



Comments on the use of Asylos's report, ["Afghanistan: Situation of young male 'Westernised' returnees to Kabul"](#), in the Home Office Country Policy and Information Note (CPIN) ["Afghanistan: Afghans perceived as 'Westernised'"](#).

Whilst Asylos welcomes the Home Office's use of our research to inform its refugee status determination processes, it is our assessment that in this case the information which has been selected from the Asylos report, the manner in which it has been summarised, and the conclusions drawn based on this analysis, do not accurately reflect the findings contained within the report as a whole.

For this reason, we would like to make the following comments

Discrimination and Stigma

Section 2.3 'Assessment of risk' of the Home Office CPIN states

"2.3.8 Some Afghans who return from Western states may face discrimination and social stigma. However, this appears to have been due to being perceived to have 'failed' by being returned, rather than being 'Westernised'. Notwithstanding this, such treatment is unlikely, by its nature and/or repetition, to amount to persecution or serious harm (see Societal views of returnees, and social norms and Discrimination and stigma).

2.3.9 There is little, if any, evidence that 'discrimination and stigma' reportedly faced by returnees results from the person having become 'Westernised'; but in most cases it is due to feelings of shame and failure of having sought and failed to gain asylum and therefore failed to meet their family and community's expectation of their migration (see Discrimination and stigma)."

The information which the CPIN bases this assessment on is listed at section 5.4 'Discrimination and stigma' and cites the Asylos report in the following places

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“5.4.4 The Asylos report cited an article by academics Liza Schuster and Nassim Majidi, dated October 2014, which explored the stigma of failure and contamination’ reportedly attached to those who had been deported. The cited article noted that young people deported to Afghanistan and with signs of cultural change, for example, clothing, behaviour, and accent, were sometimes seen by family and community as ‘contaminated’. The stigma of contamination was multiplied for those who returned without economic or social status although the article added that this could be mitigated if the person returned as a successful migrant and was thus seen as bringing benefits to their family.

5.4.5 The Schuster/Majidi article said ‘... in the case of those deported from Europe, it seems the stigma is more likely to be that of failure ...’ adding ‘... therefore returnees experience stigma, discrimination and shame due to discrepancies between what is socially expected and what is the actual reality.’

5.4.8 Abdul Ghafoor, Director of Afghanistan Migrants Advice and Support Organisation (AMASO), Kabul, interviewed in May 2017 by Asylos, said that some returnees did not want to tell their families they had been deported because deportation carried a huge stigma, and due to feelings of failure.

5.4.9 In correspondence with Asylos in June 2017, Dr. Anicée Van Engeland, a UK-based scholar with extensive research experience in Afghanistan, provided her opinion on returnees to Afghanistan and indicated that many young male returnees bring shame on their family and themselves, and are seen as a failure if they return without any financial resources.”

It is our view that the summaries of Asylos sources contained in section 5.4 and the conclusions drawn in section 2.3 do not accurately reflect the findings concerning stigma and discrimination contained within the Asylos report as a whole.

In the Asylos report the following sources link the discrimination and stigma faced by returnees to their perceived ‘Westernisation’

“The teenagers and young adults who left for Europe at a young age and returned with visible and invisible signs of their cultural change (clothing, behaviour, accent etc.) are sometimes seen by family and or the community as ‘contaminated’. [...] “They all bother me because I went to the UK. They say I lost my culture, became a kafir ... all sorts of insults.” In this case the stigma has to do with the time spent abroad, rather than the simple fact of having been returned against one’s will. Deportation exposes and compounds the stigma of contamination, particularly for those without economic or social power.” (page 32)
(Original source: Schuster, L. and Majidi, N., *Deportation Stigma and Re-migration*, 30 October 2014)

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“People who spend time in the West and their opinions and beliefs change, the way they express themselves, the opinions are different, they may have been targeted for their way of thinking, practices, their way of wearing clothes, or people convert or become atheist. Or when they went to the West sometimes they are called spies. Only when someone continues that way of their lifestyle it can be a problem. If people know they are deported, there is rather little sympathy for these people, as they are left with nothing, as they spent so much to go. Until they start practicing a Western lifestyle in that area or village, then there are problems and groups may start hating you. I do not know of anyone being targeted especially because of returning only” (page 36-37)

(Original source: Asylos Interview with Shoaib Sharifi, 23 April 2016)

