

From stand-alone programmes to an integrated community-needs-based approach

Reintegration support in Afghanistan—Lessons Learned

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Abstract

One of the major challenges on the path to peace and development in Afghanistan is to facilitate the reintegration of a highly fragmented society. This includes the return of conflict-affected populations to their home areas (refugees and IDPs) as well as the reintegration of former political prisoners and belligerent groups into society. The latter have been fighting each other and the government for decades. We find that reintegrees (refugee returnees, internally displaced, ex-combatants and ex-detainees) face reintegration challenges into social, political and economic life that do not differ significantly from the needs of the communities into which they are re/integrating. The (re-)establishment of livelihoods, as well as social and political life, remains a challenge for all segments of Afghan society. Programme assistance for specific target groups of reintegrees has not aided reintegration at large. In fact, it has often contributed to further exclusion, fragmentation and militarization of Afghan society. By reflecting on the lessons learned from different reintegration approaches and for different groups, this paper argues that introducing new reintegration programmes would most likely not reach the aspired results—and thus fail to contribute meaningfully to peacebuilding in Afghanistan. Instead, we suggest that future reintegration policies would focus on mainstreaming reintegration support in broader development programming, thus based on concrete communal/societal needs at large (security and economic development). Specific programmes and

projects could then respond to specific reintegration needs (health, disabilities, protection, etc.) of individuals and communities in specific areas.

Introduction

Over the past decades, about eight million Afghans—men, women and children—have been uprooted in various ways from their home locations in Afghanistan due to overlapping violent conflicts as well as natural hazards (e.g. droughts, earthquakes). Some were displaced within the country (IDPs)¹, some left the country² to neighbouring Pakistan and Iran, while others settled in countries around the globe (e.g. Gulf states, Europe). Many of them have also tried to return to their places of origin over the years. This paper considers the experience of these groups of reintegrees, including ex-combatants, ex-detainees/political prisoners and displaced people (refugee returnees and IDPs), as groups who returned (or tried to return) to their places of origin, aspiring social acceptance and a stable and viable livelihood, i.e. to (re)integrate.³ Thus we depart from understanding the process of reintegration into communal life as a common denominator for many different social segments of Afghan society, which are often addressed by reintegration programmes separately.⁴ We will first provide an account of the reintegration needs and the responses by the government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan (GIROA) and its international donors in respect to displaced people, ex-combatants and ex-detainees. Based on that, we will provide some key lessons learned for future policy.

Repatriation of Refugees⁵

Scope

Large numbers of Afghans are still displaced. More than 2.6 million Afghans have acquired (legal) refugee status worldwide. 49 percent of these refugees are younger than 18 years old. Pakistan still hosts 1.4 million registered Afghans and another estimated one million undocumented Afghans. Iran provides for 950,000 Afghans who are either registered as refugees or hold valid visas;

up to two million Afghans live undocumented in Iran. In both countries the majority of Afghans is either second- or third-generation refugee. 74 percent are born in Iran or Pakistan, often never having been in Afghanistan and unfamiliar with local conditions and decisive cultural patterns of Afghanistan (e.g. language).⁶

Immediate reintegration needs exist for returnees (voluntary and forced, i.e. deported). Of the 552,071 Afghans who returned from Iran between 1 January and 28 September 2018, more than 507,000 were undocumented and of these more than 302,000 were actually deported. Of the 25,153 returnees from Pakistan in the same period, only 505 were undocumented and 1,814 deported. In addition to the high numbers of those displaced across international borders, the number of conflict-induced IDPs is continuously rising. The total number of IDPs rose from 1.286,000 in late 2017 to more than 1.5 million in October 2018.

