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## COI FOCUS

# AFGHANISTAN.

## Migration movements of Afghans since the Taliban takeover of power

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The author has based the text on a wide range of public information selected with care and with a permanent concern for cross-checking sources. Even though the document tries to cover all the relevant aspects of the subject, the text is not necessarily exhaustive. If certain events, people or organisations are not mentioned, this does not mean that they did not exist.

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## List of abbreviations

AAN	Afghanistan Analysts Network
AI	Amnesty International
ANDSF	Afghan National Defence and Security Forces (former Afghan National Security Forces)
CGTN	China Global Television Network
DACAAR	Danish Committee for Aid to Afghan Refugees
DIS	Danish Immigration Service
DRC	Danish Refugee Council
DT&V	Dienst Terugkeer en Vertrek (Repatriation and Departure Service) of the Dutch Ministry of Justice and Security
DVZ	Dienst Vreemdelingenzaken (Immigration Office)
EC	Encashment Centre
EU	European Union
EUAA	European Union Agency for Asylum
Fedasil	Federal Agency for the Reception of Asylum-Seekers
Frontex	European Border and Coast Guard Agency
GDI	General Directorate of Intelligence
HRW	Human Rights Watch
IEA	Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan
ICG	International Crisis Group
IOM	International Organisation for Migration
ISAS	Institute of South Asia Studies
ISKP	Islamic State Khorasan Province
KBL	Kabul International Airport
LP	Laissez-Passer
MPVPV	(Taliban) Ministry for the Propagation of Virtue and Prevention of Vice
MMC	Mixed Migration Centre
MoU	Memorandum of Understanding
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organisation
NDS	National Directorate of Security
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NRC	Norwegian Refugee Council
NSIA	National Statistics and Information Authority

NYT	(The) New York Times
RFE/RL	Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty
SEM	Staatssekretariat für Migration (Swiss Asylum Authority)
UNAMA	United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan
UNOCHA	United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
UNSG	United Nations Secretary-General
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNHRC	United Nations Human Rights Council
UN	United Nations
US	United States
VoA	Voice of America
WASH	Water, Sanitation and Hygiene

## Introduction

In this COI Focus, Cedoca examines the migration movements of Afghans since the Taliban takeover of power in August 2021. For this, Cedoca mainly consulted sources dating from after August 2021. Because of their relevance and for a proper understanding of the context of migration in Afghanistan, some older sources were also consulted and included. Cedoca closed the research for this COI Focus on 15 November 2023.

This report consists of eight parts. The first part briefly outlines the current migration context; the second part discusses the legal framework in Afghanistan on migration and return; the third part provides more information on international air connections to and from the Afghan capital Kabul; the fourth part deals with the presence of the authorities at Kabul International Airport (KBL) and the procedures and controls in place there upon arrival; the fifth part provides information on travel documents for Afghans; the sixth and seventh parts provide a view on permanent and temporary return to Afghanistan; finally, the eighth part provides a view on the situation of returnees after leaving the airport in Kabul.

Regarding return to the country of origin, Cedoca notes that this return may be voluntary or forced. Voluntary return means that the decision to return rests with the individual, who can either organise his or her own travel or take advantage of a return programme coordinated by the Federal Agency for the Reception of Asylum-Seekers (Fedasil) and organised by the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) or by the Immigration Office (DVZ).<sup>1</sup> Return is forced when the person is sent back to their country of origin against their will by the receiving country. This return is organised by DVZ.<sup>2</sup>

Strategies for the social and professional reintegration of returnees are not the subject of this report. Cedoca also makes no mention of any readmission agreements or *Memoranda of Understanding (MoU)* concluded between Belgium and Afghanistan (at the national, Benelux or European level).<sup>3</sup> After all, their contents are often confidential.

This non-exhaustive report was prepared based on publicly available information combined with information obtained through oral sources and information communicated by actors involved in the organisation of returns from Belgium, such as DVZ and IOM. Cedoca draws attention to the fact that some sources consulted do not always specify the type of return (voluntary or forced).

The sources consulted often use different spellings for Afghan places and personal names. Cedoca adopts the most common spelling from English-language sources.

<sup>1</sup> Fedasil, 2022, [URL](#)

<sup>2</sup> Directive 2008/115/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 16 December 2008 on common standards and procedures in Member States for returning illegally resident third-country nationals was transposed into Belgian law by three texts: the Act of 19 January 2012 amending the Act of 15 December 1980, the Act of 19 January 2012 amending the legislation relating to the reception of asylum seekers and the Royal Decree amending the Royal Decree of 8 October 1981 on access to the territory, residence, settlement and removal of foreigners and the Royal Decree of 20 July 2001 on the operation and personnel of the General Inspectorate of the Federal Police and of the local police in the context of the control of forced return.

<sup>3</sup> Agreements concluded at the European level: European Commission, s.d., [URL](#)

## 1. Migration context

A joint report by the independent migration knowledge centre Mixed Migration Centre (MMC), the Danish Refugee Council (DRC) and the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, published in March 2023, describes emigration as a major component of Afghan history. By tradition, Afghan young men migrate to neighbouring countries such as Iran and Pakistan. For them, the phenomenon is traditionally seen as a *rite of passage*. Neighbouring regions in Central Asia, South Asia, South-East Asia and eventually further afield have also been destinations for Afghan emigrants over the past four decades.<sup>4</sup> In this MMC report, the complex and dynamic security context in Afghanistan, declining livelihood options for the Afghan population, natural disasters such as floods, droughts and earthquakes, and limited access for Afghan citizens to humanitarian aid are cited as the main drivers of emigration from Afghanistan.<sup>5</sup>

Also, according to a *Query Response* on departure from and return to Afghanistan since the Taliban takeover of power by the Norwegian COI Information Centre Landinfo, published in September 2022, migration in Afghanistan is a phenomenon ingrained in society and culture. In this regard, this Landinfo report notes that the millions of Afghans who routinely left their homeland in recent decades have left primarily as a result of the impact of war and conflict on the security situation. The Taliban takeover of power in August 2021 did not ultimately lead to an exceptionally large new wave of emigration, according to this report. An international organisation, cited in the report, sees a major underlying reason for this as the fact that the Afghan population was still well-acquainted with the Taliban in 2022 and is taking a wait-and-see attitude. Yet, according to the report, there are no indications that the desire to emigrate has declined. More than half of the population, meanwhile, has declared their intention to leave the country. This desire is greater among men than women and is also especially prevalent among higher-educated Afghans and young people (under the age of 30).<sup>6</sup>

About this latest wave of emigration, a confidential source, quoted in the *General Country Report on Afghanistan* published by the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs in March 2022, states that the Taliban seemed to generally allow travellers with valid travel documents to travel overland to neighbouring countries until the end of February 2022.<sup>7</sup> Evacuation flights organised by the United States (US) from Kabul International Airport and through Qatar came to a halt in December 2021 due to Qatar's suspension of flights at the time.<sup>8</sup> On 27 February 2022, a Taliban spokesman announced that families who wanted to leave the country could only do so with a valid excuse and that evacuation activities by other countries or NGOs had to be stopped.<sup>9</sup> The Taliban spokesman is reported to have initially stated that these restrictions relate to Afghans who have worked with the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) or American forces.<sup>10</sup> The Taliban also declared at that time that women would henceforth be prohibited from travelling without a *mahram* (male relative).<sup>11</sup> A few days later, the Taliban spokesman proclaimed that Afghans with proper travel documents and a specific invitation would still be allowed to leave the country.<sup>12</sup> According to this Dutch *Country Report on Afghanistan*, until March 2022, it was not clear to what extent these Taliban announcements actually led to travel restrictions for Afghan citizens in practice.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>4</sup> MMC, DRC & Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 03/2023, p. 9, [URL](#)

<sup>5</sup> MMC, DRC & Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 03/2023, pp. 9-11, [URL](#)

<sup>6</sup> Landinfo, 29/09/2022, p. 1, [URL](#)

<sup>7</sup> Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken - Nederland, 03/2022, p. 188, [URL](#)

<sup>8</sup> Al Jazeera, 02/2022, [URL](#)

<sup>9</sup> France 24, 28/02/2022, [URL](#)

<sup>10</sup> Al Jazeera, 02/2022, [URL](#)

<sup>11</sup> France 24, 28/02/2022, [URL](#)

<sup>12</sup> I24News, 01/03/2022, [URL](#)

<sup>13</sup> Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken - Nederland, 03/2022, p. 188, [URL](#)

In February 2023, a confidential source, quoted in the 2023 Dutch *General Country Report on Afghanistan*, stated that although the Taliban imposed few exit restrictions on the Afghan people after taking power, there was a degree of arbitrariness with individual Taliban fighters prohibiting people from leaving. The same source described it as a deliberate decision by the Taliban not to completely close the country's borders, so that opponents could leave on their own. In this regard, the *Country Report on Afghanistan* also notes the potential for illegal crossings at some borders and the purchase of forged travel documents to leave the country.<sup>14</sup> There are varying reports about the exit permit for women. In November 2022, women on foreign scholarships were not allowed to leave the country in the event that they were not accompanied by a *mahram*.<sup>15</sup> According to a confidential source, also cited in the Dutch 2023 *Country Report on Afghanistan*, women with Afghan citizenship travelling on their own would be stopped. Women who have a nationality other than Afghan would be allowed through.<sup>16</sup> (See also section [4. Authorities, procedures and controls at the airport](#))

Also, according to the above mentioned MMC report, since the abrupt change of power in August 2021, regular opportunities for Afghan citizens to leave the country as of 2023 continue to be limited.<sup>17</sup> (See also section [5. Travel documents for Afghans](#)) This has made it difficult for Afghans to apply for visas to neighbouring countries. Unable to renew passports under the current administration, students have since faced difficulties in meeting basic visa requirements. Female students in particular face problems leaving the country, regardless of whether they have the necessary documents and what their destination is.<sup>18</sup> According to this MMC report, a failing international migration system and uncertainties surrounding legal migration channels have contributed to more and more Afghans choosing to leave the country without legal travel documents.<sup>19</sup>

One source, quoted in the Norwegian Landinfo's September 2022 *Query Response*, relates the limited opportunities to leave the country to the fact that the Taliban have quickly become aware that they need the talents, skills and experience of their people. Immediately after the takeover of power, Zabiullah Mujahid, the Taliban spokesman, declared as much in so many words.<sup>20</sup> In September 2022, Acting Minister for the Interior Sirajuddin Haqqani also made a statement asking all the Afghans who fled the country to return and support the new order.<sup>21</sup> On the occasion of International Migrant Day, the Taliban's Deputy Minister for Refugees and Repatriations declared in December 2021 that: "The Islamic Emirate is committed to finding solutions to the problems of Afghan refugees so that all of them could return to their homeland."<sup>22</sup> Also, in several messages during 2023, the *de facto* Taliban authorities were encouraging the Afghan people not to leave the country or to return to Afghanistan.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>14</sup> Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken - Nederland, 06/2023, p. 120, [URL](#)

<sup>15</sup> OHCHR, 09/02/2023, p. 4 (§ 18), [URL](#)

<sup>16</sup> Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken - Nederland, 06/2023, p. 97, [URL](#)

<sup>17</sup> Al Arabiya News, 18/12/2021, [URL](#); MMC, DRC & Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 03/2023, p. 11, [URL](#)

<sup>18</sup> NPR, 03/10/2022, [URL](#); MMC, DRC & Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 03/2023, p. 11, [URL](#)

<sup>19</sup> MMC, DRC & Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 03/2023, p. 11, [URL](#)

<sup>20</sup> Landinfo, 29/09/2022, p. 3, [URL](#)

<sup>21</sup> Ariana News, 15/09/2022, [URL](#)

<sup>22</sup> Afghan Islamic Press, 20/12/2021, via FACTIVA

<sup>23</sup> Ariana News, 15/05/2023, [URL](#); Ariana News, 16/05/2023, [URL](#); Khaama Press, 22/06/2023, [URL](#)

## 2. Legal framework in Afghanistan on migration and return

In January 2022, six months after the takeover of power, a report by the Secretary-General to the United Nations (UN) Security Council stated that it was still unclear what – under the Taliban – the new legal and judicial system is. The new *de facto* authorities communicated very little on this at the time. On 28 September 2021, the Taliban did officially abolish the 2004 Constitution. At the same time, they announced that all existing legislation must now be tested against Sharia law. In the period that followed, however, only a few decrees and general, legal directives were issued.<sup>24</sup> The UN concluded that since the Taliban takeover of power, Afghanistan has effectively fallen into a vacuum in terms of rule of law.<sup>25</sup>

In March 2022, the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) reported that former legal and judicial systems have since become dysfunctional. The former judicial staff has been pushed aside. There is no longer any clarity about the laws that apply.<sup>26</sup>

The Danish Committee for Aid to Afghan Refugees (DACAAR), interviewed by the Danish Immigration Service (DIS) in Islamabad, Pakistan in March 2022, pointed out that there was a lack of experience among the new *de facto* administrations and that it was often unclear on the ground which institution was responsible for which competence.<sup>27</sup>

In June 2022, the Secretary-General reported to the UN Security Council that the absence of a constitution and a clear legal framework was continuing to exacerbate uncertainty about the exact nature of any *ad hoc* regulations from the new authorities.<sup>28</sup>

In late November 2022, Thomas Ruttig, Afghanistan expert and co-founder of the research organisation Afghanistan Analysts Network (AAN), at an Afghanistan conference organised by the Danish Refugee Council (DRC), pointed out the lack of a publicly established legal framework in Afghanistan since the takeover of power. The Taliban invariably refer to non-codified, religious law and, as a result, have made the legal situation opaque and obscure for Afghans. Even now, no-one really knows where the *red lines* are, when someone crosses such a line and what the consequences of this would be.<sup>29</sup>

By the end of December 2022, the *de facto* authorities have still not addressed persistent problems over the parameters of the political and legal system. The transposition of the previous Republic's court and legal framework is still ongoing, with all the concerns about ambiguity around the laws that apply.<sup>30</sup>

On 10 January 2023, the new *de facto* authorities announced Taliban leader Hibatullah Akhundzada's decision that all laws and regulations issued under the former Republic would be automatically abolished because they did not conform to Sharia law.<sup>31</sup>

In an online article published by the Institute of South Asia Studies (ISAS) in July 2022, Haroun Rahimi, Associate Professor of Law at the American University of Afghanistan, interpreted the rule of law situation from a historical analysis. He pointed out that current Taliban views on individual rights are actually based on classical works from Islam's Hanafi jurisprudence. While this jurisprudence reached its peak during the Middle Ages, it continued to be developed and taught for a long time afterwards across the Indian subcontinent through a network of *madrasas* (religious

<sup>24</sup> For more on the Taliban's implementation of Sharia law in daily life, see: EUAA, 01/2022, pp. 23-28, [URL](#)

<sup>25</sup> UNSG, 28/01/2022, pp. 2-3, 8, [URL](#)

<sup>26</sup> UNHRC, 04/03/2022, p. 13, [URL](#)

<sup>27</sup> DIS, 06/2022, p. 9, [URL](#)

<sup>28</sup> UNSG, 15/06/2022, p. 13, [URL](#)

<sup>29</sup> DRC, 28/11/2022, p. 21, [URL](#)

<sup>30</sup> UNSG, 07/12/2022, pp. 2-3, [URL](#)

<sup>31</sup> UNSG, 27/02/2023, p. 4, [URL](#)



schools). Although the impact of this in contemporary Afghanistan is still unclear, the pre-modern origins and specific further evolution of this jurisprudence in modern times (in the context of colonialism, the Cold War and the so-called global *War on terror*), according to Rahimi, at least means that it does not share today's views that underlie the civil rights and human rights discourse in the West. Through their specific jurisprudence, according to Rahimi, the Taliban have, in practice, turned back the clock on Afghans' individual rights, particularly women's rights. Furthermore, personal freedoms about people's choice of clothing, entertainment and the specifics of how they choose to practise their faith have been curtailed. Rahimi also pointed out in this regard that in practice, the Taliban have already cracked down on freedom of speech, freedom of the press and dissent.<sup>32</sup>

