Government of Afghanistan and the host country – Pakistan or Iran) needs to continue to develop agreements that facilitate cross-border labour migration, recognising that all three countries both send and receive workers.

# Annex I: Map



## Annex II: Location Descriptions

The table below is a generalised overview and comparison of the rural research sites in which respondents were identified in Herat and Baghlan provinces. It highlights the different approaches used to select the initial entry point for identifying respondents. The description of Herat relates to the district centre, where the team began identifying potential respondents (later, the team moved to several periphery villages to search for the ideal respondent). Respondents in the Herat rural areas included both those from the district centre and those from other villages (30–60 minutes drive by a car), where access to facilities and education was more limited (either primary-level schools only, or none at all). In Baghlan, the two villages from which respondents were selected had slightly different characteristics, but their common traits are summarized in contrast to the Herat site.

	Kushk-i-Robat Sangi district centre, Herat	Two villages in Dushi district, Baghlan
<b>Geography</b>	Paved main road from Herat city through Kushk-i-Robat Sangi district to Turkmenistan border Around 150 small villages in the district	Sub-villages across the valley No paved road Approximately 30 minutes drive by car from the main paved road to outlying villages
<b>Services and facilities</b>	Small bazaar in the district's central village with small shops (restaurant, PCO, grocery shop) Informal public transportation available on main road	No bazaar, no grocery shop One respondent sells stationery to children for school Villagers walk or use a donkey to get to the main road
<b>Migration</b>	Mass migration in the early 1980s due to the presence of Soviet forces; most went to Iran, some to other provinces	Migration since late 1970s to Pakistan; mass migration of entire valley (a frontline between <i>mujahiddin</i> and Soviet forces) during 1980s
<b>Returnees</b>	Many villagers returned during the 1990s due to relative stable security in the area; comparatively fewer returned after 2001	Gradual return started after 1992 when <i>mujahiddin</i> government was established in Kabul; many have also returned in recent years
<b>Tribe/ethnicity</b>	Mix of Tajik and Pashtun	Ethnically Tajik, Dari speaking (recognise themselves as one tribe)
<b>Main livelihoods</b>	Agriculture Animal husbandry (many lost animals during the drought) Labour migration to Herat city (return to village on weekend) and Iran	Agriculture: majority rain-fed land (barley, wheat, etc); seasonal collecting bushes from hillside and selling to a market outside the village Loss of <i>gilim</i> -weaving opportunities compared to before the war, resulting from destruction of pasture land during war and limited livestock/wool production. Pistachio trees also destroyed. Labour migration
<b>Reason for selection as research site</b>	Geographically distant from urban centre, poorer (limited water for agriculture, mountainous, snow in winter) Presence of a school with elder girls enrolled (9th grade)	Compared to Herat villages, more remote (further from the main paved road) Limited girls' education
<b>Education</b>	Males studying to 12th grade, females to 9th grade (in the district) centre Female teacher	Males studying to 8th grade, females to primary level No female teacher

## Annex III: Socioeconomic Classification of Respondents

	“Poor”	“Below Average”	“Average”	“Above Average”	“Rich”
	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4	Level 5
<i>Number of respondents</i>	9	12	10	7	10
<i>Source of livelihood</i>	Unskilled labour Self-employed Government employee Agricultural work, husbandry	Government employee Shop employee Daily wage labourer Agricultural work, husbandry Labour migration (4 to Iran)	Tailor Cook Government employee Farmer (not the only income source) Self-employed Labour migration (5 to the Gulf or Iran) Labour migration (1 urban/rural)	NGO Private sector Self-employed Business Remittance Remittance from the West (1) Labour migration (2 to the Gulf or Iran) Running a shop (several males in the family work) Labour migration (1 urban/rural)	NGO Private sector Business Remittance from the West (1) Labour migration (1) Business Relatives in the West/Russia (6)
<i>House rent</i>	n/a No rent – living with relative or on charity or in makeshift accommodation (4)	500–800 Afs per month No rent – living with relative or on charity (4)	Around 2,000 Afs per month No rent – living with relative (1)	n/a No rent – living with relative (1)	Over 5,000 Afs per month
<i>Property in Afghanistan</i>	Own house in village (4) Self-constructed house in IDP camp (1) Landless (6)	Own house (5); includes respondent who bought a house for US\$100–200 (2) Landless (4)	Own house (7)	Own house (4)	Own house (7)
<i>Key asset</i>	n/a	n/a	Own private car (1)	Own private car (1)	Own private car (8)
<i>Estimated monthly income</i>	Less than 5,000 Afs	Around 5,000 Afs	Around 10,000 Afs	Over 10,000 Afs	US\$ 500–1,000+
<i>Education</i>	Parents with no formal education No formal education (6)				10th grade and above (8)



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