Reintegration programmes

The performance of the Afghan government—with the Ministry of Refugees and Repatriation (MoRR) in charge—in providing effective support to the reintegration of large numbers of displaced (IDPs and returning refugees) has to date remained far behind the expectations.⁷ Programmes so far hardly respond to the actual needs of returnees:

- \ The implementation of repatriation-related provisions in the *Afghan National Development Strategy (ANDS) (2008-13)* was systematically inhibited by the MoRR's lack of capacity and prevailing corruption. In particular, delayed, corrupted and inadequately programmed land allocation and shelter provision measures deterred potential voluntary returnees. In addition, there are numerous cases where allocated plots of land lack infrastructure and water or are located far away from possible employment, education and health infrastructure. For these reasons they were usually not accepted by the returning IDPs or repatriates.⁸
- \ The *National Solidarity Programme (NSP)* as the country's largest rural development programme excluded returnees in many cases.
- \ Assisted (voluntary) repatriation programmes, such as the basic *UNHCR Voluntary Refugee Repatriation Programme (VolRep)*, focussing on Iran and Pakistan), the *Voluntary Return and Reintegration Programme (VRRP)*, since 2012, MoRR-UNHCR-UNDP), and the *Enhanced Voluntary Repatriation and Reintegration Package (EVRPR)* have successively broadened the support to returning refugees. From just providing cash in form of initial reintegration grants (US \$150 till June 2016; US \$300 thereafter) and transportation allowances (between US \$30-70 per person) in the framework of VolRep; VRRP was meant to support 48 so-called high return areas, e.g. via the construction of and infrastructure supply in returnee villages for special target groups (such as former nomads) and cash-for-work projects. EVRPR includes small-scale credits of up to US \$3,000 until six months after arrival. Eligibility of these assistance programmes is limited to registered refugees in Iran and Pakistan; it excludes the undocumented returnees. These financial and infrastructural provisions did not guarantee the sustainable return and reintegration of refugees, because of insecurity, corruption in the allocation processes (especially regarding the access to shelter in high-return areas) and lack of economic prospects (employment, business).
- \ Programmes supported by *IOM and other UN organizations* (e.g. UNFPA, UNICEF, WFP) provide small-scale aid (food, non-food items, hygiene articles) to undocumented returnees at relevant cross-border transit points. The support is basically humanitarian and usually does not comprise any type of component aimed at reintegration. Only a small share of returnees is actually covered and the support is not adequate to the potential needs. Self-reliance and self-organized reintegration of undocumented Afghans who return voluntarily or forced (deported) from Iran and Pakistan is the more common phenomenon.

- \ Similarly, IDPs receive emergency aid in the form of emergency shelter, non-food items, winterization packages and legal counselling. A pilot-project, *LIVE-UP, run by UN-Habitat* (2016) for improved access to infrastructure, shelter, basic services and property rights for displaced on the one hand and capacity-development for the responsible authorities on the other, was implemented in the three provincial capitals, namely Herat, Jalalabad and Kabul.

Results

The impact and results of all return programmes to date are sobering; they have not enabled sustainable reintegration (i.e. people settling in a location where they are socially accepted and develop a viable livelihood, and thus refraining from [re]joining non-state armed groups and able to cope with [re]migration drivers).

- 1) *Little outreach*: Such programmes were not able to reach out to many returnees: While basic humanitarian aid reaches a maximum of 80 percent of IDPs, 75 percent of undocumented returnees and 15 percent of documented returnees have not received any assistance. In addition, the large government programmes (NSP, ANDS, ANPDF) have only very limited measurable results to date. This is why the returnees remained largely dependent on self-reliance, self-help capacities and traditional coping and assistance mechanisms (e.g. family networks). However, it should be noted that these capacities are increasingly limited due to the overall economic deterioration and ongoing insecurity and violence.
- 2) *Little effectiveness*: One striking indicator of the lack of effectiveness of all kinds of programmes targeting returnees is the fact that 40 percent of refugee returnees are vulnerable to (internal) displacement after their return. The reasons are diverse, including the lack of access to employment opportunities, the absence of shelter or the prevalence of insecurity due to violent conflicts, etc.

