

# Evaluation of Reintegration Activities in Afghanistan: IOM

For

**DFID** Department for  
International  
Development

Returns and Reintegration Fund

&



Foreign &  
Commonwealth  
Office

Undertaken by:



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## Executive Summary

The goals of the evaluation, as defined in the terms of reference, are to measure the impact and relevance of the Returns and Reintegration Fund in Afghanistan through an assessment of the implementation strategies and process of the assistance programs. This executive summary highlights the key findings, challenges and opportunities identified by the evaluation team.

### Key Findings: Evaluation of Reintegration Activities

#### **IOM Evaluation: Improving the assistance to voluntary returnees**

The IOM assisted voluntary returns program met the goals set forth in the contractual agreement. IOM achieves its role of contributing to the reintegration process however the long term social impact is limited in terms of an actual and sustainable reintegration prospect. The following matrix summarizes the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of the IOM VARRP program with respect to the key findings and recommendations presented in this report.

#### *IOM Evaluation: SWOT Analysis*

<p><b>Strengths</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Effective client/contractor relationship</li> <li>● Effective UK-based communications strategy</li> <li>● Smooth pre-departure administrative and operational process</li> <li>● Successful first contact upon return: airport assistance and registration</li> <li>● Well staffed UK and country teams</li> <li>● Business Start-Up program responds to the immediate income generating need of returnees</li> <li>● Additional support addresses the second most immediate need for returnees, namely housing through rent assistance and Return and Rebuild</li> </ul>	<p><b>Weaknesses</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Scarce use of technology and communications tools to enhance sustainable reintegration. E.g. video conferencing</li> <li>● Untimely Home Office evaluation system</li> <li>● Lack of pre-departure package. E.g. counseling activities and workshops</li> <li>● Limited impact of the Business Start-Up and job placement programs</li> <li>● Lack of mandatory on-the-job training</li> <li>● Education and Vocational Training packages not adapted to the needs of returnees</li> <li>● Education and Skills gap remain unfilled.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Opportunities</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Increase AVRIM financial support package</li> <li>● Enhance IOM presence at detention centers</li> <li>● Invest in communications and technology tools: video conference with local staff and returnees to better prepare future returnees</li> <li>● Support networking opportunities to heighten a sense of initiative and solidarity upon return</li> <li>● Modify evaluation schedule: 6 months after return and again at the 12-month mark</li> <li>● Standardize a pre-departure assistance package</li> <li>● Render certain optional package components mandatory. E.g. Training course for the business start-up beneficiaries</li> <li>● Create credit and loan system to support businesses</li> <li>● Take on a more active job placement role</li> <li>● Integrate psychological and social counselling in the additional services provided locally.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Threats</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Limited medium and long term development impact.</li> <li>● High rate of business operation failure</li> <li>● Unsolved educational and vocational training gap</li> <li>● Unaddressed psychological needs</li> <li>● 34.0% of beneficiaries evaluate the assistance as helpful but not towards a permanent resettlement</li> <li>● 68.0% are prepared to leave Afghanistan again and migrate to another country as a coping mechanism.</li> </ul>

## Main challenges and opportunities

### **IOM: Building a sustainable return: Towards a longer term assistance and enhanced sense of self-initiative**

#### *Disappointment upon return*

Only 34.0% of all beneficiaries rank the help received as useful in resettling permanently back in Afghanistan. Afghans who sign up to leave the UK voluntarily with IOM do so with the expectation that their economic reintegration will be guaranteed. With high expectations, an overall dependency on the assistance structure and a lack of self-initiative often means that expectations are not met upon return, thus translating in a poor self-evaluation of any type of permanent reintegration success.

#### *Intention to leave Afghanistan*

68% show a willingness to leave Afghanistan again because of insecurity (66%), low income (42%) and difficulties in finding employment (32%). The specific context of insecurity, war and lack of economic development in Afghanistan hinders the success of IOM programs. The standard VARRP assistance offered is therefore not sufficient to fulfill sustainable reintegration goals.

Given these two trends the recommendations are to:

- 1. Improve the development impact of reintegration programs :**
  - a. Increase funding for business start-ups,
  - b. Adapt the job assistance package to provide direct job placement activities,
  - c. Fund an association of returnees / networking group to prepare future returnees and identify common goals and ventures to be implemented upon return through partnerships and enhanced local expertise.
  
- 2. Improve project design and package components:**
  - a. Strengthen pre-departure assistance through a formalized and standardized approach,
  - b. Build a more thorough in-house business training course for all participants to increase chances of business staying operational in the long run,
  - c. Revise job placement approach to include an active involvement of IOM staff in matching demand with supply on the local labor market,
  - d. Revise the vocational training program to bring it up to part with other assistance packages.

# 1. Introduction to the Evaluation

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## 1.1. Background

The Secretary for State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs – as represented by the Returns and Reintegration Fund and the Illegal Migration and Returns teams of the FCO’s Migration Directorate – contracted Altai Consulting to perform an evaluation of reintegration services provided by IOM and AGEF in Afghanistan for Afghans returning voluntarily or forcefully from the UK to their home country.

The Returns and Reintegration Fund was launched in April 2008 in line with the British Government’s strategy to manage migration to the UK. The fund’s goal is to increase the number of foreign national prisoners and failed asylum seekers who return to Afghanistan and to ensure that those who return voluntarily are effectively reintegrated.

