THE IMPACTS OF DEPORTATION ON AFGHAN REFUGEES FROM EUROPE: A PEACE AND DEVELOPMENT PERSPECTIVE

Master's Thesis

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Abstract

This research examines the effects of deportation on the lives of Afghan refugees returned from Europe, back to their home country. The focus of this research is with particular attention to their personal experiences and the broader implications for peace and stability in Afghanistan. Drawing on a qualitative approach that combines semi-structured interviews with document analysis, the research explores how pre-return conditions in Europe and the process of forced return shape post-return outcomes. Key concepts of multidimensional reintegration, human security, and social exclusion are applied to analyze findings. The study identifies some of the critical issues that face returnees, including insecurity, unemployment, social exclusion, and mental health challenges. The connection made between the experience of deportees and broader themes of peace and development makes a valuable contribution to academic discussions on return migration in fragile contexts and highlights the need for more ethical migration policies that consider long-term human security and social cohesion in Afghanistan.

Key Words

Deportation, Afghan returnees, reintegration, human security, social exclusion, peace and development, forced return.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1. Background and Research Problem

Following 2015 and the Taliban takeover in 2021, the number of Afghan migrants seeking asylum in EU countries surged dramatically. Despite the constantly unsafe security situation in Afghanistan, some European countries have continued or resumed deporting rejected Afghan asylum seekers. While deportation is commonly cited in European policy debates as a necessary reaction to irregular migration, critical research shows that forceful removal regimes cause serious physical and structural harm, resulting in significant human costs (Fekete, 2011). This framing conflicts with ongoing legal and human rights concerns, especially when returns are made to a country with minimal safety and widespread insecurity.

The central focus of this thesis is to examine how the experiences Afghan refugees undergo before deportation in Europe shape their reintegration after returning to Afghanistan. It further explores how this reintegration experiences influence multidimensional human security at the individual level and considers how such individual-level experiences may relate to broader questions of social stability and peacebuilding in Afghanistan. This focus is particularly important because deportations can occur in situations where return remains unsafe and access to protection may be restricted both legally and practically, highlighting a key tension between state migration-control objectives and the protection of individual rights (Dimitriadi,2021). Deportation may affect people's safety, well-being, and opportunities after return, in addition to functioning as a migration-control measure. The research problem addressed in this thesis is that the lived effects of deportation on Afghan returnees and their possible wider implications for peace and social stability in Afghanistan are not sufficiently understood together. Although there is research on deportation and on return and reintegration, less attention has been given to how individual and household experiences after deportation may relate to the wider social conditions within which peace and stability are maintained.

1.2. Research Gap and Relevance to Peace and Development

A large portion of current research focuses on either the lived experience of return and reintegration or migration control and policy. However, King and Kuschminder (2022)

contend that reintegration and return migration are complex and have to be examined as intricate processes rather than as outcomes. In a similar vein, Van Houte (2017) emphasizes that reintegration is influenced by broader social and political circumstances, which affect the ability of returning individuals to reconstruct their social lives and means of subsistence.

What is missing in the literature is an integrated perspective that links micro-level returnee experiences of deportation to macro-level questions about peace, stability, and social dynamics. In Peace and Development Studies, this link is crucial because deportation policy decisions in Europe can influence security perceptions, social inclusion, and everyday relationships in return contexts. By focusing on this connection, the thesis aims to contribute to a broader understanding of how deportation shapes reintegration and human security among Afghan deportees, and the implications these experiences have for social stability in Afghanistan.

1.3. Research Objective

The purpose of this thesis is to investigate how pre-deportation experiences in Europe shape the reintegration experiences of Afghan deportees after their return to Afghanistan. It further examines how this reintegration experiences influence multidimensional human security at the individual level and discusses their broader implications for social stability and peacebuilding. This thesis argues that the experiences Afghan refugees face before deportation in Europe, including legal uncertainty, labor exploitation, fear of removal and social marginalization shape their reintegration after return to Afghanistan. These reintegration challenges produce multidimensional human insecurity, which has broader implications for social stability and peace building in Afghanistan.

1.4. Research Questions

This study asks the following questions:

1. How do Afghan refugees deported from Europe describe their personal experiences of deportation and post-return life, particularly regarding economic security, social reintegration, mental health, and social exclusion?
2. How do pre-deportation experiences in Europe shape the reintegration experiences of Afghan deportees after their return to Afghanistan?
3. How might these challenges affect peace and social stability in Afghanistan?

1.5. Overview of Theoretical Framework, Methodology and Thesis Structure

The research is guided by four concepts: multidimensional reintegration, human security, social exclusion, and deportation. These principles are discussed in Chapter 3. Methodologically, the study employs qualitative semi-structured interviews with Afghan returnees as well as document analysis, which is evaluated thematically; more information is provided in Chapter 4. The study takes a comprehensive view of reintegration, building on the framework created by Kuschminder and Dubow (2023).

Chapter 2 reviews the literature on return, deportation, and reintegration and identifies the main gaps relevant to peace and development. Chapter 3 sets out the theoretical framework, including how the guiding concepts are used to interpret the findings. Chapter 4 explains the methodology and research ethics. Chapter 5 presents the findings from the interview data and document analysis. Chapter 6 discusses the findings in relation to the theoretical framework. Chapter 7 concludes with the thesis contributions, limitations, and recommendations.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

This chapter reviews the existing literature relevant to this thesis on the impacts of deportation on Afghan refugees returned from Europe. It is organized into five thematic sections. Section 2.1 examines key concepts of return migration and reintegration. Section 2.2 reviews the consequences of deportation for returnees. Section 2.3 focuses on the Afghan context of return and reintegration. Section 2.4 explores the links between deportation, return, and peace and social stability. Section 2.5 discusses psychosocial impacts and social exclusion after deportation. The chapter ends with a summary that identifies the research gap this thesis addresses.

2.2 Return migration and reintegration: key concepts

Return migration is best understood as a process rather than a single event, because people prepare for return, establish expectations about what return would entail, and then face real-world reintegration outcomes that may differ from their preparations. Flahaux (2021) connects reintegration to the goal and reality of return, demonstrating that projections about prospective reintegration and return preparation are essential for later results. Reintegration is also multidimensional, which means it encompasses more than just finding work and making money. Ndreka (2019) and Flahaux (2021) view reintegration as a complex package that combines economic and sociocultural components because difficulties in livelihood and social adjustment might persist even after return has occurred.

Reintegration theories help explain why returnees take diverse pathways after returning, as reintegration outcomes rarely consistent. Kuschminder (2017) proposes reintegration strategy framework divided into four categories (reintegrated, enclaves, traditionalists and vulnerable) based on cultural maintenance, social networking, self-identification and access to rights, institutions and the labor market in the country of return. Assisted Voluntary Return (AVR) is frequently portrayed as a "voluntary" and more humanitarian alternative to forced return, although it can also serve as a tool for migration management. Kuschminder (2017) contends that AVR schemes in Europe are contentious, with minimal data tying AVR to

development through reintegration and sustainable return, while also highlighting questions over what "voluntary" means in practice. Crane and Lawson (2020) demonstrate how EU AVR might integrate counselling and reintegration aid with security-focused migration management, influencing how return decisions are perceived within a larger system of control. Finally, reintegration is influenced by how state and institutional actors manage return and reintegration, particularly for deportees and rejected asylum seekers. Hagan and Wassink (2020) emphasize that, as immigration and emigration governments increasingly manage and control migration, political sociology of return underlines how institutions in countries of origin shape reintegration experiences for people who return through coercive or forced means. This thesis provides a peace and development perspective by linking how reintegration occurs after deportation to broader issues of stability and social interactions in Afghanistan.

2.3 Consequences of Deportation for Returnees

Deportation frequently causes long-term economic insecurity, making it difficult for returnees to re-establish their lives. For example, research on forced return in a deportation scenario finds that deportees have "poor labor market outcomes relative to voluntary returnees" and that "the negative effect is statistically significant not just immediately after return, but also in the long run" (David, 2017). According to recent return studies in Afghanistan, forced return is associated with acute precarity, with a majority of forced returnees stating their income was insufficient to cover their basic requirements, compared to lower percentages for spontaneous or supported voluntary return (Mixed Migration Centre, 2024). Deportation frequently undermines people's social networks and support systems in their host nation, causing deep social dislocation and dissolving the social and economic links formed while living abroad (Golash-Boza, 2015).

A third result is stigma and embarrassment in return communities, which can significantly restrict access to basic social services and local support networks. Returnees and refused asylum seekers face profound social stigma and moral exclusion; indeed, empirical research demonstrates that the anticipated stigma of returning empty-handed is so acute that refused Afghan asylum seekers actively resist deportation even under conditions of severe deprivation in Europe (Kuschminder and Dubow, 2023). In parallel, research on forced return and deportation processes emphasizes how deportation and "deportability" create continuous concern, anxiety, and uncertainty in migrants' lives, substantially affecting how people experience and negotiate life after removal (Hasselberg, 2016). Deportation usually affects

family life, causing the separation of spouses and children as well as psychological hardship on dependents. According to qualitative evidence from Afghanistan, forced returns are frequently accompanied by "violence, confiscated assets, and other abuses," and returnees suffer "an array of challenges" in resuming their lives (Majidi, 2017). Furthermore, larger migration-deportation scholarship demonstrates that deportation is a procedure with significant human costs and punitive repercussions on social interactions and sense of self (Hasselberg, 2013).

Finally, sustainable return is more than just "staying" after return; it is also about people's ability to reintegrate and contribute to stability. Work on return sustainability differs between narrow criteria such as whether returnees remigrate and broader metrics such as individual reintegration in home societies as well as macroeconomic and political consequences (Black and Gent, 2006). This distinction is important for assessing peace and social stability results because policymakers may consider repatriation a success even if longer-term reintegration issues continue to cause social and political pressure (Black and Gent, 2006).

This thesis addresses the gap by examining how deportation-shaped return experiences connect micro-level reintegration difficulties to macro-level processes of peace and social stability in Afghanistan. Although the existing literature consistently demonstrates that deportation can lead to economic insecurity, social isolation, and difficulties in reintegration, it pays less attention to the processes through which experiences before deportation shape these outcomes after return. In particular, there is limited research examining how prolonged legal uncertainty, labor exploitation, fear of removal, and social marginalization experienced in Europe influence reintegration trajectories after return to Afghanistan. This gap is especially evident in qualitative studies that foreground the lived experiences of Afghan deportees. By addressing these issues, the present study seeks to deepen understanding of the relationship between pre-deportation experiences, reintegration, and human security.

2.4 Connecting micro-level returnee experiences to macro-level peace and social stability

While much of the existing literature focuses on the individual-level consequences of deportation (economic precarity, psychological trauma, stigma, and social exclusion), several scholars argue that these personal experiences have broader societal consequences, particularly in fragile and post-conflict contexts such as Afghanistan. Returnees do not reintegrate in isolation; economic hardship and social isolation have a direct impact on community dynamics such as perceived governance legitimacy, social cohesiveness, and security. According to Van Houte (2017) and King and Kuschminder (2022), reintegration must be considered in terms of wider social and political structures. When a large number of returns experience long-term unemployment, shame, and a lack of opportunities, grievances may grow, weakening societal stability.

