# [En]gendering Migration, Development and Belonging:
# The Experiences of Recently Arrived Afghans in Europe

*Executive Summary*

**Abstract**

This project examines how gender shapes understandings of home, belonging and the self among recently arrived Afghan refugees in Europe. The main research question asks how the desires of Afghan refugees for their present and future selves are affected, often adversely, by state policy and the way they are perceived by and incorporated into receiving societies and transnational social networks? A multi-disciplinary framework, drawing on theories of gender, dynamics of inclusion and exclusion, self-making, migration and development is used to analyse qualitative data on four important destinations for recently arrived Afghans: Denmark, Germany, the UK and Switzerland.

## Research plan

(As initially submitted to the SNIS)

## Objectives

This project examines how gender shapes understandings of home, belonging and the self among Afghan refugees recently arrived in Europe. It explores the implications of these understandings for desires and capacities of Afghan refugees to engage with development in Afghanistan. This way it expands on ideas of linkages between migration and development reflected in policy such as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and in the hopes, desires and capacities of refugees. An interdisciplinary approach drawing on anthropological, sociological and socio-legal theories on gender, self-making, migration and development is used to analyse qualitative data generated in four important destinations for recently arrived Afghans: Switzerland, Denmark, Germany and the UK. This study yields refined understandings of refugees' positions in both contemporary Europe and transnational social networks. It unpacks the expectations, opportunities and restrictions that are tied to such positions.

## Theoretical and empirical background

Over the last two decades, the so-called migration-development nexus has been a key area of inquiry in the context of inter- and transnational migration and the emergence of transnational social spaces (Faist, 2000). However, scholars have approached this nexus, its conceptual underpinnings and impacts on the ground from various perspectives (De Haas, 2010). Some praise remittances and the contributions of return migrants as engines of development (Agunias, 2006), whereas others question underlying assumptions that relate to belonging, loyalty and the motivation to engage in transnational practices (Page and Mercer, 2012). One widespread belief in this context, is that migrants retain a particular kind of connection to the country and communities of origin that generates desires and means to contribute (Raghuram, 2009).

This project builds on recent critical contributions to the study of transnational lives, identities and engagements (Glick Schiller, 2015; Faist et al., 2013; Levitt and Jaworsky, 2007). To this end we seek to transcend the nation-state and ethnicity-centred epistemology that informs a large share of migration and integration research (Wimmer, 2009; Brubaker, 2006; Glick Schiller et al., 2006). While we fully embrace the critique that a predominant focus on nationality or ethnicity tends to promote simplifying and essentialising reasoning and conclusions, we also acknowledge the power of the nation-state (Dahinden, 2016, 2017). Migrants are perceived and governed differently according to their nationality in conjunction with other categories of difference. As a result, their living conditions and room to manoeuvre in the respective destination country vary strongly. Conditions in the country of origin as well as peoples' livelihoods and legal status in the country of settlement affect their social identities, their willingness and capacities to engage in cross-border practices, and their relationships to the country of origin and other co-nationals. At the same time, peoples' embeddedness in multiple social, cultural and political contexts has different reasons and accordingly yields different effects (Snel et al. 2016, Moret 2014, Sinatti and Horst 2013). Transnational networks vary with respect to their composition and the role they play for the lives and social engagements of individuals and groups.

Afghanistan is one of the least developed and peaceful countries in the world due to protracted intra-state conflict and poor governance. It has one of the largest refugee populations and a crisis of internal displacement. Following years of military involvement

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and international aid, an increasing compassion fatigue towards Afghanistan is reflected in the policies of European countries towards Afghan refugees. Promises of international aid are coupled with deportations, although deportees and returnees often face insecurity and stigmatisation (RSN, 2016; Schuster and Majidi, 2014; Schuster, 2011).

Research on recently arrived Afghan refugees is limited and mostly focuses on their experiences as they transition from being minors under the care of the state into adulthood without state protection (e.g. Humphris and Sigona 2016, RSN 2016). Our project expands on this research both theoretically, through its gender-based approach, and ethnographically to include a broader range of Afghans. We will examine how the desires of Afghan refugees for their present and future selves are affected, often adversely, by state policy and the way they are perceived by and incorporated into receiving societies and transnational social networks.

The project uses gender-based analysis for three reasons. First, gender is a significant demographic fact as the majority of recent Afghan arrivals in Europe are men (IOM, 2015). This gender imbalance places these Afghans in a contradictory position as they both embody the potential for development in Afghanistan and a threat to European societies with their gendered identities. The migration and development paradigm charges refugees with the duty to develop their countries of origin (Åkesson, 2011). At the same time, Afghans in Europe are currently viewed with suspicion by virtue of being men, Muslim, predominantly young and predominantly single (Kaufman, 2014). Our research will explore the consequences of gendered tensions for the roles of Afghan refugees in development.

Second, gender is a tool for analysis in all aspects of migration (Mahler and Pessar, 2006) including migration decisions (De Jong, 2000), experiences in destination countries (Griffiths, 2014) and relationships to home countries as well as transnational engagements (Shaw and Charsley, 2006). Yet, development research has largely limited gender to vulnerabilities and empowerment of women in countries of origin. The SDGs reflect this narrow focus, referring to gender in relation to migration only regarding trafficking (SDGs 5.2) and labour rights of women (SDG 8.8). Thus, we expand on the importance of gender within the migration development nexus, focusing on masculinity and its intersections with age (Gardner, 2002), ethnicity, marital status (Rytter, 2012) and religion.