This cross-government fund (FCO, UK Border Agency, DFID, and Ministry of Justice) builds upon the former Home Office and FCO Migration Funds. The objectives of the Migration Funds have been refined to focus on programs and projects which will facilitate a greater number of returns of individuals to their countries of origin in a sustainable manner. The fund will enable the British Government to support countries which face the biggest challenges in accepting back their nationals.

The program is coordinated through the work of two service providers in Afghanistan, namely the International Office for Migration (IOM) and the Association of Experts in the Fields of Migration and Development Cooperation (AGEF) which assist returnees – both forced and voluntary – in their reintegration effort upon arrival in their country of origin. Altai Consulting was hired to provide an independent and external evaluation of the programs developed and implemented by IOM and AGEF in Afghanistan and to make recommendations to best address returnees’ reintegration needs. The evaluation was completed in 9 weeks from November 2008 to January 2009. Altai’s evaluation team included an international project supervisor, an international project manager, two Afghan national consultants and a team of 4 interviewers based in Kabul and Jalalabad.

## 1.2. Goals

The goals of the evaluation, as defined by the agreed terms of reference, are to measure the impact and relevance of the Returns and Reintegration Fund in Afghanistan through an assessment of IOM’s and AGEF’s implementation strategy and processes. The specific purposes of the evaluation are:

- To evaluate the overall performance and processes of IOM and AGEF to implement the returns and reintegration programs,
- To analyze IOM and AGEF implementation strategies and results in comparison to the initial objectives and outputs indicated in the contractual agreements,
  - Implementation strategy
  - Effective output
  - Strength and weaknesses
  - Lessons learned & best practices,
- To assess the appropriateness and effectiveness of IOM and AGEF’s project design, follow-up and monitoring mechanisms and procedures,
- To assess the program beneficiaries’ profiles, needs, skill sets and self-evaluation of the programs,
- To assess the impact and relevance of the program components and assistance package given to beneficiaries,
  - To cover expenses and needs (*direct influence*)
  - To attract future voluntary returnees

- To respond to the local context (*indirect influence, community level*)
- To assess the IOM outreach strategy and effectiveness in reaching Afghans living in the UK (based on interview and field work in London),
- To assess the HMG's Home Office procedure, strategy and tracking of forced returnees,
- To assess the social outcome of the program for the beneficiaries and their surroundings after their return: "What have they become?" analysis of the profile of a sample of beneficiaries after their return from the UK.

### **1.3. Limitations and Scope**

The approach and methodology design are based on Altai Consulting's experience in Afghanistan since 2003 working on program evaluation and social research projects, with a specific focus on migration and reintegration issues in the Afghan context.

The scope and reach of this evaluation was defined by the allotted time frame and budgeted funds. These factors pushed the evaluation team to focus strictly on 18 months of program activities, from April 2007 to November 2008, and two main urban locations, Kabul and Jalalabad. The data outlined in this evaluation therefore does not stem from interaction with every beneficiary. The intention of the evaluation was never to contact every beneficiary and every employee associated with the IOM and AGEF reintegration programs, but rather to utilize different, more qualitative tools of analysis to build upon the quantitative data collected. To this end, the evaluation sought to interact with about 15% of all beneficiaries as well as local, management and decision making teams in Kabul and London.

It is also important to note that the evaluation team depended on the timely and open cooperation by IOM and AGEF local and management teams to share the relevant contact information for beneficiaries, and details pertaining to contractual agreements, project designs, human resources and management decisions. Information and key documents were collected to the best of the evaluation team's capacity given the intrinsic need to rely on the full cooperation of IOM and AGEF teams. The quota of interviews was reached for both service providers through the perseverance and local knowledge of the evaluation team.

The evaluation's methodology relied heavily on in-person interviews of beneficiaries which in turn necessitated the ability to quickly identify and contact beneficiaries in the 2 chosen locations of Kabul and Jalalabad. AGEF handed over all the contact information of its beneficiaries in 2007 and 2008. IOM required first to obtain the approval of beneficiaries to undergo this evaluation, before providing names and contact information to the Altai evaluation team. As such, the evaluation team was slowed down in its approach by logistical and confidentiality issues and was not able to increase its sample pool or choose the interviewees without the involvement of the IOM staff. The sample chosen is based on a random sampling based on a first screening done by IOM teams in Kabul. It is therefore as independent and objective as possible although the sample pool may potentially include biases due to the confidentiality requirement imposed by IOM. Consequently, the individuals interviewed or contacted for this evaluation were not chosen at random, but by the willingness and likelihood with which they could be located.

Little analysis could be conducted on beneficiaries who could not be located. Nevertheless, the fact that a large number of potential interviewees were difficult to find is a finding in and of itself and was kept in mind when assessing the conclusions of this report.

## 1.4. Methodology and Tools of the Evaluation

To achieve the stated evaluation goals, the research team developed and utilized a combination of tools to collect information and feedback from a wide range of sources and actors associated with the IOM and AGEF reintegration programs. This combination of quantitative and qualitative research tools ensured that the final analysis for the report was based on contact and interaction with a wide variety of participants in the program, at the decision making, implementing and beneficiary levels.

