

Shortcomings in assistance for deported Afghan youth

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Since 2008 the British government has been deporting young Afghans back to Afghanistan, supporting its forcible return programme with an assistance programme intended to facilitate sustainable reintegration. However, interviews with 50 deportees in 2008 and again in 2011¹ indicated a lack of understanding of the backgrounds of these young people, of the context of life in Afghanistan, and of the economic and psychosocial traumas of return on youth. The failure to incorporate the actual socio-economic profiles of youth and their experience of return (whether forced or voluntary) into the programme design and planning led to high drop-out rates and effectively undermined the impact of the assistance provided to returnees.

Specifically, the assistance programmes addressed only the material lives of deportees. Beneficiaries could enrol in a programme of training for a

qualification, vocational training or business start-up but no consideration was given to the social challenges of return, and the economic solutions have been, at best, temporary. The short duration of the vocational training courses did not allow for real skills learning or enhancement, and therefore they did not lead to paid employment. 16% of those interviewed took up the option of gaining qualifications but respondents were not able to continue paying after the initial six months. As for the start-up businesses, 40% failed within six months.

Of the youth forcibly returned and interviewed in 2008, only one third were still present in Afghanistan in 2011. The others had left the country, some within a year and others within two to three years of their return. The reintegration programmes did not prevent the same cycle of debt and migration from being repeated; at best, they only delayed its timing.

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Recommendations²

- Reduce the skills gap upon return by providing a salary plus support for transport, food and accommodation for one year to allow for at least a year of training.
- Increase the level of control and monitoring of the training provided to ensure that programmes achieve effective and appropriate vocational and educational goals; and go beyond the short-term financial support. This requires investing time in understanding returnees' skills, education levels and job interests, and linking them to the local labour market through tailored and youth-relevant responses.
- Create an informal network so that deportees can keep in touch and share their experiences. Networking opportunities among returnees could help provide a source of solidarity and local knowledge often missing in the lives of young returnees.

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1. Majidi, N 'Understanding the Return and Reintegration Process of Afghan returnees from the UK', <http://tinyurl.com/Majidi-2009>
2. Samuel Hall (2013 forthcoming), *Urban displaced youth in Kabul*, a representative survey of 2,000 displaced and returnee youth.