Third, most research on migrants as development drivers portrays them as rational actors in the narrowest sense (Raghuram, 2009), while anthropological (Moore, 2011), sociological (Giddens, 1991) and psychological (Gergen, 2011) theories of self-identity stress the importance of individual capacity for imagining and narrating the self in its relations to others in society. Our gender-based analysis moves migrants' identities to the foreground drawing on concepts of 'self-making' which focus on migrants' ambitions and obligations in the migration process (Morris, 2016; Dalgas, 2015) whilst considering cultural constructions of gender (Monsutti, 2007). The project thus captures how Afghanistan, Afghan communities outside of Afghanistan and their embeddedness in transnational networks more generally feature in Afghan refugees' gendered self-making projects. It extends previous research on recent Afghan arrivals in Europe (Donini et al., 2016; Humphris and Sigona, 2016; RSN, 2016) with a gender-based, intersectional approach to capture the diversity of socio-economic backgrounds and past experiences of recently arrived Afghans.

## Research questions

The project asks *how gender shapes understandings of home, belonging and development given the everyday experiences of recently arrived Afghans in Europe.* This overarching research question encompasses various subthemes that reflect distinct facets of the lives of Afghan refugees in Europe, such as:

- Reception conditions and their effects

- The interplay of socio-economic backgrounds, past experiences and current living conditions

- The hopes, desires and fears Afghan refugees have for and about the future. How are such hopes, desires and fears are gendered and how does Afghanistan features in them.

- Intentions Afghan refugees may have to return or use skills, money and other resources earned abroad in Afghanistan.

## Methods

To address our research questions, we applied an interpretive approach. Rather than referring to pre-determined hypotheses, we explored and corroborated emerging answers to our research questions. We purposely selected data sources and research instruments for our comparative qualitative case study and generated data through a desk-based policy review and qualitative interviews.

We selected four case study countries (Denmark, Germany, Switzerland and the UK) to provide a comparative basis for contextualising the findings. As a first step, we conducted a gender-sensitive desk review of national and EU/international migration and development policies to map recent policy developments in these countries towards Afghans and Afghanistan. Subsequently, conducted qualitative interviews with recently arrived Afghan refugees in each country. By 'recently arrived' we refer to Afghans who arrived in Europe from 2011 onwards coinciding both with a rise in Afghan asylum applications and new migration trends following the Syrian crisis. In conjunction with migrant interviews, we conducted stakeholder interviews. The accounts generated through interviews constitutes the core source of data from which we draw conclusions.

### Case study selection

We selected Denmark, Germany the UK and Switzerland for a country-based comparison to contextualize our findings and avoid essentialist conclusions that draw on culture or ethnicity to explain peoples' everyday lives, their concerns and practical engagements. The four countries were chosen as popular destinations for Afghans that differ in their relations with Afghanistan, the histories of Afghan diasporas, geographical accessibility and their policies on reception, integration and border management. All case study countries have adopted restrictive asylum policies towards Afghans, illustrated by a rise deportations and reduction in the granting of asylum claims (Bilefsky and Sorensen, 2017; Deutsche Welle, 2017; Glatz, 2017; Achermann and Häberlein, 2016; McClenaghan, 2016; Häuptli, 2015). All our case study countries except Switzerland were engaged in military intervention in Afghanistan. We ask how the linkages between peace-building and development, migration and security in each of these countries impact the reception experiences of recently arrived Afghans both through migration policies and public perceptions of them.

A cross-county comparison of these four countries is a means of identifying the gendered implications/effects of country-specific reception conditions for recently arrived Afghans. This is an essential component of our research, because the experience of gender, and its intersection with other aspects of identity, is situated within the given socio-cultural and political context.

**Approach**

We applied our empirical and analytical methods in ways that enable us to go beyond nation-state and ethnicity-centred epistemologies that are inherent to the migration and development nexus. Rather than assuming that recent Afghan refugees are genuinely committed to their crisis-ridden country of nationality, we explored how their embeddedness in both local structures and transnational networks affects their self-making and future projects (Dahinden, 2016).

**Phase 1: Literature review and policy analysis**

Based on the principles of critical discourse analysis (Wodak, 2001a) we conducted a gender-sensitive analysis of national and EU/international migration and development policies that affect Afghan refugees in the selected countries. Originating from a cross-fertilization of linguistics and social science, critical discourse analysis enables researchers to systematically analyse the political and social import of text. Analytical procedures of critical discourse analysis include the formulation of precise research questions, which are then applied on to the text while using theoretical approaches to interpret the meanings resulting from the research questions (Wodak, 2001b). We devised a set of questions that informed our policy analysis:

- First, how are recently arrived Afghan refugees presented in the texts under consideration?

- Second, what gendered characteristics and features are attributed to them?

- Third, what are the expectations on refugees in their relationship to Afghanistan, especially relating to its reconstruction and development?

These questions and the principles of critical discourse analysis help us to maintain our approach to gender in our analysis.