After the fall of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, some legal ambiguity also arose in the area of individual rights regarding emigration and return to Afghanistan. Cedoca asked professor Haroun Rahimi by e-mail on 28 April 2023 whether he was aware of any current Taliban legislation or the issuance of specific regulations and decrees on migration (leaving the country and/or returning to Afghanistan) since the takeover of power in August 2021. On 30 April 2023, professor Rahimi replied by e-mail as follows:

"I am not aware of any legislation concerning immigration. While it was reported that the Taliban reinstated the 1964 constitution, the group has never cited or referenced the document since, and when asked about it in a press conference, the deputy of the Taliban's supreme court stated that a written constitution is unnecessary but if the leadership instructs them they would prepare a written constitution too."<sup>33</sup>

Also, in relation to the legal framework applicable to Afghans travelling to and from abroad, professor Rahimi explained at an Afghanistan meeting organised by the European Union Agency for Asylum (EUAA) in Malta on 8-9 June 2023 that the legal basis for airport controls is complex under the Taliban. In principle, as long as someone has not committed an illegal act, the Taliban is not likely to intervene. Indeed, through Islamic jurisprudence, they have a great sensitivity to privacy and to honour. Nonetheless, Rahimi points to the Taliban's concern to maintain control at all times, which sometimes allows them to deviate from their own rules for pragmatic considerations (for example, if there were to be a security risk).<sup>34</sup>

<sup>32</sup> ISAS (Rahimi H.), 26/07/2022, [URL](#)

<sup>33</sup> Rahimi H., Associate Professor of Law at the American University of Afghanistan, e-mails, 28/04/2023, 30/04/2023

<sup>34</sup> Rahimi H., Associate Professor of Law at the American University of Afghanistan, conference, in EUAA, *Afghanistan COI Specialist Network Meeting*, Malta, 08-09/06/2023

### 3. International air connections to and from Kabul

National (domestic) flights were to resume from Kabul Airport in early September 2021.<sup>35</sup> The Taliban negotiated with Qatar and Turkey to reopen and manage Kabul International Airport (KBL). The three parties reached an agreement in late January 2022.<sup>36</sup> From spring 2022, Kabul International Airport was to be operational again. Qatar and Turkey initially assumed operational responsibility and provided security.<sup>37</sup>

After further negotiations, the *de facto* Taliban authorities appointed the firm GAAC Solutions from Abu Dhabi to manage the country's three largest airports (Kabul, Herat and Kandahar). At that point, Turkey was no longer involved in managing the airports because the Turks did not want to collaborate with local, Afghan personnel or train them.<sup>38</sup>

In the autumn of 2022, the China Global Television Network (CGTN) published a video on YouTube showing Kabul International Airport being fully operational again. There were both domestic and international flights arriving and departing daily. Ground and baggage personnel were working as before. The new authorities put out a message in English: "The Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan seeks peaceful and positive relations with the world."<sup>39</sup> Another video from AF Journal published on YouTube also seemed to confirm that the airport was operating normally and that travellers were coming and going daily.<sup>40</sup>

A Western security expert on Afghanistan, who wishes to remain anonymous, told Cedoca in March 2023 that Kabul International Airport has become a major hub. In doing so, however, he pointed out that the airport infrastructure was in need of a major upgrade. He described the security perimeter as particularly weak. He also said the radar did not work, there was no meteorological station and the radio link to the control tower was manned by only one person. He added that the six required fire engines were not all sufficiently operational to ensure proper accident management. According to him, the Taliban was not investing in static security (such as guarding infrastructure and equipment) and therefore there was little chance that international airlines would trust them in terms of security. He added that only Kam Air and Ariana Afghan Airlines were serving this airport at that time.<sup>41</sup>

In the spring of 2023, the *de facto* Taliban authorities announced some efforts to self-manage international air connections from now on. In May 2023, the spokesman for the Taliban Ministry of Transport stated that the further purchase and installation of standard machines and equipment at the airports were underway. According to this spokesman, this would allow more and more foreign airlines to provide connections to Afghanistan.<sup>42</sup>

Since the Taliban seized power in August 2021, as of October 2023, no direct flights to Afghanistan are possible from Belgium, or by extension from the European Union (EU). However, it is possible to fly daily via stopovers (in Istanbul, Abu Dhabi, Dubai, Tehran, etc.) from Western Europe to Kabul International Airport (KBL). Kam Air and Ariana operate roughly 70 international flights per week to Kabul from 16 airports in 9 countries (United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, Turkey, Iran, the Russian Federation, India, Kuwait and Uzbekistan).<sup>43</sup>

<sup>35</sup> The Washington Post, 05/09/2021, [URL](#)

<sup>36</sup> Daily Sabah, 28/01/2022, [URL](#)

<sup>37</sup> Tolo News, 30/04/2022, [URL](#)

<sup>38</sup> The Diplomat, 09/09/2022, [URL](#); City Monitor, 13/09/2022, [URL](#)

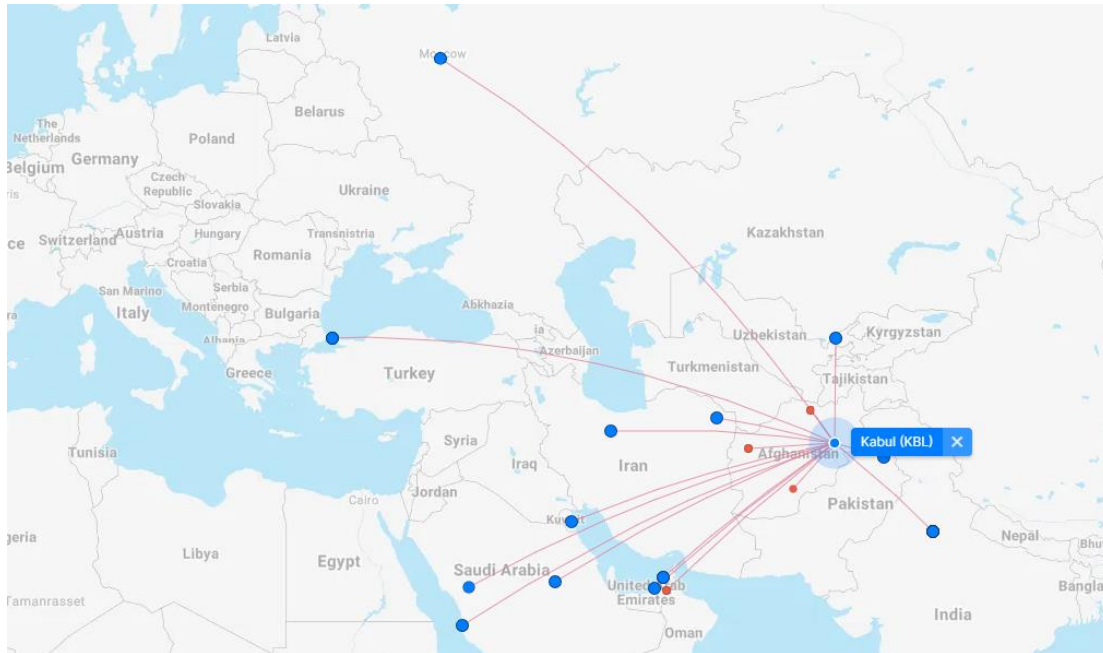
<sup>39</sup> CGTN [video], 30/08/2022, [URL](#)

<sup>40</sup> AF Journal [video], 18/08/2022, [URL](#)

<sup>41</sup> Western security expert on Afghanistan, interview, Brussels, 15/03/2023, e-mail, 25/11/2023

<sup>42</sup> Ariana News, 17/05/2023, [URL](#)

<sup>43</sup> Flight Connections [website], accessed on 16/10/2023, [URL](#)



Map: direct flights to and from Kabul International Airport (KBL) in October 2023.<sup>44</sup>

From Brussels, it is possible to reach Kabul daily via three indirect connections (via Istanbul on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays; via Abu Dhabi and Dubai any day of the week).<sup>45</sup> Dubai Airport's website says 210 flights left for Kabul in September 2023. This not only involves Ariana Afghan Airlines and Kam Air, but also Jeju Air.<sup>46</sup> According to the website Flightradar24 too, three airlines operate international flights at Kabul Airport, namely Ariana Afghan Airlines, Kam Air and Jeju Air.<sup>47</sup>

In October 2023, the Consulate-General of Afghanistan in Dubai declared that after a break of more than two years since the Taliban seized power, the Fly Dubai airline would resume its flights between Kabul and the United Arab Emirates from November 2023.<sup>48</sup> On 15 November 2023, several local media outlets reported that the first Fly Dubai flight had landed at Kabul Airport.<sup>49</sup> According to these reports, Fly Dubai would initially start with two flights a day to Kabul and in the future this would be increased to three or four flights a day.<sup>50</sup> The aforementioned Western security expert on Afghanistan, who wishes to remain anonymous, added that it is unclear on what basis Fly Dubai would resume its flights to and from Kabul – after all, insurance for international airlines is prohibitively expensive.<sup>51</sup>

<sup>44</sup> Flight Connections [website], accessed on 16/10/2023, [URL](#)

<sup>45</sup> Flight Connections [website], accessed on 16/10/2023, [URL](#)

<sup>46</sup> Dubai Airport [website], accessed on 16/10/2023, [URL](#)

<sup>47</sup> Flightradar24 – Kabul International Airport – Arrivals [website], accessed 16/10/2023, [URL](#)

<sup>48</sup> Ariana News, 12/10/2023, [URL](#); Tolo News, 12/10/2023, [URL](#)

<sup>49</sup> Ariana News, 15/11/2023, [URL](#); Khaama Press, 15/11/2023, [URL](#); RFE/RL, 15/11/2023, [URL](#)

<sup>50</sup> Ariana News, 15/11/2023, [URL](#); RFE/RL, 15/11/2023, [URL](#)

<sup>51</sup> Western security expert on Afghanistan, e-mail, 25/11/2023

## 4. Authorities, procedures and controls at the airport

In the spring of 2022, a Qatari private security company with private security personnel was responsible for security at Kabul International Airport. Female security officers served female travellers. An Afghan source in Kabul and an international journalist confirmed to the Norwegian Landinfo in March 2022 that no Taliban could be seen on the Kabul Airport site at that time, either in the section for arriving passengers or in the section for departing passengers. The journalist described the system at the airport as highly effective and noted that the Taliban at that time did have a presence everywhere outside the airport and on the streets.<sup>52</sup> As already mentioned in section 3, in the autumn of 2022, the Abu Dhabi-based company GAAC Solutions was appointed to manage and provide security at Kabul International Airport.<sup>53</sup>

A Western security expert on Afghanistan, who wishes to remain anonymous, told Cedoca in March 2023 that checks on passengers at Kabul Airport were very thorough. According to this source, the same immigration and security personnel (including women) are still operating as before; he confirmed that they now work for a United Arab Emirates firm. He explained that the airport personnel of the past are gradually getting replaced by Taliban personnel in uniform. According to him, the Taliban (and to a limited extent their intelligence department, the General Directorate of Intelligence, GDI) did have a presence at the airport at that time. He stated that immigration procedures were largely proceeding as under the old system. He described the atmosphere in the airport as not threatening, but did state that the Taliban were trying to find out who was entering the country.<sup>54</sup> According to this source, the Taliban allegedly retained technical personnel from the former Afghan intelligence services (the National Directorate of Security, NDS) because of their experience in tracking phones (especially in an urban context).<sup>55</sup>

Finally, also in March 2023, this source stated that departing passengers were also being thoroughly checked at Kabul Airport. Uniformed personnel check the tickets. Passports are checked and stamped, including by female staff members. Luggage is also thoroughly checked. There is a check on how much cash departing passengers are taking out of the country with them, with a particular interest shown in the higher amounts. Upon embarkation, stamped passports are checked again. Those who have problems with the Taliban will be confronted upon departure, according to this source. According to this source, immigration officials in the arrival and departure hall have lists of people wanted by the *de facto* Taliban authorities. As to women leaving the country, this source stated that some manage to leave without a *mahram*, citing examples of female students who left on foreign study visas and women with dual citizenship. However, the majority of women travel in the company of relatives.<sup>56</sup>

An article from the L.A. Times of April 2023 confirms the Taliban's presence at Kabul Airport.<sup>57</sup>

During the aforementioned Afghanistan meeting organised by EUAA in Malta on 8-9 June 2023, journalist and Asia Editor at The New Humanitarian Ali Latifi indicated that there were five or six security checkpoints at the airport at that time. According to this source, it is mainly the former staff (men and women) who are still doing the work. This source also indicated that Taliban personnel are trying to learn the procedures from them. Passengers arrive daily from all over the world (including Afghans with two passports). Arriving passengers who have been staying in the West are allowed through and do not have any problems showing their passports, according to this source.

<sup>52</sup> Landinfo, 29/09/2022, p. 5, [URL](#)

<sup>53</sup> The Diplomat, 09/09/2022, [URL](#); City Monitor, 13/09/2022, [URL](#)

<sup>54</sup> Western security expert on Afghanistan, interview, Brussels, 15/03/2023, e-mail, 25/11/2023

<sup>55</sup> Western security expert on Afghanistan, conference, in EUAA, *Afghanistan COI Specialist Network Meeting*, Malta, 08-09/06/2023 and e-mail, 25/11/2023

<sup>56</sup> Western security expert on Afghanistan, interview, Brussels, 15/03/2023, e-mail, 25/11/2023

<sup>57</sup> L.A. Times, 13/04/2023, [URL](#)

The new regime would see it as positive that people return now (and not during the period of the former Republic). Latifi also noted that there are passenger lists of the people on the planes, so it is fairly easy for the Taliban authorities to figure out who is entering the country. According to this source, Afghans with foreign passports are unlikely to face any problems entering the country unless they are personally suspected of something, have connections to people wanted by the Taliban or are accused of corruption or fraud. After entry, one's passport will no longer normally be asked for. However, the police could possibly ask for someone's *taskara* (national ID).<sup>58</sup>

According to Latifi, anyone leaving the country must specify to the Taliban at the first checkpoint at the airport where the trip is going and must also show them their luggage. Further at the gate, passports are checked by former government personnel. This source also confirmed that people are asked about the amount of cash they are travelling out of the country with.<sup>59</sup>

Also at this Afghanistan meeting in Malta in June 2023, an international analyst on Afghanistan, who wishes to remain anonymous, confirmed the presence of the Taliban and their General Directorate of Intelligence (GDI) at Kabul Airport. According to this analyst, the GDI at the airport pays particular attention to foreigners, spies and people with possible connections to Islamic State Khorasan Province (ISKP). Foreigners must therefore register upon arrival in the country.<sup>60</sup>

According to a confidential source, cited in the Dutch *Country Report on Afghanistan* published in June 2023, there are lists of names of personnel of the former Afghan National Defense and Security Forces (ANDSF) who are wanted at Kabul Airport and in the provinces. Staff of the former intelligence service (NDS) would be particularly at risk. Reportedly, the Taliban are actively using biometrics to identify and track these people.<sup>61</sup> Research by Human Rights Watch (HRW) indicates that the Taliban have access to this personal and biometric data through databases of both the former government and international donors or that they have obtained this data through informants.<sup>62</sup>

It is not clear, according to this Dutch 2023 *Country Report on Afghanistan*, whether or not leaving the country illegally would lead to problems upon return. According to an anonymous quoted source, there are no reports so far that individuals are experiencing problems due to having left illegally. Any problems they might face are based on other reasons.<sup>63</sup> The *Country Report* indicates that it is not clear whether residence in a Western country would play a role in whether or not Afghans would experience problems returning to Afghanistan. There are only few known cases of people who have returned from Europe or a Western country and, moreover, this return is also usually through a third country. Another anonymous source, cited in this report, stated that people coming from a Western country may need to answer more questions upon entry, especially when wearing Western clothing.<sup>64</sup>

In June 2023, Cedoca contacted the Abu Dhabi-based firm GAAC Solutions Security, which had been appointed to handle security at Kabul Airport from the autumn of 2022, by e-mail and through a contact form on their website. Cedoca asked the company for more information on the (standard) security procedures and checks carried out upon arrival and departure at Kabul Airport. However, Cedoca did not receive a response or reply from GAAC Solutions within the timeframe agreed upon for this COI Focus.