This is why the vast majority of repatriated Afghans, as well as many internally displaced persons who face secondary or even tertiary displacement, aim to leave the country if they have the chance.⁹ Thus, they succumb to (re)migration drivers and are unable to reintegrate.

Gaps in the support to the reintegration of refugees and displaced are observed at least at two levels:

- \ *Policy level*: A viable repatriation strategy was missing, which would have addressed respective planning for a proper registration as well as for long-term needs for returnees. Such planning would have been decisive for establishing a viable livelihood and avoiding the (re-)migration or the joining of non-state armed opposition groups. The failure to implement the Land Reform Act in particular has to be mentioned here. Indeed, the uncertainty about regulations of land entitlements had a significant impact on the willingness of refugees to return.
- \ *Technical/ implementation level*: Clear steps in the IDP-strategy were missing on how to enforce protection of IDPs and refugees. Moreover, the concerned ministries (MoRR, Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, MoLSAMD, Ministry for Rural Rehabilitation and Development, MRRD, Ministry of Urban Development, MUDH) and departments were incapable of cooperating across sectors to identify and react to reintegration needs.

Reintegration of Ex-Combatants

Scope

The number and character of official and semi-official armed forces and armed opposition groups in Afghanistan is complex and fluid. The authorized strength of the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces is 334,000 personnel. As of January 2018, the actual number was estimated at 296,400. There is also a range of armed groups who are somehow associated

with leaders in or outside the government. The numbers of these groups and their fighters are unknown. Many of them are part-time fighters who at the same time are farmers, shopkeepers or students. The number of Taliban forces is also unknown. Estimates by various sources range between 15,000 and 60,000. What is more, significant numbers of members of such armed groups took refuge in Pakistan, Iran or other parts of Afghanistan, when rival factions gained the upper hand. So a realistic estimate of how many current Afghan combatants would possibly be demobilized in the foreseeable future—and thus become potentially eligible for any form of reintegration support cannot be made. Essentially, this could only be assessed in the course of credible peace processes and an associated reform of the security sector. In an optimistic scenario, however, tens of thousands of combatants would need to reintegrate themselves into a full civilian life. And it is important to note that many who might need to put their weapon down (or at least focus on their civilian livelihood) are in fact already living in the locations where they would want to ‘reintegrate’.

Reintegration programmes

Over the past one-and-a-half decades several specific programmes, which can be subsumed under the programme label of disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR), have been implemented to support the return¹⁰ of combatants from various armed groups to civilian life. The main programmes were:

- \ *Afghanistan New Beginning Programme* (ANBP) (2003-05) was a rather classical DDR programme, supported by UNDP. It was aimed at forces which had been fighting the Taliban. It included support to militiamen to their reintegration into civilian life. However, there is little evidence that significant numbers actually embraced civilian life and broke chains of command.
- \ *Disbandment of Illegal Armed Groups* (DIAG) (since 2005). The DIAG supports development projects for communities in districts free of ‘illegal armed groups’. As a result of the programme only a few armed groups demobilized. There

was a general lack of coherence with any serious form of security sector reform (SSR).

- \ *Programme Tahkim Sulh (Strengthening Peace Programme)* (PTS) (2005-10). The US-supported PTS was based on an amnesty clause. Only a few significant commanders however made use of it. It was found that the great majority of those who went through the programme had not recently been involved in actual fighting.
- \ *Afghanistan Peace and Reconstruction Programme* (APRP) (2010-16). This programme was run by the Joint Secretariat of the High Peace Council and supported by UNDP. It included support to mediation, community development projects and individual assistance to those demobilized. It also supported some wider outreach and advocacy activities. Yet, the programme was unable to convince Taliban forces to defect. For the little it delivered, the APRP was hugely expensive.