This link is also supported by theoretical considerations. According to multidimensional reintegration theory (Kuschminder, 2017) and human security frameworks, individual failures in economic, social, and psychosocial reintegration endanger collective security and growth. Persistent social exclusion of returnees can exacerbate injustices and grievances, fuelling instability, as documented in peace and development literature on post-conflict reintegration. As a result, this thesis assesses likely societal effects using actual data on individual deportation experiences. While the main data focuses on returnees lived experiences, the analysis employs established theoretical and contextual links to investigate the implications for Afghanistan's peace and societal stability. This integrative perspective fills a large vacuum in the return migration literature.

2.5 Psychosocial impacts and social exclusion after deportation

Deportation and forced return can create long-term psychological distress, beginning before removal with host-country enforcement and incarceration and lasting long after people return home. For example, Saavedra Solano et al. (2023) show that emotional suffering related to deportation builds during host-country deportability and worsens following forced return, meaning that the resulting psychological trauma can last "an indefinite number of years". Furthermore, research on forced deportation to countries of origin shows that the exact way of return and amount of time spent living abroad have a substantial impact on mental health outcomes; hence, psychosocial dangers cannot be treated uniformly for all returnees.

Family separation is one of the most visible effects of deportation-related psychological anguish on children and deported parents in their daily life. According to Ojeda et al. (2020), more than half of deported dads reported being separated from their nuclear family members, while children who stayed in the deporting countries experienced mental health symptoms such as "continuous sobbing" and "depression, despair, rage, and resentment". This separation immediately damages parents' ability to provide emotional and practical support, as deported dads feel tremendous sadness and despair at not being able to care for, mentor, and support their children. Research on deported dads shows that deportation disrupts traditional parenting duties, demonstrating that the psychosocial impact extends beyond the individual to profoundly modify family interactions and obligations over time.

Beyond trauma and family disruption, deportation can result in stigma, humiliation, and social exclusion, limiting social affiliation and involvement. Schuster and Majidi (2015) believe that deportation imposes a "shame of failure" as well as a "contaminated" stigma, leading to stigmatization and shaping how people respond to and manage that stigma. This stigma has an impact on social life since it can encourage people to withdraw from communities or avoid visibility, particularly when they are concerned about the implications to their reputation.

Studies also show that exclusion is reinforced through wider social conditions that weaken people's social functioning after forced return, including feelings of indignity and impaired access to support.

Psychosocial suffering is inextricably tied to re-migration decisions and techniques, since people may believe that staying is impossible when shame and bleak prospects make daily life unpleasant. Schuster and Majidi (2015) argue that, in many circumstances, forcibly expelled

people do not settle permanently and "will depart again," citing humiliation and shame as additional factors that encourage re-migration. More broadly, research on deportability demonstrates how uncertainty and persistent control constraints impact well-being, as people live with the constant threat of arrest or deportation and suffer "waiting," which impairs daily stability and mental health. When mental anguish is combined with limited possibilities and social marginalization, re-migration might become a reaction to structural factors rather than a personal decision. Protective factors can help lower psychosocial risk, although they are largely dependent on returnees' ability to find work, social support, and services. Ceciliano-Navarro and Golash-Boza (2021) demonstrate that deportees' "combination of limited human capital" and "fractured social capital" can still be supported by what the study describes as "positive psychological capital," and that "access to employment" assists deportees in achieving "emotional stability."

Research and guidelines on forced return contexts emphasize the importance of social support and service availability for recovery, since poor healthcare and resources exacerbate mental health concerns. At the same time, limited access to healthcare and chronic economic insecurity may worsen psychosocial vulnerability and impair the efficacy of institutional support systems.

Finally, institutional constraints can exacerbate psychosocial harm by restricting both rehabilitation services and the everyday situations that promote resilience. Izquierdo-Condoy, Salazar-Aguilar, Vásconez-González, and Ortiz-Prado (2025) contend that returning migrants face systemic barriers such as "limited healthcare access, economic instability, and social exclusion," which contribute to "widening health disparities" and increase risks such as depression and PTSD. In Afghanistan-specific protection reporting, returnee women's mental health problems are linked to economic difficulty and food hunger, and access hurdles to psychosocial help can be significant, heightening danger when resources are unavailable. These findings show that psychological rehabilitation following deportation is dependent not just on individual coping, but also on institutions' ability to provide accessible healthcare and support in circumstances when social and economic resources are already limited.

This thesis addresses the gap by connecting these psychosocial and social-exclusion mechanisms to the peace and social-stability implications of deportation for Afghan deportees returned from Europe.

2.6 Summary and research gap

This chapter demonstrates that return and reintegration are not a single event but rather a long process influenced by expectations, planning, and multidimensional requirements. It also demonstrates how deportation can cause long-term economic hardship, damaged social networks, interpersonal stress, and chronic anxiety, all while taking place within the specific reality of Afghanistan. The literature also implies that deportation-shaped return does not always result in peace, because social stability is dependent on security, governance, and community ties, all of which can be influenced in different ways. Finally, the chapter emphasizes how deportation can inflict significant mental trauma and shame, resulting in social exclusion that disrupts daily life and increases re-migration pressures. This thesis fills an important vacuum by connecting Afghan deportees' micro-level lived experiences of coping, suffering, and reintegration to macro-level questions concerning peace and societal stability in Afghanistan.

Chapter 3: Theoretical Framework

3.1 Introduction

This chapter establishes the theoretical framework that underpins this thesis. The study is based on four interrelated analytical concepts: multidimensional reintegration, human security, social exclusion, and deportability. Each concept is explained in its own section. The chapter concludes with an integrated framework that demonstrates how the four ideas interact to understand Afghan deportees' micro-level experiences and their macro-level consequences for peace and social stability in Afghanistan.

3.2 Reintegration Challenges after Deportation

Reintegration is frequently described as multidimensional since it entails more than simply returning to one's home country. Kuschminder (2017) defines reintegration as the process of rebuilding life in various areas at the same time, including cultural maintenance, social networks, self-identification, and access to rights, institutions, and the labor market. From this standpoint, reintegration might thrive in one area while failing in another, which helps to explain why returnees have such disparate results even when they follow comparable return pathways. In this thesis, multidimensional reintegration is treated as a way to understand reintegration as uneven and shaped by both individual resources and the wider environment of return. The economic factor of multidimensional reintegration is critical, since it include access to livelihoods, work, housing, and financial stability. Return and reintegration studies reveal that economic re-engagement is often challenging, especially when returning means starting over with little funds or access to respectable work. According to Ndreka (2019), reintegration in the origin nation entails economic issues as well as broader socio-cultural difficulties, therefore economic reconstruction is a primary reintegration effort rather than a side issue.

The social dimension is concerned with re-establishing relationships, networks, and a sense of belonging in the community. Kuschminder (2017) connects social networks and self-identification to reintegration success by demonstrating how diverse returnees maintain culture, make connections, and navigate how they identify themselves and are perceived by others. Ndreka (2019) also points out that social and socio-cultural reintegration receives less

attention than other aspects of return migration studies, despite the fact that returnees can encounter significant challenges while returning to their home country. In addition, social reintegration after return may involve family relations, everyday trust, and the ability to participate in community life, all of which shape whether reintegration feels possible. A third factor is cultural and psychological, which encompasses identification, a sense of community, mental well-being, and negotiating new values after a period of absence.

A third factor is cultural and psychological, which encompasses identification, a sense of belonging, mental well-being, and negotiating new values after a period of absence. Kuschminder (2022) includes self-identification and cultural maintenance in reintegration techniques, implying that return is more than just an economic or administrative transition; it is also an identity and belonging process. This matters for studying deportation because deportation is more likely than voluntary return to disrupt preparation, expectations, and the ability to recover a stable sense of self.

A fourth dimension is the rights or political dimension, which includes access to legal status, services, and political involvement. Kuschminder (2017) considers access to rights, institutions, and the job market as part of the reintegration strategies framework, suggesting that reintegration depends on what returnees can actually access in the receiving context of the origin nation. According to Ndreka (2019), returnees experience reintegration differently, and economic and socio-cultural obstacles can be related to broader difficulties they confront after they return to their home country. In this thesis, the rights and institutional dimension is important because it helps explain why reintegration can be limited even when returnees are personally motivated or have some resources. Additionally, Kuschminder (2017) provides a typological framework for classifying reintegration tactics into four groups: vulnerable return migrants, enclaves, traditionalists, and reintegrated. These typologies are based on how returnees relate to the aspects of self-identification, social networks, cultural maintenance, and access to institutions, the labor market, and rights. These kinds of typologies are useful because they draw attention to the diversity of returnees and demonstrate that reintegration outcomes are influenced by the institutional and cultural context of return in addition to personal decisions (Kuschminder, 2017).

For Afghan deportees, this helps avoid treating return as a uniform experience and instead supports analysis of how different reintegration strategies may be produced under deportation and constrained opportunities.

Overall, multidimensional reintegration is useful for studying Afghan deportees because it makes reintegration visible as context-dependent, uneven, and shaped by pre-migration and migration experiences (Kuschminder, 2017). This thesis uses multidimensional reintegration in Chapter 6 to interpret interview evidence across economic, social, cultural-psychological, and rights/political dimensions so that the analysis can explain not only whether people reintegrate but also how and why reintegration is experienced differently.

3.3 Human security

Human security was designed to redefine security by focusing on the protection and dignity of humans rather than only national sovereignty. The United Nations Development Program's (UNDP) Human Development Report is widely regarded as formalizing this people-centered approach, establishing that security must include both "freedom from fear" (protection from violence) and "freedom from want" (protection from systemic deprivation) (UNDP, 1994; Axworthy, 2001). According to this viewpoint, security is challenged not only by direct physical violence but also by structural, systemic, and indirect causes that endanger long-term human well-being and social stability. The UNDP (1994) paradigm views human security as intrinsically multidimensional, distinguishing seven distinct but highly interwoven realms of security: economic, food, health, environmental, personal, community, and political security. As a result, focusing just on state aggression or military threats risks ignoring key, life-threatening vulnerabilities, including extreme hunger, sickness, socioeconomic hardship, and the systemic breakdown of basic protection systems (Axworthy, 2001).

Since multiple overlapping dangers contribute to insecurity, human security is particularly crucial in conflict and unstable governments. Dangers to people's safety and well-being often extend beyond the battlefield, impacting daily livelihoods, access to resources, and the capacity to live with dignity in settings where institutions are weak and violence is common (Hanlon and Christie, 2016). "A people-centered approach is advantageous for Afghanistan because it recognizes how worries build up across sectors rather than addressing them individually (Kuschminder, 2017)." "Human security also explains why forced migration and deportation may be so destructive. Individuals who are deported to an unsafe or unstable country risk jeopardizing multiple dimensions of human security at the same time, including personal security (fear of direct physical harm), economic security (loss of livelihood opportunities), and rights-related security (restricted legal protection) (UNDP, 1994; Schuster and Majidi, 2015)." "Deportation, in terms of human security, does far more than physically

relocate persons; it radically affects the structural conditions under which they must seek to achieve basic necessities while remaining free of terror (Schuster and Majidi, 2015).