### I. Quantitative field work

In-person interviews were carried during the first two weeks of December 2008 out by a team of Afghan consultants and interviewers in 2 locations (Kabul and Jalalabad) with beneficiaries from the past 18 months preceding the survey, from April 2007 to November 2008. The questionnaires for the interviews were composed of about 90 close-ended questions and lasted on average between 30 and 45 minutes per interview. The breakdown of the quantitative field work is summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. Distribution of quantitative field work, December 2008

Service provider	Location	
	Kabul	Jalalabad
IOM	38	12
AGEF	42	8
Total by location	80	20
Grand Total	100	

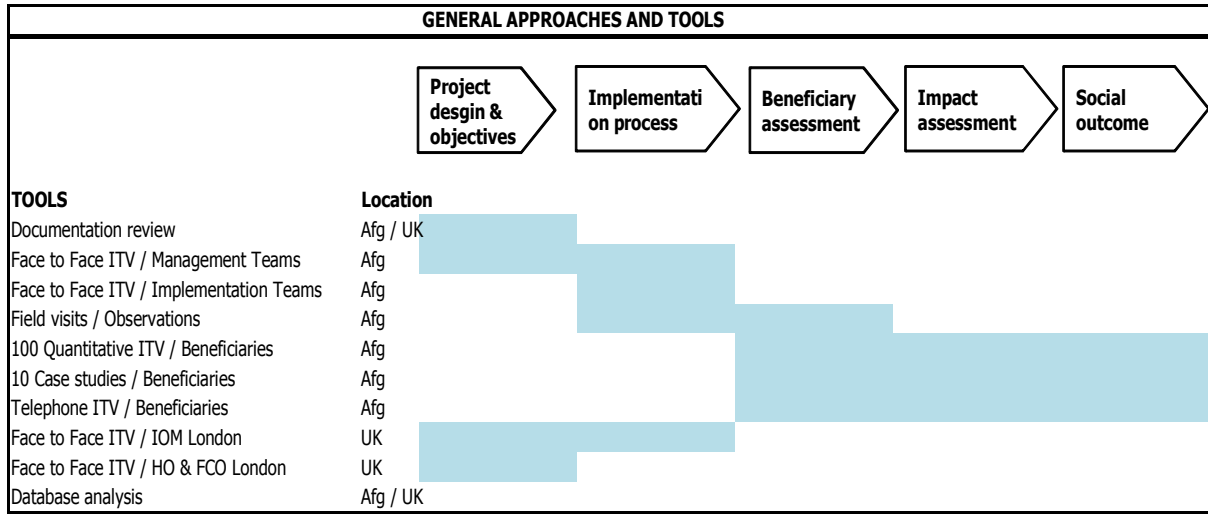
### II. Qualitative field work

Meetings in Afghanistan and the UK, and internal document review, provided insight into the program's structural organization and allowed for a better understanding of the projects constraints. Likewise, case studies and telephone interviews with beneficiaries were designed to gather feedback on strengths, weaknesses, and potential recommendations for the program's processes and proposed goals, as well as to assess the broader social impact of the program on Afghan returnees. Each case study was conducted by an international consultant and an Afghan consultant. The case studies were based on observation and interviews with beneficiaries. The interviews were administered using an open-ended and qualitative questionnaire lasting approximately 1 hour per interview.

- Meetings with IOM team in Kabul
  - Airport assistance team,
  - Reintegration activities team,
  - Monitoring team,
  - Counseling team.
- Meetings with IOM team in London
  - Reintegration department,
  - Operations department,
  - Communications department.
- Meetings with AGEF team in Kabul
  - Executive and management staff,
  - Service center team: registration, counseling, outreach, placement and monitoring.
- Meetings with UKBA, HO and FCO staff in London.
- Review of IOM and AGEF internal documents and internal processes
  - Contractual agreements,
  - Terms of references,
  - Guidelines and objectives.
- Case studies with Afghan returnees:
  - 5 case studies with voluntary returnees / IOM beneficiaries,
  - 5 case studies with forced returnees / AGEF beneficiaries,
  - In-depth phone interviews with Pule Khumri and Kunduz IOM and AGEF beneficiaries.

- Field visits and observation of IOM and AGEF teams in their day to day work activities in Kabul.

The chart below details the utilized tools and their application to the framework of the evaluation:





## 2. Part A: IOM Evaluation

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### 2.1. Background

The Voluntary Assisted Return Programme (VARP) was established by IOM in 1999 during the Kosovo crisis to assist people who wanted to return home. The Voluntary Assisted Return and Reintegration Programme (VARRP) was then launched in 2002 to include the reintegration assistance packages. IOM has been actively assisting returnees to Afghanistan since 2002 through VARRP, a worldwide program designed by IOM London giving all returnees the same kind of assistance independent from the country context. The standardized package is offered by IOM in all 130 countries falling under its umbrella of action.

The purpose of VARRP is to facilitate the voluntary and orderly return home of asylum seekers and those granted discretionary leave to remain in the UK. The program contributes towards the sustainability of their return by assisting the returnees in their first steps towards their reintegration in their country of origin. A Reintegration Fund, managed by IOM London, is used to provide vocational training, job placement, education and setting up small businesses in the country of origin. The reintegration assistance varies according to the needs of the returnees and the resources and local circumstances in the country of origin.

**Afghanistan is currently the number 2 country for VARRP returns with 318 assisted voluntary returns in 2007 and 279 so far in 2008.** IOM has been assisting Afghan returnees with the VARRP package since 2002 and has adopted a new, more flexible approach, since October 2007 to make the program more attractive for returnees.