Results

Most analysts conclude that these DDR-type programmes have failed to make a meaningful impact:

- 1) *Little outreach*: Despite these programmes, targeted armed forces stayed in power, most chains of command remained intact and significant disarmament never took place. For example, the 2016 peace agreement¹¹ between Hizb-e Islami Afghanistan (Gulbuddin Hekmatyar faction, i.e. HIA/G¹²) and the GoA excludes disarmament provisions.
- 2) *Militarization*: Contradicting their good intention, DDR-related programmes even contributed to increased militarization of Afghan society and the deepening of cleavages between armed groups, due to enormous funds poured into DDR processes without maintaining sufficient checks and balances. In contrast to the official DDR-programmes, informal processes of demobilization were sometimes successful, to mention for example the reintegration of some mid-level Taliban commanders and foot soldiers in the second half of the 2000s, using their personal networks.

3) *Reintegration*: Stakeholders interviewed for this paper had a clear notion that ordinary foot soldiers and low-level commanders had not benefitted from DDR-related programmes, thus far. Moreover, within the DDR programmes, reintegration support did not receive the attention it deserved, remaining generally weak and incoherent. It was usually delayed and insufficiently based on the realistic needs of the former combatants. Academic analyses have mostly dealt with the DDR programmes as such and their role in a strategic and political perspective. Little vision and analysis have been elaborated and conducted thus far on the actual reintegration processes of former combatants.

Gaps in the support to demobilization and reintegration efforts can be detected on the policy as well as on the technical level:

- \ *Policy level*: There has generally been insufficient credible agreement and buy-in on the policy side, as well as lack of the required trust, to disarm armed groups more or less permanently. Even if combatants were actually demobilized, chains of command within (former) armed groups were usually not broken. Sometimes demobilization efforts coincided with actual mobilization into armed groups, in conjunction with the international military support to the fight against the Taliban. The programmes also had little chance to succeed because a proper security sector reform (SSR) did not take place, and DDR-programmes are not supposed to substitute for genuine SSR.
- \ *Technical level*: The programmes are seen as not having been appropriately designed given the political circumstances. The actual mapping of armed groups on which the activities were based was usually incomplete. The programmes led to only limited numbers of demobilized combatants and, in fact, created some perverse incentives, by encouraging mobilization. Lastly, but importantly, these programmes were very expensive and were feeding clearly into serious graft and other types of corruption, right up to the top.

Reintegration of Former Political Prisoners

Scope

After 2001, the prison population increased throughout the country, likely because of the intensifying violent conflict in Afghanistan. The number of political prisoners or detainees in Afghanistan is not reported and thus uncertain. Conflict-related detainees¹³—members of the armed insurgency against the government or members of armed opposition groups—are exclusively male. Their share in the total number of prisoners in Afghanistan cannot be reliably estimated. HIA/G claimed that near to 3,000 of its former followers were still in prisons across the country by early 2018 and demands their release in line with the peace agreement of 2016.¹⁴

Reintegration programmes

Of the Afghan security organs, the National Directorate of Security (NDS), the Afghan National Police (ANP), the Afghan National Army (ANA) and local police forces (ALP) have the state's authority to detain people. At the same time, the Amnesty Law of 2008 grants de facto blanket amnesty for crimes committed between 1978 and 2001, but also possible crimes still to be committed by opponents of the government.¹⁵ Despite an explicit amnesty clause in the peace agreement with HIA/G, the prisoner release of HIA/G fighters has been slow and is far from completed. The authors could not establish whether the released detainees have thus far received any form of support in their societal reintegration. Reintegration programmes do not exist.

Perceptions of Reintegration in Afghanistan

The current thinking on reintegration across Afghan society and the Afghan government is dominated by the idea that the main conflict in Afghanistan is between government and armed opposition, i.e. the so-called 'insurgency'. This implies that the fight is

about who controls the state and its resources. In this logic, reintegration eventually means ‘joining the government’, which is understood as obtaining government positions and a decent share of participation in and control over the security sector. Thus, in the political discourse the issue of ‘community reintegration’ appears to be of minor importance. In contrast to this public discourse it should be noted that at the everyday local level the integration of various actors is of high significance and triggers violent conflicts at the local level time and again. Moreover, regional differences matter. Particular in northern Afghanistan where communities are more heterogeneous in ethnic, sectarian and political terms the return of Afghans has had a severe impact on conflict constellations (e.g. land conflicts). Issues of reconciliation seem to be more important here than in the south.