Policies of interest to the project address the avenues for residency (such as resettlement, family reunification and asylum) (e.g. Neikirk, 2016; Rehaag, 2011; Turner, 2016) reception conditions and border controls (Griffiths, 2015; Pickering, 2014). In addition, we analysed national programmes and policies targeting development and reconstruction in Afghanistan and programmes that seek to encourage the involvement of Afghan refugees in development and reconstruction initiatives (CIM, 2017; Glatz, 2017; van Houte, 2016; Sinatti and Horst, 2014). Fischer and Dahinden (2017) demonstrate in their gender-based analysis of Swiss immigration policy how contemporary societal norms and anxieties around gender are reflected in migration policies. Our policy analysis explored these migration policies in relation to norms around gender and migration which typically situate refugees on a scale ranging between vulnerability and threat (Crawley et al., 2016). We then analysed how gender norms we identify with relation to recently arrived Afghans in Europe manifest themselves in development discourses and policies in relation to migration. This first, desk-based research phase yields important groundwork for subsequent interview phases as it situates our research participants in their political contexts and discursive environments.

**Phase 2: Field research**

*Semi-structured interviews*

In each country, we undertook semi-structured interviews with Afghan refugees. During these interviews, we followed an interview guide with open ended questions (Bryman, 2012; Mason, 2002). This approach facilitated both cross-country comparison and exploration of

country-specific issues. We approached research participants through stratified snow-balling, starting with our existing contacts and advice from our research partners on the ground. We interviewed Afghan men and women, aged 18 and above who hold different legal statuses and have been in Europe for differing lengths of stay since 2010. This is because attributes such as personal characteristics like age, sex, socio-economic backgrounds, legal status and length of stay in the receiving country influence participants' relationships with Afghanistan, their current context of residence, their embeddedness in transnational networks as well as their future hopes and aspirations (Wyss and Fischer, forthcoming).

The interviews were conducted with the aim to obtain in-depth accounts of participants' gendered perspectives on their experiences of reception conditions, their socio-economic and migration backgrounds, their views of their future and their views on development in Afghanistan. Where necessary we conducted follow-up interviews with participants to ensure that their accounts are sufficiently comprehensive. Our interviews were conducted in different languages: Danish, English, Farsi, French and German. We were able to work largely without the support of an external interpreter, except for series of interviews we conducted with several Afghan women in Geneva.

The semi-structured interviews were based on the subthemes set out in the research questions outlined above:

*Reception conditions*

*Backgrounds and transnational relations*

*Imaginings of the self and the future*

To facilitate data analysis and to ensure the comparability of findings, we used the same interview guide at all four research sites. For complementary insights into livelihoods and development engagements, we will interview 10 experts in each country such as representatives of civil society, international development organisations and the national governments.

*Analysis*

All interviews were transcribed and translated into English for easy access for all members of the team and for coding using NVivo as qualitative analysis software. All researchers involved referred to roughly the same coding matrix. To identify country-based similarities and differences, we developed the coding matrix as part of a work-in-progress meeting among the project coordinator and all principal researchers after we concluded a first round of fieldwork (see time table and mile stones in Annex). Prior to the workshop, each country team carried out a first round of individual data analysis to identify emerging trends.

*Field sites and access*

For each of the four countries we identified localities with larger numbers of recent refugees, immigrant reception centres and more established Afghan communities. In doing so, we were sensitive to restrictions on residency place for Afghans of different legal statuses in each of the countries. All places where interviews were conducted could be reached from our researchers' home institutions within a few hours by public transport, except for a two-week period of interviews in Berlin. Existing networks of contacts played a crucial role in identifying participants. Our NGO partners offered support in growing our contacts and we used snowballing to identify further participants.

*Ethics*

We made sure that our research meets the highest ethical standards by complying with ethical guidelines set out by major disciplinary bodies. Specifically, we draw on the guidelines defined by the American Anthropological Association and the British Sociological Association (AAA, 2017; BSA, 2002) at all stages of the research from data collection to storage. Principally, all participants' identities and places of residence and origin were anonymized. We obtained informed consent from participants who could withdraw from the project at any point. The experience of our team members in working with refugees facing diverse challenges enabled us to ensure that our methods are sensitive to potential vulnerabilities of recent Afghan refugees. All members of the team, including interpreters and project assistants, were bound by a confidentiality agreement. We devised a data management policy to protect sensitive information such as interviews transcripts for which we use secure online storage and sharing software.

## Overview and analysis of research findings

Between November 2017 and June 2019, our three research teams conducted fieldwork in the four case study countries. As outlined above, interviews with refugees of Afghan origin and a variety of stakeholders constitute our main data source. For organisational and practical reasons, the periods during which interviews were carried out varied in length and intensity. In Germany, for example, we exclusively focused on the city of Berlin. Berlin not only hosts an important number of Afghan refugees but also registers a great variety of different stakeholders, some of which we were able to speak to.

The following table offers an overview of the number of interviews we conducted in each of the four case study countries:

| Overview of interviews conducted in the four case study countries | |
| :---: | :---: |
| **Refugees** | **Stakeholders** |
| **Denmark** | |
| **27** (22 male/5 female) | 9 |
| **Germany** | |
| **14** (13 male/1 female) | 9 |
| **Switzerland** | |
| **21** (15 male/6 female) | 8 |
| **UK** | |
| **8** (4 male/4 female) | 18 |

As expected, most of our Afghan research participants were men aged 18 above. However, we also interviewed a total of 16 female participants. The persons we interviewed as stakeholders include representatives of national refugee councils, legal counsellors, representatives of different local refugee support organisations, persons working in reception centres as well as representatives of Afghan community organisations, some of which dedicate their activities to the development of Afghanistan.