<sup>58</sup> Latifi A., journalist and Asia Editor at The New Humanitarian, conference, in EUAA, *Afghanistan COI Specialist Network Meeting*, Malta, 08-09/06/2023

<sup>59</sup> Latifi A., journalist and Asia Editor at The New Humanitarian, conference, in EUAA, *Afghanistan COI Specialist Network Meeting*, Malta, 08-09/06/2023

<sup>60</sup> International analyst on Afghanistan, conference, in EUAA, *Afghanistan COI Specialist Network Meeting*, Malta, 08-09/06/2023

<sup>61</sup> Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken - Nederland, 06/2023, p. 148, [URL](#)

<sup>62</sup> HRW, 30/03/2022, [URL](#)

<sup>63</sup> Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken - Nederland, 06/2023, p. 148, [URL](#)

<sup>64</sup> Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken - Nederland, 06/2023, p. 149, [URL](#)

## 5. Travel documents for Afghans

### 5.1. Passport issuance in Afghanistan

According to information gathered by the Swiss asylum agency State Secretariat for Migration (SEM), updated in an April 2023 report, passport offices in Afghanistan remained closed for quite some time after the Taliban's takeover of power on 15 August 2021. The Kabul passport office reopened in early October 2021; passport offices in all the other provinces also reopened from December 2021. However, for security reasons and due to technical problems, there are frequent interruptions, both in Kabul and elsewhere in the country, sometimes lasting for weeks. The demand for Afghan passports also appears to be far higher than the supply. There are long queues at passport offices in the provinces. This means that some local passport services are no longer accepting applications. Kabul's passport office issues 4.000 to 5.000 items every day. Sometimes, the waiting time for the final issuance can amount to several months. In many cases, bribery is involved and sums of hundreds of dollars are paid as bribes to obtain a passport. In other situations, issuance is facilitated through personal connections with the *de facto* authorities.<sup>65</sup> According to a September 2021 Pajhwok Afghan News article, the official price for an adult passport is 5.500 afghani (\$77) and for a passport for children (less than 14 years old) 2.250 afghani (\$32). In the same article, however, several Afghans state that they had to pay hundreds or even more than a thousand dollars in additional bribes to obtain a passport.<sup>66</sup> According to media reporting, it has been possible to apply for passports online again in Kabul from April 2022 and in the other provinces from August 2022.<sup>67</sup>

The importance of personal connections with the authorities in obtaining a passport, as mentioned above, was confirmed by professor Haroun Rahimi during an Afghanistan meeting in Malta in June 2023. "The government in Afghanistan is who you know," he stated. For example, many people have lost access to government services because they no longer know anyone personally with the current *de facto* authorities.<sup>68</sup>

Journalist and Asia Editor at The New Humanitarian Ali Latifi also confirmed at this Afghanistan meeting in Malta in June 2023 that it is crucial for Afghans who want to get a passport (without long waits) to know the right people in the government. He also referred to the problem mentioned above that so many people want to get passports that, for a time, there were no more copies available. Another obstacle, according to Latifi, is that officials in the passport services initially took a negative, intimidating attitude towards people who wanted to leave the country. These were officials who had been appointed by the previous government and not by the Taliban. They were still trying to get bribes when issuing a passport.<sup>69</sup>

According to an international analyst on Afghanistan, the high cost of issuing a passport is a deliberately created obstacle for those who want to leave the country.<sup>70</sup>

<sup>65</sup> SEM, 15/12/2022, pp. 9-14, [URL](#)

<sup>66</sup> Pajhwok Afghan News, 17/12/2021, [URL](#)

<sup>67</sup> Tolo News, 09/04/2022, [URL](#); Khaama Press, 23/08/2022, [URL](#)

<sup>68</sup> Rahimi H., Associate Professor of Law at the American University of Afghanistan, conference, in EUAA, *Afghanistan COI Specialist Network Meeting*, Malta, 08-09/06/2023

<sup>69</sup> Latifi A., journalist and Asia Editor at The New Humanitarian, conference, in EUAA, *Afghanistan COI Specialist Network Meeting*, Malta, 08-09/06/2023

<sup>70</sup> International analyst on Afghanistan, conference, in EUAA, *Afghanistan COI Specialist Network Meeting*, Malta, 08-09/06/2023

## 5.2. Passport issuance abroad

Regarding the issuance of travel documents to those wishing to return to Afghanistan from abroad, professor Haroun Rahimi cited the fact that most Afghan embassies in countries in the region have handed over their operations to Taliban-appointed officials. At the embassies in the European Union and Canada, in some cases there is some (*ad hoc*) contact and communication between mission posts and former consular officials in Kabul who have remained and are continuing their work.<sup>71</sup>

According to information from the above mentioned report by the Swiss asylum agency SEM, updated in April 2023, foreign missions are no longer issuing passports since the Taliban takeover of power. Some consulates do apply stickers to existing passports to extend their validity (by five years). In principle, this can only be done with the expired copies that are machine-readable, but usually not with handwritten passports. The conditions for issuing a sticker vary from consulate to consulate, and the stickers themselves can also vary in form. On 10 January 2022, the Consulate-General in Bonn, Germany - the central place for issuance in Europe before the Taliban takeover of power - informed the other European consulates that it had developed some stickers with verifiable security features that are machine-readable. Yet even since then, the same uniform stickers do not appear to be used everywhere.<sup>72</sup> A representative of the Taliban Foreign Ministry, referred to in this SEM report, stated in January 2022 that passport renewals should be coordinated with the *de facto* authorities in Kabul. If not, they will not be recognised.<sup>73</sup>

Staff at the Afghan Embassy in Brussels confirmed during a January 2023 meeting that their consulate does not issue any new passports, but that this post can extend the validity of expired passports by five years through a sticker. This only applies to passports that are machine-readable, not handwritten copies. The only condition for obtaining an extension is to show one's passport. The cost of such a sticker to renew the passport is 120 euros.<sup>74</sup>

Journalist and Asia Editor at The New Humanitarian Ali Latifi confirmed during the above mentioned Afghanistan meeting in Malta in June 2023 that new passports are not yet being issued at mission posts in Europe. The extensions with the stickers, he said, are being accepted by the *de facto* Taliban authorities. Whether a sticker is issued at a foreign embassy to women (travelling alone) depends on embassy to embassy, according to Latifi.<sup>75</sup>

The Swiss SEM report mentioned above indicates that in the past, paper *taskaras* (Afghan national identity card) were issued only at the Afghan diplomatic mission post in Iran. In other countries, it was possible to obtain a paper *taskara* issued in Kabul through Afghan mission posts. The applicant had to provide a number of documents through the foreign mission post. The document could then be issued in Afghanistan and eventually delivered abroad. The applicants did need to make some further efforts themselves through an agent (relative or lawyer) in Afghanistan before the issuance, which often involved the payment of bribes. According to the information in this SEM report, in the months before the Taliban's takeover of power, certain Afghan mission posts abroad were also able to print so-called *foreign taskaras* and then affix the necessary stamps and signatures to them. These *foreign taskaras* needed to be requested online. The diplomatic mission post concerned forwarded the application to the National Statistics and Information Authority (NSIA) headquarters

<sup>71</sup> Rahimi H., Associate Professor of Law at the American University of Afghanistan, conference, in EUAA, *Afghanistan COI Specialist Network Meeting*, Malta, 08-09/06/2023

<sup>72</sup> SEM, 15/12/2022, pp. 9-14, [URL](#)

<sup>73</sup> Pajhwok Afghan News, 30/01/2022, [URL](#); SEM, 15/12/2022, p. 12, [URL](#)

<sup>74</sup> Afghan Embassy Brussels, interview, 19/01/2023

<sup>75</sup> Latifi A., journalist and Asia Editor at The New Humanitarian, conference, in EUAA, *Afghanistan COI Specialist Network Meeting*, Malta, 08-09/06/2023

in Kabul, where it may or may not have been approved. As of August 2021, applying for a *taskara* from abroad is no longer possible.<sup>76</sup>

Entry into Afghanistan for non-Afghans is only permitted with a visa. This visa, on the one hand, can be issued by an Afghan diplomatic mission post abroad. In December 2022, Khaama Press reported that the new *de facto* authorities have instructed all foreign mission posts to continue their operations and continue to issue such visas. Nothing is known about the nature of the conditions for obtaining such a visa. On the other hand, in December 2022, the Taliban Ministry of Industry and Trade announced the establishment of an office at Kabul International Airport (called the Afghanistan Investment Desk) where non-Afghans and foreign investors can obtain visas upon arrival.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> SEM, 15/12/2022, pp. 19-20, 24, [URL](#)

<sup>77</sup> Khaama Press, 11/12/2022, [URL](#)



## 6. View of permanent return

### 6.1. Forced permanent return

#### 6.1.1. European Union

On 26 April 2021, four months before the Taliban takeover of power, the European Union (EU) signed the *Joint Declaration on Migration Cooperation* with Afghanistan. This text replaced the 2016 *EU-Afghanistan Joint Way Forward on Migration Issues*. This European initiative is complementary to any agreements made by individual EU countries such as, for example, those under the *Memorandum of Understanding (MoU)* between the Netherlands and Afghanistan.<sup>78</sup> After the Taliban seized power in August 2021, the EU suspended all return agreements with Afghanistan.<sup>79</sup>

Since August 2021, a number of individual European countries have also decided to suspend forced deportation to Afghanistan. The status of such agreements as mentioned above is no longer clear after the Taliban takeover of power.<sup>80</sup> (See also section [2. Legal framework in Afghanistan on migration and return](#)) According to a source cited in the 2023 Dutch *Country Report on Afghanistan*, the Taliban does not recognise any agreements signed by the government of former President Ashraf Ghani or previous governments.<sup>81</sup> According to sources cited in the Dutch 2022 and 2023 *Country Reports on Afghanistan*, there were no forced returns from Europe to Afghanistan in 2022 and during the first months of 2023.<sup>82</sup>

Germany still maintained no diplomatic ties with the new *de facto* authorities as of 20 March 2023. Until that date, the country has also not returned any Afghans.<sup>83</sup> The Repatriation and Departure Service (DT&V) of the Dutch Ministry of Justice and Security indicates that between April 2022 and March 2023, no Afghans were forcibly returned from the Netherlands to Afghanistan through the DT&V.<sup>84</sup>

#### 6.1.2. Belgium

According to the *Final Report* by the Commission for the Evaluation of the Policy on Voluntary Return and Forced Removal of Foreigners<sup>85</sup> (presented to the Minister for Asylum and Migration on 15 September 2020), the procedure for the removal of foreigners who are not, or no longer, allowed to reside on Belgian territory is complicated. Without going into detail, air travel requires a valid travel document. If such a document is not available for various reasons, the Immigration Office (DVZ) must take steps to obtain one from the authorities of the country of origin.<sup>86</sup> In this regard, the report states the following:

<sup>78</sup> Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken - Nederland, 03/2022, p. 180, [URL](#)

<sup>79</sup> The New Humanitarian, 10/08/2022, [URL](#)

<sup>80</sup> Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken - Nederland, 03/2022, p. 180, [URL](#)

<sup>81</sup> Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken - Nederland, 06/2023, p. 143, [URL](#)

<sup>82</sup> Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken - Nederland, 03/2022, p. 180, [URL](#); Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken - Nederland, 06/2023, p. 143, [URL](#)

<sup>83</sup> Info Migrants, 20/03/2023, [URL](#)

<sup>84</sup> Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken - Nederland, 06/2023, p. 143, [URL](#)

<sup>85</sup> This committee is chaired by Emeritus Professor Marc Bossuyt, former commissioner-general. Commission for the evaluation of policies on voluntary return and forced removal of foreigners, 15/09/2020, [URL](#)

<sup>86</sup> The identification procedure is also described in detail in DVZ's 2020 activity report: FPS Home Affairs, 12/2021, p. 76, [URL](#)

"It is not because an agreement [MoU or otherwise] has been concluded that obtaining a travel document is easier. Much depends on collaboration with the country of origin in other areas or on the representative for the country of origin, e.g. the consul."<sup>87</sup>

To obtain this travel document, nationality must be established, according to rules that vary from country to country. The report further states the following:

"The travel document issued by the authorities for repatriation is the "*laissez-passer*" (LP). Once nationality or identity is recognised by the country of origin, DVZ must request an LP for effective removal. Again, depending on the country of origin, there are different rules. For a very limited number of countries, DVZ itself can prepare an LP (EULP). For certain countries, the LP is valid for a considerable time (three months or one month). For other countries, the LP is valid only for the pre-notified day of departure with the flight listed on it."<sup>88</sup>

Forced removal can take place with or without an escort from the Belgian Federal Police.<sup>89</sup> This may involve a regular flight or a special flight. Of those special flights, some are organised by the European Border and Coastal Security Agency (Frontex).<sup>90</sup>

However, the above report mentions that some countries of origin refuse special flights because they are concerned about their image.<sup>91</sup>

There is currently no Belgian diplomatic post in Kabul, and Belgium has not established diplomatic relations with the *de facto* new authorities since the Taliban seized power.<sup>92</sup>

The retrieval of data on return from Belgium follows a procedure defined in consultation with IOM and DVZ. On 24 April 2023 and 20 June 2023, Cedoca obtained data by e-mail from DVZ regarding whether there had been any cases of forced returns to Afghanistan since the Taliban seized power. This data shows that one person was forcibly returned to Afghanistan from Belgium on 13 August 2021, just before the closure of Afghan airspace. This was a departure without an escort. The flight was operated by a commercial airline and the ticket was paid for by Frontex. Throughout 2022, no-one was forcibly returned to Afghanistan from Belgium. In February 2023, one forced departure from Belgium to Afghanistan was recorded by DVZ. This took place without an escort and, this time, there was no link to Frontex.<sup>93</sup>

### 6.1.3. France

According to a French press release, an Afghan was forcibly returned to Kabul from France on 23 March 2023. This concerned an Afghan who had been sentenced to 18 months in prison in 2020 for glorifying terrorism (in the context of Samuel Paty's murder). According to an official source in the article, the individual initially refused to return, but eventually agreed to be returned. To that end, he received a consular LP from the *de facto* Taliban authorities.<sup>94</sup>

<sup>87</sup> Commissie voor de evaluatie van het beleid inzake de vrijwillige terugkeer en de gedwongen verwijdering van vreemdelingen, 15/09/2020, p. 85, [URL](#)

<sup>88</sup> Commissie voor de evaluatie van het beleid inzake de vrijwillige terugkeer en de gedwongen verwijdering van vreemdelingen, 15/09/2020, p. 87, [URL](#)

<sup>89</sup> Commissie voor de evaluatie van het beleid inzake de vrijwillige terugkeer en de gedwongen verwijdering van vreemdelingen, 15/09/2020, p. 96, [URL](#)

<sup>90</sup> "Frontex has an important mandate as to returns, assisting and supporting (including financially) Member States in and with the organisation of national and joint return operations." Commissie voor de evaluatie van het beleid inzake de vrijwillige terugkeer en de gedwongen verwijdering van vreemdelingen, 15/09/2020, p. 112, [URL](#)