Afghans generally see reintegration as closely tied to the precondition of a political agreement or settlement (peace agreement) on the one hand. On the other hand they understand reintegration as political inclusion, what should be manifested either in the transfer of government positions or the rehabilitation through integration in the official armed forces (i.e. ANP and ANA). However, the current state of the HIA/G-GIRoA peace deal shows that a political settlement on paper does not necessarily materialize into immediate political inclusion. The current political order is seen as highly exclusionary, mainly because of unequal benefits that different segments of society and reintegree-groups receive or not. One critique directed at the HIA/G leadership is that they have not distributed rewards to their members and former followers so far.

Yet, in view of a potential peace deal with Taliban factions, the prospect of political inclusion of leadership figures could aid what is perceived to be ‘dignified’ reintegration and avoid the impression of potential reintegrees’ surrender. In the absence of a political settlement with the Taliban that constitute the largest faction in the armed opposition, it is first and foremost protection concerns (security of the potential reintegrees and their families) which inhibit progress in HIA/G reintegration efforts. However,

IDP- and repatriate reintegrees also face primarily protection concerns. Across the country security is a precondition of any group’s reintegration.

Interviews with stakeholders in Afghanistan show a general lack of trust in the government’s genuine commitment and intentions among potential reintegrees. Comparing HIA/G reintegration challenges with those of the Taliban groups, the constitution of HIA/G as a highly organized party (incl. associated institutions, committees, youth wing, etc.) suggests it can easily claim and distribute rewards (such as political positions, material rewards, etc.) among its organizational bodies. In contrast, it is less clear for the Taliban as an umbrella formation that comprises armed opposition groups which are highly heterogeneous in scope, ideology, territorial control claims, hierarchical subordination, etc. The composition and structure of the Taliban movement would thus call for more nuanced approaches to reintegration once a peace deal at the national level would be reached, considering different needs of the leadership vs. mid-level commanders level vs. low-level commanders and foot soldiers (incl. part-time fighters) in different social and regional contexts (north vs. south, valley vs. provinces, etc.).

Lessons Learned

A major share of the people who have been displaced by the conflicts in Afghanistan over the past four decades is still—in part newly—displaced, not able to establish viable livelihoods, and/ or struggle for social acceptance. The general security and economic environment were decisive factors in whether displaced people returned and whether they did well or not in their subsequent socio-economic reintegration. Protection and economic issues feature most prominently among the concerns. The low absorption capacity of the labour markets and productive sectors in Afghanistan and the inability/ lack of capacity of the government to guarantee access to land and property in practice, are key factors preventing reintegration. In addition, the general failure of government programmes for reintegration—both of returning refugees and members of the armed opposition—has led

to an overall negative perception of reintegration programmes (in particular within DDR frameworks). Key factors affecting the success of reintegration of conflict-affected groups in Afghanistan are thus not directly related to reintegration programmes, but include:

- \ General (perceived) security situation in the relevant locations, lack of protection;
- \ Protection of land and other property rights;
- \ Economic environment (opportunities);
- \ Inclusion in patronage/access networks;
- \ Acceptance in the location/community.

In the absence of satisfying answers to the above challenges, expectations of the reintegration of conflict-affected groups should remain low. However, there are two aspects, which are significant and should be considered for future policies. The first addresses political arrangements to frame any reintegration processes, and the second focusses on the support of reintegration as processes.