Human security has also been criticized. Its excessive breadth, according to critics, makes it challenging to prioritize, evaluate, or operationalize in practice and policy (Paris, 2001). While its people-centered framing continues to be a potent normative guide for understanding insecurity, others argue that human security can be used to justify acts while losing sight of its original focus on people's protection (Chandler, 2008).

In this thesis, human security provides the overarching analytical lens through which the reintegration experiences of Afghan deportees are interpreted. Rather than treating human security as a separate process, the study uses it to examine how pre-deportation experiences and post-return reintegration influence people's economic, personal, social, and rights-related security after return to Afghanistan. Human security therefore serves as the broader framework for understanding the consequences of reintegration challenges identified in the interview data.

3.4 Social exclusion

Social exclusion is typically regarded as more than just a lack of money, since it also concerns people's ability to participate in social life and their recognition and treatment as legitimate community members. Paul Spicker (2020) describes exclusion in relational terms, using social solidarity networks to describe how exclusion manifests itself.

A wider view of social exclusion also makes clear that poverty and social exclusion overlap but are not the same thing, because exclusion refers to a broader and more complex situation of participation and recognition (Mela and Toldo, 2019). Exclusion, according to research, can be caused by infrastructure as well as individual attitudes. Shaaban (2011) defines social exclusion as mechanisms that determine who is able to fully engage in economic, social, and political life, including barriers based on language, culture, religion, or race. Merging structural and policy-level perspectives is critical since institutions, labor markets, and services can systematically obstruct access, preventing people from finding work, obtaining housing, and claiming rights. This is significant for analyzing deported Afghans since exclusion can be incorporated in everyday access to work and services, not just interpersonal conflict. At a relationship level, social exclusion frequently manifests as stigma, shame, and social rejection. Riduan Parvez (2021) discovers that repatriated migrants face stigma through processes such as branding, stereotyping, social isolation, and status loss. These types of stigmas are not only psychological experiences but also social mechanisms that undermine trust, diminish support, and perpetuate marginalization in local communities. Similar dynamics can be seen in returnee reintegration research, where returnees may be perceived as suspicious or not "quite" belonging and where everyday encounters may turn into exclusionary behaviors (Lukunka, 2018). Returnees and deportees, in particular, may face social marginalization in the form of being labelled a "failed migrant" or an "outsider" even after physically returning to their home country. Schuster and Majidi (2015) discuss how deportation might lead to extra stigmatization, such as "shame of failure" and "infection".

At a relationship level, social exclusion frequently manifests as stigma, shame, and social rejection.

When stigma narratives expand in communities, they can impede returnees' ability to rebuild networks and receive social support, resulting in uneven reintegration across different people and situations. Individuals who have been deported may risk isolation not only upon arrival, but also during the longer process of attempting to reintegrate into family, neighborhood, or communal life. These exclusion processes are also linked to peace and stability, as exclusion can undermine trust and exacerbate grievance. When returnees face marginalization and loss of recognition, it can exacerbate social tensions and erode the basis for peaceful coexistence in communities. Kaplan and Nussio (2018) demonstrate that community-level social reintegration is simpler in more participatory contexts, implying that social inclusion and involvement influence whether conflict risks are mitigated. For this thesis, social exclusion will be used as a lens to examine how stigma, marginalization, and barriers to belonging shape the post-return lives of Afghan deportees and how these experiences connect to the research questions about broader peace and social stability. social exclusion helps explain why reintegration fails.

3.5 Deportability

Deportability is frequently defined as a state of living with the ongoing possibility of removal, rather than as a singular event that occurs only at the time of expulsion. In critical migration studies, this concept emphasizes how the prospect of deportation can define everyday life for those with fragile legal status (De Genova and Peutz, 2010) and those whose lives are affected by the "possibility of deportation" (Asad, 2019). For deportable migrants, uncertainty becomes

a routine part of social existence: it influences where people go, how they interact with authorities, and how they imagine their futures (Machinya, 2020). Deportability also serves as a governance tool. The fear of removal can be used by states to shape migrant behavior over time, encouraging conformity and limiting movement in social and psychological dimensions as well as physical ones. This governance function can operate through legal and administrative processes that put migrants in a constant state of vulnerability, with deportation choices linked with larger systems of enforcement and control (Turaeva and Amon, 2021). According to research, deportation might have disciplinary repercussions similar to a "waiting" situation, in which people perceive the future as inevitable yet unpredictable (Machinya, 2020).

Living with deportability results in unique types of lived experience, such as fear and self - censorship. According to studies of deportation processes, deportable people frequently try to reduce perceived risk, which can include modifying daily routines, avoiding public institutions, and minimizing encounters that may attract notice. Such experiences can also influence social interactions, since uncertain legal status impairs trust, reliance, and willingness to seek help (Hasselberg, 2014). The concept of deportability encompasses not just what happens before deportation, but also what may occur following return. Even when deportation involves physical removal to another location, the experience of being "deportable" and then deported can continue to impact identity, self-worth, and social position. To put it another way, deportation can have long-term consequences due to stigma and the perception that one's life is ruled by governmental power (Hasselberg, 2014).

This is important for studying Afghan deportees because it suggests that the effects of removal may persist in everyday practices long after the border crossing. In an Afghan setting, deportability is important since many persons seeking asylum in Europe face the possibility of deportation while also suffering greater limits caused by insecurity and inadequate protection in their home country. Even without assuming clear Afghan-specific evidence in all studies, deportability is relevant for explaining how the prospect of deportation influences choices and mental health prior to removal. Research on deportability and waiting suggests that deportable persons manage with uncertainty by reorganizing habits and expectations in the face of persistent danger, which can exacerbate anxiety and stress (Machinya, 2020). When these processes meet with limited opportunities for safety and livelihood, deportation can exacerbate

feelings of dread and insecurity, influencing how returnees approach reintegration and belonging.

In this thesis, deportability is used to understand the broader pre-deportation experiences of Afghan refugees in Europe. Rather than referring only to the possibility of removal, the concept encompasses prolonged legal uncertainty, fear of deportation, administrative waiting, labor exploitation, social marginalization, family separation, and other experiences that shape everyday life before return. These experiences provide the starting point for analyzing how deportation influences subsequent reintegration and human security after return to Afghanistan.

3.6 An integrative analytical framework

This thesis employs an integrative analytical framework based on four concepts, because no single concept can fully explain the implications of deportation for people's lives and broader social stability. Multidimensional reintegration provides insight into the process of rebuilding life after return, but it does not entirely explain why return feels unsafe or why some people are unable to begin their lives. Human security focuses on whether people are truly free of fear and desire in various aspects of their lives. Social exclusion describes how membership, acknowledgment, and social engagement can be denied even when formal opportunities are available. Finally, deportability highlights the power relations and the lasting effects of state control, because deportation is not only an event but also a condition produced through the threat of removal.

The analytical framework adopted in this thesis centers on the relationship between pre-deportation experiences, multidimensional reintegration, and human security. Rather than treating the four concepts as separate theoretical pillars, the framework integrates them into a single analytical pathway. Deportability is used to understand the pre-deportation experiences of Afghan refugees in Europe, including legal uncertainty, fear of removal, prolonged waiting, labor exploitation, and social marginalization. These experiences shape the reintegration process after return to Afghanistan. Reintegration is analyzed as a multidimensional process encompassing economic, social, psychological, and rights-related dimensions. Human security provides the overarching analytical lens through which the consequences of reintegration are interpreted. Within this framework, social exclusion is understood as one of the mechanisms that helps explain why reintegration becomes more difficult for some deportees than for others.

3.7 Summary

This chapter has introduced the four theoretical notions that will drive the analysis of this thesis. Multidimensional reintegration provides a perspective on the complex and unequal process of rebuilding life following expulsion. Human security examines whether returnees are free of fear and want across a variety of life variables. Social exclusion refers to the stigma, marginalization, and difficulties to belonging that deportees encounter in their home communities. Deportability demonstrates how living under the fear of deportation continues to alter identity and social standing even after return. These themes combine to provide an integrative analytical framework that relates individual experiences to bigger problems of peace and social stability in Afghanistan, as addressed in the following results and discussion chapters.

Chapter 4: Methodology

4.1 Research approach

This study takes a qualitative approach, focusing on meanings and lived experiences rather than numerical data. Researchers use qualitative research to better understand the complex social and cultural processes that shape people's interactions and interpretations, which are difficult to describe using data alone. This is especially vital for a thesis on the deportation of Afghan refugees, as people's narratives of events, coping strategies, and expectations serve to understand how deportation affects human security, peace, and stability.

The study is based on an interpretive-qualitative paradigm. In this approach, reality is viewed as socially created, and meanings are co-produced through interactions between researchers and participants, rather than being treated as permanent and independent facts to be collected objectively. As a result, the research approach is appropriate for the study's topics, as it focuses on how Afghan deportees experience deportation and how those experiences influence their welfare, social belonging, and safety. This interpretive approach also influenced the research process by encouraging the interviewer to remain flexible during the interviews, to explore participants' perspectives through follow -up questions, and to interpret the findings in relation to the meanings participants themselves attached to their experiences rather than treating their accounts as objective facts. The qualitative design also allows for flexibility, because researchers can reformulate earlier understandings during the research process as new insights emerge from participants and field realities. In a study involving extremely sensitive displacement experiences, this reflexive position is also part of responsible knowledge production since it allows the researcher to remain aware of power dynamics, context, and the potential constraints of what participants choose to reveal. Overall, the qualitative research approach promotes a thorough, context-sensitive knowledge of deportation experiences, which is crucial for answering the thesis question.

4.3 Research design

This study, which focuses on Afghan refugees deported from Europe, employs a qualitative case study design. A case study approach is well suited for examining a contemporary phenomenon in its real-world context, as it enables the researcher to explore how individual lived experiences are deeply shaped by the broader socio-political and legal circumstances surrounding deportation. A case study design supports the thesis in capturing these complexities rather than reducing them to isolated variables, as deportation and post-return life are shaped by deeply interacting social, institutional, and personal dynamics. The individual returnee serves as the primary unit of analysis in this thesis, while the broader Afghan post-deportation landscape provides the critical contextual background for interpretation. Each participant's narrative of deportation and its aftermath is examined in depth, situated within the structural and relational conditions that participants describe as shaping their choices and lived experiences upon return.

The interpretive qualitative approach also supports this design by recognizing that researchers are embedded in the social worlds they study and therefore must be attentive to how context and meaning are co-produced through the research process (Schwartz-Shea and Yanow, 2012).

Overall, by enabling the study to link individual deportation experiences (as well as pre-return experiences in Europe) to more general implications for life after return, the case study approach helps address the two research questions. The strategy makes it feasible to demonstrate how specific reintegration experiences are connected to broader post-deportation realities in Afghanistan by maintaining the focus on deported Afghan refugees as a distinct, bounded case. This is important for the thesis because it aims to generate a grounded understanding of lived experiences while still considering their wider peace and social stability implications.