The research findings which emerged from our interview data so far are best described in conjunction with publications that have either already appeared or are currently in progress.

### Repercussions of gendered representations of Afghan refugees

In a paper entitled ***repercussions of ambivalent representations of refugee masculinity*** (original title: *Männlichkeit als Spannungsfeld. Auswirkungen ambivalenter Repräsentationen afghanischer Geflüchteter in Deutschland und der Schweiz*), Anna Wyss

and Carolin Fischer illuminate ambivalent constructions of masculinity and their effects on the everyday lives and practical engagements of Afghan refugees in Germany and Switzerland. The paper is forthcoming and part of a Special Issue of the German *Zeitschrift für Flüchtlingsforschung*. The central argument is that persistent suspicion towards particularly male and Muslim refugees in combination with precarious living conditions and uncertainty as well as with feelings of responsibility towards family members creates a gendered tension male Afghan refugees are forced to navigate.

Based on interview data from Germany and Switzerland, the paper illuminates how these representations of 'foreign masculinity' play out in relation to Afghan men. It emerges that in the case of Afghan refugees these representations are particularly ambivalent. First, there is the prevailing image of the threatening male Muslim, which is prominent in political discussions of the far-right. In Germany, it also manifests itself in the public discourse revolving around deportations to Afghanistan. In this context, it is frequently emphasised that mostly or only criminal men are deported. Second, there is a humanitarian discourse as part of which Afghan refugees are portrayed as persons who suffered severely from decades of wars and poverty and who therefore deserve protection. The situation of unaccompanied minors also plays an important role in this context. Discourses emphasising the vulnerability of Afghan refugees have been particularly prevalent in Germany, since 2015 and since the country has started deporting rejected asylum seekers to Afghanistan. This discourse also enters mainstream media. Third, there are representations of Afghan refugees according to which they are particularly diligent, hard-working and making an extra effort to 'integrate' into the host context. For instance, reports about people's everyday efforts and struggles to find work have been featured in public television and newspapers. Such reports also tend to shed critical light on obstacles people face when trying to find work, also alluding to the expectations men often face in their role as bread-winners.

These ambivalent representations manifest themselves in contradictory expectations towards Afghan refugees, which our interlocutors are forced to navigate. However, these conflicting expectations not only derive from European migration governance and public discourse but also from expectations of family members living abroad. The social pressure to support family members 'back home' or to be a 'good' husband, brother, or son often clashes with expectations and constraints people face in the receiving countries and many of our interlocutors struggle to fulfil the conflicting (gendered) expectations of both their social network back home and the host society. Lengthy waiting times in asylum procedures elevate the pressure and feelings of responsibility towards family members that should be taken care of and might also push people into precarious work relations. Importantly, a precarious and temporary legal status further complicates access to work and thus restricts peoples' ability to send remittances. At the same time, a precarious legal impedes prospects for family reunification and it complicates the fulfilment of 'integration requirements' set by the receiving country.

The paper concludes that there is a tension between integration imperatives, everyday exclusion and people's own feelings of responsibility towards their families in Europe and Afghanistan. This creates a situation in which people are caught in multiple constraints and have little room to manoeuvre. Negative representations of male refugees promote the implementation of restrictive policies and co-constitute precarious living conditions. Our interlocutors are exposed to a double risk of marginalisation. It derives 1) from their precarious legal situation and their marginal position in Europe and 2) from unfulfilled expectations of family members, which can weaken transnational family networks. This is why we find it essential to apply a transnational perspective when studying everyday lives of

refugees in Europe. Gender works as a key constitutive element of this situation as causes and consequences of the precarious situation of our interlocutors are highly gendered.

## Working for Protection

In another paper, entitled *Working for Protection? Precarious legal inclusion of Afghan Nationals in Germany and Switzerland*, Anna Wyss and Carolin Fischer ask how and with what consequences current integration policies affect Afghan nationals with precarious legal status in Germany and Switzerland. Theoretically, the paper draws on critical engagements with integration (cf. Rytter 2019; Schinkel 2018) and theories of violence (cf. Bourdieu 2000; Farmer 2004; Galtung 1969; Menjívar and Abrego 2012). We follow Schinkel's (2018, 8) call to take 'any claim and practice that concerns integration' as the 'object of research, rather than the project of research'. We argue that persons holding a precarious legal status are under great pressure to fulfil integration requirements in order to secure their legal residence in Europe and to prevent being deported to their country of citizenship. The weaker someone's legal status, the more limited are his or her access to support services and the labour market; yet, the stronger are the expectations for him or her to integrate. As far as the situation of asylum seekers is concerned, we observe a shift from residence permits granted for humanitarian reasons to residents permits that are based on labour market performance (Scherschel 2016). In other words, people are increasingly required to 'earn' their residence permit.

