



**Youth on the Move:
former unaccompanied minors
removed to Afghanistan
Emily Bowerman and Abdul Ghafoor**



Refugee Support Network

We work with young people affected by displacement and crisis, enabling them to access, remain and progress in education at multiple stages of the migration journey.



Youth on the Move: Background

Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC) – refusal of extension of leave to remain after turning 18.

- Reduced support and access to legal representation
- Possibility of detention and forced removal
- Isolation and lack of support



Broken Futures (1)

Broken Futures: Young Afghan asylum seekers in the UK and their country of origin

- From looked-after child to failed adult asylum seeker
- Youth pushed into negative decision-making nexus
- ‘Safe’ return? Complex intersecting factors
- Targeted support essential

Broken Futures (2)

Issues on return include:

- Returned youth as empty-handed outsiders
- Psychosocial impact of UK/Afghanistan contrast – poverty and insecurity
- Westernisation – perceived and actual
- Limited education and employment options – mismatched skills
- Leaving again – at risk of exploitation
- Problems with anti-government groups

Youth on the Move: Goal

That no former unaccompanied minor be left alone and unsupported in the face of potential forced removal to Afghanistan, and that research tracking outcomes for these young people will bring about a better informed and more compassionate approach to decision-making about returns in the UK.



Youth on the Move: Objectives

ARE (Appeal Rights Exhausted) young people enabled to access legal, psycho-social and practical support in the face of potential forced removal to Afghanistan.

Accurate information about outcomes of forcibly removed young people impacts policy, debate and programmes.



Youth on the Move

Young Afghans who have spent their formative years in the UK care system. Now 18-23 and Appeal Rights Exhausted (ARE)

- Explore routes for remaining in UK
- Practical and psychosocial support
- Monitoring outcomes on return



Support Work in the UK

- Information about current situation and options
- Awareness of, and access to, support
- Contingency planning for worse case scenario of enforced removal
- Equipping other practitioners – capacity building through sharing best practice and lessons learned



Monitoring in Kabul (1)

- Challenges of monitoring from the UK
- Second field visit and interviews with returnees (March 2014)
- Recruitment of Abdul Ghafoor as RSN's Monitoring Officer in Kabul



Monitoring in Kabul (2)

- One year of semi-structured interviews with 22 young returnees
- Kabul-based research steering committee
- Final interviews in process
- Coding matrix and analysis with Oxford University
- Research publication and policy briefs

Monitoring in Kabul (1)

Abdul's presentation about the changed situation in Afghanistan and the issues facing young people on return.



Monitoring in Kabul (2)

Abdul's presentation about recent changes RE forced return to Afghanistan and case studies of young people.



Security

“No, I have not visited the place since I have returned from UK. I left for UK from Ghazni. Ghazni is one of the most dangerous provinces in Afghanistan and there are always security incidents happening on the way to Ghazni. That is one of the reason I haven't been able to go to Ghazni yet.”

“I have lonely gone back to Pakistan once, for a short stay of 3 nights. But, I have not been able to go Helmand to meet my family yet. They say; don't come to Helmand. That is why I am staying here alone in Kabul.”

“I have witnessed at least 3 incidents. 3 of them were blast that took place in Jalalabad city. One of the blast was only in distance of 20 steps from the place I lived, but luckily none of us got hurt in that blast.”



Lack of access to education and employment (1)

“Yes, I have had few jobs since I have returned back. I have worked as a driver; have worked in car wash shops and few other short term jobs. The duration of all these jobs has been so short.”

Lack of access to education and employment (2)

“The challenges I face in finding work here is me not having a good quality of education and documents. The other very reason of haven’t been able to find work is that I did not have any contacts in the government. In Afghanistan very illiterate people are in high ranking posts, but people who are educated and deserve to be on that posts are thrown a side, because they do not have contacts of man in power who will help them to occupy those posts for them.”

“No, I have not had any job since I have arrived back in Afghanistan. I tried a lot and searched a lot if there was any job opportunity. But, I couldn’t find anywhere to work. “



Identification as a returnee

“I won’t saying if anybody has treated my particularly badly, but people mock me all the time. They say; I have wasted my life and now have returned with empty hands. It feels so depressing from inside. But, you can’t fight with everyone. That is how it works in Afghanistan.”

“I won’t say someone has particularly treated me badly. But, people always make joke of me saying’ I have wasted my life and childhood. Now that I have returned back I don’t have anything in my hands. I can’t even take care of my own expense. You know how mean people are in Afghanistan. If you have money, they like you a lot. If you don’t have money, they won’t even try to communicate with you.”

Identification as a returnee

“When they arrested me they said; we are going to provide you with better education and sports facilities back In Kabul, and you are going to be much safer with those facilities. But when I came to Afghanistan, there was nothing like that. It was just a lie.”

“I was living in Paktia before I leave Afghanistan. But I have only been able to go there once or twice. There are two reasons behind that. When I was going to UK, I did not have money. So I borrowed money from my maternal uncle and promised to give him his money back once I reach UK. Unfortunately I was rejected from UK and was sent back with empty hands. Since my arrival in Afghanistan, my uncle has been calling me almost every day to return his money back. Because I don't have the money right now, therefor I am obliged to ignore his calls most of the time.”

Health – physical and mental

“Well yeah, as you know I had few health issues since and when I arrived back in Afghanistan. The first very problem was my braces. Which by the help of some financial help from the supporters in UK I was able to take care of here in Afghanistan.”

“UK was a good country. Everything was fair there. People don’t think if you are black, red or white. All have equal rights in the UK. I had some of the best time of my life in the UK.”

“I used to be very patient before I go to UK, or when I was in the UK. But now I am very impatient and always depressed concerning my future and my family’s future.”

Leaving again

“My work at the garage will soon finish. And if I did not find another work then I will go to UNHCR in any of the neighbouring countries like Iran or Pakistan. Because there is no other option. I can't sit here with any income and earnings. Or I should go out and start stealing.”

“When they arrested me they said; we are going to provide you with better education and sports facilities back In Kabul, and you are going to be much safer with those facilities. But when I came to Afghanistan, there was nothing like that. It was just a lie.”

Leaving again

“My plan is still the same. I will get out of Afghanistan as soon as I find the chance. I don’t have anything in Afghanistan; I don’t have any future here. Most of my friends who were also deported from UK have already left Afghanistan and are on the way back to Europe. “

“I am working hard to earn and save some money and then get out of Afghanistan as soon as I can. Life is not safe here. Security situation is getting worse every day. Therefore the only option I can think of is to get out of here as soon as I can. “

“Life has been so difficult since I have returned back. They destroyed my life. My childhood was the best part of my life, I was very happy in the UK. But now, I don’t have anything and am not sure about my tomorrow even. I don’t know what is going to happen to me tomorrow.”



Emily Bowerman, Senior Programmes Officer (UK)

ebowerman@refugeesupportnetwork.org

Abdul Ghafoor, Monitoring Officer (Afghanistan)

aghafoor@refugeesupportnetwork.org