Lesson I:

Government Level: Open the Space for Political Arrangements

Reintegration requires political inclusion; i.e. an official 'deal', such as the one with HIA/G and potentially a peace agreement with the Taliban that is endorsed by all sides. Subsequent oversight and monitoring of political inclusion and respective support efforts are paramount to avoiding the creation of a further exclusionary political order. Any peace deal would be the necessary framework within which to base sub-national and local arrangements with individual commanders in single communities ruled by armed opposition groups. Consequently, to be inclusive, political inclusion and government positions at the national and sub-national administrative levels need to be accompanied with the provision of sustainable employment prospects as measures for the reintegration of ordinary group members ('foot soldiers').

Given that the dominant understanding of 'reintegration' by members of opposition groups is to 'join the government', conventional DDR programmes may not provide stabilization in the long run. Rather it would be more stabilizing if the government signalled their readiness to introduce *constitutional and/or institutional reforms* that provide reintegrated opposition groups with voice, representation and incentives to invest in rebuilding governance structures, as opposed to joining a government that is perceived as autocratic, exclusive and corrupt.

It would also be vital to consider multi-level types and forms of engagement with reintegrees in response to their regional and individual specificities. Against the background of a major peace agreement at the national level, *local and regional arrangements* could be sought, such as the cooperation of locally viable powerbrokers—defined as any armed opposition leader who is holding control over anything as small as a sub-village (and the constitution of their group but also of the communities and territory they hold control over)—in voicing their respective specific demands and local communities' reconciliation needs. This could also involve informal reintegration, which was successfully practised in several instances in the past. As long as the government and its enforcement capacities do not enjoy enough trust, especially with regard to ensuring protection/security for 'returnees' and 'reintegrees', using the credibility of local powerbrokers/authorities could prove paramount to building some form of local peace and stability as a precondition for programmes that address specific social and economic needs. Moreover, serious consideration of different needs and expectations among reintegrees is important against the backdrop of the leadership level aiming at political inclusion (allocation of government positions), low-rank commanders and foot soldiers need protection/security and livelihood alternatives that prevent them from taking up arms again or (re)migrating.

Lesson II:**Programming: Aim at individual, regional and communal needs, not at social identities**

The overall argument of this paper is that returnees, ex-combatants and ex-detainees face similar challenges in reintegrating themselves into society and the economy which do not even differ significantly from the needs of the local communities into which they integrate—irrespective of whether they receive external assistance or not. Besides questions of governance and technical challenges, we would like to point out two aspects which are underlying factors of Afghan realities, which programming policies have not considered sufficiently so far:

- 1) *Chimera of programme categories*: Social categorizations such as ‘displaced persons’ or ‘ex-combatants’ do not match the severe challenges people and communities are facing. In addition, there are large overlaps between displaced persons, ex-detainees, and ex-combatants. By fleeing and fighting in repetitive cycles many Afghans took up several identities throughout their lives. This is why a clear line between civilians and combatants is hard to draw. Many civilians are armed, while combatants often serve ‘part-time’ in non-state armed groups (militias, rebels, gangs, etc.) and are integrated into communal life;
- 2) *Non-linear return*: A significant number of returnees or ex-combatants are in fact not returning to their original homes, but rather integrating into locations (mostly urban areas) where they, or their family, have not lived before.¹⁶ Insecurity, as well as the lack of livelihood (e.g. land titles, access to water) in their home regions, are decisive reasons for individualized integration strategies.

Based on this argument, the likelihood of a policy to fail is high if it provides programmes and projects which are targeted towards certain social categories (ex-combatants, refugees). Instead, policy should understand reintegration as a communal process. This is why policy has to change the angle of its perspective. In light of the conclusion above that essential

factors affecting reintegration are not delivered by ‘reintegration programmes’, it makes sense to consider supporting reintegration with a comprehensive policy considering the communal needs. The economic and security conditions for all those reintegrating, including displaced people and ex-combatants, need to be addressed.