The worldwide reintegration assistance is designed to:

- Assist individuals with their return needs: both short term and longer term,
- Help people find income generating activities and become financially independent,
- Support reintegration activities benefiting returnees and their families.

The management structure in place develops and implements the goals for VARRP in Afghanistan are as follows:

- **Chief of Mission (IOM UK)** in charge of the overall organizational management,
- **Deputy Chief of Mission / Project Development and AVR Manager (IOM UK)** who manages and implements project development activities and supervises the Project development team with an overall oversight and management of staff in delivery of IOM programs,
- **Operations Manager (IOM UK)** who manages and supervises the operations team and coordinates all relevant operational activities in the delivery of the project,
- **Reintegration Manager (IOM UK)** who manages and supervises the delivery of reintegration assistance and coordinates strategies relevant to the reintegration aspects of the project,
- **Communications Manager (IOM UK)** who develops new information and outreach strategies, promoting awareness of IOM's programs and general activities and managing the information team,
- **Resource and Administration Manager (IOM UK)** who manages all financial and logistical matters and supervises the finance and admin staff,
- **Human Resource Manager (IOM UK)** who manages all HR matters, staff training and development,
- **IT Manager (IOM UK)** who implements all IT related matters and supervises IT assistant,
- **Head of Sub-Office (IOM Afghanistan)** who manages the general operational and outreach activities for the delivery of the AVR project and supervises staff in the sub-office,
- **AVR Reintegration Coordinator (IOM Afghanistan)** who supervises the work of the AVR staff in the sub-office and oversees reintegration assistance,

- **AVR sub-office team in Kabul** consisting of 6 staff members in charge of registration and counseling (2 staff members), airport assistance (1 staff member), database management (1 staff member), equipment purchasing (1 staff member) and monitoring (1 staff member).

## 2.2 Goals and Initial Commitments

According to the agreement between IOM and the Home Office, the assisted voluntary return of Afghans back to their country of origin is to be structured following successive stages of assistance:

### A. Pre-departure assistance: IOM commitments in the UK:

The IOM staff in London is contracted to provide potential voluntary returnees with:

- **Information on the VARRP program:** Applicants call or visit the IOM UK offices and the return process is explained to them;
- **Return information:** The application is processed and IOM begins its assistance upon approval from the Home Office;
- **Assistance to acquire travel documents:** Most returnees to Afghanistan travel with an Afghan passport issued by the Afghan Embassy in London – the process involves an interview, passport application and provision of passport sized photographs – for which IOM covers all the costs;
- **Transportation within the UK;**
- **Flight ticket back to the country of origin:** Flights go from London to Dubai with Emirates or British Airways. Returnees are assisted to transit in Dubai. Onwards flights are with Ariana or Pamir Airlines to Kabul;
- **Extra luggage allowance:** Returnees can travel with 40kgs of luggage and IOM can pay for one additional bag if needed;
- **Departure airport assistance with IOM staff;**
- **A £500 Relocation cash grant** is handed to the returnee at the airport before departure from the UK.

NB: IOM London does not provide potential returnees with information regarding the security, political or economic situation in Afghanistan. However, it does encourage applicants to collect as much information as possible and to prepare themselves for their return notable through (a) a mentor scheme: giving applicants the possibility to call returnees who have already reintegrated and (b) the possibility to talk to the local IOM mission prior to departure.

### B. Assistance upon arrival: IOM commitments in Afghanistan:

The IOM staff in Kabul is contracted to provide voluntary returnees with:

- **Arrival airport assistance:** The IOM staff meets returnees upon arrival at the airport and assists them with border control procedures, provides them with counseling, assistance in identifying personal belongings and clearing through customs. If required, medical assistance is available, along with transportation to a final destination as well as temporary accommodation. Finally, information is given on mine awareness, current exchange rates, and assistance is provided with lost luggages and cargo;
- **Onward travel arrangements to province of origin / destination;**
- **Temporary accommodation:** If required upon arrival at the airport, a few days of free accommodation is offered at the Jangalak Reception Centre in Kabul. Transportation to this centre is provided by the IOM airport assistance staff;
- **Child care;**
- **Small business set up and training, or**
- **Vocational training, or**
- **Education opportunities, or**
- **Job placements, and**
- **Consistent monitoring.**

In addition to the above mentioned assistance packages, offered to all returnees worldwide, IOM has been commissioned by the Home Office to administer two new programs, in place since September 2008.

- **Temporary accommodation up to approximately 3 months:** As part of the new IOM approach for AVR returnees in Afghanistan, IOM assists returnees by providing appx. 3 months worth of rent assistance. The beneficiary is required to find the rental through a property dealer then bring the quotations and paperwork to the IOM office. After inspection of the space and of the rent level, the IOM staff pays the property dealer or landlord directly for the set amount of rent (usually around 3 months, but may be for longer if rent is cheaper).
- **Return and Rebuild Program:** This is the newest addition to the standard VARRP program in Afghanistan. The idea is to give £2,000 to beneficiaries to repair their houses or expand their houses. It started on September 1, 2008.