The paper focuses on the specific case of Afghan refugees who rarely receive political asylum but mostly hold a temporary legal status or are denied protection altogether. This precarious legal inclusion (cf. Rytter and Ghandchi 2019) yields disciplinary effects in the sense that people feel urged to achieve economic success so that they fulfil their host country's requirements and prove their deservingness. Given their temporary legal status, however, people face significant difficulties to access the labour market. Thus, achieving economic success represents a challenge, which is often hard and sometimes impossible to tackle. At the same time, the qualitative interviews with Afghan refugees reveal how persons with precarious legal status often internalize the pressure to integrate. Their narratives emphasize how integration is mostly seen as an individual effort while structural inequalities are side-lined. Such pressure to fulfil integration requirements in conjunction with legal restrictions and the insecurities resulting from the ubiquitous threat of deportation causes great pressure and anxieties among our interlocutors.

Theories of violence are employed to theoretically frame such social and political conditions and their effects on a specific group of persons. That violence is not a purely physical and political phenomenon but can be subtle and invisible while still having severe effects on those concerned is now well established in social science (Scheper-Hughes and Bourgois 2004). Although violence is a widely recognized reason for forced migration, the concept is rarely employed to analyse the situation of refugees in contexts of reception (see the work of Abrego and Lakhani 2015; Canning 2017; Davies, Isakjee, and Dhesi 2017; Menjívar and Abrego 2012 as exceptions). However, the paper demonstrates how theories of structural (Farmer 2004; Galtung 1969) and symbolic (Bourdieu 2000) violence lend themselves to generating original insights to modes of contemporary asylum governance and their effects on those seeking protection.

## Precarious inclusion

In a book chapter entitled *Workers for Free: Precarious Inclusion and Extended Uncertainty among Afghan Refugees in Denmark*, Mikkel Rytter and Narges Ghandchi focus on newly arrived Afghan refugees and what they refer to as their "precarious inclusion" in the Danish

labor market (cf. Karlsen 2015). The chapter discusses how, why and at what cost the Danish state has increased the number of recent refugees entering the labor market since the long summer of migration. Back in 2015 only 21% of recent refugees had a job after three years in Denmark, but in 2018 the employment rate for refugees after three years in the country was 43%. These numbers were presented by national politicians as an overwhelming success. However, the authors argue that the "thin" (cf. Geertz 1973) statistical representation of successful inclusion and integration in the Danish labor market is a simplified and politicized representation of much more complicated experiences and realities. In fact, it may be counterproductive, creating a new precarious subclass of underpaid refugees who fear that they might be sent back to war-torn countries if they object to their current conditions in Denmark.

Rytter and Ghandchi are not only interested in the insecurity of the structural position which refugees occupy in Danish society. They also examine how the different internship and job-training schemes are perceived, understood, and experienced by recently arrived Afghan refugees. Their perspectives on these integration programs illuminate precarious inclusion as a dimension of everyday experience. Many of the interlocutors explain that despite their willingness to work and earn their own money, they feel that they have been parked outside the real labor market and have a difficult time relating to Danish colleagues, who often ignore them at work. They too work but for a much lower salary and under other legal conditions than their Danish colleagues.

To make matters worse, Afghans and other refugees risk not having their relatively short-term temporary residence permits extended (these are currently issued for 1-2 years at a time). In other words, they risk being deported back to Afghanistan. In the current state of "precarious inclusion", the uncertainty, which has been documented in research on asylum centers (Whyte 2011; Vitus 2011; Syppli Kohl 2015; Verdasco 2018), is extended into the lives of recognized refugees.

**The Development-Deportation Nexus**

In this paper, Mikkel Rytter, Carolin Fischer and Narges Ghandchi explore how what they refer to as the *Development-Deportation Nexus* affects the governance and everyday lives of Afghan refugees in Denmark and Germany. Following the mass arrival of asylum seekers in 2015, many European states adopted or refined their policies to receive, incorporate or exclude those seeking protection. The orientation of these policies is twofold: On one hand, the introduction of local integration programs aims at facilitating access to the labor market, on the other hand, rejected asylum seekers are subjected to deportation more rigidly.

However, those deported do not only face threats to life and wellbeing in their country of origin. Often fragile war-torn states in the global south, like Afghanistan, are reluctant to accept their own citizens. As a cunning solution to this problem, some European governments signed bi-lateral agreements with countries of origin. According to such agreements, development aid is conditional on the re-admission of deported citizens.

Based on the case of Afghan refugees in Germany and Denmark, two countries that were part of the ISAF-coalition that fought the 'war against terror' in Afghanistan from 2002 to 2014, this paper proposes to frame this situation as the 'development-deportation nexus'. To expand on this, the authors first discuss the political discourse and humanitarian legitimization of linking development aid and deportation. Particular attention is paid to discussions of the contested security situation and classification of certain regions in Afghanistan as sufficiently 'safe' for rejected asylum seekers to be deported to. Subsequently, the paper draws on the narratives of Afghan refugees living in Denmark and Germany that were captured as part of a

qualitative case study. This is to explore the legal and existential consequences that derive from the tension between being 'integratable' or 'deportable', focusing on how it influences people's everyday lives and shapes their future prospects.