<sup>91</sup> Commissie voor de evaluatie van het beleid inzake de vrijwillige terugkeer en de gedwongen verwijdering van vreemdelingen, 15/09/2020, pp. 100-102, [URL](#)

<sup>92</sup> FPS Foreign Affairs, 12/08/2022, [URL](#); FPS Foreign Affairs, 12/09/2023, [URL](#)

<sup>93</sup> DVZ, e-mail, 24/04/2023; DVZ, e-mail, 20/06/2023

<sup>94</sup> France Info, 19/04/2023, [URL](#)

#### 6.1.4. Denmark

On 11 February 2023, the Danish authorities gave the go-ahead for possible forced returns to Afghanistan of asylum-seekers who have exhausted all legal remedies.<sup>95</sup> In November 2023, the Danish media outlet Information.dk published a report indicating that the Danish authorities had been in contact with the consulate of the *de facto* Taliban regime in Istanbul with a view to arranging a repatriation document for an Afghan refugee. This is despite the fact that the Danish authorities do not officially recognise the *de facto* Taliban regime as the government of Afghanistan. Evidence of this contact between the Danish authorities and the *de facto* Taliban authorities was said to be a travel document, dated 24 July 2023, which the Danish Home Travel Agency obtained through the Taliban consulate in Istanbul. In a written response to this article, the Danish Ministries of Foreign Affairs and of Immigration and Integration, along with the Danish Migration Agency, did not refer to the contact with the Taliban consulate as a “collaboration”, but described it as “technical assistance”.<sup>96</sup>

#### 6.1.5. United States

According to an article by American news website Axios, American authorities forcibly returned the first Afghan to Afghanistan on 13 February 2022. This was a person who had been evacuated from Kabul with about 76.000 others during the Taliban takeover of power. The reason for the forced return was that this individual was assessed as a risk during the mandatory vetting process in the United States. The person appeared to have a criminal record; however, details of the crime committed were unclear. According to this article, out of all the (tens of thousands of) evacuated and vetted Afghans, only 44 such high-risk cases have turned up.<sup>97</sup>

On 13 June 2022, American authorities forcibly returned another person to Afghanistan. This was a person who had resided in the United States since 1990, had been naturalised as an American in 2007, but had been stripped of American citizenship in 2018 owing to a conviction in a terrorism case.<sup>98</sup>

According to a Los Angeles Times article, the American authorities forcibly returned an Afghan asylum-seeker to Afghanistan in January 2023. This time, it was a person who had managed to reach the United States from South America in June 2022. Upon his forced return to Afghanistan, he said, he was interrogated by the Taliban. He then went into hiding in the country for several weeks. Meanwhile, however, American lawyers had succeeded in demonstrating that the deportation was a procedural mistake. Therefore, on 21 February 2023, the American authorities arranged for this person to be flown back to Los Angeles. At the time the article was published, he was again in a closed centre there.<sup>99</sup>

#### 6.1.6. Rwanda

On 8 May 2023, an article published by the British newspaper The Independent reported that two Afghans had been forcibly returned to Kenya from Kigali. From there, they were escorted back to Afghanistan via Dubai. According to the UN refugee agency UNHCR, at least one of the two Afghans had ties to the international military force in Afghanistan. The exact date of the forced return is not mentioned in the article.<sup>100</sup>

<sup>95</sup> Le Monde, 11/02/2022, [URL](#)

<sup>96</sup> Information.dk, 16/11/2023, [URL](#)

<sup>97</sup> Axios, 28/02/2022, [URL](#)

<sup>98</sup> US Immigration and Customs Enforcement, 08/07/2022, [URL](#)

<sup>99</sup> Los Angeles Times, 13/04/2023, [URL](#)

<sup>100</sup> The Independent, 07/05/2023, [URL](#)

### 6.1.7. Turkey

Since the Taliban's takeover of power, Turkey, like Iran and Pakistan (see below), has always maintained a diplomatic post in Kabul. These three countries have also continued to trade and maintain ties with the new *de facto* authorities since August 2021. The latter, in the case of Turkey, according to an Afghan aid worker who regularly travels back and forth between Kabul and Istanbul, may have to do with that country's deportation policy.<sup>101</sup>

Since Turkey resumed commercial flights to Kabul on 27 January 2022,<sup>102</sup> there have been continuous reports of deportations of Afghans.<sup>103</sup> According to the Turkish Migration Management Directorate, these are individuals who entered the country illegally, violated visa and residency laws, worked without permits, committed fraud or threatened public safety.<sup>104</sup> During 2022, according to official figures from the Turkish General Directorate of Migration, 68.290 of the 124.441 illegal Afghan migrants were forcibly returned to Kabul from Turkey.<sup>105</sup> The returns were primarily by air, via commercial scheduled or charter flights with private and government-run Afghan airlines.<sup>106</sup> According to a source quoted in the Dutch *Country Report on Afghanistan* of 2023, undocumented Afghans stopped by Turkish police risk immediate deportation from the country.<sup>107</sup> HRW reported on mistreatment, humiliation and use of force by the Turkish authorities towards Afghan migrants in November 2022.<sup>108</sup>

According to Ali Latifi, journalist and Asia Editor at The New Humanitarian, there is strong resentment against Afghan refugees in Turkey. He describes how countless Afghans reaching the city of Van (in eastern Turkey) were taken by the police to deportation camps. He also indicates that Afghan refugees are often victims of violence by the Turkish police and criminal gangs who extort the migrants (often violently). Latifi says he has seen Afghans at Istanbul Airport showing scars of mistreatment during their deportation and having difficulty walking.<sup>109</sup> Latifi adds that these Afghan migrants deported from Turkey were initially (in 2022) interrogated aggressively by the Taliban upon their arrival at Kabul Airport. Since early 2023, Latifi has described this procedure upon arrival at the airport in the Afghan capital as a rather systematic and quick process, where migrants from Turkey are seen as "poor guys" and simply let through.<sup>110</sup> In a June 2022 article for Middle East Eye News, Latifi mentioned that IOM staff were waiting for returned Afghans upon arrival of their flight from Istanbul at Kabul Airport.<sup>111</sup>

Numerous reports of such deportations of Afghan migrants from Turkey were also published in 2023.<sup>112</sup> For example, the Turkish government reported in April 2023 that more than 3.000 Afghans had been deported during the first three months of 2023.<sup>113</sup> Journalist Ali Latifi noted hereby on X (formerly Twitter) that anti-refugee rhetoric in the run-up to Turkey's May 2023 presidential election played a role in this.<sup>114</sup> On 16 April 2023, Taliban spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid criticised host

<sup>101</sup> Middle East Eye, 15/11/2022, [URL](#)

<sup>102</sup> Xinhua News, 08/06/2022, [URL](#)

<sup>103</sup> VoA, 16/06/2022, [URL](#); Khaama Press, 24/07/2022, [URL](#); AI, 31/08/2022, [URL](#); RFE/RL, 05/09/2022, [URL](#); Ariana News, 13/11/2022, [URL](#); Khaama Press, 13/12/2022, [URL](#)

<sup>104</sup> Ani News, 25/07/2022, [URL](#)

<sup>105</sup> Khaama Press, 08/01/2023, [URL](#)

<sup>106</sup> Middle East Eye, 15/11/2022, [URL](#)

<sup>107</sup> Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 06/2023, p. 150, [URL](#)

<sup>108</sup> HRW, 18/11/2022, [URL](#)

<sup>109</sup> Latifi A., journalist and Asia Editor at The New Humanitarian, conference, in EUAA, *Afghanistan COI Specialist Network Meeting*, Malta, 08-09/06/2023

<sup>110</sup> Latifi A., journalist and Asia Editor at The New Humanitarian, conference, in EUAA, *Afghanistan COI Specialist Network Meeting*, Malta, 08-09/06/2023

<sup>111</sup> Middle East Eye, 01/06/2022, [URL](#)

<sup>112</sup> Khaama Press, 11/01/2023, [URL](#); Ariana News, 30/01/2023, [URL](#); Khaama Press, 10/04/2023, [URL](#); Ariana News, 14/04/2023, [URL](#)

<sup>113</sup> Ariana News, 16/04/2023, [URL](#); Khaama Press, 16/04/2023, [URL](#)

<sup>114</sup> Latifi Ali M. (@alibomaye) [X post], 15/04/2023, [URL](#)

countries that carried out such deportations of Afghans. Mujahid called for better collaboration in such deportations and argued that the return should take place in a way that causes as little suffering to the migrants as possible. He added that the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan (IEA) would welcome them to their homeland if the refugees want to return.<sup>115</sup> In late May 2023, Mohammad Arslah Kharotai, Taliban Deputy Minister for Refugees and Repatriations, also spoke out in the media about the fate of the deportees. According to him, the region's host countries (such as Turkey, Iran and Pakistan) are not fulfilling their promises to provide assistance to the refugees. He also asserts that these countries mistreat the refugees and use them to pressure the IEA.<sup>116</sup>

It is unclear whether a return agreement exists between Turkey and the *de facto* Taliban authorities, according to the 2023 Dutch *Country Report on Afghanistan*. According to one source cited, there is no tripartite agreement between Turkey, UNHCR and the *de facto* Afghan authorities. However, Turkey and the Taliban are said to have expressed a desire for a return agreement. According to another source in this Dutch *Country Report on Afghanistan*, Turkey and the Taliban did sign a return agreement and, following this, at least 5.000 Afghans are said to have already returned from Turkey on charter flights in the first two months of 2023. The return is said to be voluntary, but rumours say people looked neglected, as though they have been staying in detention.<sup>117</sup>

According to journalist Ali Latifi, deported Afghans must sign a document or "deportation letter" before leaving Turkey. This looks formally like a *taskara*, but it is not a *taskara*. The refugees use this document to re-enter Afghanistan.<sup>118</sup> A Western security expert on Afghanistan, who wishes to remain anonymous, confirmed that the Afghan migrants are returning from Turkey with one specific document, usually with a photograph. On the one hand, he said, the Taliban authorities are trying to find out who is entering the country, but on the other hand, he argued that not many of their intelligence services (GDI) are present at Kabul Airport and that the atmosphere at the airport did not feel threatening.<sup>119</sup>

In addition to deportations of Afghan migrants by air from Turkey to Afghanistan, there are also reports of Afghans being expelled overland from the border areas of Eastern Turkey to Iran.<sup>120</sup> According to HRW reporting, 238.448 illegal migrants, most of them Afghans, were driven back to Iran in this way in 2022. In that same year, 92.583 Afghans were rounded up as illegal migrants by the Turkish police.<sup>121</sup> An aid worker assisting Afghan refugees in Turkey explained to Middle East Eye News in November 2022 that these expulsions of Afghan migrants are being carried out in a highly organised and systematic way: their fingerprints are taken, their biometric data are stored and they are sent back across the border.<sup>122</sup>

In October 2023, Taliban Minister for Refugees and Repatriation Khalil Rahman Haqqani appealed to the Turkish authorities to provide Afghan migrants with employment opportunities in Turkey instead of deporting them to Afghanistan.<sup>123</sup> In mid-November 2023, Khaama Press reported on the deportation of 3.000 Afghan migrants from Turkey in less than a month. The migrants reportedly received support, in the form of cash, from IOM upon return.<sup>124</sup>

<sup>115</sup> Ariana News, 16/04/2023, [URL](#)

<sup>116</sup> Tolo News, 31/05/2023, [URL](#)

<sup>117</sup> Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 06/2023, p. 150, [URL](#)

<sup>118</sup> Latifi A., journalist and Asia Editor at The New Humanitarian, conference, in EUAA, *Afghanistan COI Specialist Network Meeting*, Malta, 08-09/06/2023

<sup>119</sup> Western security expert on Afghanistan, interview, Brussels, 15/03/2023, e-mail, 25/11/2023

<sup>120</sup> Middle East Eye, 15/11/2022, [URL](#); HRW, 18/11/2022, [URL](#)

<sup>121</sup> HRW, 18/11/2022, [URL](#); HRW, 18/11/2022, [URL](#)

<sup>122</sup> Middle East Eye, 15/11/2022, [URL](#)

<sup>123</sup> Ariana News, 17/10/2023, [URL](#)

<sup>124</sup> Khaama Press, 12/11/2023, [URL](#)

### 6.1.8. Neighbouring countries Iran and Pakistan

According to reports by Khaama Press, Tolo News and Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL), Afghans who fled to neighbouring Iran and Pakistan after the Taliban seized power are being plagued by harassment, intimidation, abuse, detention and deportations by their host countries.<sup>125</sup>

Data from the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA) published in their *Snapshots of Population Movements* show the following figures for returns from Iran and Pakistan to Afghanistan during the years 2021, 2022 and 2023. In 2021 (data from January through December), 1.24 million Afghans returned from Iran and 29.200 from Pakistan.<sup>126</sup> In 2022 (data from January through November), 762.900 million Afghans returned from Iran and 75.700 from Pakistan.<sup>127</sup> In 2023 (data from January through September, which does not include the data of mass returns from Pakistan in October and November 2023), 635.800 Afghans returned from Iran and 101.000 from Pakistan.<sup>128</sup> These data cover all returns of Afghans from Iran and Pakistan, both voluntary (see below) and forced returns.

Throughout 2022, 924.000 Afghan migrants returned to Afghanistan from Pakistan and Iran without official documents, according to United Nations Secretary-General (UNSG) reporting. This figure refers exclusively to Afghan migrants without official documents who returned through four border crossings in the provinces of Herat, Nimroz, Nangarhar and Kandahar.<sup>129</sup> According to Liza Schuster, Researcher and Professor at the Department of Sociology at City University of London, the metaphor of the “revolving door” applies here to the large groups of Afghan migrants in the neighbouring countries of Pakistan and Iran. People sent back to Afghanistan from these countries often try to re-enter them (multiple times) afterwards.<sup>130</sup>

#### Iran

At the aforementioned Afghanistan conference organised by DRC in late November 2022, researcher and professor Liza Schuster noted that estimates of numbers of Afghans returned from Iran are difficult to make, given the uncertainty about how many people leave, return, and possibly leave and return again.<sup>131</sup> According to regular reports in the Afghan media, large groups of Afghans were relentlessly deported to Afghanistan from Iran in 2022 and 2023. This involves thousands of migrants forced to return to Afghanistan every week. For many other returnees, it is not clear whether they returned voluntarily or forcibly. The forced returns from Iran are all by land and this includes the Islam Qala border crossing in Herat province, the Silk Bridge and the Abrishum border post, both in Nimroz province. In many cases, IOM and UNHCR are parties involved in assisting and receiving the returned migrants.<sup>132</sup> The latter has also been confirmed by an international organisation to the Norwegian Landinfo for their *Query Response* published in September 2022 on departures from and returns to Afghanistan since the Taliban takeover of power.<sup>133</sup>

An August 2022 report by human rights organisation Amnesty International (AI) reported on Iranian security forces taking Afghan deportees from Iran and Turkey to official and also unofficial border posts by bus. At the unofficial border posts, Afghan migrants reportedly have to climb over fences

<sup>125</sup> Khaama Press, 22/06/2023, [URL](#); Tolo News, 03/10/2023, [URL](#); RFE/RL, 18/10/2023, [URL](#)

<sup>126</sup> UNOCHA, 06/01/2022, [URL](#)

<sup>127</sup> UNOCHA, 23/11/2022, [URL](#)

<sup>128</sup> UNOCHA, 08/11/2023, [URL](#)

<sup>129</sup> UNSG, 27/02/2023, pp. 12-13, [URL](#)

<sup>130</sup> DRC, 28/11/2022, p. 40, [URL](#)

<sup>131</sup> DRC, 28/11/2022, p. 40, [URL](#)