#### C. Focus on the types of reintegration activities

The IOM VARRP program offers 4 types of reintegration activities as outlined below. The reintegration staff locally is available to meet returnees as many times as necessary in order to decide the most suitable and viable reintegration assistance. The returnee chooses the field of assistance with the help and advice of the IOM staff. Returnees often need information related to quotations, school or college invoices, rental agreements, business licenses and other details needed to fill out a business plan or other program applications before they are sent to IOM London for approval. After approval the documentation is processed by the local IOM office and the payment to the supplier/school/college or employer is done.

##### **(1) Business set-up**

Under the business option, returnees can benefit from £2,000 in assistance (£1,500 given as an initial payment and the remaining £500 is given as a second and final payment after 6 months) and from a business training course coupled with a subsistence allowance. The assistance is not given in cash but as payments to suppliers of goods to be purchased for the business. Returnees are then to be monitored by IOM Afghanistan 6 months after their return date in order to benefit from the additional £500. They are then evaluated 12 months after their return date.

##### **(2) Job placement**

Under the job placement option, IOM Afghanistan grants the returnee a salary support for the initial 3 months of an agreed 12-month contract with an identified employer. The returnee can also benefit for up to 2 months of a vocational training course along with a subsistence allowance during the duration of the program.

##### **(3) Education**

Under the education option, university or college fees can be paid for adults for up to 1 year as well as the payment of other material and school-related costs. Children returning home can benefit from the education assistance in the form of school fees paid for one year plus school materials and uniforms.

##### **(4) Vocational training**

Returnees can receive assistance for 2 months' fees. Subsistence and travel allowances can also be provided as well as other material costs.

## **2.3 Measurable Goals**

The broad goal of the IOM VARRP program in Afghanistan is to contribute to the reintegration efforts of voluntary returnees from the UK. As a result of the program designs and individual choices of returnees, VARRP in Afghanistan almost entirely consists of business start up projects as it is the most popular and widely selected assistance package.

To cover the realm of assistance provided to returnees prior to and after departure from the UK, we have identified a list of measurable project goals pertaining to both the process and impact of the program. These goals will be discussed and assessed, forming a basis for our overall conclusions and recommendations at the end of the IOM evaluation section.

1. To effectively outreach and assist potential voluntary returnee communities with information regarding the VARRP program and available options for reintegration,
2. To provide appropriate assistance to returnees pre-departure,
3. To assist returnees starting from the day of their return and up to 12 months after their return date,
4. To provide a range of assistance services in country from counseling to monitoring appropriate to the needs of returnees upon their arrival back to Afghanistan,
5. To offer an assistance package to beneficiaries adapted to the local context, sufficient to cover expenses and basic needs and to attract a strong pool of applicants,
6. To monitor and control the implementation mechanisms and procedures for the project,
7. To properly ensure donor visibility and reporting,
8. To meet the criteria and goals targeted by the Home Office and UK Border Agency.

## **2.4 Limitations and Scope**

Some segments of the assistance package, such as the rental assistance and the Return and Rebuild Programme, were too recent an addition to be able to be evaluated in current study's framework. The IOM staff adopted a "new approach" in the fall of 2008 aimed at being more flexible and better targeted to the local Afghan context within the broader standard VARRP model. As will be discussed in the conclusions of the evaluation, a more "custom made approach" is needed in Afghanistan if the number of voluntary returns are to successfully increase with, as a goal, the protection and dignity of returnees in their country of origin.

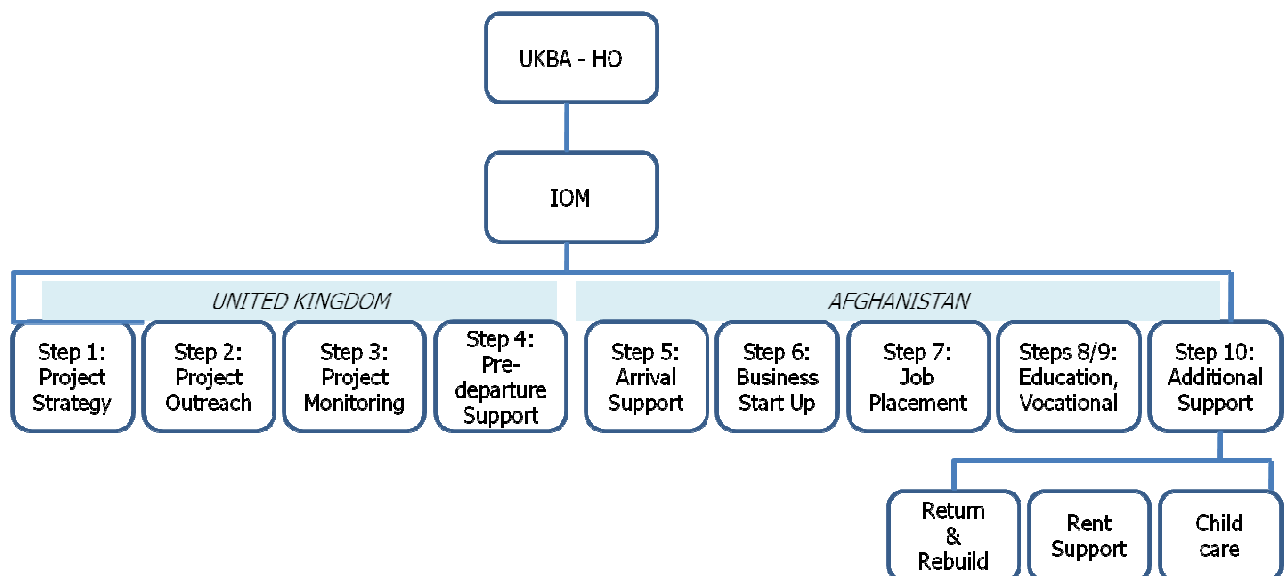
## **2.5 Program Analysis and Evaluation**

The IOM VARRP program has been analyzed and assessed by our team combining a horizontal and vertical approach, the goal being to look both at the process *and* the impact of the program. A multi-step evaluation (as illustrated in the graph below) has the advantage of evaluating not only the quality and impact of the program but also the strategy, outreach and holistic vision of the program.