Semi-structured interviews with Afghan returnees constitute the primary empirical data for this study, while relevant reports, policy documents, and academic literature are used as secondary sources to provide context and support the analysis. Semi-structured interviews are particularly appropriate for this topic because they foster a guided dialogue where participants can describe their experiences in their own words while the researcher maintains thematic focus on the core research questions. Furthermore, this approach directly supports an interpretive inquiry into what deportation and return subjectively mean to the individuals who live through them. By providing context and assisting in capturing the policy framing that influences how deportation and reintegration are described and handled, document analysis enhances the interviews. According to Bowen (2009), documents are a crucial source of information for qualitative research, and document analysis can supplement analysis by offering more proof in addition to interview narratives. Because it enables the researcher to look at both official or institutional narratives (from secondary sources) and lived experience (from interviews), using documents in this manner enhances the study as a whole (Bowen, 2009). Robust empirical evidence is produced at both the micro and macro analytical levels when these two qualitative data collection techniques are combined. Semi-structured interviews offer comprehensive, detailed accounts of the lived experiences of Afghan returnees at the micro level, including psychological pressures, daily post-deportation difficulties, and subjective coping mechanisms. Document analysis sheds light on how state actors and international organizations define reintegration, assign institutional tasks, and operationalize underlying policy assumptions at the macro institutional level. In terms of methodology, the study can go beyond single-perspective accounts and create a thorough, multi-layered analysis of deportation and reintegration dynamics by triangulating primary interview narratives with secondary document analysis (Bowen, 2009).

By connecting participant narratives to the larger governance and policy context, this combined use of interviews and documents is meant to enhance the overall coherence of the research design. In order to answer the study issues on the effects and implications of deportation for peace and stability, this thesis provides a deeper understanding of both individual outcomes and structural factors.

4.4 Sampling and recruitment

This study uses purposive sampling to recruit Afghan adults who have been deported from European countries to Afghanistan. The study also includes interviews conducted in Europe where relevant to understanding experiences of deportation, return, and reintegration. The goal of purposive sampling is to identify participants who have lived experience that is directly relevant to the research question, rather than to build a statistically representative sample. Because access to people who have experienced deportation can be difficult, the study also uses snowball recruitment through the Afghan diaspora and returnee networks to reach individuals who are not easily identified through formal channels. The study's inclusion criteria required that participants be at least 18 years old, provide informed consent, and either have experienced deportation from Europe to Afghanistan or be currently living in Europe under enforceable return orders as rejected asylum seekers. The final sample comprised 14 participants: eight Afghan men who had been deported to Afghanistan and six Afghan men awaiting return in Europe. This sample size is appropriate for qualitative inquiry because it prioritizes depth of meaning and granular, contextualized narratives over statistical breadth, which are essential for understanding experiences across the pre-removal, deportation, and post-return stages.

When necessary, cooperative relationships with non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and diaspora associations are used in conjunction with established community contacts to recruit participants. Recruitment processes rigorously guarantee that participation is completely voluntary in order to avoid coercion or perceived institutional pressure; informed consent is presented as an independent personal choice rather than a requirement for obtaining humanitarian services or preserving relationships with community gatekeepers. Since acute vulnerability and unequal power dynamics can subtly undermine an individual's perceived freedom to decline participation, ethical recruitment practices and genuine respect for voluntary participation are critical in precarious forced migration settings (Clark-Kazak, 2017).

4.5 Interview guide and procedure

This study employs semi-structured interviews to gather detailed accounts of Afghan deportees' experiences across distinct stages of the migration and return trajectory. To achieve this, the interview guide was structured around key thematic modules: life and precarity in Europe prior to removal, the deportation event itself, immediate arrival in Afghanistan, economic coping strategies and livelihoods, family and community dynamics, mental health

and physical security, and participants' future outlooks. This thematic framework ensured that the interviews systematically generated evidence directly aligned with the research questions, while simultaneously granting participants the narrative space to articulate their lived experiences in their own words. Interviews will be conducted in the language participants prefer, either Dari or Pashto. The researcher will translate the interview content during or after the interview, and the guide will be used as a flexible framework rather than a fixed script so that follow-up questions can be asked when participants raise topics that are important to their lives. Interviews are expected to last about 60 to 90 minutes, and they are audio-recorded only with informed consent, followed by verbatim transcription for analysis. Because research with refugees and asylum seekers involves particular vulnerabilities, the interview process should be designed to support participants 'wellbeing and to reduce the risk of harm during questioning.

This study employed thematic analysis, following the foundational framework developed by Braun and Clarke (2006), as the primary method for analyzing qualitative empirical data. Thematic analysis was selected because it enables the systematic identification, analysis, and interpretation of patterns of meaning or themes across interview transcripts and documentary material. The analytical procedure was methodical and iterative, progressing from in-depth familiarization with the empirical data to generating initial codes that captured recurring experiences, structural barriers, and institutional dynamics across the material. After preliminary coding, related codes were arranged into candidate themes, which were then examined and improved to make sure they accurately represented the particular coded extracts as well as the larger empirical story of the entire dataset (Braun and Clarke, 2006).

Coding is initially established logically, which means that early codes are created by reading and re-reading transcripts and documents rather than beginning with predetermined categories. At the same time, the study employs the four theoretical ideas as focusing lenses, allowing for more refined coding and theme development to focus on relevant aspects of reintegration, human security, social exclusion, and deportability. This combination helps the analysis remain grounded in participants' accounts while still linking the findings to the theoretical concerns of the thesis. To improve interpretation, document analysis is conducted simultaneously with interview analysis rather than as a distinct operation. Both the policy documents and the interview transcripts used the same coding methodology, which made it possible to compare data sources systematically and highlighted important conflicts between the official policy framing and the actual experiences of returnees (Bowen, 2009).

Using a shared analytic frame makes it easier to recognize where documentation validates, elaborates on, or disputes topics raised in interviews, resulting in a more cohesive understanding of deportation and return.

Lastly, the general guiding framework for this study was a reflexive qualitative perspective. This method acknowledged the researcher's interpretive role as an essential part of producing qualitative knowledge rather than as an analytical constraint that needed to be overcome. As a result, the analysis continued through ongoing critical reflection on how theoretical viewpoints and individual positionality influenced coding and theme development. This approach supports transparency in the analytic process, and it helps ensure that the final themes are not just descriptive categories, but meaningful interpretations that answer the thesis research questions.

4.6 Research ethics

Ethical standards placed a high priority on participant protection from harm throughout the whole research process because this study focuses on Afghan nationals who have been forcibly removed or are still under enforced deportation orders. By creating an interview process that reduced emotional suffering and clearly acknowledging participants as a vulnerable group facing severe legal precarity, social stigma, and ongoing insecurity, the fundamental tenet of "Do No Harm" was operationalised. Because researchers run the danger of unintentionally increasing vulnerability through institutional constraints that undermine free consent, structural power imbalances, and confidentiality violations, procedural ethics in forced migration research must be actively adjusted to field reality (Clark-Kazak, 2017).

Informed permission and willing involvement enable ethical participation. Participants were provided with an introduction sheet outlining the purpose of the study, what participation involved and how their data would be used (see Appendix B) informed consent was obtained before participation (see Appendix C). Participation is voluntary, with the option to withdraw from the study at any time, and the consent process is supported by careful communication that considers language and comprehension requirements.

Anonymity and confidentiality are key components of the ethics design.

Participants are allocated codes (such as P1, P2), and identifying information is deleted from transcripts and study outcomes. To protect privacy, anonymity and confidentiality are essential components of the ethical design to safeguard privacy. Identifying information is

eliminated from transcripts and any study results, and participants are given codes (such as P1 and P2). Only the researcher has access to the securely stored data, and all data processing practices adhere to data protection regulations (such as GDPR standards).

To mitigate potential harms, ethical protocols placed paramount importance on maintaining rigorous confidentiality and anonymity, ensuring that no inadvertent disclosure could expose precarious participants to heightened legal, social, or physical risks. The study used trauma-informed precautions to reduce the risk of suffering because talking about forced removal can bring up terrible memories. Participants were invited to take breaks whenever necessary, interviews were performed carefully and sensitively, and they were clearly told that they might end the conversation at any time without giving a reason. Participants were directed to psychosocial resources and local community support networks as needed. The researcher's ethical commitment to minimizing harm when examining precarious migratory trajectories was operationalized by these procedural measures.

4.7 Trustworthiness and reflexivity

My positionality in this research is shaped by both personal and professional experiences of migration and asylum. I left Afghanistan in 2002 and experienced irregular migration, detention and forced return during my journey before eventually reaching Belgium in 2003. After arriving in Belgium, I experienced approximately four years of legal uncertainty before obtaining secure residence status. These experiences gave me personal familiarity with prolonged waiting, insecure legal status and the fear of deportation. However, I recognize that my own experiences cannot be assumed to be equivalent to those of the participants in this study. My professional experience has also shaped my understanding of migration and asylum processes. I worked in the Belgian asylum context from 2011 to 2018 and later worked with the International Organization for Migration (IOM) on programs involving Afghan migrants in Qatar and Germany. As an Afghan researcher who speaks both Pashto and Dari, I was also able to conduct the interviews in participants' preferred languages. This shared linguistic and cultural background could facilitate trust and rapport, but it also created a risk of over-identification and of interpreting participants' experiences through my own assumptions. Open-ended questions were used throughout the interviews to ensure qualitative rigor and reliability, inviting participants to describe their paths in their own words while the researcher remained reflexively vigilant to distinguish participant narratives from personal assumptions. Long-term interaction with the empirical material and methodical data triangulation cross-

referencing interview narratives with official policy documentation to reduce single-source bias and validate emerging findings were used to establish the analysis's credibility (Bowen, 2009).

Transferability is reinforced by a detailed explanation of the Afghan post-deportation context and the conditions under which interviews are conducted, allowing readers to assess whether the findings apply to other settings. Dependability is addressed by keeping a clear audit trail of crucial research decisions and analytic stages, which allows another researcher to track the study's progression from raw data to conclusions. Confirmability is increased through reflexive documentation of interpretations, allowing the reader to understand that the findings are based on the data rather than the researcher's assumptions.

Triangulation and member checking are used to strengthen credibility by testing whether participants' accounts and the researchers' interpretations align with one another. This is crucial in a study of deportation since meanings may be altered by fear, stigma, and changing circumstances after repatriation, thus interpretative checks can lessen the danger of misrepresentation. Transferability is addressed by thoroughly characterizing the context of return to Afghanistan and the circumstances of participation, particularly how the larger environment influences what returnees can and cannot say .This thick description approach supports readers to understand the limits of application, rather than treating the findings as universally generalizable.

4.8 Limitations of the methodology

A constraint of this research is the limited qualitative sample size. Since the study relies on detailed interviews and contextual documents, the results cannot be statistically applied to all Afghan deportees or returnees. In this study, the qualitative approach provides insight into how pre-deportation experiences such as legal uncertainty and fear of removal shape participants' reintegration experiences after return to Afghanistan. A further constraint is that the recruitment of deportees is delicate and relies on connections built on trust. This recruitment dynamic may have resulted in a sample leaning toward individuals who felt comparatively secure and emotionally prepared to articulate their experiences. However, this dynamic also underscores the credibility of the empirical findings, as sensitive or distressing experiences of forced removal and post-return marginalization are far more likely to be underreported than exaggerated. Furthermore, given the acute vulnerabilities surrounding deportation, participants occasionally exercised protective self-censorship—withholding sensitive details, omitting specific events, or restricting disclosures to

safeguard their personal security and protect relatives remaining in Europe or Afghanistan.