- \ Any reintegration support needs to be based on a *broadly shared concept of reintegration* in Afghanistan. This understanding would primarily concern the actual reintegration process that people go through after their return, rather than focus on the support they would possibly require. Moreover, it should acknowledge that combatants are often part-timers, most of the time already located in the places where they would ‘reintegrate’;
- \ Specific programmes and projects could then respond to *contextual reintegration needs* (health, disabilities, protection, etc) of communities and regional specifics, rather than be based on specific identities as ex-combatants, returning refugees, etc.
- \ Reintegration support should not be ad hoc and based on short-term solutions. Creation of short-term employment opportunities that would disappear when the external support runs out is likely to negatively affect longer-term reintegration.

Endnotes

- 1 Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs), i.e. (in this case conflict-induced) displaced within the national borders of Afghanistan. IDMC figures until incl. 2017 point to proportionally small shares of disaster-induced displaced across Afghanistan. However, there is indication that drought-conditions caused disaster-induced displacement almost equal conflict-induced displacement in 2018. Cf. https://www.irinnews.org/photo-feature/2018/10/04/if-water-finishes-we-will-leave-drought-forcing-hundreds-thousands-afghans?utm_source=IRIN+-+the+inside+story+on+emergencies&utm_campaign=38a0a53133-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2018_06_22_11_22_COPY_01&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_d842d98289-38a0a53133-75473293
- 2 In this paper, we call displaced Afghans across the international border refugees. Given that Pakistan is not a party to the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of refugees/ 1967 Protocol and has neither enacted national legislation for the protection of refugees nor established procedures to determine the refugee status of persons who are seeking international protection within its territory, such persons – if they are not documented, i.e. registered by Pakistani authorities – are treated in accordance with the provisions of the Foreigners Act, 1946. Thus, they do not comply with the international legal category of ‘refugee’. Documented Afghans in Pakistan are exempted from treatment by the Foreigners Act; they enjoy temporary legal stay and freedom of movement. Returning refugees encompass those documented and undocumented Afghans from Iran or Pakistan who repatriate to Afghanistan, assisted or not.
- 3 The concept of reintegration is ambiguous. Without entering into a discussion about the lack of an internationally agreed definition, this paper considers as *(re)integration the process where people settle in a location where they are socially accepted and develop a viable livelihood*. This implies that they are not (re)joining non-state armed groups and are able to cope with (re)migration drivers. Although in other countries it might not be considered as such, in the Afghan context we consider enlisting within the Afghan official national security forces (ANA and ANP, not ALP et al.) also as (part of a process of) ‘reintegration’ in the above sense.
- 4 There has been a certain overlap between the categories of ex-combatants and refugee returnees in the past, which is believed to be marginal now. Figures or estimates are not available.
- 5 Refugee return to Afghanistan is encouraged by the following policy frameworks, presidential decrees, and international agreements: Decree No. 297. On The Dignified Return of Refugees. June 3, 2001; Decree No. 104. On Land Distribution for Housing to Eligible Returnees and IDPs. December 6, 2005; trilateral MoUs and Agreements incl. UNHCR to return rejected asylum seekers from France, Great Britain, Netherlands 2002 / Denmark 2004/ Switzerland and Norway 2005 / Sweden 2006/09; trilateral repatriation agreements for Afghans’ voluntary return from Iran and Pakistan (so-called Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees, SSAR, since 2012); Afghan National Development Strategy (ANDS, 2008-13); the Citizens’ Charter of the Afghanistan National Peace and Development Framework (ANPDF, 2017-21); and the IDP Policy of 2013; the Comprehensive Voluntary Repatriation and Reintegration Plan developed by the Ministry of Refugees and Repatriation (MoRR), and (prospective) the Presidential Decree on Land endorsed by Ashraf Ghani in August 2018 which approves the legal framework on land allocation (superseding Decree 104 of 2005).
