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6 April 2016

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# Up to 1,000 Asylum Seekers at Risk of Being Returned to Afghanistan as Major UK Refugee Charity Challenges the Government's Policy

Posted: 05/04/2016 16:48 BST | Updated: 05/04/2016 16:59 BST

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In 2015, over 3,000 unaccompanied asylum-seeking children came to the UK ©Bureau of Investigative Journalism/Shutterstock

As many as 1,000 Afghan asylum seekers, many of whom entered the UK as unaccompanied children, are in danger of being deported from the UK back to Afghanistan, according to law firm Duncan Lewis Solicitors. Cases will now be considered, after Home Secretary Theresa May [won the right](#) to resume deportations to Afghanistan in early March. The decision, made by the Court of Appeal, overturned an injunction imposed in May 2015, which prohibited all removals to Afghanistan due to fears over security. The Home Office told Duncan Lewis Solicitors seven months ago that the ban had prevented approximately 400 people from being deported. A spokesperson at the firm now estimates that this figure could be close to 1,000.

I spoke to a young Afghan, who came to the UK aged 13 and is now at risk of being deported. He told me that, "I've been here ten years - I've never committed a crime, never caused any trouble, and they want to deport me back to one of the worst countries in the world. There's a war going on there. I feel scared."

Whilst officials can now begin to process the claims, a major UK charity is expected to challenge the government for its treatment of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children from Afghanistan. In their *After Return* report, to be released this evening, [Refugee Support Network](#) will say that young people who are returned to Afghanistan are confronted with bleak future prospects. These individuals struggle to make contact with their families, are often unable to continue their education or find work, and are known to have been targeted by terrorist groups. Excerpts of the report, exclusively released to me by RSN, show that 76% of young people monitored are experiencing desperate employment circumstances, to the extent that they are considering leaving Afghanistan again.

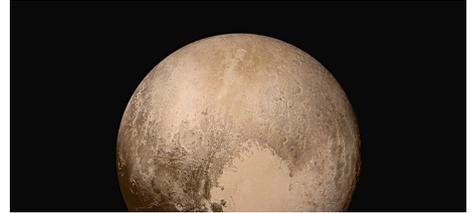
The report - conducted over an 18-month period - reveals that just under 50% of those monitored have been caught-up in security incidents since their return, such as bomb blasts or suicide attacks. Three individuals have been threatened or targeted as a result of unresolved issues that originally caused them to seek refuge in the UK, and seven young people have been targeted due to their association with the West. Discussing the report, Catherine Gladwell, Director of Refugee Support Network, said that "we have been shocked by the findings of our own research, and deeply saddened that the lives of boys we knew and supported here in the UK have been reduced to a daily battle for survival in Afghanistan."

The report concludes by suggesting that decision-makers should review the prevailing assumption that young people should be deported back to Afghanistan, and that 'due consideration [should be given] to the impact of the deteriorating security situation on the safety of former unaccompanied asylum-seeking children as a particular social group who are made more vulnerable by their lack of essential support networks.' Speaking to RSN, a former UK asylum seeker who was deported back to Afghanistan said that "the government in the UK don't care whether I live or whether I die."

It is evident that the conflict in Afghanistan has escalated over the past year - fuelled by



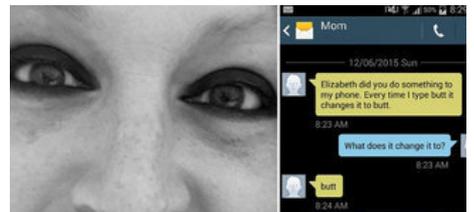
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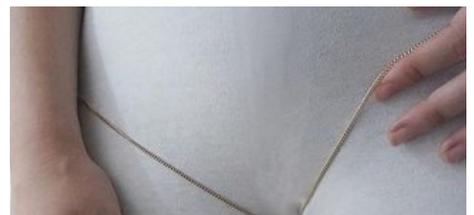
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a myriad of factors, including the rise of Islamic State and the withdrawal of foreign forces. The United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) noted that 2015 was the deadliest year in terms of civilian casualties. There were 11,002 civilian casualties in Afghanistan during 2015 - 3,545 of which were fatalities. The Taliban currently controls 30% of Afghanistan - more territory than it has controlled at any other time since 2001.



In June 2015, the Taliban attacked the Afghan parliament, killing two and injuring 40. ©Reuters

Taliban advances have catalysed opposition forces, including rival jihadi groups. The U.S. military has initiated a series of bombing raids against Islamic State extremists in recent months, and it is estimated that as many as 3,000 fighters have entered Afghanistan - mainly concentrated in the Nangarhar province. In order to solicit obedience from local villagers in Dih Bala, a district controlled by Islamic State, the [Washington Post reports](#) that terrorists arbitrarily selected five local men, who they accused of co-operating with U.S. forces. These men were publically beheaded in the central market, and their heads and torsos placed on the ground. Fellow villagers - previously the friends and neighbours of the murdered men - were then ordered to drive over the body parts. It is therefore hardly surprising that, in January 2016, the U.S. Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR) stated that the nation is worse off today than it was before the 2001 invasion.

Patricia Gossman, a senior researcher for Human Rights Watch, upheld this pessimistic interpretation. She expressed to me that: "The most important immediate concern is security. In the past year, it's safe to say that the war has intensified in Afghanistan, meaning that areas of the country that had been relatively stable a year ago are now very unsafe. According to the UN, half of the country's districts are considered to be at a high or extreme threat level from the Taliban and other insurgents. A huge number are fleeing conflict and insecurity. Whether it's safe for someone to return depends on their individual circumstances, but there really is not such a thing as totally "safe" areas where all Afghans can somehow be returned."

[UNHCR figures](#) suggest that the number of internally displaced people in Afghanistan rose by 18% in 2015 to nearly 1,000,000. And Charles Davy, Managing Director of [Afghan Aid](#), told me that security in the country is only likely to deteriorate further. "I would say that every year for the past three or four years it has been worse still. I'm expecting it to be worse again this year" he said, via Skype from his office in Kabul. "As things progress, I think everyone anticipates that the government will continue to hold major urban areas - provincial capitals - but the Taliban and other forces including Islamic State will increasingly hold rural areas. I think this sort of fluid arrangement will carry on. It looks bad. It's not been this bad for a long, long time."

In light of this evidence, and with many politicians already calling for a more compassionate approach from the UK towards refugees, there will surely be mounting pressure on the government to reconsider its stance and to provide sanctuary for those at risk of depravity and insecurity if they are returned to Afghanistan.

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