To navigate these challenges, the study implemented a targeted recruitment strategy combined with flexible, responsive communication with prospective participants.This approach integrated ongoing informed consent protocols and trauma-sensitive interviewing techniques, actively empowering participants to determine the scope, depth, and boundaries of their disclosures. Additionally, the research clearly records the recruitment and interview process to help readers evaluate how the circumstances of access might influence the information gathered.

Security conditions in Afghanistan affected how some interviews were conducted, particularly where remote interviewing was necessary. Remote interviews limited my ability to observe non-verbal communication and may have reduced the depth of rapport compared with face-to-face interviews. This may have affected the level of detail participants provided, particularly when discussing sensitive experiences of deportation, insecurity, and reintegration. However, conducting interviews in Pashto or Dari and allowing participants flexibility in the timing and format of interviews helped reduce these limitations.

4.9 Summary

The approach combines a qualitative case study format, semi-structured discussions with Afghan returnees, and an examination of relevant policies and documents. The data is analyzed thematically, using the four theoretical ideas from Chapter 3 as guiding perspectives. Ethics, reliability, and self-reflection are prioritized in the design due to the participants' sensitive circumstances. The following chapter will showcase the results that came from this examination.

Chapter 5: Findings

5.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the study's findings. The findings are primarily based on semi-structured interviews with eight Afghan men who had been deported from European countries to Afghanistan and six Afghan men who were still living in Europe as rejected asylum seekers at the time of the study. Relevant reports, policy documents, and academic literature are used as secondary sources to provide context and support interpretation. Additional conversations were conducted with six Afghan men who, at the time of the study, were still in Europe as rejected asylum seekers. As explained in Chapter 4, the sample is all male. Afghan women are not being systematically deported from EU member states because of a 2023 Court of Justice of the European Union (CJEU) ruling, as well as logistical and cultural obstacles, and interviewing Afghan women in this setting was not culturally feasible. The analysis followed Braun and Clarke's reflexive thematic analysis, resulting in nine themes that collectively address the two research questions. The chapter is organized topically rather than by individual participants. Deportees are referred to as P1–P8, while participants still in Europe are referred to as E1, E2, and so on. All identifying information has been deleted or modified. Chapter 6 will be used to interpret and discuss the findings in light of the theoretical framework and existing literature.

5.2 Life in Europe before deportation: illegality, labor exploitation and fear

Prior to deportation, participants reported life in Europe as uncertain and tiring, shaped by their lack of legal status as rejected asylum applicants or undocumented immigrants. They explained that they had no official address and frequently no documents to defend themselves, making daily life feel dangerous and uncertain. Many people said they avoided public settings and tried to blend in because they were afraid of police inspections, landlords raising concerns, or colleagues reporting them. Although their personal stories differed, a unifying theme was that their routine was based on the constant possibility of removal. Work played a significant role in this uncertainty. Participants recalled working in low-wage occupations under difficult conditions, frequently because it was the only way to live. One man recounted how he might

work long hours for little pay, earning only €20 per day for 12 hours of heavy labor. P1 described it as: "We worked from daylight to late evening." They paid me only €20 for twelve hours. My body felt exhausted, but if I protested, they would reply, "If you don't like it, go." So, I remained silent. They recounted feeling trapped in these occupations, not only because the income was low, but also because they couldn't easily change employment or protest without risking drawing attention.

Several participants expressed fear of deportation and rumors that mass forced returns could occur at any time. Even when they were not held, they claimed that fear was always present, influencing how they organized their days and who they communicated with. Some reported hearing stories from others in their neighborhood, including claims that many people would be sent back together, which worsened their worry and made them more cautious when speaking with authorities. E2 described it: 'In my town, people talked about it happening any week, even if you weren't caught today. ' When you hear that, you lose trust in everything. You avoid areas where police may be present, and you choose your words carefully, even when speaking to a neighbor.' Hope and terror coexisted throughout this time: they hoped that things would improve, but they also feared that any moment may bring unexpected loss.

Along with this concern, some individuals expressed a plan to better their prospects by relocating within Europe. Rejected asylum seekers in Europe, including those individuals identified to as E1 to E3, stated that they explored moving to Eastern European nations such as Romania or Hungary, believing that it would be simpler to regularize their status. They mentioned comparing possibilities and looking for realistic solutions, even if it meant taking on additional risks. P2 described: 'Some individuals told me that going to Romania makes getting papers easier. "I began to think about it because I was stuck without a legal way. I sought the quickest way to travel again, even if it was dangerous because I didn't see any other options. ' This pre-deportation experience of insecurity was not only something that happened before return; participants explained that it shaped how they experienced the possibility of losing their lives again, and it influenced the way they later described the transition back to Afghanistan. In the next section, Chapter 5.2 focuses on how participants experienced the deportation event itself and the journey back.

5.3 The deportation experience: shock, loss of control and the journey back

Participants described the deportation itself as shocking and humiliating, not as something they had time to prepare for. Several explained that they were given very short notice hours, not days and that the process moved quickly from information to removal. For example, P1 described: 'They gave me no time even to collect my belongings, and I still had to go back for the little money I earned from the low wages they paid me but even that felt impossible now,' capturing the feeling that nothing was under their control once the decision was implemented. They also described being taken directly from places of detention, which made the experience feel sudden and degrading. On the flight back, participants repeatedly described a sense of complete loss of control and dignity. They felt like criminals, even though they insisted they had done nothing wrong, and that feeling shaped how they understood the journey.. They felt like criminals, even though they insisted they had done nothing wrong, and that feeling shaped how they understood the journey. P3 described it as 'This was the end of any future I had dreamed of I was going back to darkness, to a future so uncertain I couldn't even picture tomorrow,' capturing the despair and the crushing weight of having no path forward. Others said they tried to stay quiet and focused on survival, but the uncertainty of what would happen next remained present throughout the trip. Some also described shame on the plane because they did not want other passengers to know they were being deported, and this shame intensified their sense of being exposed.

On the return trip, individuals regularly expressed a complete loss of control and dignity. They felt like criminals, despite the fact that they said they had done nothing wrong, and this sensation colored their understanding of the adventure. P3 described it as 'This was the end of any future I had dreamed of I was returning to darkness, to a future so unclear I couldn't possibly imagine tomorrow,' conveying the sorrow and crushing weight of having no way forward. Others stated that they tried to remain silent and focused on survival, but the uncertainty of what would happen next persisted throughout the journey. Some also described shame on the plane because they did not want other passengers to know they were being deported, and this shame intensified their sense of being exposed. P6 described: 'The frustration at the airport was scary. Psychologically, I was afraid because everything

looked grey, and there was no smile on people's faces that takes you to lose all hope about the future.'

5.4 Arrival and early survival in Afghanistan

When participants recalled their first hours in Kabul, they frequently described feeling dragged into pandemonium with little strategy or support. Several people mentioned that they didn't have enough money for transportation, food, or even basic phone service, so they had to figure out where to go while feeling watched and unsure. Some reported being quickly processed at the airport and then being left alone, while others said they relied on strangers or NGO workers for instructions and tiny amounts of assistance to get through the day. In the days that followed, participants stated that immediate needs such as housing and money were more pressing than longer-term reintegration issues. They recalled arriving in places where there was no room for them at first, or discovering that those who were supposed to assist them could not do so right away. Some mentioned that they had to sleep in the same room as relatives or even wait for someone to get a temporary home. They mentioned trying to obtain daily food and being uncertain about whether they would receive assistance the next day. Several others recalled borrowing money from family to get through the first several weeks, including for transportation, basic supplies, and occasional medical requirements. Some individuals also reported that they received a minor bit of IOM reintegration cash, but that it was not enough to last and ran out within days.

Many participants acknowledged being shocked when they compared what they had expected to what they discovered upon their return. Because they had been abroad in Europe for years, some had hoped to discover a country that was at least mostly functional, however tough. Instead, they described pervasive poverty and a Taliban-controlled environment with few prospects for genuine employment. These accounts are consistent with World Bank evidence showing that poverty remained at around 48 per cent, while urban poverty continued to rise partly because of limited employment opportunities (World Bank, 2024). Participants stated that a shortage of jobs made even fundamental routines seem difficult, and that it was not simply hard work that was lacking, but also the conditions that allowed work to exist at all. One participant described the emotional impact of this difference in a straightforward manner: P5 explained: 'I expected hardship, but not this there is no work, no future, no way to even

start over. The Taliban control everything, and the poverty is so deep that you can't see a way out. I feel like I returned to a place that has no room for me anymore.'

These early experiences also influenced what happened afterward, since participants reported that survival demands were urgent and constant. When the first few weeks were marked by waiting, borrowing, and uncertainty, it became impossible to prepare for longer-term goals such as establishing livelihoods or mending family relationships. The way people characterized their arrival in Afghanistan is thus linked to how they later talked about economic difficulty and finding a means to live under new limits, which are discussed in the following section.

5.5 Economic reintegration: unemployment, debt and financial hardship

Following their return, participants regarded economic reintegration as one of the most difficult aspects of their lives. They stated that unemployment was the norm and that obtaining regular formal jobs was nearly impossible for many returnees. Several individuals mentioned looking for work but being turned down because they lacked contacts, documents, or because hiring opportunities were extremely limited under present conditions. They discussed how, even when they tried to undertake little day jobs, the work did not endure and the revenue was too unpredictable to develop a future plan. In many tales, a lack of a job not only limited alternatives but also defined daily routines and made people feel trapped. Participants also described debt as a long-term burden that persisted after returning rather than something that ended with the voyage back. Many claimed that they had borrowed money from family members or moneylenders to migrate and endure the years of uncertainty in Europe and that this money had yet to be repaid. They said that the pressure to repay caused ongoing tension within the home because repayments were required despite their limited earning capacity. Some participants stated that they were forced to sell household assets or give up land or other things in order to meet basic needs and repayment demands. They spoke about money as if it were not simply an economic concern but also a constant cause of worry about how they would manage the following month.

Many participants associated economic difficulty with family expectations and humiliation. They explained how, during their time overseas, relatives had financially invested in their departure, hoping that the participant would subsequently send assistance. Following

deportation and return, participants stated that they could no longer match those expectations, and family members occasionally expressed dissatisfaction. Several individuals expressed feeling like a burden to those who aided them, which caused them to withdraw from family talks. They noted the emotional burden of being unable to give, particularly when they observed that children or other dependents still required food, schooling, or assistance.

Another trend emerged from participants' descriptions of drug usage and substance misuse in their social milieu, which were linked to economic desperation and restricted alternatives. Participants stated seeing drug usage around them, hearing about it from neighbors or at work, and feeling pressured to engage in informal or dangerous money activities when stable work was not available. They underlined that these constraints were not viewed as a personal decision taken in isolation, but rather as a result of the broader economic circumstances and a lack of legal or safe avenues to employment. They continually emphasized the significance of avoiding injury, and they described how difficult it was to protect themselves and their families when daily survival necessitated immediate fixes.

