

Unaccompanied Afghan children: on the move again?

"I failed but still I want to go abroad. I need to get [to] my destination because here in Afghanistan there is no work or education." (Amini, aged 17, Nangarhar)

Many Afghan minors who previously left Afghanistan for the West but were forcibly returned are keen to set out again, despite the challenges faced during their journeys. Arrest and deportation are common for young people attempting unaccompanied migration, and those who are forced to return to Afghanistan also face the problem of repaying money borrowed by their family to finance the initial trip. Reintegration into the community can be hindered by a perception of failure, especially when resources were pooled to meet travel expenses. The community which once encouraged the decision to undertake unaccompanied migration abroad is the same community that undervalues the efforts made by the former unaccompanied child migrants.

"They taunt [us] and say that other children who were smaller reached their destination but we couldn't. [...] They think that it's easy to go on an unaccompanied journey. They don't know about the risks and difficulties." (Ghulam, aged 18, Nangarhar)

Many young people, however, believe a second attempt will prove easier and are more determined than ever to try again; the desire to earn a livelihood, enjoy relative freedom and have the opportunity to access facilities such as education offset the risks they know they will face.

These are some of the findings of a collaborative research project by UNHCR and the Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit (AREU) to be published mid 2014: see www.areu.org.af For more information, contact Jennefer Lyn Bagaporo, AREU Senior Research Officer jennefer@areu.org.af who worked on the report with Sofya Shahab sofya.shahab@gmail.com.