**'Self-making' in the context of the European asylum system**

This article seeks to conceptualise the self-making projects of asylum-seekers and refugees in the context of precarious migration regimes in Europe drawing on primary research with recently arrived Afghans in the UK. The article defines 'self-making projects' as what people want in their lives for themselves, families or persons they care for and the ways in which they pursue these hopes and aspirations. Research on what constitutes self-making in migration is often subsumed under processes of negotiating legal status and their engagements with formal integration processes. While these policies are important in framing self-making, little attention is given to understanding of self-making outside of migratory trajectories and beyond their legal positioning in host societies. This is partly a reflection of the limitations of the structure- agency paradigm which emphasises actions which are 'structurally visible' (Laidlaw 2014) and does not account for diversity of (Archer 2006).

The article refers to the ethical turn in anthropology as a theoretical grounding (e.g. Kuan and Grøn 2017; Mattingly 2014; Mattingly and Throop 2018) for conceptualising the ways in which participants imagine and narrate their selves in their everyday lives. The article elaborates on self-making with reference to the stories of two participants in the UK. In these accounts self-making emerges as subjective and ethical projects as well as social projects situated in family, host countries and communities elsewhere. Thus, the article argues that the notion of self-making can contribute to a more comprehensive representation of asylum-seeker and refugee experiences within the context of increasingly restrictive asylum and migration policies in Europe without reducing these experiences to responses to the impositions of these regimes.

# Correspondence of findings to initial expectations

When comparing our initial research objectives with the findings outlined above, one notices a discrepancy as far as the envisaged and the de facto focus of our research is concerned. This discrepancy primarily relates to our proposed and actual focus on transnational relations, perceived attachments to Afghanistan and potential transnational engagements aimed at contributing to the development of Afghanistan.

The notion of development features centrally in both in our initial objectives and in our research questions. We explicitly state our interest in "the capacity and willingness of Afghan refugees to engage with development in Afghanistan and their contributions as development actors". However, we also emphasise the need "… to re-evaluate the assumptions of theory and practice of migration and development" and "…to specify how gendered everyday experiences in Europe affect aspirations and capacities to contribute to Afghanistan" (see full proposal).

Although our initial approach to TN development contributions was critical and sceptical, we still encountered impasses when trying to address persons' relationships with Afghanistan during our interviews. Most of our participants simply are not in a position that would allow or encourage them to engage with what is widely assumed to be their country of origin. Here, it is important to add that an important proportion of Afghan nationals arriving in Europe have never lived in Afghanistan but grew up in one of the neighbouring countries Iran or Pakistan. This also calls widely assumed intrinsic relations between refugees and their official country of origin into question. Conversely, what moved to the foreground once we

entered the field and started speaking with representatives of the targeted research population, are the challenges they confront in the receiving countries. In the same vein, we grew increasingly interested in how people engage with and confront these challenges.

In light of these caveats and necessity to shift perspectives, our primary research focus has been on **how the desires of Afghan refugees for their present and future selves are affected, often adversely, by state policy and the way they are perceived by and incorporated into receiving societies and transnational social networks**. We argue that the interaction of recently arrived Afghan refugees with their host societies and the migration policy in place is shaped by both their perceptions as threats and the restrictions and duties imputed on them in their respective receiving countries. Ultimately our focus has been predominantly on the workings and implications of borders and national reception, asylum and integration regimes and this is what we concentrate on in our publications.

## Information on the practical application of results

Our collaboration with practitioners underlined the practical value of our research interests and findings. Throughout the research process, we maintained close exchange and collaboration with practitioners, among them some of our NGO partners, such as The Coventry Migrant and Refugee Centre, The Swiss Refugee Council or The Scottish refugee council. Our NGO partners were particularly helpful when we were seeking access to the field or information from stakeholders. As the research process progressed, however, we encountered further practitioners. Many of these practitioners were members of different refugee support organisations or legal counsellors who both have profound insights to and thus knowledge about the lives of Afghan refugees in the respective country.

The practitioners we met and collaborated with generally expressed their appreciation of the project. They all asked to kept informed about our research outputs, also because they are hoping to acquire a better understanding of the situation in other European countries of reception. The practical value of our research findings also became evident when Carolin Fischer was invited to lead a one-day information session for collaborators of the *Asylorganisation Zürich (AOZ)* who work in refugee reception centres in the city and the canton of Zürich. The event took place in May 2018. Participants showed lively interest in our expertise on forced migration trajectories from Afghanistan and the research findings emerging from our Swiss case study.

Some of the practitioners with whom we worked together from the beginning of the project or whom we met along the way, attended and actively contributed to the closing event of the project on 6 December 2019. During a panel discussion on practical and political implications of our findings, they reiterated their interest in our outputs and some form of continued collaboration. In the aftermath of the workshop, we informally discussed several ideas for joint initiatives such as an event organised together with the City of Berlin focusing on the lives of Afghan refugees in the city and possible ways to ease the challenges they confront. Aspects that are likely to be of particular interest or importance to practitioners relate to identified specificities of the challenges which Afghan nationals confront in different receiving countries across Europe. Another dimension of our findings that may be particularly interesting to practitioners derives from the gendered nature of the challenges Afghan refugees are faced with.