5.6 Family and social networks after return

After deportation and return, participants described family reactions as mixed. For some, the immediate response was relief that their family member was alive, followed by a fast shift to disappointment about what had happened and what support they hoped would come from Europe. Several participants said they felt they had let their families down after years of expecting that life in Europe would bring money, stability, and a future they could build together. P2 described it as: "My father hugged me first. Then he started asking why I came back with nothing, after all those years. He said, 'This was our last hope. We told ourselves, just hold on until he sends money. We told ourselves, if the winter is too harsh, he will help. If your mother gets sick again and we need to take her across the border for treatment, he will pay. Now you are back here, with empty hands and that final hope is over. We have nowhere else to turn.'"

Participants also explained that families often financed the journey to Europe by borrowing money, and they were now waiting for repayment. They described feeling trapped between family obligations and the reality that, after return, there was not enough work or income to repay debts. In many cases, the financial expectations placed on them during their time abroad

did not match the possibilities available after deportation, which created ongoing tension in daily family life. P5 stated, "Everyone in the family is waiting for the money we promised. But I can't offer it, and my stomach feels heavy every day. Not only do my parents and siblings put pressure on me; uncles, aunts, cousins, and even neighbors who know I went to Europe do as well. They all want to know when I'll pay back what I borrowed. I see it in their eyes: they're losing patience. And I'm afraid that in the near future, our family will be split apart due to financial troubles; we won't be able to survive together." Some participants reported that these expectations were a continuous source of stress, hurting not only their relationships with siblings or parents but also how freely they could communicate at home. Marriage possibilities were another area in which people reported that returning affected their future. Several described being deemed unacceptable by future in-laws because they were labelled as having 'failed' in Europe, even if the expulsion was not their choice. Participants said that this stigma made it more difficult to present themselves as reliable and financially stable, limiting their alternatives for marriage. P7 described: People's perceptions of you change when they learn that you visited Europe and returned. Why should our daughter marry you if you didn't succeed, they ask? Participants' discussions of time and hope were also influenced by the decreased likelihood of marriage, as family planning that had previously been feasible became questionable. According to several participants, discrimination extended beyond the idea that they were failures; families deliberately avoided them for marriage, and the stigma was made much more difficult to overcome by rumors that returnees brought diseases from Europe. As a result, many participants were dubious that they would ever be able to start the families they had planned for. Participants also talked about how, upon deportation, they were essentially cut off from their European social networks. They clarified that friendships and professional connections made in Europe were difficult to preserve because phones were occasionally confiscated during deportation and contacts were lost. Even if they still wished to get in touch with friends or other asylum seekers, some participants claimed that the distance itself made communication challenging. P1 explained, "We used to make daily calls in Europe. The phone and number were gone after deportation, and now there is simply stillness. I had pals that were aware of my experience and could relate to my struggles. It feels like that period of my life never happened since I can't get in touch with them or they can't get in touch with me." In this sense, participants said that their return separated them not only from Europe in terms of geography but also from the practical and emotional social assistance they had depended on.

5.7 Stigma, shame and the challenge of belonging

One of the strongest social experiences following return, according to the participants, was stigma. According to their testimonies, locals ridiculed them as "failed persons in life", i.e., individuals who travelled to Europe and returned empty-handed. They said the label was repeated in everyday conversations and quickly became a public story about who they were, not just what happened to them. Several participants explained that the stigma was connected to rumors that they "brought disease from Europe". They described this as a powerful social metaphor that framed their return not as a political event, but as a moral failure or contamination. In some households and neighborhoods, they said people spoke about them in warning tones, as if being close to them carried risk. One participant described it like this: P3 described the following: "People say we brought diseases from Europe not just normal sickness, but things from sexual contact, or because we ate pork meat there. They say we have become like Europeans, that we are no longer clean. I heard a neighbor tell her daughter, 'Stay away from him, you do not know what he has caught over there.' They do not see that I was just trying to survive. They see me as dirty now." In this way, the stigma was not only about failure but also about perceived moral and physical contamination, which further isolated returnees from their communities.

Participants also talked about self-stigma and withdrawal. They said they internalized the shame and started to feel like outsiders in their own community. Several described avoiding going out or limiting visits because they did not want to face direct questions from neighbors or the judgement that came with them. P4 described it as "The neighbors are getting personal and provoking questions – whether we still practice being a Muslim, or do we still have money, or do we go back, etc." These constant interrogations, framed as casual curiosity, made participants feel exposed and judged in their own neighborhoods, reinforcing their sense of not belonging. As a result, many chose to stay indoors rather than risk the humiliation of being questioned about their faith, finances, or future plans. Family reactions could reinforce this shame. Participants said that sometimes their families openly showed disappointment, and in other cases they pressured them to keep the deportation hidden. They described being asked not to tell neighbors, and in some cases, they said they felt responsible for disappointing

relatives who had expected success after Europe. They also described how this affected their relationships at home and their confidence to rebuild a normal life. The stigma also shaped future possibilities, especially marriage prospects. Participants reported that the "failed" image made it harder to find someone willing to marry them, because families saw them as men who had lost value or who could bring negative attention. They said this reduced their options and increased the pressure they felt to hide what happened. Some described managing stigma by telling others they had chosen to come back voluntarily, even if they knew that was not what neighbors expected. P6 described it as "When people ask why I came back, I tell them I decided myself that Europe was not for me, that I missed home. I cannot say I was deported. If I tell the truth, no one will marry my sister, and my parents will lose face in the community. So I lie, even though everyone probably knows the truth anyway." This constant negotiation between concealment and exposure added another layer of psychological strain, as participants had to carefully manage their stories to protect both their own reputation and that of their families.

The next section explains how these social pressures connected to participants' wider wellbeing and sense of safety after return.

5.8 Mental health and psychosocial wellbeing

Participants described widespread psychological distress after deportation and return. They spoke about feelings that they associated with depression and hopelessness but also with strong emotions such as anger and anxiety. Several participants described changes in daily life that they linked to these emotions, including not being able to sleep properly, losing appetite, and feeling that they had no motivation to do anything. One participant, P3, described it as follows: Some days I do not even get out of bed because there is nothing to get up for. My family tells me to eat, but food has no taste anymore. I just sit and stare, thinking about everything I lost and everything I cannot get back." These experiences of persistent emotional and physical exhaustion were common across participants, who often struggled to articulate the depth of their distress but consistently described a sense of being stuck between a past they could not reclaim and a future that offered little hope.

Identity disruption was a second part of the mental health picture. Participants who had spent years in Europe said they had started to develop habits, expectations, and a sense of self in that environment, and then felt that return broke that process suddenly. After return, they described struggling to explain themselves and their lives to other people, and they said they no longer knew who they were. P5 said: 'I feel like I belong to neither place; in Europe they looked at me as if I was temporary, and here I feel like a stranger.'

Participants also described coping mechanisms, but these were often informal and depended on who they could reach. Some said faith helped them, including prayer and time in a religious space, especially on days when they felt overwhelmed. Others described relying on family members or friends, talking with someone they trusted to reduce the pressure they carried. P1 described: 'When I start thinking too much, I go to prayer and then I speak with my brother; it is not a solution, but it calms me down.' At the same time, most participants said professional mental health support was essentially unavailable in their communities, and they spoke about not knowing where to go or feeling that there was no service that could genuinely help. The participants also linked their psychological distress directly to the stigma and shame described in the previous section. They said that being mocked, judged, and treated as a failed person made it harder to accept themselves and made them withdraw from normal social life. As one participant, P7, put it: '[After people spoke badly about me], I stopped visiting and I started staying alone, because I could not face the questions.' These combined experiences shaped how participants described their emotional wellbeing after return, and the next section will move to safety, security, and living conditions in Afghanistan.

5.9 Safety, security and living conditions in Afghanistan

After returning to Afghanistan, participants described security as one of their biggest everyday concerns, and they often explained this in practical terms, not only as a general feeling. They talked about how life after the Taliban takeover felt unpredictable, and how ordinary routines could become risky when people did not know who was watching, where threats might come from, or what could happen if someone was reported. Several participants said that even leaving home required careful thinking, because they felt they could not rely on the same kinds of protections they had been used to in Europe, even when they had been living there without legal status. P3 described it as follows: "When I wake up, I cannot control my thoughts; I feel

heavy in my chest, and I cannot find peace." Another participant spoke about how this distress manifested in a constant state of vigilance and withdrawal: "I stopped going out like before, because you never know what can happen in one day. Going out is risky; someone can easily abduct you and ask for money." This pervasive fear of violence and kidnapping further constrained participants' daily lives, as they retreated from social spaces and activities that had once been routine, deepening their isolation and reinforcing the hopelessness they described.

Finally, participants consistently contrasted their sense of safety in Europe with their experience after return. They described that, even though life in Europe was precarious and they were without legal status, there were still places and systems where they could reach emergency healthcare and where daily conditions felt less physically constrained than in Afghanistan.

In their accounts, the contrast was not just about comfort but about the difference between having limited support in Europe and facing a broader environment in Afghanistan where help was harder to access and security threats could be closer and more immediate. One participant captured this sentiment directly: "In Europe I was afraid too, but at least I knew where to go if something happened. Here, it feels like you are trapped." This feeling of being trapped without reliable institutions, without recourse to protection, and without the basic predictability of daily life underlined the profound sense of vulnerability that participants associated with their return, making even the precarity of Europe seem preferable to the dangers they now faced at home. The narratives regarding safety, the possibility of kidnapping, limited liberties, and the differences with Europe influence how the participants recount their subsequent challenges with readjusting, which will be addressed in the upcoming section.

5.10 Re-migration intentions, aspirations and views on policy

Almost all participants expressed a strong desire to leave Afghanistan again, despite having already returned from Europe. When they discussed how they would try again, the most popular routes they identified were through Iran and then on to Turkey, which they frequently described as the same road they had previously taken. Some participants stated that they had begun to consider the costs and scheduling of another attempt, and a few recounted saving little sums whenever they could because they believed another trip was still possible if they "prepared correctly". P6 explained: I'm not staying here. I must try again, even if it is

perilous. 'P2 stated, "Most people here talk about Iran and Turkey because that is how it can operate.'"

Participants attributed their remigration plans to a combination of economic necessity and emotional pressure. They cited unemployment and the inability to maintain their families as the primary reasons, but they also identified hopelessness and shame as factors that prompted them to leave. According to their stories, staying in Afghanistan was difficult not only due to financial constraints but also because they felt they had already "failed" and could not envisage a realistic future in which things would change. Several participants stated that they felt imprisoned between bills and daily survival, which made staying seem impossible. P4 stated: 'I can't keep waiting for help. When there are no employment and no future, you begin to consider leaving again.' P1 stated: "I am humiliated, but shame does not pay rent." That's why I want to go. Their criticism of European deportation policies was broad and direct. Participants typically thought that European states returned them to an unsafe country and did not provide adequate help to enable them to return to normal life. Many people felt misled by the outcome, despite the fact that European governments posed themselves as human rights champions. Some participants claimed that the deportation decisions did not take their lived reality seriously and that the disparity between policy promises and on-the-ground situations caused a sense of abandonment.