The analysis below includes these different aspects and provides an insight into the strengths and weaknesses, some of which are structural, some are related to the local context and others are a result of the decision making process of both sides of the contractual agreement.

Overall, the evaluation team noted a well designed and well run voluntary returns process, both in the IOM UK and Afghanistan offices. The evaluation team was assisted by IOM staff members and responded in a timely and cooperative manner to all requests put forward and were very forthcoming with information and briefings.

**Graph 1. IOM VARRP Process and Implementation Chart for Evaluation**



**Step 1: Program Strategy & Contractual Agreement**

- **A strong and effective client (Home Office, UKBA) / contractor (IOM) relationship ensures a responsive assistance mechanism fulfilling both client agenda and contractor mandate.**
- **Recommendations to enhance voluntary vs. enforced returns:**
  - **Increase AVRIM assistance package to target economic migrants,**
  - **Enhance IOM’s presence and counseling in detention centers.**

Objectives

IOM has been contracted by the Home Office (HO) to undertake the assisted voluntary returns process for Afghans wishing to return to their country of origin. The contracting and funding of the project is processed through the United Kingdom Border Agency’s (UKBA) Immigration Group.

The AVR team within the HO UKBA works closely with IOM to:

- (1) Offer a more dignified and sustainable chance of return to Afghans and
- (2) Favor the cheapest option of return as voluntary returns are much cheaper than forceful returns.

Based on information released by the AVR unit and the 2005 National Audit Report, the current costs of return are estimated below:

- **The average unit cost for forced returns: £11,000,**
- **The average unit cost for the VARRP program: £5,000,**
- **The average unit cost for AVRIM<sup>1</sup> program: £1,000.**

<sup>1</sup> AVRIM (the Assisted Voluntary Returns program for Irregular Migrants living in the UK) is different from VARRP as it falls outside of the asylum process and contains no reintegration element except for vulnerable individuals. AVRIM started in 2004, first as a 6-month pilot then as a regular program, and includes counseling, return arrangements, documentation, airport assistance upon arrival, in kind assistance up to £1,000.

## Process

- ✓ IOM and the AVR team hold regular monthly operational meetings and throughout the VARRP years have addressed many issues and found solutions to work more effectively to provide a better service to returnees.
- ✓ The contractual agreement with IOM for Afghanistan includes both VARRP and AVRIM programs. **Until now, all beneficiaries have been assisted through the VARRP program.** This is due to the fact that the Home Office was restricted by EU funding to asylum seekers and by the lack of political will to offer assistance to people working irregularly, whether they have overstayed their stay or entered the country illegally without requesting asylum.
- ✓ **As such, the statistics from the past three years show a very minimal success of the AVRIM program in absolute and in relative terms,** compared to the VARRP program figures (Table 2).

Table 2. Afghanistan: VARRP and AVRIM returns

	2006	2007	2007
VARRP returnees	519	272	307
AVRIM returnees	4	13	10

## Strengths / Weaknesses

- IOM and the UKBA AVR team have successfully worked together to determine assistance strategies and package content. The working relationship between the two parties is smooth, regular and transparent based on monthly provision of information by IOM to UKBA.
- Based on recent studies, economic migration – rather than refugee related migration – is the main driver of migration from Afghanistan to neighboring countries and European countries. Unaccompanied adult Afghan men enter the UK either legally or illegally in the hopes of obtaining a job that will help them provide for their families back home. These are men who could be interested in a voluntary returns program several years down the road, as the goal of an economic migrant is not to settle down permanently in the host country, but typically to gain skills, accumulate wealth and sustain the livelihoods of families and communities at home. After a few years, based on the need to return home and to their families, these single adult men will inevitably take the decision to migrate back home.
- The political will and funding should therefore fully support programs such as AVRIM which are specifically targeted to this population of economic migrants. In the current state, **AVRIM is the lowest assistance package with £1,000 of assistance provided in-kind. For an income generating population, this is not enough to tip their decision making process and push them to return.** To be able to target the population of economic migrants and improve the rate of success and appeal of AVRIM, the assistance package should be increased to the levels of benefits received under VARRP. This will acknowledge the changing nature of migration from Afghanistan and allow for all irregular migrants to benefit from a voluntary return package that will increase their chances of reintegration and sustainable return at home.

## Conclusions / Recommendations

**The allocation of funding should be better distributed to bring up to par the financial benefits of VARRP and AVRIM, which are both currently cheaper options than the forced returns program.** Reinforcing the assistance package offered by AVRIM for Afghanistan will better target irregular migrant workers and encourage them to decide of their own will to return to their country of origin looking like winners who have been offered a chance at reintegration. This could

allow the authorities to save resources currently dedicated to arrest and deportations by giving an incentive for voluntary returns.