## Questions that merit further exploration

Our research findings and the experiences we made in the field rise multiple questions that merit further attention and scientific inquiry. One general question relates to research on

refugees as such. It is more a problem statement than a question. Although we did everything possible to approach our research participants with respect, empathy and understanding, the power balance between us as researchers and them as participants remains fundamentally unequal. The extent to which we can undertake action that substantially improves the lives of our research participants is limited. Although all our research participants showed an active interest in speaking with us, we found it not only dissatisfactory but also ethically problematic to appear in their lives for a few hours and ask questions, some of which may have been perceived as delicate or personal. Of course, we remain eager to give back, at the very least by sharing our research findings and by advocating for a change in the current politics of precarity. However, due to time and budgetary restrictions, we were unable to engage in more long-term relationships with our participants, although – based on our fieldwork experiences – we consider them as essential.

One puzzle that cuts across our four case studies relates to narratives of integration. What are the parallels and difference between narratives and politics of integration in our four case study countries? How can they be explained? What are the consequences of integration discourses and politics for the everyday lives and future prospects of Afghan refugees in particular or persons seeking legal protection more generally?

Another question, which we already raise in our research proposal, but which we were not able to thoroughly address in the field, pertains to the relations between persons of Afghan origin that came to Europe during different periods of time and under different circumstances respectively. As far as we can tell from the accounts of our research participants, both refugees and stakeholders, there is hardly any interactions between Afghans representing a more established diaspora and the persons who arrived during the period under study. To a large extent, this lack of contact may derive from the fact that 'old' and 'new' migrants have very different backgrounds in terms of their lives in Afghanistan, their experiences of migration and reception but also their educational and socio-economic backgrounds. However, it would be interesting to substantiate such assumptions by generating first-hand accounts of persons who represent a variety of backgrounds and perspectives.

Finally, one area of inquiry that calls for further investigation, relates to the interplay of foreign policy and refugee reception and asylum politics. Our findings suggest that bi-or multilateral relations between Afghanistan and European states that host Afghan refugees, impact on the way the latter are received and governed. Findings that emerge from both our policy analysis as well as our interviews with refugees and stakeholders corroborate such assumed interdependencies. However, our findings call for further substantiation, which could be achieved through expert interviews with policymakers and further stakeholders with close insights to such entanglements.

## Practical and policy recommendations that follow from the results obtained

Based on our research findings, we can formulate several recommendations for policy-making and practice.

First, there is urgent need for changing the current politics of precarity that shape the daily lives of asylum seekers across Europe to significant extents. Such changes could consist in allowing better access to more secure and long-term legal status or refugee status according to the Geneva Convention. This would not only ease states of permanent uncertainty that are widespread among persons seeking refugee protection in Europe but also improve peoples' chances on the labour market and thus increase their independence in the receiving country. In addition, a change to politics of precarity would entail access to better support structures, such as language classes, general education and vocational training.

Second, it is necessary to revise national assessments of the security situation in Afghanistan, as they are currently carried out by countries like Denmark, Germany or Switzerland. There are numerous recent reports of experts as well as national and international institutions like The Global Peace Index, UNHCR, UNAMA, ProAsyl or the Swiss Refugee Council, which suggest that the idea that there are safe areas in Afghanistan to which rejected asylum seekers can safely be returned is an illusion. Based on the insights we gain from the assessment of these actors, European governments should acknowledge that the security situation in Afghanistan is at its lowest point since 2001 and continues to deteriorate rather than improve.

Third, related to the previous point, European governments should cease deporting rejected asylum seekers of Afghan nationality to their assumed country of origin. Given the problematic and deteriorating security situation, it seems cynical to continue assuming that there are safe areas in Afghanistan which deported Afghan nationals can retreat to. Deportations should also be ended in response to the fact that many asylum seekers who are formal Afghan nationals have never lived in the country but grew up under conditions of protracted displacement. As a result, they lack any social network or support structures in Afghanistan without which it is currently difficult to survive in the country.

Fourth, the issues and problems we study in this research project are not purely the problems of refugees but also of society as a whole. Future research should therefore not exclusively focus on 'refugee others' but turn to society in a wider sense and frame questions in terms of social cohesion, mutual support and solidarity more broadly. In a similar vein, it is not 'the migrant other' that should do his or her utmost to integrate in thereceiving society. Rather what is widely thought of as a duty of newcomers, is a process that involves society as a whole. This should be considered and have repercussions in multiple spheres, including academic research, public discourse and civic engagement, legislation and policy making.

## Information on past and expected publications and other activities

From 28 February until 1 March 2019, members of the core research team organised a workshop entitled ***Exploring Dimensions of Afghan Migration to Europe: Experiences, Discourse and Politics*** in collaboration with Mikkel Rytter and his project Articulations of life among Afghans in Denmark (ARTlife). The workshop was held at Moesgaard Museum, Aarhus University. It gathered a group of 18 international researchers, working on issues relating to Afghan migration, among them all principal researchers of our project as well as our co-coordinator Prof. Alessandro Monsutti an affiliated member Dr. Nick Van Hear.

Contributions to the workshop explored diverse aspects of the lives of Afghan refugees in Europe, including persons who arrived recently and others who have established themselves in their country of settlement. Specific questions that were addressed include:

- What changes and trends in European policies and public debates relating to Afghan refugees and towards Afghanistan can be observed?
- How do Afghan refugees navigate an increasingly restrictive European migration regime?
- How are Afghan refugees' journeys to and through Europe experienced and shaped?
- What challenges do Afghan refugees face in relation to local and transnational family relations i.e. establishing homes, getting married, raising children, caring for elders, handling burials?
- In what ways do Afghan refugees and persons with Afghan origin engage with host societies, families and friends across the globe, digital communities and their country of citizenship?