P8 described it: 'They claimed to care about human rights, but when you are deported, they close the door.' That's betrayal.' P3 described it as 'They returned us to an area where there is no work or safety.' What type of protection is that?

Participants were also frustrated with Afghan authorities. Several individuals expressed unhappiness with the Afghan government structures that existed prior to the Taliban takeover, as well as resentment and powerlessness toward the Taliban administration for failing to provide a viable route ahead. They described the reintegration support they received as being insufficient and ineffective in changing their condition. In their opinion, the help arrived too late and did not address the basic issues of safety, livelihoods, and social rebuilding upon return. P5 described: 'They helped for a brief while, but then nothing changed. How do you live with that? P7 stated: 'No authority actually assists you when you return. You are left to find your own route. These narratives demonstrate that re-migration aspirations and policy disappointment are inextricably linked to both economic situations and sentiments of guilt and betrayal, and Chapter 6 will analyze these findings using the four theoretical concepts.

5.11 Summary

This chapter summarized the findings across nine themes. Participants reported their lives in Europe before deportation as fraught with fear, exploitation, and illegality, with some intending to relocate to Eastern European nations in order to regularize their status. The expulsion itself was shocking and humiliating. Arrival in Afghanistan brought further hardships: economic collapse, debt, a lack of assistance, and a foreign and dangerous environment. Economic reintegration was exceedingly tough, with unemployment being the norm and migratory loans adding to the pressure. Family ties were strained due to unfulfilled expectations and financial obligations that participants could no longer meet. Stigma and humiliation appeared as the primary social experiences, with individuals being labelled as "failed people in life" by their communities and having fewer marriage chances.

Mental health and psychological well-being were severely impacted, with identity confusion and hopelessness frequently stated. Safety and security in Afghanistan offered actual physical hazards, including the potential of abduction against anyone with European links. Almost all participants reported a strong desire to leave Afghanistan again, particularly via Iran and Turkey, motivated by economic necessity and the lack of a viable future. Chapter 6 explores these findings using the four theoretical principles introduced in Chapter 3.

Chapter 6: Analysis

6.1 Introduction

This chapter examines the empirical data reported in Chapter 5 using the theoretical and analytical framework established in Chapter 3. The analysis centers on how pre-deportation experiences in Europe shape reintegration after return to Afghanistan, with human security providing the broader analytical lens. Deportability helps explain experiences of legal uncertainty and fear before removal, while social exclusion is considered where it helps explain difficulties in reintegration. The research progresses from the micro-level experiences of deported Afghan returnees to the macro-level implications for Afghanistan's peace and social stability. This analysis addresses the three research questions while demonstrating the study's relevance to Peace and Development Studies.

6.2 Reintegration as Multidimensional and Uneven

A central finding of this study is that reintegration following deportation is neither automatic nor linear. Viewed through King and Kuschminder's (2022) multidimensional framework, the trajectories of returnees were deeply uneven and, in many cases, marked by clear regression across economic, social, psychosocial, and political dimensions.

On the economic front, participants spoke of chronic unemployment, precarious day labour, and the crushing weight of debts carried over from their journeys to Europe. As Van Houte (2017) observed among Afghan returnees, this persistent financial insecurity made it almost impossible to secure stable housing, support dependents, or build any realistic plans for the future.

These economic pressures inevitably spilled into personal relationships. Family ties often frayed under the weight of unmet expectations, while wider community acceptance remained fragile. Many participants described feeling like failures, struggling with a fractured sense of identity and deep social alienation an experience reflecting the patterns of moral exclusion and post-return marginalization identified by Kuschminder and Dubow (2023). Politically, returnees had virtually nowhere to turn for legal protection or basic public services under Taliban governance.

How participants navigated these hardships depended heavily on individual circumstances:

how long they had lived in Europe, their household dependency burdens, and the amount of time elapsed since their deportation. Ultimately, these narratives reinforce and build upon King and Kuschminder's (2022) work by showing how forced removal compounds vulnerability in ways that voluntary return rarely does rather than an unproblematic 'return home', life after deportation is better understood as an ongoing, fragile struggle shaped by severe structural constraints.

This multidimensional unevenness directly undermined participants' sense of human security, as explored below.

6.3 Human Security and Lived Insecurity After Return

According to the human security framework, deportation exposed returnees to several insecurities that compounded themselves. Participants indicated significant concerns about economic security (unemployment and debt), personal and community security (fear of violence and kidnapping), and human rights security (restricted access to services and protection). This multidimensional insecurity contrasts sharply with the ideas that underpin many European deportation strategies, which frequently promote homecoming as a return to safety and normality. Participants expressed increased risk upon arrival in a fragile situation, which is consistent with critiques by Van Houte (2017) and Schuster and Majidi (2015). Everyday existence was distinguished by continual alertness, limited movement, and little hope for the future.

These cases of human insecurity were not isolated personal issues. When shared by a large number of returnees, structural constraints may weaken the social framework required for stability, outlined more in Section 6.5.

6.4 Social Exclusion and Stigma in Everyday Life

Social exclusion functioned as both a structural barrier and a very interpersonal feeling. Participants experienced structural barriers to employment, housing, and services. Relationally, they faced significant stigma as "failed migrants", allegations of contamination, and social rejection, all of which harmed their sense of belonging. This stigma caused many people to retreat from communal activity, conceal their deportation history, and limit their social relationships. Such isolation severely limited access to the social capital and support networks required for successful reintegration. The findings build on Schuster and Majidi's (2015) work by illustrating how deportation stigma in Afghanistan links with moral and cultural expectations of achievement, masculinity, and family honor. Stigma's relational damage reinforced structural exclusion, resulting in an unhealthy cycle that made meaningful community engagement extremely difficult. This dynamic has obvious implications for social

cohesiveness and peace, since widespread marginalization of returnees can undermine trust and mutual support within communities.

6.5 Deportability and Its Lasting Effects

Deportability, or living under continual threat of removal, impacted participants' experiences before and after deportation. In Europe, the constant threat of deportation promoted chronic uncertainty, fear, and self-censorship, affecting everyday routines and social relationships. This problem persisted even after physical recovery. Many participants still felt vulnerable, lacked autonomy, and had their identities altered. The effects of deportation interacted with other post-return stressors, including economic hardship, unemployment, insecurity, limited support networks, and difficulties in rebuilding social relationships. Together, these factors shaped participants' ability to reintegrate and their sense of security after return.

6.6 From Micro Experiences to Macro Peace and Social Stability in Afghanistan

The findings of this study primarily demonstrate the individual-level consequences of deportation and should not be interpreted as evidence that deportation directly causes societal instability in Afghanistan. Instead, participants' experiences of economic insecurity, social exclusion, fear, and difficulties with reintegration provide a basis for considering how such individual-level insecurities may relate to broader questions of social stability and peace. The discussion that follows therefore treats these wider implications as contextual and policy-relevant considerations rather than direct outcomes demonstrated by the interview data.

When returnees are labelled "failed" or "tainted", their capacity to fully participate in communal life suffers. This marginalization may undermine the social capital required for collective resilience in a fragile post-conflict environment. Third, the long-term implications of deportability and persistent remigration plans prolong cycles of vulnerability and uncertainty. The participants' strong desire to go again indicates not only personal desperation, but also a broader conviction that staying offers little hope of dignity or security. Taken together, these trends show that large-scale forced returns, paired with limited reintegration

support and difficult local conditions, might generate grievances, weaken social cohesiveness, and prevent communities' ability to recover and rebuild peace. Returnees who feel abandoned by both European governments and Afghan institutions may become increasingly disillusioned with official authority, hindering governance and stability efforts. In terms of peace and development, the study demonstrates that deportation policies that prioritize fast removal without enough attention to multidimensional reintegration and human security can unintentionally contribute to the conditions that prevent long-term peace.

This thesis adds to the discipline by rooting macro-level problems in the specific lived experiences of Afghan deportees. It goes beyond abstract policy discussions to show how individual harms accumulate into societal pressures that undermine social stability. While the data do not support assertions of direct causal ties to large-scale conflict, they do demonstrate that present deportation procedures hamper peace-building and development in Afghanistan.

6.7 Policy Implications

The findings show considerable disparities between European deportation rhetoric and the realities faced by Afghan returnees. Policy should change from short-term removal tactics to comprehensive, long-term support that addresses multidimensional reintegration, human security, and social exclusion. European countries should conduct more thorough pre- and post-return risk assessments, provide longer-term reintegration help, and ensure support addresses social and psychological requirements. Programs for Afghanistan and international players must focus on community-level social reception, stigma reduction activities, long-term livelihood opportunities, and access to mental health treatments.

6.8 Summary

This chapter demonstrated that deportation presents significant, connected problems for Afghan returnees in all four theoretical aspects. These micro-level experiences can have a negative impact on Afghanistan's overall societal stability and peace. The study emphasizes the need for policy that considers the long-term human and social costs of forced return.

Chapter 7: Conclusions

7.1 Introduction

This final chapter synthesizes the important facts and arguments presented throughout the thesis. It summaries the main empirical patterns emerging from the research, provides direct answers to the three research questions, articulates the study's theoretical and empirical contributions to peace and development studies, acknowledges its limitations, and makes policy recommendations and suggests future research directions. Rather than adding fresh data, the chapter examines what the study as a whole indicates about the effects of deportation on Afghan returnees, as well as the broader ramifications for Afghanistan's peace and stability.

7.2 Summary of Main Findings

This thesis looked at the lived experiences of Afghan refugees deported from Europe, as well as the implications for Afghanistan's peace and social stability. Using semi-structured interviews with deported returnees and supporting document analysis, the study analyzed data thematically and interpreted findings using four interrelated concepts: multidimensional reintegration, human security, social exclusion, and deportability. The dominant pattern emerging from the nine elements described in Chapter 5 is that reintegration following deportation is deeply uneven and frequently precarious. Participants reported significant economic hardship, long-term debt, widespread unemployment, and limited access to services. These material hardships were exacerbated by strong social stigma, feelings of failure and contamination, and strained family and community relationships.

Pre-return experiences in Europe, marked by uncertainty, fear of deportation, work exploitation, and marginalization, had a substantial impact on post-return outcomes, making reintegration more difficult. The state of deportability persisted after physical removal, influencing participants' feeling of agency, identity, and future planning. These findings are consistent with and build upon key concepts from the literature. King and Kuschminder (2022) contend that return should be viewed as a long-term social process rather than a singular event. Van Houte (2017) emphasizes the disparity between governmental expectations and the

difficult realities of returning to vulnerable environments like Afghanistan. Schuster and Majidi (2015) show the stigma and "shame of failure" that many deported Afghans face. The current study provides empirical depth by demonstrating how these processes interact in the lives of individual returnees, resulting in collective pressures on social cohesion.

7.3 Answers to the Research Questions

7.3.1 RQ1: How do returnees experience deportation and reintegration?

Participants considered deportation as a sudden, humiliating, and unsettling experience characterized by a loss of control and dignity. The travel back and the initial period after arriving were marked by shock, practical confusion, and a lack of support. When they returned, the most significant obstacles included extreme economic insecurity, unemployment, debt payback pressure, social criticism, and psychological suffering. Many felt like foreigners in their own nation, experiencing both material hardship and relationship rejection. As a result, reintegration was viewed as a challenging, often painful process of navigating several overlapping vulnerabilities rather than a return to normal. These experiences demonstrate that forced return causes both immediate and long-term disturbances in the economic, social, and psychological components of life.