**Step 2: Project Outreach**  
**Organization: IOM UK**

- **The UK-based communications outreach to Afghan communities is effective and uses a wide range of media outlets to advertise VARRP.**
- **Donor visibility is absent to serve a neutrality aim of IOM.**
- **Communications tools are not systematically used to enhance reintegration. Returnees should be exposed to video conferencing with local IOM staff and past returnees to prepare their return.**
- **These initiatives should serve the purpose of creating links of solidarity and networking opportunities among returnees.**

### Objectives

The objective of the communications department at IOM UK is to make IOM and its Voluntary Return programs known and understood by all the UK's relevant diaspora communities. The strategy involves identifying where these communities are concentrated and the best ways to communicate with them – then do so in the most cost-effective manner.

### Process

The method consists of (a) mapping communities and identifying 'multipliers': agencies, individuals, media and (b) communicating directly via outreach, advertising, marketing, PR/media relations and indirectly through Partners and Associates. The communications materials are available in 31 languages, the video is available in 20 languages. Receptionists each sample 10 phone calls a day to ask how they have heard about IOM. The information team also tries to get the case workers to fill that out as an indication of what campaign efforts work best. The most common answers are word of mouth and advertisement.

Specific communications outreach is done by target country and community. For the Return and Rebuild program, IOM held 6 conferences throughout the UK in October and November 2008 to increase the knowledge of this new addition to the assistance package. Video conferencing is also being used to link up potential returnee communities with actual returnees who have benefited from the assistance programs.

### Strengths / Weaknesses

- **The mapping exercise for Afghanistan could benefit from a revision as the field work dates from October and December 2006.**
- Not wanting to jeopardize its independence, IOM UK does not believe in working with the government to communicate on voluntary returns program. It is questionable whether it is in the beneficiaries' interests and whether it is more successful not to undertake such a cooperation which would allow for an easier nationwide outreach.
- It is very difficult for IOM UK to effectively reach out to irregular migrants who fall outside of the scope of the asylum process since they usually live 'under the radar' and in hiding from the authorities. It is in their interest not to be found, it is therefore difficult to reach them out.

- **The video conference tools between future returnees (UK) and previous groups of returnees (Afghanistan) have so far not been implemented in any systematic manner.** Afghans interviewed do not seem to know of the available resources given to them to prepare their return to Afghanistan.

### Conclusions / Recommendations

**Based on a review of the latest mapping exercise, the communications activities of IOM UK are suited for an effective outreach to the Afghan community in the UK.** These activities capitalize on the profiles and habits of Afghan communities.

**Donor visibility is intentionally absent** to maintain the perception of IOM as an independent and nongovernmental organization. Staff in the IOM London office expressed concern on the success of outreach activities if they are linked too closely to government strategies. None of the beneficiaries were indeed capable of identifying the EU or the Home Office as the funding source of the programs they were benefiting from.

**Communications strategies should be used to link up Afghans already returned home and future returnees still in the UK.** This is not an option systematically offered and the awareness is not raised among future assisted returnees. It could have an important impact on their reintegration success and on the ability of UK returnees to form networks of solidarity in their country of origin.

***Step 3: Project Monitoring Mechanisms  
Organization: HO / IOM UK***

- **Home Office evaluations of IOM programs are outdated and not effectively used to improve program components as they are released years behind schedule: E.g.: the 2004 VARRP evaluation will be released in 2009.**
- **IOM evaluations should take place 6 months from the start of the program activity rather than 6 months from the date of return *AND* at the 12-month mark to assess the full impact of its programs.**

### Objectives

The goal is to meet funding and reporting requirements, assess the success and challenges in implementing the AVR goals and VARRP project in Afghanistan and evaluate ways to improve the appeal of the voluntary returns programs.

### Process

Evaluations of the IOM programs take place at 2 levels: externally by the HO and internally by the IOM Monitoring & Evaluation Unit.

*The Home Office* evaluates the VARRP program as part of the EU funding requirement. IOM provides UKBA monthly statistics and financial reviews to keep track of the implementation of programs and of the progress in achieving the stated goals.

*IOM UK* has a Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) department whose responsibility is to:

- Assess the progress and challenges of local programs based on the feedback received from in country staff;
- Undertake an evaluation of returnees on a yearly basis by visits to countries of return;
- Implement a self evaluation report based on phone and in person interviews led by IOM missions in countries of return. Afghanistan is included among the 27 countries evaluated in the 2002-2005 report. The self evaluation report released in 2005 consisted of interviews



with 2,065 returnees from 2002 and 2005. A new report for the years since 2006 is due to be released in the coming year.

*IOM Afghanistan* carries out regular monitoring of the reintegration process through regular advise and counseling sessions for returnees as well as follow-up visits undertaken every six months or in accordance with the timeframe of the assistance being implemented.

#### Feedback from Beneficiaries on Monitoring and Evaluation

**80% of the sample pool has been monitored by IOM Afghanistan.** Of these, 93.3% indicated having fallen within a 3-month mark from the start of their activity.

The remaining 20% was not monitored since the 6-month evaluation mark had not yet been reached.

The process was therefore implemented according to the contractual agreement and monitoring schedule put forward by IOM.

