Urban displaced youth in Kabul

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The results of a recent survey of urban displaced youth (15-24 years of age) in Kabul¹ suggest that displaced youth in Kabul want the opportunity to play a fuller role at home as economic and social actors but that they feel they are not given the opportunity – or the space – to achieve their potential. Out of 2,000 respondents surveyed, only 50 mentioned having plans to move on again, and these were primarily deportees and returnees from Europe, who form a very specific sub-group among the displaced youth.

In the short term, displaced young people in Kabul find opportunities where they can – through insecure jobs locally, or through temporary, cyclical and seasonal jobs in Iran and Pakistan. They remain economically and socially vulnerable and isolated. Rather than migrating overseas, however, they appear to be waiting to see what will happen in Afghanistan over the next year or two. This provides organisations with some time during which they can have an impact on the education, skills and labour market integration of these young people in general and, more specifically, provide options appropriate for displaced young women.

At the moment, the Government of Afghanistan and international and national organisations are lagging behind on developing youth-sensitive programming. Based on our research, we would recommend a neighbourhood approach to youth-sensitive programming, assisting Afghan displaced youth inside their homes (especially young women in need of home-based income-generating activities) and inside their communities where they are often marginalised and lack strong networks or representation.

Stakeholders should use this window of opportunity to a) develop training programmes tailored to the needs of male and female displaced youth, including community-based skills upgrading programmes at the neighbourhood level, and b) open youth centres in Kabul city where young people can interact with each other and seek advice, and where NGOs can more easily offer training.

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Unaccompanied Afghan children: on the move again?

“I failed but still I want to go abroad. I need to get [to] my destination because here in Afghanistan there is no work or education.” (Amini, aged 17, Nangarhar)

Many Afghan minors who previously left Afghanistan for the West but were forcibly returned are keen to set out again, despite the challenges faced during their journeys. Arrest and deportation are common for young people attempting unaccompanied migration, and those who are forced to return to Afghanistan also face the problem of repaying money borrowed by their family to finance the initial trip. Reintegration into the community can be hindered by a perception of failure, especially when resources were pooled to meet travel expenses. The community which once encouraged the decision to undertake unaccompanied migration abroad is the same community that undervalues the efforts made by the former unaccompanied child migrants.

“They taunt [us] and say that other children who were smaller reached their destination but we couldn’t. [...] They think that it’s easy to go on an unaccompanied journey. They don’t know about the risks and difficulties.” (Ghulam, aged 18, Nangarhar)

Many young people, however, believe a second attempt will prove easier and are more determined than ever to try again; the desire to earn a livelihood, enjoy relative freedom and have the opportunity to access facilities such as education offset the risks they know they will face.

These are some of the findings of a collaborative research project by UNHCR and the Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit (AREU) to be published mid 2014: see www.areu.org.af For more information, contact Jennefer Lyn Bagaporo, AREU Senior Research Officer jennefer@areu.org.af who worked on the report with Sofya Shahab sofya.shahab@gmail.com.