<sup>132</sup> Ariana News, 06/04/2022, [URL](#); Ariana News, 28/05/2022, [URL](#); Ariana News, 17/06/2022, [URL](#); Ariana News, 14/11/2022, [URL](#); Ariana News, 23/01/2023, [URL](#); Ariana News, 05/02/2023, [URL](#); Khaama Press, 05/03/2023, [URL](#); Khaama Press, 16/03/2023, [URL](#); Khaama Press, 21/05/2023, [URL](#); Khaama Press, 20/06/2023, [URL](#); Khaama Press, 23/10/2024, [URL](#); Khaama Press, 25/10/2023, [URL](#)

<sup>133</sup> Landinfo, 29/09/2022, p. 4, [URL](#)

or crawl under them. Prior to their deportation, the migrants are held in detention centres. Sometimes, the buses drive further into Afghanistan and let the deportees get off there. Some migrants interviewed by AI stated that they were handcuffed or blindfolded. Children have also been reported among the deportees. Sources also explained to AI that some migrants have to pay Iranian security forces for their transfer from the detention centre to the border.<sup>134</sup>

According to UNHCR figures, an estimated 485.000 Afghans without official documents were deported from Iran to Afghanistan in 2022. During the first six months of 2023, the number was estimated at 310.000 Afghan migrants without official documents. Of the group of Afghan migrants with official documents in Iran (people holding an *Amayesh* card), twelve people were deported to Afghanistan in 2022, while during the first six months of 2023, according to UNHCR figures, there were seven people. These deportations took place through the border posts of Islam Qala in Herat province and Zaranj in Nimroz province. UNHCR declares that it undertakes protection monitoring interviews of and provides support for deported and returned Afghan migrants.<sup>135</sup>

There were also reports in 2023 of hundreds of Afghans detained in Iran being sent back overland to Afghanistan from their prisons in Iran after the Taliban seized power.<sup>136</sup> The large-scale repatriation of Afghan detainees from Iran with a view to serving their sentences in an Afghan prison may be putting pressure on Afghan authorities to provide minimum standards for detainees in their prisons, according to a UNAMA report.<sup>137</sup>

According to a Western security expert, who wishes to remain anonymous, the situation of Afghans who have committed a crime abroad (in Iran or Pakistan) and were detained there upon returning to Afghanistan will depend upon several factors, such as the nature of the crime, the profile of these individuals and the possible interest the *de facto* authorities might have in these individuals.<sup>138</sup> This source added that Taliban authorities note the details of these detainees upon arrival in Afghanistan, but then release most of them. Some 800 deported detainees from Iran, who had yet to serve their sentences, were reportedly first sent to prison upon arrival in Afghanistan, but were later released on the basis of the Emir's Eid pardon (an Afghan tradition in which some prisoners are released during Islamic holidays). This source added that little information is available on the criteria and grounds of possible re-arrests and potential further detentions of deportees in Afghanistan.<sup>139</sup>

In October 2023, Iran's Minister for the Interior declared at a press conference that Afghan migrants residing in Iran without official documents would need to leave the country. He added that by September-October 2023, an estimated 200.000 Afghan migrants who had entered Iran illegally would have been sent back to Afghanistan and stressed the need for a proper legal mechanism for this procedure of return and repatriation.<sup>140</sup>

## Pakistan

In January 2023, The Guardian reported that about 250.000 Afghan migrants had travelled to Pakistan since the Taliban seized power in August 2021. In the summer of 2022, Pakistani authorities began deportations of Afghans who had entered the country illegally. Since October 2022, these arrests and detentions of Afghan migrants have been increasing. According to human rights lawyers, about 1.400 Afghans, including 129 women and 178 children, were being detained in the cities of

<sup>134</sup> AI, 31/08/2022, pp. 28, 34-37, [URL](#)

<sup>135</sup> UNHCR, 11/04/2023, p. 5, [URL](#); UNHCR, 13/09/2023, p. 5, [URL](#)

<sup>136</sup> Khaama Press, 06/03/2023, [URL](#); Khaama Press, 06/03/2023, [URL](#); Ariana News, 08/03/2023, [URL](#); Tolo News, 10/03/2023, [URL](#); Ariana News, 31/03/2023, [URL](#); Ariana News, 12/06/2023, [URL](#); Ariana News, 14/06/2023, [URL](#)

<sup>137</sup> UNAMA, 09/05/2023, p. 5, [URL](#)

<sup>138</sup> Western security expert on Afghanistan, interview, Brussels, 15/03/2023, e-mail, 25/11/2023

<sup>139</sup> Western security expert on Afghanistan, conference, in EUAA, *Afghanistan COI Specialist Network Meeting*, Malta, 08-09/06/2023 and e-mail, 25/11/2023

<sup>140</sup> Khaama Press, 06/10/2023, [URL](#); Ariana News, 19/10/2023, [URL](#); Khaama Press, 25/10/2023, [URL](#)

Karachi and Hyderabad alone.<sup>141</sup> According to sources cited in the 2023 Dutch *Country Report on Afghanistan*, hundreds of Afghans were deported from Pakistan in early 2023. They were detained or had to pay fines. The amnesty declared for fleeing Afghans with visas expired in December 2022. Persons with expired visas have since had to return to Afghanistan to renew their visas.<sup>142</sup> Another source, also cited in this Dutch 2023 *Country Report on Afghanistan*, states that the Taliban assert that the Pakistani authorities have released 700 to 800 arrested Afghan migrants. According to this source, the penalty for an expired visa consists of a fine and two months in prison. People have reportedly died in prison while serving this sentence. The attitude of the Pakistani authorities, according to this source, is probably so implacable because they want to show a hard line towards illegal migrants from Afghanistan.<sup>143</sup> According to another source, also cited in the 2023 Dutch *Country Report on Afghanistan*, an estimated 4.050 Afghans were deported from Pakistan in the year 2022. This was said to involve 852 people in the January-February 2023 period.<sup>144</sup>

Reports of announced as well as hundreds of actual forced returns of Afghans from Pakistan have also appeared in the Afghan and international media since late December 2022.<sup>145</sup> These Afghans were returned overland (through the border crossing of Spin Boldak in Kandahar province). In some cases, assistance was provided by IOM and the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC). From March 2023, these reports of forced returns followed more and more, but at that time they did not involve at that time the same large numbers as the returnees from Iran.<sup>146</sup>

Groups of detained Afghans were also transferred back to their home country from Pakistan. This almost always involved people who were detained because of their non-regular stay in Pakistan.<sup>147</sup> This is confirmed by UNHCR. According to their data, an estimated 1.500 Afghans without official documents were arrested in Pakistan and deported to Afghanistan in 2022. During the first six months of 2023, this is estimated to be 3.300 people. These Afghan migrants were arrested in Pakistan and then deported on charges of violating the *1946 Foreigners Act*. UNHCR further recorded three cases of Proof of Registration (PoR) card-holders deported from Pakistan to Afghanistan during the first six months of 2023. In 2022, UNHCR recorded no deportations of PoR card-holders from Pakistan to Afghanistan.<sup>148</sup>

In early October 2023, the Pakistani authorities announced that all migrants illegally residing in Pakistan, including an estimated 1.7 million Afghan migrants, would need to leave the country by 1 November 2023. Those who had not voluntarily left the country after this predetermined deadline would be arrested and then deported.<sup>149</sup> According to New York Times (NYT) reports, Pakistan's Interior Ministry even promised a "reward" here for information that could lead to migrant arrests after the 1 November deadline had passed.<sup>150</sup> According to Pakistani government figures, nearly 4 million Afghan migrants were estimated to reside in Pakistan, of which 2.2 million have official documents and are eligible to stay.<sup>151</sup> The announcement of this deportation policy was followed by several media reports of Afghan tenants being evicted from their homes, illegal Afghan workers being fired, Pakistani police patrols surrounding districts where Afghan migrants live, destroying and

<sup>141</sup> The Guardian, 10/01/2023, [URL](#)

<sup>142</sup> Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken - Nederland, 06/2023, p. 145, [URL](#)

<sup>143</sup> Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken - Nederland, 06/2023, p. 145, [URL](#)

<sup>144</sup> Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken - Nederland, 06/2023, p. 145, [URL](#)

<sup>145</sup> Khaama Press, 13/12/2023, [url](#); The Guardian, 10/01/2023, [URL](#)

<sup>146</sup> Ariana News, 07/03/2023, [URL](#); Khaama Press, 25/03/2023, [URL](#); Ariana News, 03/05/2023, [URL](#); Ariana News, 09/05/2023, [URL](#); Khaama Press, 13/06/2023, [URL](#)

<sup>147</sup> Khaama Press, 03/01/2023, [URL](#); Khaama Press, 04/01/2023, [URL](#); Ariana News, 09/01/2023, [URL](#); Ariana News, 16/02/2023, [URL](#); Khaama Press, 06/03/2023, [URL](#); Ariana News, 08/03/2023, [URL](#); Khaama Press, 16/03/2023, [URL](#); Ariana News, 25/05/2023, [URL](#); Tolo News, 29/05/2023, [URL](#); Khaama Press, 07/06/2023, [URL](#); Khaama Press, 13/06/2023, [URL](#); Khaama Press, 20/06/2023, [URL](#); Khaama Press, 12/10/2023, [URL](#)

<sup>148</sup> UNHCR, 11/04/2023, p. 5, [URL](#); UNHCR, 13/09/2023, p. 5, [URL](#)

<sup>149</sup> Al Jazeera, 03/10/2023, [URL](#); Ariana News, 04/10/2023, [URL](#); NYT, 08/10/2023, [URL](#)

<sup>150</sup> NYT, 08/10/2023, [URL](#)

<sup>151</sup> Al Jazeera, 07/11/2023, [URL](#)



raiding homes, questioning people about official residence papers and, failing that, proceeding to arrests (including women and children).<sup>152</sup> In Karachi, a city home to a large community of Afghan migrants, arrests at road checkpoints and markets have also been reported. Although Afghan migrants have faced harassment in Pakistan for decades, this recent deportation policy by the Pakistani authorities has been described as the most explicit and far-reaching measure, to be framed within a context of rising tensions between the Pakistani government and the *de facto* Taliban authorities in Afghanistan over violence and security incidents by extremist groups in the border region between the two countries.<sup>153</sup>

Shortly after the announcement of this deportation policy, the Taliban Deputy Minister for Administrative Affairs called upon the Pakistani authorities to reconsider their decision<sup>154</sup> and a special commission was set up by the *de facto* Afghan authorities to deal with the problems of Afghan refugees in Pakistan.<sup>155</sup> According to Taliban sources, this commission would also provide returned Afghan refugees with access to basic services and set up temporary camps to house the migrants.<sup>156</sup> Reactions to the Pakistani government's decision were also coming from the international community. In mid-October 2023, the UN asked Pakistan to immediately cancel their plan to deport more than one million Afghan migrants from the country.<sup>157</sup> A few days later, the US strongly encouraged Afghanistan's neighbours, including Pakistan, to accept Afghan refugees and allow them access to their territory.<sup>158</sup> In mid-November 2023, AI called upon the Pakistani government to immediately halt ongoing detentions and deportations of Afghan migrants.<sup>159</sup>

In late October 2023, according to media reports, 60.000-70.000 Afghan migrants were said to have already returned from Pakistan in less than a month.<sup>160</sup> According to humanitarian aid organisations, about 4.000 people were leaving daily in October 2023 - more than 10 times as many as before the deportation policy was announced.<sup>161</sup> Reports of rising numbers continued to follow.<sup>162</sup> By mid-November 2023, according to the Afghan Ministry for Migrant Affairs, 6.000 people per day were already said to be crossing the border,<sup>163</sup> totalling more than 300.000 Afghan migrants who had left Pakistan since the announcement of the deportation policy in early October.<sup>164</sup> Pakistan's Minister for the Interior stated that Afghan migrants waiting for visas to leave for a Western country would not be deported.<sup>165</sup> A few days later, Pakistan's Ministry for the Interior confirmed that the deadline for the illegal migrants to leave the country would not be extended and that the government already had a plan ready for beginning repatriation,<sup>166</sup> in which migrants without official documents would be detained in specially set up deportation centres to await their return.<sup>167</sup>

According to an early November 2023 MO Magazine article, mobile hospitals and refugee camps have been established at the Torkham border crossing in Pakistan where returning Afghans can stay for up to a month. Families returning must reportedly stay two or three nights in Torkham, among

<sup>152</sup> Al Jazeera, 03/10/2023, [URL](#); Ariana News, 04/10/2023, [URL](#); NYT, 08/10/2023, [URL](#); Khaama Press, 16/10/2023, [URL](#); NYT, 30/10/2023, [URL](#); HRW, 31/10/2023, [URL](#); MO Magazine, 03/11/2023, [URL](#)

<sup>153</sup> NYT, 08/10/2023, [URL](#)

<sup>154</sup> Ariana News, 20/10/2023, [URL](#)

<sup>155</sup> Tolo News, 11/10/2023, [URL](#)

<sup>156</sup> NYT, 30/10/2023, [URL](#)

<sup>157</sup> Ariana News, 18/10/2023, [URL](#)

<sup>158</sup> Ariana News, 20/10/2023, [URL](#)

<sup>159</sup> Khaama Press, 11/11/2023, [URL](#)

<sup>160</sup> Khaama Press, 23/10/2023, [URL](#); NYT, 30/10/2023, [URL](#)

<sup>161</sup> NYT, 30/10/2023, [URL](#)

<sup>162</sup> Ariana News, 01/11/2023, [URL](#); The Guardian, 01/11/2023, [URL](#); Ariana News, 05/11/2023, [URL](#); Ariana News, 06/11/2023, [URL](#); Khaama Press, 06/11/2023, [URL](#)

<sup>163</sup> Ariana News, 07/11/2023, [URL](#); Khaama Press, 12/11/2023, [URL](#)

<sup>164</sup> RFE/RL, 10/11/2023, [URL](#)

<sup>165</sup> Khaama Press, 23/10/2023, [URL](#)

<sup>166</sup> Khaama Press, 26/10/2023, [URL](#); NYT, 30/10/2023, [URL](#); RFE/RL, 01/11/2023, [URL](#)

<sup>167</sup> Ariana News, 25/10/2023, [URL](#); Al Jazeera, 26/10/2023, [URL](#); NYT, 30/10/2023, [URL](#); MO Magazine, 03/11/2023, [URL](#)

other things to re-register themselves in Afghanistan. They are then transported by the Afghan *de facto* Ministry of Transport in lorries and buses to their original provinces and districts. Also according to this article in MO Magazine, Afghan refugees returning before 1 November 2023 were permitted to take a maximum of 50.000 Pakistani rupees (about 170 euros) and several personal belongings back to their homeland. Other belongings, such as livestock and furniture, had to be left behind. All property is reportedly being confiscated from refugees who have been arrested and deported since 1 November 2023. Moreover, the Pakistani government reportedly announced that it would take action against Pakistanis sheltering Afghan refugees.<sup>168</sup>

On 10 November 2023, after deporting all illegal migrants in the country, the Pakistani government announced that it would also return the remaining more than 2 million Afghan migrants who do have official documents.<sup>169</sup> A few days later, however, Pakistan's interim Minister for the Interior contradicted this, stating that refugees with immigration documents/cards would not be deported.<sup>170</sup> In mid-November 2023, Pakistan opened three additional border posts to smooth the flow of migrants returning to Afghanistan - Saifullah Fort in Balochistan province, Chagai district in Brabcheh and a border post in the region of Noorhab.<sup>171</sup>

According to UNHCR figures, from 15 September to 30 November 2023, more than 428.000 Afghans returned from Pakistan within the context of Pakistan's aforementioned deportation policy.<sup>172</sup>

## 6.2. Voluntary permanent return

### 6.2.1. From the West

Regarding the organisation of voluntary return from Belgium, Fedasil mentions on its website that it is working with IOM, which is taking care of booking the flights and accompanying the person in question during the various stages of the journey, up to arrival in the country of origin. The person himself/herself is responsible for obtaining travel documents.<sup>173</sup>

When organising returns, neither DVZ nor IOM inform the relevant embassies whether or not the people being returned to their countries of origin have requested international protection. This is evidenced by an interview with DVZ on 22 March 2022<sup>174</sup> and an e-mail from IOM to Cedoca on 29 March 2022.<sup>175</sup>

The retrieval of data on return from Belgium follows a procedure defined in consultation with IOM and DVZ.