- 6 Afghans who grow up in Pakistan usually speak Pashto and Urdu, but never learned Dari, the lingua franca of Afghanistan. See Schetter, C. (2016). Playing the Ethnic Card: On the Ethnicization of Afghan Politics. In: Studies in Ethnicity and Nationalism 16 (3), S. 460-477.
- 7 Two main policy frameworks underlie the return of IDPs and refugee returnees, i.e. (1) the tripartite “Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees, to support Voluntary Repatriation, Sustainable Reintegration and Assistance to Host Countries” (SSAR) in two constellations (UNHCR with GoP and GoA; UNHCR with GoI and GoA) since 2012, and (2) the IDP-Policy (2013). An inter-ministerial committee for refugees (High Commission for Migration) was established in early 2015 and has since transformed into a so-called High Level Task Force on Migration (since November 2016) led by the President of Afghanistan. In addition to the existing IDP-policy, the Afghan government established a Displacement and Returnees Executive Committee and a Policy Framework and Action Plan to promote the successful integration of returnees and IDPs in 2017. The US Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR) (2015) found that until 2013 the implementation of the Government’s “Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees, to support Voluntary Repatriation, Sustainable Reintegration and Assistance to Host Countries” has not met its objectives.
- 8 By 2011, 14 percent (38,000) of the 266.000 applicant families had received plots and only 40 percent (9,200) of these families have settled in the respective place. See SIGAR (2015): 6). Macdonald (2011) also reports how out of 270,000 applicant families 31,000 or 24 percent had received plots by 2009; however, only 10,684 families moved to the place. According to a news media report citing a government spokesman, about 7,000 families received land in the period 2015-18.
- 9 The number or proportion of militarily engaged Afghan potential returnees (refugees/migrants) in government-opposition forces in Pakistan is unknown, but likely marginal at this point of time.
- 10 A return to civilian life does not necessarily imply a return to the location where they would reintegrate, since a large number of combatants were either part-timers or did live in the community where they would live with reintegration support after giving up violence. The main change is thus to fully turn to the civilian livelihood.
- 11 <http://www.bakhtarnews.com.af/eng/politics/item/25074-full-text-of-agreement-between-goira--hezb-e-islami-of-afghanistan-led-by-gulbuddin-hekmatyar.html>
- 12 Hizb-e Islami Afghanistan (HIA) has been split into two wings over the last years. One – under the leadership of Arghandiwal – is part of the government and the other violently opposes it (under the leadership of Hekmatyar). Since the peace deal of the latter faction with the government in December 2016, the return of the faction’s leadership to Afghanistan and efforts to reunite the party, a clear break occurred in March 2018. Since then, Hekmatyar is reportedly claiming the name Hizb-e Islami for his faction alone. Until end of 2018, at least four factions have evolved within the original Hizb-e Islami. See Derksen, Deedee (2018): Hezb-e Islami, peace and integration into the Afghan security forces. Peaceworks No. 138. Washington, D.C.: USIP, p. 21ff.

13 According to UNAMA, “Detainees suspected of offences related to the armed conflict are generally accused of committing crimes against the State codified in the 1976 Penal Code (which includes chapters on “crimes against the external security of the State” and “crimes against the internal security of the State”), the 1987 Penal Law on Crimes against Internal and External Security of the Democratic Republic of Afghanistan (which includes crimes such as assassination, acts of explosion, armed looting and incitement to hostilities) and the 2008 Law on Combat against Terrorist Offences (which defines as terrorist offences the “use of explosive or other lethal devices,” “membership of a terrorist organization,” “offences against internationally protected persons” and other acts).”

14 <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/03/04/world/asia/afghanistan-gulbuddin-hekmatyar.html>

15 The National Reconciliation, General Amnesty, and National Stability Law came into effect in late 2008, promising an amnesty to anyone currently committing crimes while fighting the Afghan government and international forces if they “cease their enmity” in the future and join a process of national reconciliation.

16 This paper still refers to ‘reintegration’, even if the relevant individuals are settling in a new (for them) environment.