7.3.2 RQ2: How do experiences in Europe shape return outcomes?

Pre-return experiences in Europe have a dramatic impact on post-return reintegration. Participants frequently attributed their hardships in Afghanistan to the lengthy uncertainty, fear of deportation, labor exploitation, and social marginalization they faced while waiting for judgements on their asylum petitions. The length of time spent in Europe, living without legal status, and accumulated debt were identified as particularly relevant variables. When many returnees arrived in Afghanistan, they had fewer money, weakened social networks, and were more psychologically vulnerable. The data show that the mechanism and conditions of return are not neutral; forcible deportation after extended periods of deportability has much worse reintegration prospects than more prepared or voluntary returns.

7.3.3 RQ3: How might these challenges affect peace and social stability in Afghanistan?

The study demonstrates that the individual challenges faced by deported returnees might combine to create conditions that undermine social stability and peace-building efforts. Economic uncertainty, social stigma, and a loss of trust in institutions all contribute to dissatisfaction and a breakdown in social cohesion. When a large number of returnees experience similar patterns of exclusion and restricted options, home and community tensions rise. Strong remigration plans exacerbate already unstable social and economic structures. While the qualitative nature of this study does not allow for direct causal claims about large-scale conflict, the findings show that current deportation practices, combined with insufficient reintegration support in a fragile context, create structural conditions that complicate everyday peace and long-term stability in Afghanistan.

7.4 Theoretical and Empirical Contribution

This thesis provides two major contributions. It theoretically creates an integrated analytical framework that combines multidimensional reintegration (Kuschminder, 2022), human security, social isolation, and deportability (De Genova, 2002). By combining these notions, the study reveals how deportation has interrelated and long-lasting consequences that reach far beyond the moment of removal. This framework provides a broader perspective for understanding forced return in fragile environments than single-concept approaches.

Empirically, the thesis provides rare in-depth qualitative evidence from Afghan deportees, a population that is regularly mentioned in policy discussions but rarely heard in their own words. The study connects micro-level lived experiences of insecurity, stigma, and limited life opportunities to macro-level problems of peace and societal stability, bridging migration studies and peace and development research. It calls into question basic assumptions about a "successful return" and emphasizes the importance of treating deportation as a peace and development issue with major long-term human and social consequences.

7.5 Limitations of the Study

Several constraints should be recognized. First, the sample size is limited, and the participants were recruited specifically through networks. This indicates that the findings are not statistically generalizable, but they provide valuable analytical insight. Second, the sensitive nature of the topic and the security situation in Afghanistan most certainly influenced what participants felt comfortable disclosing. Self-censorship and selective narration are thus feasible. Third, the researcher's Afghan background gave cultural awareness and increased access, but it also necessitated ongoing reflexivity to avoid assumptions or over-identification. Finally, the cross-sectional methodology captures experiences at a single point in time; longitudinal study would provide a more comprehensive knowledge of how reintegration progresses.

Despite these limitations, the study prioritizes depth, context, and participant voices, consistent with qualitative interpretive traditions.

7.6 Recommendations

7.6.1 For European Migration Policy

European countries should consider human security while making deportation decisions and assessing risks. Policies must acknowledge the long-term repercussions of forced repatriation and look beyond short-term removal goals. Increased investment in true pre-return preparation and long-term post-return support is required.

7.6.2 For Reintegration Programming in Afghanistan and the International Community

Reintegration programs should be broad, addressing not only economic requirements but also social inclusion, stigma reduction, psychosocial assistance, and access to rights. Community-level actions to promote inclusion and eliminate marginalization of returnees are especially significant. Programming should be informed by returnees' personal perspectives and tailored to the unique challenges of fragile situations.

7.6.3 For Future Research

This study found that reintegration is an ongoing and uneven process, with participants continuing to experience economic insecurity, social exclusion, and uncertainty after return. Future research should therefore use longitudinal designs to examine how these experiences and reintegration outcomes change over time. Comparative studies across European countries and host environments would shed light on how policy differences influence outcomes. Gender analyses of deportation and return experiences are still desperately needed, as are studies that investigate the relationships between return migration and local peace dynamics in weak states.

7.7 Closing Reflection

Deportation is much more than a migration management tool. For Afghan refugees, it is a profoundly traumatic life event with far-reaching implications for human dignity, family relationships, communal cohesiveness, and the broader circumstances for peace and stability. This research has demonstrated, via the voices of returnees themselves, how forced return can cause long-term instability and marginalization in an already fragile society. By juxtaposing these experiences with peace and development perspectives, the study emphasizes the ethical and practical responsibilities of both researchers and politicians to assess the entire human and social costs of deportation policies. Finally, more humane and context-sensitive ways to return and reintegration are not only morally imperative, but also critical for fostering conditions conducive to long-term peace

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Semi-Structured Interview Guide

Semi-Structured Interviews with Afghan Deportees from Europe

Institution: Linnaeus University, Sweden

Program: Masters in Peace and Development Studies

Opening Script

Thank you for agreeing to speak with me. I am a Master's student at Linnaeus University conducting research on the experiences of Afghan refugees who have been deported from Europe. The purpose of the interview is to understand your experiences before, during, and after deportation, particularly how experiences in Europe may have shaped life and reintegration after return to Afghanistan. Participation is voluntary. You may choose not to answer any question and may stop the interview at any time. Your identity will not be disclosed in the thesis; a participant code will be used instead. With your permission, I would like to audio-record the interview so that I can accurately analyse what you say. Do you have any questions before we begin? Do I have your permission to record?

Part 1: Life in Europe Before Deportation

1. Can you tell me about your life in Europe before you were deported?

2. Which country were you living in, and for how long?

3. Did you apply for asylum? Can you tell me about that process?

4. How did it feel to wait for a decision on your asylum claim?

5. What was daily life like when you were worried about being sent back?

6. What had you built for yourself in Europe—such as work, friendships, or education—that you were afraid of losing?

7. How did the fear of deportation affect your everyday choices and behavior?

8. Did you have any legal support or help from organizations during this time?

Part 2: The Deportation Experience

9. Can you describe how and when you found out you were going to be deported?

10. How much notice where you give before you were removed?

11. What happened during the deportation process, from notification to the flight?

12. How did you feel during the journey back to Afghanistan?

13. What did you lose, practically or personally, when you were deported?

14. How did you experience the moment of arriving back in Afghanistan?

15. Were you given any information or support before leaving Europe about what would happen after return?

Part 3: Return and Economic Reintegration

16. What were the biggest practical challenges you faced in the first weeks and months after return?

17. Where did you go when you arrived? Did you have family or friends to stay with?

18. How did you try to find work or income after you returned?

19. Can you tell me about any debts connected to migration or the asylum process and how they affected your life?

20. How has your economic situation changed since you returned?

21. What support, if any, did you receive from the Afghan authorities, international organizations, or the European country that deported you?

22. Are you able to meet your basic needs, such as food, shelter, and healthcare?

Part 4: Family, Community, and Social Life After Return

23. How did your family react when you came back?

24. How have your relationships with family members changed since your return?

25. How did your community or neighbors treat you when you came back?

26. Did you feel welcomed, judged, or something else? Can you describe that experience?

27. Have people made comments or treated you differently because you were deported?

28. Have you been able to rebuild friendships and a social life in Afghanistan?

29. Has your deportation affected your ability to marry or your family's marriage prospects?

Part 5: Safety and Wellbeing

30. How safe do you feel in Afghanistan compared with how you felt in Europe?

31. Can you describe any specific threats or dangers you have faced since your return?

32. How has your mental health or emotional wellbeing been affected by deportation and return?

33. What do you do to cope when things are difficult?

34. Are there things you cannot do now—in terms of work, movement, or speaking freely—that you could do before?

35. Have you had access to healthcare or mental health support since returning?

Part 6: Identity, Belonging, and the Future

36. Do you feel that Afghanistan is home? How has that feeling changed, if at all?

37. How do you describe yourself to others now—as someone who lived in Europe, as Afghan, or in another way?

38. Have people treated you as a "failed migrant" or as if you do not fully belong? Can you describe that experience?

39. What are your plans for the future? Do you intend to stay in Afghanistan?

40. If you could leave Afghanistan again, would you? Why?

41. Are you considering moving to another country, for example Iran, Turkey, or elsewhere?

Closing Questions

42. Is there anything important about your experience that we have not discussed?

43. What do you think European governments should have done differently in your case?

44. What should Afghan authorities or international organizations do to support people in situations like yours?

45. How do you feel now compared with the period immediately after you were deported?

Demographic Information

Age
Gender
Province/city of origin in Afghanistan
Country deported from
Year of deportation
Number of years spent in Europe
Asylum application history
Current location
Current employment status
Family situation

Appendix B: Participant Information Sheet

Research study: Experiences of Afghan Refugees Deported from Europe

Institution: Linnaeus University, Sweden

What is this study about?

This study examines the experiences of Afghan refugees who have been deported from European countries. It focuses on experiences before deportation, the process of return, reintegration after return to Afghanistan, and participants' sense of security and wellbeing.

Why have I been invited?

You have been invited because your experience is relevant to understanding deportation, return, and reintegration. Your participation can contribute to a better understanding of these processes.

Do I have to take part?

No. Participation is voluntary. You may decline to answer any question and may stop the interview at any time without giving a reason.

What will happen if I take part?

You will take part in a semi-structured interview. The interview may be conducted in Pashto or Dari according to your preference. With your permission, the interview may be audio-recorded for transcription and analysis.

How will my information be protected?

Your real name will not be used in the thesis. A participant code will be used, and identifying details will be removed or altered where necessary. Research materials will be handled securely in accordance with the procedures described to participants.

Are there any risks?

Talking about deportation, uncertainty, insecurity, or return may bring back difficult memories. You may skip questions, request a break, or end the interview at any time.

Are there benefits?

There is no guaranteed direct personal benefit. Your account may contribute to academic and policy understanding of deportation and reintegration experiences.

What will happen to the results?

The findings will be presented in a Master's thesis at Linnaeus University. Quotations may be used in anonymised form so that participants cannot be identified.

Who can I contact?

For questions about the study, participants may contact the researcher using the contact details provided to them.

Appendix C: Informed Consent Form

Research study: Experiences of Afghan Refugees Deported from Europe

Institution: Linnaeus University, Sweden

Please confirm the following:

☐ I have received and understood information about the study.

☐ I have had an opportunity to ask questions about the study.

☐ I understand that my participation is voluntary.

☐ I understand that I may decline to answer questions or stop the interview.

☐ I understand that my identity will be protected and that identifying information will not be included in the thesis.

☐ I understand how the interview material will be used for the Master's thesis.

☐ I consent to participate in the interview.

☐ I consent to audio-recording of the interview (if applicable).

Participant code: _____

Date: _____

Participant signature (if written consent was used): _____

Researcher signature: _____