- How do Afghan refugees articulate themselves and their visions of the future through art production (poetry, photography, theatre, filmmaking, etc.) and digital media?
- How are the experiences of Afghan refugees shaped by intersecting factors such as gender, age, ethnicity, class and religion?
- How do Afghan diaspora organization and persons of Afghan origin in Europe engage in local and transnational politics and development?

At the end of June 2019, Carolin Fischer, Esra Kaytaz and Anna Wyss organised a research panel at the **16<sup>th</sup> IMISCOE Annual Conference**, held at Malmö University in Sweden. The panel was entitled ***Exploring self-making projects among refugees in Europe: Opportunities, restrictions and strategies***. It comprised of two sessions with four presentations each.

The aim of the panel was to explore and theorise self-making projects of migrants with more or less precarious migration statuses living in Europe. By self-making we mean practices and strategies, by which persons pursue aspirations and desires for themselves and their families. So far, related issues have mainly been examined with regard to migration decision-making. To expand on this research, presentations focused on self-making projects of refugees who recently arrived and are in the process of settling at their respective destination. In recent years, immigration and asylum regimes have become more restrictive, legal precarity has increased and levels of hostility have risen across Europe. At the same time, there has been extensive humanitarian response work seeking to support people en route and upon arrival at the destination. We used this ambivalent situation as point of departure for exploring the self-making projects of refugees who arrived at and now seek to settle in diverse national and local settings. In particular, we examined how persons who were granted refugee status or temporary admission respond to opportunities and constraints of their social and political context when imagining and narrating the self in terms of individual aspirations and relations to others in society. Contributions to the panel explored how migrants craft their lives and selves within the context of contemporary Europe and individual hopes, desires and satisfactions that may not be captured by existing research. To understand migrants self-making projects in the countries of residence, contributors mobilised concepts like agency, aspirations, capacity, practice and meaning-making.

From 20-23 August 2019, Carolin Fischer participated in the **14<sup>th</sup> conference of the European Sociological Association** in Manchester. She presented a paper entitled ***Repercussions of borders and boundaries in the everyday lives of Afghan refugees in Switzerland***. In the paper she explores how and with what effects global social inequalities and dynamics of marginalisation and exclusion manifest themselves in the everyday lives of Afghan refugees in Switzerland. It combines theories of boundary work with insights from border studies to examine experiences, practices and politics of inclusion and exclusion in different settings of refugee arrival and settlement. A focus on gender and its intersection with other categories of difference lends itself to illuminating the links and discontinuities between territorial borders and social boundaries and their everyday manifestations and effects. It draws on qualitative empirical research on the experiences of recently arrived Afghan refugees in Switzerland. Based on our emerging findings, three points are put forward: First, the everyday lives of Afghan refugees in Switzerland are marked by tensions between exclusion and dependency. These are, for example, reflected in the pressure to 'integrate' and participants' feelings of responsibility towards their families in Afghanistan or elsewhere. Second, a focus on gender helps illuminate how borders and boundaries contribute to shaping the specific situations of our research participants. Precariousness combined with the effects of hostile public representations evoke gender-specific vulnerabilities. In addition, negative representations provide fertile ground for more restrictive policies and more

precarious living conditions. Third and more generally, our findings underline the importance of situating very concrete experiences of inclusion and exclusion in a broader context of global inequalities.

Based on our research findings, **the following publications** are currently planned, in progress, under review or already available:

- Fischer, Carolin and Anna Wyss (in preparation). Constructing and governing the undeserving Afghan: A critical and reflexive analysis of the German asylum regime. To be submitted to *The Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*
- Ghandchi, Narges (in preparation). Metaphors of belonging: Addressing belonging and attachment to the host country in narratives of Afghan refugees in Denmark.
- Kaytaz, Esra (in preparation). 'Self-making' in the context of European asylum system: arguing for an 'ethical turn' in migration studies.
- Rytter, Mikkel, Carolin Fischer and Narges Ghandchi (in preparation). Quid pro quo: The development-deportation nexus connecting Afghanistan and Europe.
- Rytter, Mikkel and Narges Ghandchi (in press). Workers for Free: Precarious Inclusion and Extended Uncertainty among Afghan Refugees in Denmark. Chapter in *Palgrave's "Global Diversities" series*.
- Rytter, Mikkel and Narges Ghandchi (2019). Integration via arbejde: Prekær inklusion og udvidet usikkerhed blandt afghanske flygtninge i Danmark. *Social Kritik*, no.160: 4-17.
- Wyss, Anna and Carolin Fischer (in preparation). Working for Protection? Precarious legal inclusion of Afghan Nationals in Germany and Switzerland. To be submitted to *Antipode*.
- Wyss, Anna and Carolin Fischer (under review). 'Männlichkeit Als Spannungsfeld. Auswirkungen Ambivalenter Repräsentationen Afghanischer Geflüchteter in Deutschland Und Der Schweiz'. *Zeitschrift Für Flüchtlingsforschung*.

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