On 21 April 2023, Cedoca learnt by e-mail from DVZ that up till then, this service had not organised any voluntary returns from Belgium to Afghanistan.<sup>176</sup> On 21 November 2023, Cedoca learnt by e-mail from DVZ that the service had been supporting Afghans who wanted to return to Afghanistan voluntarily since February 2023.<sup>177</sup>

On 20 June 2023, Cedoca obtained information by e-mail from IOM that this organisation had not organised any returns from Belgium to Afghanistan by that point. IOM added that all voluntary

<sup>168</sup> MO Magazine, 03/11/2023, [URL](#)

<sup>169</sup> RFE/RL, 10/11/2023, [URL](#); Ariana News, 10/11/2023, [URL](#); Khaama Press, 10/11/2023, [URL](#)

<sup>170</sup> Ariana News, 14/11/2023, [URL](#)

<sup>171</sup> RFE/RL, 13/11/2023, [URL](#); Ariana News, 14/11/2023, [URL](#)

<sup>172</sup> UNHCR, 01/12/2023, [URL](#)

<sup>173</sup> Fedasil, *Return journey*, no date, [URL](#); Fedasil, 2022, [URL](#)

<sup>174</sup> DVZ, interview, Brussels, 22/03/2022

<sup>175</sup> IOM, e-mail, 29/03/2022

<sup>176</sup> DVZ, e-mail, 21/04/2023

<sup>177</sup> DVZ, e-mail, 21/11/2023

returns to Afghanistan have been suspended since August 2021 and that this measure is still in effect.<sup>178</sup>

As indicated by the Norwegian Landinfo in their *Query Response* published in September 2022 on departures from and returns to Afghanistan since the Taliban takeover of power, there is no complete record available of Afghans voluntarily returning to their homeland - either in terms of a permanent return or in terms of a short or longer temporary stay.<sup>179</sup>

According to a source cited in the 2023 Dutch *Country Report on Afghanistan*, it is unknown how many Afghans have voluntarily returned to Afghanistan from Western countries. Another source cited states that he is not aware of any voluntary or forced returns from Europe to Afghanistan since August 2021. A further source cited in this *Country Report on Afghanistan* reports that since the Taliban seizure of power, ten people have voluntarily returned to Afghanistan from the Netherlands through the DT&V.<sup>180</sup>

### 6.2.2. From neighbouring countries

UNOCHA data published in their *Snapshots of Population Movements* show the following figures for returns from Pakistan and Iran to Afghanistan during the years 2021, 2022 and 2023. In 2021 (data from January until December), 1.24 million Afghans returned from Iran and 29.200 from Pakistan.<sup>181</sup> In 2022 (data from January until November), 762.900 million Afghans returned from Iran and 75.700 from Pakistan.<sup>182</sup> In 2023 (data from January until September, which does not yet include the data of mass returns from Pakistan in October and November 2023), 635.800 Afghans returned from Iran and 101.000 from Pakistan.<sup>183</sup> These data cover all returns of Afghans from Iran and Pakistan, both voluntary and forced returns (see above).

According to UNHCR's 2022 *Voluntary Repatriation Update*, 6.424 Afghan refugees voluntarily returned to their homeland between 1 January and 31 December 2022, with UNHCR's assistance. Most of these (6.029 people) were from Pakistan (mainly from the provinces of Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa<sup>184</sup>), 372 people voluntarily returned from Iran and the remaining 23 people returned from other countries, such as Tajikistan, Azerbaijan and Russia. This number is significantly higher than the same numbers of voluntary returnees in 2021 (1.363 people) and in 2020 (2.147 people), according to UNHCR figures. More than half of the refugees that returned in 2022 did so to the following five Afghan provinces: Sar-e-Pul, Kabul, Kunduz, Kandahar and Jawzjan.<sup>185</sup> According to UNHCR's 2023 *Voluntary Repatriation Update* (with data from January until September 2023), 12.795 Afghan refugees voluntarily returned to their homeland between 1 January and 30 September 2023. The majority of these refugees (97 % or 12.283 people) returned from Pakistan, 395 voluntarily returned from Iran and 117 returned from other countries. In the third quarter of 2023, UNHCR recorded 54 % of total voluntary returns for the entire year. The total number of voluntary returnees during this period was more than three times the number of returnees recorded during the same period in 2022 (3.717 people), according to UNHCR figures. In 2023, 60 % of refugees returned to the following five Afghan provinces: Kabul, Kunduz, Kandahar, Balkh and Nangarhar.<sup>186</sup>

<sup>178</sup> IOM, e-mail, 20/06/2023

<sup>179</sup> Landinfo, 29/09/2022, p. 4, [URL](#)

<sup>180</sup> Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken - Nederland, 06/2023, p. 143, [URL](#)

<sup>181</sup> UNOCHA, 06/01/2022, [URL](#)

<sup>182</sup> UNOCHA, 23/11/2022, [URL](#)

<sup>183</sup> UNOCHA, 08/11/2023, [URL](#)

<sup>184</sup> UNHCR, 03/01/2023, [URL](#)

<sup>185</sup> UNHCR, 22/03/2023, pp. 2-3, [URL](#)

<sup>186</sup> UNHCR, 18/10/2023, [URL](#)

According to interviews conducted with returning Afghan households by UNHCR, their return from Iran and Pakistan had to do with socio-economic challenges in the host countries Iran and Pakistan on the one hand, such as strict rules for gaining access to land and loss of income sources; but on the other hand also with reunification with relatives and rebuilding a life in the homeland, the (perceived) improved security situation in Afghanistan and certain government programmes for allocating land in Afghanistan. Some returnees stated that a fear of arrest and mistreatment in the host country or of deportation to Afghanistan led to their return. These interviews with returned households also show that more than 90 % of returnees had previously ascertained the security situation in their home region in Afghanistan.<sup>187</sup>

According to a confidential source cited in the 2023 Dutch *Country Report on Afghanistan*, UNHCR provides support to registered Afghan refugees upon their return to Afghanistan under voluntary repatriation by UNHCR. UNHCR also offers various forms of guidance at four Encashment Centres (ECs). Returning refugees receive a cash allowance of \$375 per person upon arrival. This allowance is intended to cover risks upon return to Afghanistan, as well as transport costs to the home area. Returning refugees also receive basic health care, overnight accommodations, mine risk education, school enrolment information, drug education and screening for malnutrition. Interviews / advisory conversations are conducted to ensure that the decision to return is well-considered, and made in safety and dignity.<sup>188</sup>

Also, according to confidential sources cited in the 2023 Dutch *Country Report on Afghanistan*, IOM provides assistance to voluntary and forced Afghan returnees. At four border crossings (two near Pakistan and two near Iran), the organisation has reception and transit centres. There, returnees receive screening, an assessment of their vulnerability, a hot meal, access to health care and support for returning to where they want to go in Afghanistan. These centres are located on the borders at Spin-Boldak, Torkham and Islam Qala, among others. When returnees travel on from the centres, they can be helped by community-based organisations or local NGOs. These can help with food aid, health care and WASH (water, sanitation and hygiene). Aid work by some local NGOs is restricted as of December 2022 because of the ban on women working for these organisations.<sup>189</sup>

According to a report by the Afghan media outlet Ariana News, in February 2023, some twenty students who had been sent out by the former Republic government for military training in India voluntarily returned to Afghanistan after their training ended. According to the Taliban, dozens of students who were in such a situation, have already returned and, upon their return, they were all assigned to the *de facto* Ministry of National Defense.<sup>190</sup>

According to journalist Ali Latifi, the authorities at Kabul Airport are in principle aware of who is arriving in Afghanistan on a flight, as there are lists of the people on the flights. However, this is more difficult for people returning (by land) from the neighbouring countries of Iran and Pakistan. When asked how the *de facto* Afghan authorities can have any certainty about the identity of the thousands of refugees returning, in the event that they do not possess any official identity documents, Latifi stated that the *de facto* authorities rely on the statements of the returnees themselves here.<sup>191</sup>

<sup>187</sup> UNHCR, 03/01/2023, [URL](#); UNHCR, 22/03/2023, pp. 2-3, [URL](#); UNHCR, 18/10/2023, [URL](#)

<sup>188</sup> Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken - Nederland, 06/2023, p. 147, [URL](#)

<sup>189</sup> Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken - Nederland Affairs, 06/2023, p. 147, [URL](#)

<sup>190</sup> Ariana News, 09/02/2023, [URL](#)

<sup>191</sup> Latifi A., journalist and Asia Editor at The New Humanitarian, conference, in EUAA, *Afghanistan COI Specialist Network Meeting*, Malta, 08-09/06/2023

## 7. View of temporary return

In March 2022, an Afghan source living in Kabul explained to the Norwegian Landinfo that it is impossible to prevent Afghans from travelling back and forth. He added that on the one hand, many Afghans reside abroad, and on the other, family ties are very strong within Afghan culture and maintaining these family relationships is important for all Afghans, including those who reside abroad.<sup>192</sup>

This same Afghan source explained to Landinfo that he occasionally flies from the Arab Emirates back and forth to Afghanistan and states that among the passengers on board, there are always some Afghan families going on holiday or visiting their homeland. According to this source, this has not changed since the Taliban seized power in August 2021. Ali Latifi, journalist and Asia Editor at The New Humanitarian, described the passengers on flights between Istanbul and Kabul as a mixed group of Afghan men, women and children visiting relatives, businessmen, aid workers and deportees.<sup>193</sup>

At the above mentioned Afghanistan conference organised by DRC in late November 2022, professor Liza Schuster confirmed that people are (temporarily) returning to Afghanistan. She referred to people returning to visit family or to do business.<sup>194</sup>

On 14 April 2023, journalist Ali Latifi stated on X that he had flown from Istanbul in Turkey to Kabul for the first time in a year. In doing so, he noted a difference in the composition of passengers on the flight from Istanbul to Kabul compared to flights from Dubai to Kabul. On the flight from Istanbul, he said, more families were present - a mix of men, women and children (especially ahead of the annual Eid festival). From Dubai, more businessmen were leaving for Kabul.<sup>195</sup> In an article also published in April 2023, Latifi referred to Afghan businessmen and entrepreneurs travelling back and forth between Kabul and Istanbul, where wealthy families have purchased real estate in certain districts.<sup>196</sup> During the aforementioned Afghanistan meeting organised by EUAA in Malta on 8-9 June 2023, Latifi confirmed that there is a great deal of travel back and forth to and from Afghanistan and that it is possible to travel back and forth to the country as part of a family or other type of visit.<sup>197</sup>

A confidential source, cited in the 2023 Dutch *Country Report on Afghanistan*, explained that people return to Afghanistan voluntarily - sometimes for a short time - for business interests, to see family members again or for the sake of their property.<sup>198</sup>

<sup>192</sup> Landinfo, 29/09/2022, p. 5, [URL](#)

<sup>193</sup> Middle East Eye, 01/06/2022, [URL](#); Landinfo, 29/09/2022, p. 5, [URL](#)

<sup>194</sup> DRC, 28/11/2022, p. 42, [URL](#)

<sup>195</sup> Latifi Ali M. (@alibomaye) [X post], 14/04/2023, [URL](#)

<sup>196</sup> Turkey recap, 12/04/2023, [URL](#)

<sup>197</sup> Latifi A., journalist and Asia Editor at The New Humanitarian, conference, in EUAA, *Afghanistan COI Specialist Network Meeting*, Malta, 08-09/06/2023

<sup>198</sup> Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken - Nederland, 06/2023, p. 147, [URL](#)

## 8. View of the situation of returnees after leaving the airport

### 8.1. The absence of documents upon return

According to journalist Ali Latifi, returnees who do not have the necessary documents can experience problems accessing (public) service(s) after arriving in Afghanistan. Afghans returning from Turkey often have only one identity document, the aforementioned “deportation letter” (see section [6. View of permanent return](#)), which they are forced to sign, but whose content the refugees themselves often do not know. Many single young men, according to Latifi, are completely on their own upon their return once they leave the airport. Some of them have been away from Afghanistan for years, have spent extended periods in Iran or Turkey and only have relatives in the provinces.<sup>199</sup>

A Western security expert on Afghanistan, who wishes to remain anonymous, confirmed that it is difficult for undocumented returnees to re-register after arriving in Afghanistan. They must first travel to their native village, where a village elder must confirm their identity. Then, they must travel to a larger city to obtain a *taskara*. Children receive documents only from a certain age (7 or 12).<sup>200</sup>

A confidential source cited in the 2023 Dutch *Country Report on Afghanistan* claims to be unaware of any problems for undocumented refugees returning to Afghanistan from neighbouring countries. Another confidential source, also cited in this *Country Report on Afghanistan*, indicated to be unaware of any difficulties with the *de facto* authorities in the return process for registered refugees returning from Pakistan with UNHCR assistance. The authorities were said to issue documentation when requested.<sup>201</sup>

### 8.2. Commission for the Return and Communications with Former Afghan Officials and Political Figures

In March 2022, the *de facto* Taliban authorities established the Commission for the Return and Communications with Former Afghan Officials and Political Figures,<sup>202</sup> which became operational in May 2022.<sup>203</sup> The Commission has drawn up a list of fifteen articles assuring that the legitimate demands of returnees will be met and that a procedure will be established to provide accommodation for politicians and military personnel from the former government, among other things.<sup>204</sup> Article two of this list stipulates that the Commission is authorised to collect information on who has left Afghanistan, before or after the Taliban seized power, and on who stayed but turned against the new Taliban government.<sup>205</sup> In May 2022, the head of the Commission declared that the Taliban authorities would guarantee the security of former government officials returning.<sup>206</sup> This message was repeated in June 2022 by the Commission itself,<sup>207</sup> as well as by the Taliban Minister for Foreign Affairs.<sup>208</sup>

<sup>199</sup> Latifi A., journalist and Asia Editor at The New Humanitarian, conference, in EUAA, *Afghanistan COI Specialist Network Meeting*, Malta, 08-09/06/2023

<sup>200</sup> Western security expert on Afghanistan, conference, in EUAA, *Afghanistan COI Specialist Network Meeting*, Malta, 08-09/06/2023 and e-mail, 25/11/2023

<sup>201</sup> Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken - Nederland, 06/2023, p. 147, [URL](#)

<sup>202</sup> Ariana News, 17/03/2022, [URL](#); Tolo News, 17/03/2022, [URL](#)

<sup>203</sup> Ariana News, 17/05/2022, [URL](#); Tolo News, 23/05/2022, [URL](#)

<sup>204</sup> Khaama Press, 21/05/2022, [URL](#); Tolo News, 23/05/2022, [URL](#)

<sup>205</sup> Afghan Analyst (@AfghanAnalyst2) [X post], 21/05/2022, [URL](#)

<sup>206</sup> Tolo News, 21/05/2022, [URL](#)

<sup>207</sup> Tolo News, 09/06/2022, [URL](#)

<sup>208</sup> Tolo News, 04/06/2022, [URL](#)

