functional connections between the UK-focused refugee and asylum support sector, and the international development sector. This means that the majority of staff with whom returned young people are remaining in contact in the UK have little knowledge of the contexts the young people now find themselves in or of the organisations that could help them. As a result, there is very little support provided to forced returnees once they have left the UK, and they are largely left to fend for themselves.

In response to these issues, and the ongoing requests of young people returned to Kabul, in February 2013 we launched a new programme, Youth on the Move. We are drawing on our staff’s experience in both the international development/emergency response and refugee support sectors to ensure that young people facing deportation are no longer cut adrift. We are working to help them to explore all possible means to remain in the UK, and to provide a safety net of support for the possible eventuality of forced return.

We also recognise that better, more reliable information about what happens to forcibly removed young people is needed. Over the course of the coming years, we are committed to documenting real and nuanced outcomes for all the young people we work with, including examining the extent to which young people attempt to re-migrate. We hope that this information will contribute to creating an increasingly robust body of evidence enhancing collective understanding of the real risks and opportunities young people face if they are returned, and thus help to inform decision making and ‘best interest determination’ for young people applying to extend their Discretionary Leave to remain at 17½.

Catherine Gladwell is Director of Refugee Support Network www.refugeesupportnetwork.org and Emergency education and forced migration consultant at Jigsaw Consult. cgladwell@refugeesupportnetwork.org

1. Not his real name.
2. See Catherine Gladwell and Hannah Elwyn ‘Broken Futures: Young Afghans in the UK and on return to their country of origin’ http://tinyurl.com/RSN-Broken-Futures-2012
3. www.refugeesupportnetwork.org/content/youth-on-the-move

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**Shortcomings in assistance for deported Afghan youth**

Nassim Majidi

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 2011 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.
In recent years, ‘assisted voluntary return’ (AVR) or ‘assisted voluntary return and reintegration’ (AVRR) schemes have spread across Europe and the Western industrialised world – from five in 1995 to 35 in 2011. These schemes, the majority of which are administered by the International Organization for Migration (IOM), facilitate the return of rejected asylum seekers (and also, in some countries, irregular migrants) to their countries of origin. They typically provide return flights, offer cash allowances and in some cases also provide reintegration assistance upon return; they also usually entail a temporary re-entry ban. Such schemes allow for the ‘orderly return’ of unwanted migrants in that they avoid the use of outright coercion.

While AVR is clearly preferable to deportation, NGOs and academics alike have in the past criticised these schemes for being misleadingly labelled and lacking genuine voluntariness. IOM acknowledges that for many individuals the only alternative to AVR may be forced return – and some governments openly admit that the threat of deportation is used to increase participation in AVR schemes.

The UK first established an AVR scheme in 1999. Responsibility for ‘enforced removals’ and ‘voluntary removals’ now lies with the Returns Department of the UK Border Agency’s Immigration Enforcement unit – and both channels are used to increase the overall number of returns per year. Despite AVR being implemented by another actor (currently the NGO Refugee Action), the central oversight for both types of return measures is thus subsumed under one institutional umbrella.

Recommendations

- 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.

Nassim Majidi nassim.majidi@samuelhall.org is a PhD candidate at the Institut d’Etudes Politiques de Paris, France, and the director of Samuel Hall Consulting. www.samuelhall.org

2. Samuel Hall (2013 forthcoming), Urban displaced youth in Kabul, a representative survey of 2,000 displaced and returnee youth.

Assisted voluntary return schemes

Anne Koch

Inrecentyears,‘assisted voluntary return’ (AVR) or ‘assisted voluntary return and reintegration’ (AVRR) schemes have spread across Europe and the Western industrialised world – from five in 1995 to 35 in 2011. These schemes, the majority of which are administered by the International Organization for Migration (IOM), facilitate the return of rejected asylum seekers (and also, in some countries, irregular migrants) to their countries of origin. They typically provide return flights, offer cash allowances and in some cases also provide reintegration assistance upon return; they also usually entail a temporary re-entry ban. Such schemes allow for the ‘orderly return’ of unwanted migrants in that they avoid the use of outright coercion.

When comparing voluntary return schemes in different countries in Europe and across the world, it becomes apparent that the UK’s choice of institutional design reflects a broader development. Whereas in countries that established AVR schemes during the 1970s or 1980s (e.g. Germany and Belgium) assisted voluntary returns and enforced returns are administered by separate governmental departments, countries that have established similar schemes more recently (e.g. Canada, Australia and most Eastern European countries) tend to follow the British example and assign oversight responsibilities for both pathways to the same domestic authority.

AVR can constitute a welcome option for migrants wishing to return home but when ‘forced’ and ‘voluntary’ returns are pursued in combination, the notion of voluntariness becomes compromised. It follows that the only way to shield AVR from this and to realise its beneficial potential is to keep it institutionally separate from forced returns. Governments committed to the protection of refugees against forced return would be well advised to bear this in mind when establishing new AVR schemes.

Anne Koch koch@transnationalstudies.eu is a PhD Candidate at the Berlin Graduate School for Transnational Studies.