“In terms of westernized lifestyle and religious issues, they aren’t perceived very well. It has been very easy to recognize a person if someone has been to Europe from the way of style, haircut and clothes. Yes, there are times they are excluded from the society. Both because people will not accept it, and the fear of failure they have of deportation. They think they failed in the journey, and necessarily they are not included in the society, and this is a huge problem for them. One of the other big issues is that some returnees are converted to Christianity. In a country like Afghanistan, if they find out that you are not Muslim anymore that is would be the end of your life, your story. [...] Regarding the westernized lifestyle let me talk about the stigma of deportation. We all know we have been raised in Muslim family. For someone who has been in Europe for 5 or 6 years and he has been away from religious issues, so it is very difficult to reintegrate into the family and society. Yes, there have been case that returnees were marginalized by the family because they are too westernized and they can create problems for their brother, their sister and parents, so they tell them don’t come to the area and stay away from us.” (page 37-38)

(Original source: Abdul Ghafoor, Interview with Asylos, 28 May 2017)

“Society fears returnees as they are perceived as intoxicated by western values; some of the youngest ones even picked up an accent when speaking Dari or Pashto, making them foreigners in their own home country. There is a clear rejection of those who have changed when abroad: for example, some might have embraced secularism or might have turned towards another religion; other might have discovered their sexuality and became homosexuals. Such behaviours will be rejected and will cause rejection if not death.

These young men who have spent time abroad have changed. Their cultural, religious and traditional compass has been altered at an age where one is flexible and resilient, making it a challenge for them to fit into existing societal structures. Some have learned another language or have adopted another religion; they have changed the way they dress or behave in society. They might have begun drinking alcohol. It is a real challenge for them to shed that skin and go

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back to the traditional ways. For example, when abroad, these young men had to make decisions by themselves on a daily basis, and without having the possibility to rely on a religious authority or the local jirga to provide guidance. They have become more individualist and empowered. The younger they are, the most difficult it is for them to re-integrate: a young Afghan male who arrived at 12 or 15 years old in the West usually attends school, makes friends, go out and grow up to be westernized. A return to Afghanistan is then a shock. Society doesn't look kindly on those young men and refuse association with them: this means that it is very difficult for these young men to find wives, for example.

Attitude towards religion is often a problem for returnees: when living abroad, some Afghans might have discovered secularism or a more relaxed way of practicing Islam. They find themselves at odds with the rest of society when they are returned: they lost the habit of praying or fasting, got used to drinking alcohol, have learned to speak to women... Many of the young individuals I interviewed in Europe admitted they didn't pray or fast anymore. They have forgotten those rituals because the society they lived in had other rules.

Return within an individual community is therefore complex. Relocation proves even more complex as the returnee will have to re-enter a society with rituals it has forgotten about and will have also to adapt to local mores, as each province of Afghanistan is different." (page 39) (Original source: Dr. Anicée Van Engeland, written Expert Opinion, 11 June 2017)

Targeted incidents against returnees

Regarding the topic of targeted incidents against returnees, section 2.3 'Assessment of risk' of the Home Office CPIN states

'2.3.4 There are anecdotal accounts of experiences of returnees, some of which reportedly included violent incidents. However, there is no evidence that these alleged violent incidents were a consequence of being 'Westernised'. There is no general indication that incidents of violence against returnees are due to any apparent 'Westernised' demeanour (see Targeted incidents against returnees).'

The information which this assessment relies upon is contained within section 5.5 of the Home Office CPIN. Whilst this section does reference some of the evidence contained within the Asylos report (citing Tim Foxley, Shoaib Sharifi, Dr Anicée Van Engeland and Abdul Ghafoor) we would like to highlight that this section fails to reference the 2016 UNHCR "Guidelines for Assessing the International Protection Needs of Asylum-Seekers from Afghanistan" which is cited at page 33 of the Asylos report.

“AGEs (Anti-Government Elements) reportedly target individuals who are perceived to have adopted values and/or appearances associated with Western countries, due to their imputed support for the Government and the international community. There are reports of individuals who returned from Western countries having been tortured or killed by AGEs on the grounds that they had become “foreigners” or that they were spies for a Western country. Individuals who fall under other profiles, such as profile 1.e (humanitarian workers and development workers) and profile 1.i (women in the public sphere) may similarly be accused by AGEs for having adopted values and/or appearances associated with Western countries, and may be targeted for that reason.” (page 33)

(Original source: UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), *UNHCR Eligibility Guidelines for Assessing the International Protection Needs of Asylum-Seekers from Afghanistan*, 19 April 2016)

It should be noted that the UNHCR guidelines are referenced in an earlier section of the CPIN, paragraph 4.1.2.

‘4.1.2 The UNHCR Eligibility Guidelines for Assessing the International Protection Needs of Asylum-Seekers from Afghanistan, published 19 April 2016, noted that an individual may be targeted because of they are perceived as ‘westernised’ and thus associated with, or perceived as supportive of, the Government or the international community.’

However, it is our assessment that the summary omits some crucial information (such as ‘reports of individuals who returned from Western countries having been tortured or killed by AGEs on the grounds that they had become “foreigners” or that they were spies for a Western country’) which contradicts the conclusions drawn on risk at paragraph 2.3.4.