As indicated in Landinfo's September 2022 *Query Response*, the *de facto* Taliban authorities recognise that - in order to govern the country - they are dependent upon people who are educated and also have governance experience.<sup>209</sup> In a December 2021 statement, Taliban leader Haibatullah Akhundzada stated that the new *de facto* authorities needed to solve the problems of Afghans who want to leave the country for political or economic reasons. The Emir welcomed all Afghans to return and contribute to rebuilding the country.<sup>210</sup> Numerous messages followed during 2022 and 2023, with the Taliban calling upon political leaders and officials from the former government, as well as investors, businessmen and academics who have left the country, to return to Afghanistan.<sup>211</sup>

Sporadic reports have been published in the Afghan media about former high-ranking figures who have actually returned to Afghanistan. Examples of these include Abdul Salam Rahimi, special envoy for peace under former President Ashraf Ghani and senior member of the delegation that participated in peace negotiations with the Taliban;<sup>212</sup> Zarifa Ghafari, former mayor of Maidan Shar in Maidan Wardak province;<sup>213</sup> Dawlat Waziri, former spokesman for the Ministry of Defense;<sup>214</sup> Amanullah Ghalib, former Director of the national energy company Barishna Sherkat;<sup>215</sup> Farooq Wardak, former Minister of Education;<sup>216</sup> Sediq Chakari, former Minister of Religious Affairs, and Brigadier General Mohammad Anwar Kohistani, former Director of the Police;<sup>217</sup> Abdul Hakim Noorzai, former Assistant to the National Security Adviser, and Maulvi Abdul Khabir Chichka, former Ulema councillor;<sup>218</sup> Hidayat Amin Arsala, former Finance Minister;<sup>219</sup> Nisamuddin Qaisari, former commander of the local uprising forces in Faryab province;<sup>220</sup> Hasibullah Kalimzai, former member of the Senate, and General Habibullah Ahmadzai, former Adviser to former President Ashraf Ghani;<sup>221</sup> Hassan Mubarak Azizi, former Minister of Transport;<sup>222</sup> and Daud Gulzar, also former Adviser to former President Ashraf Ghani.<sup>223</sup>

In mid-May 2022, Anas Haqqani, a prominent Taliban figure also involved with the Commission, stated that by that time, 50 former government officials and political figures had already returned to Afghanistan.<sup>224</sup> According to a spokesman for the new *de facto* authorities, 370 prominent figures had already returned in October 2022, including former ministers, members of parliament, national security officials, journalists and prominent politicians.<sup>225</sup> In March 2023, the Commission declared that talented and "honest" former political figures and officials would be given jobs in the new administration upon their return to Afghanistan. The Commission pointed out that thousands of former government officials had been reassigned to the current *de facto* Taliban administration. According to the Commission, 513 former government officials, including ministers, governors and vice-governors and political figures have since returned.<sup>226</sup> In mid-May 2023, a press release was issued in which Tahir Zuhair, former governor of Bamiyan province and also former Minister of

<sup>209</sup> Landinfo, 29/09/2022, p. 3, [URL](#)

<sup>210</sup> Tolo News, 08/12/2021, [URL](#)

<sup>211</sup> Ariana News, 28/11/2021, [URL](#); Tolo News, 05/01/2022, [URL](#); Ariana News, 25/04/2022, [URL](#); Ariana News, 18/05/2022, [URL](#); Khaama Press, 14/11/2022, [URL](#); Ariana News, 15/03/2023, [URL](#); Ariana News, 16/05/2023, [URL](#); Khaama Press, 22/06/2023, [URL](#)

<sup>212</sup> Khaama Press, 12/02/2022, [URL](#); Tolo News, 13/02/2022, [URL](#)

<sup>213</sup> Tolo News, 27/02/2022, [URL](#)

<sup>214</sup> Khaama Press, 05/06/2022, [URL](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, 15/06/2022, [URL](#)

<sup>215</sup> Pajhwok Afghan News, 07/06/2022, [URL](#)

<sup>216</sup> Khaama Press, 08/06/2022, [URL](#)

<sup>217</sup> Pajhwok Afghan News, 13/06/2022, [URL](#)

<sup>218</sup> Pajhwok Afghan News, 16/06/2022, [URL](#)

<sup>219</sup> Pajhwok Afghan News, 23/06/2022, [URL](#)

<sup>220</sup> Ariana News, 26/06/2022, [URL](#)

<sup>221</sup> Ariana News, 29/06/2022, [URL](#); Tolo News, 29/06/2022, [URL](#)

<sup>222</sup> Najib Farhodi (@Najib\_Farhodi) [X post], 02/06/2022, [URL](#)

<sup>223</sup> Ariana News, 14/11/2022, [URL](#)

<sup>224</sup> Khaama Press, 14/05/2022, [URL](#)

<sup>225</sup> Ariana News, 23/10/2022, [URL](#)

<sup>226</sup> Tolo News, 13/03/2023, [URL](#)

Information and Culture, called for all Afghans who fled to return home. In doing so, he referred to the general amnesty proclaimed by the IEA. Zuhair himself has also returned from abroad.<sup>227</sup> In June 2023, acting Taliban Prime Minister Maulvi Abdul Kabir declared that more than 550 former government officials had already returned to Afghanistan.<sup>228</sup> In mid-July 2023, the Commission stated that 15 prominent members of the former government had returned within one week, which would bring the total number of returnees to more than 600.<sup>229</sup> By early October 2023, that number was said to have reached nearly 700 people, according to a Commission spokesman. The spokesman added that several additional application forms had been sent to prominent figures who are still abroad and that these individuals would soon be returning to Afghanistan with the Commission's support as well.<sup>230</sup>

According to a source at the EU, it remains difficult to estimate how many prominent figures have actually returned to Afghanistan and who and what profiles are actually involved. According to this source, the Taliban's promises are not always kept. Returnees are not always given new positions/employment, nor are any reintegration programmes provided.<sup>231</sup>

According to a Western security expert on Afghanistan, who wishes to remain anonymous, the Commission functions primarily as a way for wealthy Afghans to manage their assets in Afghanistan, and has not led to the political recognition of returnees. He added that people who have returned through this Commission usually cannot resume their former positions, except in highly exceptional circumstances (for example, technicians needed in the security forces of the new *de facto* authorities) and that these returnees are not allowed to participate in political activities.<sup>232</sup>

### 8.3. Situation for non-prominent returnees

As cited above, since the Taliban takeover of power in August 2021, their official reports have indicated several times that the new *de facto* authorities do not harbour any hostility or resentment and encourage the Afghan people not to leave the country, or instead to return to Afghanistan.<sup>233</sup> In late May 2023, Amir Khan Muttaqi, the Taliban's Foreign Minister, proclaimed through Tolo News on X that "Afghanistan is a home for all Afghans and all Afghans, whether they like the government or not, have the right to live in Afghanistan".<sup>234</sup> Muttaqi made this statement in response to the deaths of eighteen Afghan migrants in Bulgaria. He added that "all Afghans are free to travel abroad but they should not use the system to secure asylum".<sup>235</sup> On World Refugee Day on 20 June 2023, the Taliban's Minister of Refugees and Repatriations, Khalil-ur-Rahman Haqqani, called upon all Afghans abroad to return to Afghanistan. At the same time, Haqqani asked host countries to treat Afghan refugees residing in their territories with respect and adhere to international principles and legislation relating to the Geneva Convention.<sup>236</sup>

In its *Query Response* on departure from and return to Afghanistan since the Taliban takeover of power, published in September 2022, Norway's Landinfo indicated that little is known about the current situation of Afghans returning to Afghanistan from the West. There have been hardly any

<sup>227</sup> Ariana News, 15/05/2023, [URL](#)

<sup>228</sup> Khaama Press, 11/06/2023, [URL](#)

<sup>229</sup> Tolo News, 16/07/2023, [URL](#)

<sup>230</sup> Ariana News, 01/10/2023, [URL](#)

<sup>231</sup> EU delegation to Afghanistan, e-mail, 02/05/2023

<sup>232</sup> Western security expert on Afghanistan, conference, in EUAA, *Afghanistan COI Specialist Network Meeting*, Malta, 08-09/06/2023 and e-mail, 25/11/2023

<sup>233</sup> Tolo News, 08/12/2021, [URL](#); Tolo News, 05/01/2022, [URL](#); Ariana News, 25/04/2022, [URL](#); Ariana News, 18/05/2022, [URL](#); Khaama Press, 14/11/2022, [URL](#); Ariana News, 15/05/2023, [URL](#); Ariana News, 16/05/2023, [URL](#); Khaama Press, 22/06/2023, [URL](#)

<sup>234</sup> Tolo News (@TOLONews), [X Post], 30/05/2022, [URL](#)

<sup>235</sup> Ariana News, 31/05/2023, [URL](#)

<sup>236</sup> Khaama Press, 22/06/2023, [URL](#)



forced returns of Afghans from Western countries, and the number of voluntary returnees is also believed to be rather low. Landinfo stated that it was not aware of any reports that returned Afghans have experienced any reactions or problems because of their stay in a Western country. Landinfo added that Afghan society is highly diverse and complex and that this is also reflected in the way the new *de facto* Taliban authorities are governing the country. This implies that considerable variation in attitudes and numerous local differences are possible. Landinfo assumed that this also applies to how people returning from the West are perceived. Thus, potential reactions will always depend upon the individual profile of the person returning, the network that person has in Afghanistan and the place in Afghanistan to which that person is returning. Landinfo pointed out that Afghans returning from abroad will need to deal with the local variation of Taliban decrees and regulations in a similar way to the rest of the Afghan population.<sup>237</sup>

The 2022 Dutch *Country Report on Afghanistan* stated that there is no systematic monitoring of the circumstances for Afghans returning from Europe to Afghanistan.<sup>238</sup>

The 2023 Dutch *Country Report on Afghanistan* indicated that it is unclear as to what potential problems, if any, returning Afghans might face and how they would be treated upon return to Afghanistan. This *Country Report on Afghanistan* described the information on this as sparse and purely anecdotal. According to this *Country Report on Afghanistan*, it is not clear whether factors such as whether or not the person has left Afghanistan illegally, the ethnicity of the person returning, any residence in Europe or another Western country or in one of the neighbouring countries (such as Iran and Pakistan) play a role in whether or not problems would be experienced when returning to Afghanistan or would manifest in a difference in treatment when returning to Afghanistan.<sup>239</sup>

One source, cited in the 2023 Dutch *Country Report on Afghanistan*, stated that there was no reliable information available on the treatment by the Taliban of people voluntarily returning to Afghanistan. The information on this is described as limited and anecdotal. Other sources cited in this report state that they are not aware of any problems or difficulties with the *de facto* authorities in returning registered or undocumented refugees from neighbouring countries. According to another source cited in this report, there is always a chance, but not necessarily in each individual case, of problems in returning for people who left as economic refugees. Prominent individuals with certain profiles (such as former ANDSF personnel, for example) or people who already had certain problems before leaving Afghanistan could face retaliation upon their return. The source did not speak of any consistently occurring problems, but did state that such problems can never be ruled out. The same source claimed that no information was available on the treatment by the *de facto* Taliban authorities of people who are forced to return from a European or Western country, as there are hardly any such cases known.<sup>240</sup>

According to a Freedom House report published in January 2023, in terms of the profile of human rights defenders, the Taliban would consider certain factors such as having received a Western education, having worked for a Western organisation, wearing Western-style clothing and speaking English as indicators of association with the "enemy".<sup>241</sup>

The independent non-profit news organisation The New Humanitarian stated that it is difficult for researchers and aid workers to determine whether or not returning Afghans from Pakistan, Iran or Turkey are being persecuted by the *de facto* Taliban authorities. In this regard, The New

<sup>237</sup> Landinfo, 29/09/2022, pp. 6-7, [URL](#)

<sup>238</sup> Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken - Nederland, 03/2022, p. 182, [URL](#)

<sup>239</sup> Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken - Nederland, pp. 148-149, [URL](#)

<sup>240</sup> Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken - Nederland, 06/2023, pp. 147-148, [URL](#)

<sup>241</sup> Freedom House, 19/01/2023, p. 17, [URL](#)

Humanitarian referred to the difficulty to follow up on individual cases due to the difficulty of setting up monitoring activities in the field.<sup>242</sup>

During the research for this COI Focus, Cedoca neither found any information on the (systematic) following-up of Afghans who have returned to Afghanistan, either from neighbouring countries or from the West.

Regarding the Taliban's ability to monitor returning Afghans and gather intelligence on them, IOM stated during a conversation with the Danish Immigration Service (DIS) in March 2022 that the infrastructure of the *de facto* authorities is very weak and that, consequently, the Taliban are unable to track and monitor all returnees. In practice, though, at the village level, village elders will always be aware of who has returned. However, according to IOM, this information is unlikely to reach the *de facto* Taliban authorities in Kabul.<sup>243</sup> Cedoca contacted IOM in May 2023 asking whether the organisation still endorses the above information as of 2023, but did not receive a response within the agreed time frame for this COI Focus.

In April and May 2023, Cedoca contacted both UNHCR and IOM by e-mail with some additional questions about how both organisations monitor the return of Afghan refugees upon arrival in Afghanistan, how and to what extent / in what form assistance is provided, who among the returnees is eligible for such assistance, and whether the situation and reintegration of these returnees is further monitored later on. However, within the agreed time frame for this COI Focus, Cedoca did not receive any specific answers to these questions from either UNHCR or IOM. Cedoca has been informed by both the UNHCR office and the IOM office in Belgium that they have forwarded the questions to their regional offices, but that waiting for a response could take time because of the volatile situation in the region. At the conclusion of this COI Focus in November 2023, Cedoca has not yet received any further response from UNHCR and IOM to the above mentioned questions.

Cedoca did receive information by e-mail from IOM on 24 July 2023, which the organisation explained at a meeting with the Federal Migration Centre Myria in Brussels in June 2023. During this explanation, IOM indicated that they have suspended assistance for voluntary return to Afghanistan and further reintegration after return since August 2021, owing to their assessment that there is "no safe environment for return". A new internal review took place in March-April 2023 to examine the conditions relating to return and reintegration and to determine the possibility of resuming return and reintegration operations in Afghanistan. Following this internal review, IOM confirmed full suspension of the provision of assistance for voluntary return. IOM anticipated that the conditions that led to this decision will remain unchanged at best in the near and foreseeable future and will likely deteriorate further. In this regard, IOM cited the current multi-layered crisis in Afghanistan, in terms of both socio-economic / humanitarian and human and women's rights, and referred to the unpredictability of the *de facto* Afghan authorities, the unstable political situation, the operationally difficult environment, the lack of basic services, and the increase in negative coping strategies that Afghan families are employing to earn a living. The organisation added that IOM Afghanistan's current response is focused on continuing its humanitarian and protection work at key border points and in communities (not linked to return per se, but more generally as assistance to and protection for vulnerable populations) and enhancing the links between reception, protection and community stabilisation programmes. IOM views assistance to returning Afghan refugees as part of a broader intervention to respond to displacement and address basic needs.<sup>244</sup>

According to UNHCR, Afghan migrants deported from Iran, Pakistan or Turkey are mainly trying to keep a "low profile" and be as unobtrusive as possible. UNHCR has stated that they sometimes try

<sup>242</sup> The New Humanitarian, 10/08/2022, [URL](#)

<sup>243</sup> Danish Immigration Service, 06/2022, p. 38, [URL](#)

<sup>244</sup> IOM, e-mail, 24/07/2023

to contact them by phone, but often do not get an answer. The returnees then choose a suitable time to contact them, according to UNHCR.<sup>245</sup>

According to professor Haroun Rahimi, people who oppose the Taliban and are considered “instruments of Western influence” will be seen as a problem upon return. Rahimi argued that the *de facto* authorities will not necessarily resort to (openly) killing these people, but will instead employ “softer” methods of intimidation, such as imposing all kinds of restrictions.<sup>246</sup>

According to an international analyst on Afghanistan, who wishes to remain anonymous, the *de facto* Taliban authorities are genuinely concerned about the skilled and educated Afghans leaving the country. They therefore encourage these people to stay or to return. This source referred to the perception that these migrants discredit the Taliban regime by seeking asylum in a Western country and claiming their lives are in danger, but he stated that the Taliban do not see these Afghans as political refugees, but rather as economic migrants. The analyst indicated that he was not aware of any systematic or even sporadic actions on the part of the Taliban towards returnees merely because they have returned from a Western country (except in the case of former ANSDF commanders). He added that possible problems may arise later after the return, for example when a new Taliban commander takes office in someone's region. According to this source, the *de facto* Taliban authorities are seeking to gain complete control over the country and the Afghan people, and their approach and reactions against anyone perceived as a threat are rather rudimentary and brazen.<sup>247</sup>

Journalist Ali Latifi pointed out a clear difference between, on the one hand, the situation of Afghans who travel back and forth to Afghanistan without any problems (for family visits, for example) and, on the other hand, the situation of Afghan migrants who did not choose to return to Afghanistan (the largest group), but who have returned because their situation abroad was so bad that they want to try to rebuild their lives in their home country. The majority of returnees in the latter group also return to Afghanistan with financial debts.<sup>248</sup>

Latifi stated that merely returning from the West does not make someone a target. Here, he referred to the large numbers of Afghans returning and Afghans travelling back and forth without encountering problems. According to Latifi, the *de facto* Taliban authorities cannot know or find out about where someone has returned from and why; they cannot monitor that for every returnee. Large groups of people come and go. That fact alone, according to Latifi, will not cause problems unless there are other reasons or the people returning have additional problems. He has not heard of systematic or even sporadic actions against returnees just because they have returned. He does know of actions taken against former ANSDF commanders.<sup>249</sup>

Speaking to Cedoca in March 2023, a Western security expert on Afghanistan, who wishes to remain anonymous, stated that the *de facto* Taliban authorities do not really have the necessary capacity, manpower and resources to monitor everyone and systematically track down any opponents. According to this source, in practice they are more likely to stick to the attempt to set up a totalitarian and theocratic police state against any opposition. The Ministry for the Propagation of Virtue and Prevention of Vice (MPVPV) is primarily used in this effort to obtain information about certain individuals or families who are targeted by the Taliban. According to this source, there are reports of checks where phones are read at checkpoints, but this depends on the location and profile of the

<sup>245</sup> UNHCR, Brussels conference, 24/05/2023

<sup>246</sup> Rahimi H., Associate Professor of Law at the American University of Afghanistan, conference, in EUAA, *Afghanistan COI Specialist Network Meeting*, Malta, 08-09/06/2023

<sup>247</sup> International analyst on Afghanistan, conference, in EUAA, *Afghanistan COI Specialist Network Meeting*, Malta, 08-09/06/2023

<sup>248</sup> Latifi A., journalist and Asia Editor at The New Humanitarian, conference, in EUAA, *Afghanistan COI Specialist Network Meeting*, Malta, 08-09/06/2023

<sup>249</sup> Latifi A., journalist and Asia Editor at The New Humanitarian, conference, in EUAA, *Afghanistan COI Specialist Network Meeting*, Malta, 08-09/06/2023

person being checked. Here, he referred to the monitoring of, for example, UN national personnel, military vehicles and persons suspected of having ties to ISKP. This is how the *de facto* Taliban authorities would try to convince the Afghan people that they are in control of the situation. According to this source, most Afghans actually do also feel safer while travelling compared to the pre-August 2021 situation. However, crime in cities has remained a challenge and a number of unclear targeted killings, on the other hand, have shown that not everyone enjoys protection/security. This source indicated that there are fewer checkpoints than before, and that they are mostly to be found in cities and are set up at night. Following reports of an attack or threat, some (temporary) mobile checkpoints also often pop up. Taliban intelligence service (GDI) training, according to this source, initially began with the slogan "suspect everything and you will find the truth". More recently, GDI agents were said to have been instructed to check more closely before making arrests. Some local GDI agents were said to want to spread fear or demonstrate to their superiors that they are doing a thorough job, but in practice, according to this source, many of them do not really know what exactly they are looking for. The question also often arises as to whether these are individual acts of vengeance or settlements, or government policies.<sup>250</sup>

In June 2023, this same source added that the Taliban agents manning checkpoints are particularly unpopular with the Afghan people. These are often foot soldiers who fought as combatants during the Taliban insurgency and have now been given a position within the new *de facto* government, but often find it difficult to cope with the routine nature of their new job. According to this source, the *de facto* Taliban authorities are eager to keep all Afghans in Afghanistan and return those who have left, and are also clearly sending this message to the world: Afghanistan is a home for all Afghans. He added that generally minimal background information checks are done on returnees.<sup>251</sup>

According to journalist Ali Latifi, checks where phones are read are rather rare and people are not randomly stopped on the street for this. Legally, police officers or members of the Taliban's intelligence services (GDI) do not have permission to do this on the street at random - they need a document to do so. But in practice, according to Latifi, it does occur. People are often afraid and hand their phones over to the Taliban anyway. Latifi says he experienced this himself and that the Taliban went through his photos and WhatsApp messages.<sup>252</sup>

The aforementioned international analyst on Afghanistan, who wishes to remain anonymous, indicated that in provincial capitals, district centres and urban centres such as Kabul, there are numerous checkpoints set up and manned by the police (in Kabul, the officers wear uniforms). During these checks some standard questions are asked, such as where one is from and where one is going. Elsewhere in the country, there are hardly any checkpoints, according to this analyst. The local agents manning the checkpoints often exercise a lot of power and act according to who they have in front of them. This source claimed to have heard of checks where phones are read (for example, from Panjshiris), but has never experienced this himself. He described the Taliban's intelligence work as "human intelligence", based on connections with people. He called the Taliban's ability to monitor people's private communications rather rudimentary.<sup>253</sup>

Both AAN analyst Thomas Ruttig and professor and researcher Liza Schuster have pointed out the importance of having a network in Afghanistan, especially upon return. Ruttig described Afghanistan as a "network society", defined by extensive networks of kinship and other kinds of relationships, where everyone knows just about everyone. Schuster agreed, stating that a network is very

<sup>250</sup> Western security expert on Afghanistan, interview, Brussels, 15/03/2023, e-mail, 25/11/2023

<sup>251</sup> Western security expert on Afghanistan, conference, in EUAA, *Afghanistan COI Specialist Network Meeting*, Malta, 08-09/06/2023 and e-mail, 25/11/2023

<sup>252</sup> Latifi A., journalist and Asia Editor at The New Humanitarian, conference, in EUAA, *Afghanistan COI Specialist Network Meeting*, Malta, 08-09/06/2023

<sup>253</sup> International analyst on Afghanistan, conference, in EUAA, *Afghanistan COI Specialist Network Meeting*, Malta, 08-09/06/2023

important for survival in Afghan society. She added that Afghan migrants returning to Afghanistan after spending a (long) time abroad may face difficulties if they cannot rely on the support of their network.<sup>254</sup>

According to Schuster, who mentioned she has not been to Afghanistan since August 2021, but is still in contact with acquaintances and her network in the country and is getting information that way, the general attitude within the Taliban is that Afghans should stay in Afghanistan to contribute towards building up the country with their knowledge and skills. Schuster claimed to have learned that some voices within the Taliban have a negative attitude towards people who have fled the country. She referred to certain profiles of people, such as former employees of international NGOs, people who worked for the former government or in former ministries, former ANDSF personnel, human rights organisation employees or media workers who left the country and are considered “traitors” by the Taliban. In this regard, she also referred to information she has received about family members of these people left behind in Afghanistan who have been harassed by local government officials and neighbours. In other cases, Schuster has heard that prominent figures from the overthrown Republic have been asked to turn over lists of fugitive employees to the Taliban.<sup>255</sup>

At the same time, Schuster pointed out that not everyone who left Afghanistan is at the same risk upon return. She knows of people who go back for various reasons, such as family visits or business/professional reasons, and that this is possible, that these people do not have any problems in doing so. According to Schuster, there is a difference between people who return voluntarily and those who are forced to return. The latter group, she said, would be at greater risk. In relation to this, Schuster indicated that there may be a negative perception towards people who left Afghanistan, sought asylum in a Western country and were then later sent back to Afghanistan. She claimed to know of cases where these returnees were viewed with suspicion and stigmatised due to the assumption that they may have been “contaminated” by Western influences during their stay in a European or other Western country. She explained how she herself has seen how some Afghans, upon their return from the West, hid the fact that they had not returned voluntarily, to avoid the presumption that they were deported because their migration had been a failure, or because they had committed a crime or similar.<sup>256</sup>

Schuster added that the most difficult thing about Afghanistan is the great uncertainty that exists in many respects. Among other things, she referred to the possible differences in interpretation of the rules by different Taliban members. This makes it difficult to find reliable information about what is really happening on the ground.<sup>257</sup>

<sup>254</sup> DRC, 28/11/2022, pp. 17, 20, 46, 47, [URL](#)

<sup>255</sup> DRC, 28/11/2022, pp. 38-39, 41-42, 44-45, [URL](#)

<sup>256</sup> DRC, 28/11/2022, pp. 41-42, [URL](#)

<sup>257</sup> DRC, 28/11/2022, p. 48, [URL](#)

## Summary

Migration is described as a major component of Afghan history and a phenomenon ingrained into Afghan society and culture. The Taliban takeover of power in August 2021 did not ultimately lead to an exceptionally large new wave of migration, according to sources. Yet the desire to emigrate remains strong, with more than half of the Afghan population indicating they want to leave the country. However, the *de facto* Taliban authorities, according to sources aware that they need the talents, skills and experience of their people, have been proclaiming a clear message in their official communications since seizing power, asking the Afghan people not to leave the country and urging those who have already fled to return to support the new order.

As of 2023, two years since the Taliban seized power, there still appears to be some ambiguity about Afghanistan's new legal and judicial system. The 2004 Constitution and the laws and regulations enacted under the former Republic were abolished, as they were not in line with Sharia law. According to the UN, Afghanistan is in a vacuum in terms of rule of law, fuelling uncertainty about any *ad hoc* regulations by the new authorities. Some legal ambiguity has also arisen in the area of individual rights regarding emigration and return to Afghanistan since August 2021. Sources indicate that they are not aware of any current Taliban legislation or the issuance of specific regulations or decrees on migration since the seizure of power.

Since spring 2022, the international airport of the Afghan capital city Kabul has been operational again. As of 2023, there are daily departures and arrivals of both domestic and international flights worldwide. As of 2023, no direct flights to Afghanistan are possible from the EU. However, it is possible to fly daily via Istanbul, Abu Dhabi or Dubai from Brussels to Kabul International Airport. Flights to Kabul are operated by Ariana Afghan Airlines, Kam Air, Jeju Air and (since November 2023, also) Fly Dubai. The immigration process at Kabul Airport is largely as it was before. The screening of arriving passengers is described as thorough and is still being carried out by former immigration and airport personnel, who are reportedly gradually being replaced by Taliban personnel in uniform. As of 2023, the Taliban and their intelligence service (GDI) have a presence at the airport.

Demand for passports in Afghanistan appears to far exceed supply, resulting in long waiting times. For security reasons and due to technical problems, interruptions in the operation of passport offices are regularly reported, both in Kabul and in the provinces. Bribery and the importance of having personal connections with *de facto* authorities in obtaining a passport in Afghanistan have also been reported. No new passports have been issued by foreign mission posts since the Taliban seized power in August 2021. Some consulates in Europe, such as the Afghan Embassy in Brussels, do allow machine-readable passports to be extended (by five years) by affixing a sticker. As of August 2021, applying for a *taskara* from abroad is no longer possible.

Since August 2021, the EU has suspended all return agreements with Afghanistan. A number of individual European countries have also decided to suspend forced deportation. The status of such agreements is no longer clear after the Taliban seizure of power. According to sources, there were no forced returns from Europe to Afghanistan in 2022 and during the first months of 2023. During the research for this COI Focus, Cedoca found only a few exceptions to this - a handful of reports of forced returns to Afghanistan from European or Western countries after 15 August 2021. Just about all of these cases involved individuals who were returned within a particular context or have a specific profile.

Since Turkey resumed commercial flights to Kabul in January 2022, there have been continuous reports of deportations of Afghan migrants. Throughout 2022, this was said to involve nearly 70.000 people; in 2023, it was again said to involve thousands. The returns from Turkey mainly took place by plane. Various sources reported on mistreatment, humiliation and use of force by the Turkish authorities towards Afghan migrants. According to sources, it is unclear whether a return agreement

exists between Turkey and the *de facto* Taliban authorities. In addition to these deportations by air, there are also reports of Afghans being expelled overland from the border areas of Eastern Turkey to Iran.

Afghan migrants in the neighbouring countries Iran and Pakistan also face harassment, intimidation, abuse, detention and deportations by their host countries. Reports of (mainly illegal) Afghan migrants being sent back to Afghanistan appeared regularly in both 2022 and 2023. A large number of detained Afghans were also repatriated from Iran and Pakistan. These forced returns all took place overland. In 2022 and during the first half of 2023, there were 100.000s of Afghans mainly being sent back from Iran. The autumn of 2023 also saw a massive wave of deportation from Pakistan, when the Pakistani authorities announced in early October that all migrants residing illegally in Pakistan would need to leave the country. Those who had not left voluntarily by 1 November 2023 would be arrested and deported. By mid-November 2023, more than 300.000 Afghan migrants were thought to have already left Pakistan since this deportation policy was announced.

Sources indicated that it is unknown how many Afghans have voluntarily returned to Afghanistan from Western countries since the Taliban seized power in August 2021. Voluntary return to Afghanistan from neighbouring countries is being monitored by UNHCR. According to these data, the number of people in 2022 was nearly 6.500 and in the first nine months of 2023, nearly 13.000. The majority of these Afghan migrants were coming from Pakistan. This voluntary return is mainly related to socio-economic motives, a desire for family reunification, the (perceived) improved security situation in Afghanistan and the fear of arrest in the host country, according to UNHCR.

Several sources confirmed that since the Taliban seized power in August 2021, there have been some temporary returns of Afghans to their homeland in addition to permanent returns to Afghanistan. Family visits, business interests and property management are cited as possible reasons for this temporary return.

In March 2022, the *de facto* Taliban authorities established the Commission for the Return and Communications with Former Afghan Officials and Political Figures, which has been operational since May 2022. The Taliban have been calling on political leaders and officials from the former government, as well as investors, businessmen and academics who have left the country to return to Afghanistan, promising to guarantee their safety and offer them positions within the new administration. Sporadic reports were published about former high-ranking figures who have actually returned. By early October 2023, that number was said to have reached nearly 700 people. However, according to sources, the Commission's promises are not always kept in practice.

Multiple sources indicated that there is little concrete information on the current situation of Afghans returning to Afghanistan, both from the West and from neighbouring countries. The available information on this is described as scant, limited and often rather more anecdotal. Sources pointed out that there is no systematic monitoring of individual Afghans returning due to the difficulty of conducting monitoring activities on the ground. Furthermore, Afghan society is described as highly diverse and complex, which is also reflected in the way the *de facto* Taliban authorities are governing the country. Consequently, there is always some (local) variation in interpretation and attitudes possible, including in terms of how people returning to Afghanistan are perceived and treated. Thus, possible reactions towards returnees by the *de facto* Taliban authorities or by the Afghan community, according to sources, will always depend on several factors, such as the individual profile of the person returning, the network this person has in Afghanistan and the place, context and family situation this person is returning to. However, several sources did indicate that they were not aware of any systematic actions by the *de facto* Taliban authorities towards returned Afghan migrants merely because they had returned from a Western country (unless there were any additional reasons - for example, in the case of people with a particular profile, such as former ANDSF personnel).

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