#### Strengths / Weaknesses

The team work between HO and IOM is reinforced by this dual monitoring and evaluation process.

- **The UKBA evaluation results are delivered in an untimely and irrelevant schedule which does not allow for operational or effective recommendations, especially given the fast changing pace and volatile nature of the Afghan context.** The UKBA AVR team informed us that they hoped to publish the evaluation for VARRP 2004 in 2009. The evaluation team was not provided with any of the HO UKBA's evaluation reports as they had not been published and released yet.
- **HO reports are in part outdated.** Previous research from HO staff into VARRP dates back to reports published in 2005 (*The Voluntary Return and Reintegration Programme 2003: an evaluation*), 2004 (*Understanding voluntary return*) and 2002 (*The Voluntary Assisted Returns Programme: an evaluation, covering the periods of September 2000 to August 2001*). Other country specific researched has been conducted, such as a VARRP 2006 field work on returnees to Nigeria. However to this date no research has been conducted on Afghanistan.
- Regarding IOM's process, the monitoring is done 6 months after the return date. The problem with this approach is that it is based on the time elapsed since the return, not since the start of the activity. As such, a beneficiary may have started an activity 4 months after return and will therefore be evaluated only 2 months into his activity program. 2 months in such a case is not enough to assess the impact of the program on the beneficiary.
- **The main problem encountered is the inability of IOM staff to visit non-secure areas for monitoring and assistance, hence limiting the evaluation capacity for beneficiaries living in certain Afghan provinces.** Communications is done by phone.

#### Conclusions / Recommendations

*The evaluation process at the HO* has to emphasize a more effective and timely process, to provide relevant and up to date data to support the efforts of the AVR team to design relevant projects along with IOM. Further research should be financed to focus specifically on up to date information on Afghanistan, as it represents the 2<sup>nd</sup> biggest population of voluntary returns from the UK and is a key priority for the UKBA for 2009 and beyond.

*The evaluation process at IOM in Afghanistan* should be built to respond to the start of activity date rather than being planned in function of the return date. It should also include monitoring not just 6-months into the assistance provided, but also at the 12-month mark.

**Step 4: Pre-departure Assistance Package**  
**Organization: IOM UK**

- **Pre-departure assistance should focus more on counseling activities:**
  - **Only 2.1% indicated having had the opportunity of a one-on-one interview with IOM staff and**
  - **Only 22.9% said they received counseling services from the IOM staff in the UK.**
  
- **None of the interviewees mentioned having had the opportunity of attending a workshop prior to their departure.**
  
- **The impact of reintegration programs should benefit from a pre-departure assistance package:**
  - **A compulsory series of workshops and lectures, strengthened by**
  - **Communication tools such as videoconferencing with Afghanistan-based staff and returnees.**

Objectives

The assistance offered by IOM to voluntary returnees begins in the UK, through counseling to help Afghans understand the conditions of returns, assistance in arranging the logistics of departure (flight tickets, travel documents, luggage allowance), as well as airport assistance and a relocation cash grant. These program contents are developed in detail page 11 of this report.

Feedback from Beneficiaries

**79.2% of respondents were either satisfied or very satisfied with the assistance received prior to departure.** Only 4.2% had an average viewpoint and 16.7% below average.

Justifying their lack of satisfaction of the assistance received, 2 interviewees mentioned that their return was not fully voluntary, meaning that they were given the choice of accepting a voluntary return or of being deported; they therefore chose the most preferable option, but had they been able to stay, they would have chosen to stay.

Other interviewees just mentioned that the amount of help provided to them – in cash and in kind – was insufficient to respond to their needs. This was supported by qualitative interviews which showed that the financial relocation cash grant given was viewed as not sufficient for a dignified and successful return.

**Only 2.1% indicated having had the opportunity of a one-on-one interview with IOM staff and 22.9% said they received counseling services from the IOM staff in the UK.**

**None of the interviewees mentioned having had the opportunity of attending a workshop prior to their departure** or obtaining any form of vocational training preparing them for reintegration activities in Afghanistan.

Strengths / Weaknesses

- The operations segment of the assistance was successful, from obtaining documents for travel, arranging for the transportation to and departure from the airport, as well as obtaining the relocation cash grant from IOM staff.

- The counseling element can be strengthened through a more in-depth staff consultation in each case to help returnees adopt a mind frame focused on the impact of their return.

### Conclusions / Recommendations

Although future returnees are not in a mind set to decide on their reintegration activities at this point, since they are mostly consumed with the logistical aspects of their departure, there needs to be a more systematic and mandatory system to provide them information regarding their return and reintegration.

**The recommendation is to schedule a compulsory week of workshops pre-departure, with required participation of all future returnees. This would include one-on-one counseling sessions with IOM staff, group meetings with other future returnees and video conferencing sessions with local IOM staff and past program beneficiaries.**

These options are currently available but are not widely used by Afghan returnees. This is especially true of the video conference with past beneficiaries and with local IOM staff. **The purpose of the pre-departure assistance should encourage the networking of Afghan returnees, past, present and future returnees.** As shown in other country contexts, networking among returnees is a decisive factor of the success and sustainability of reintegration efforts (e.g. Sri Lanka).

***Step 5: Assistance upon Arrival  
Organization: IOM Afghanistan***

- **Beneficiary review indicates a solid track record in assisting returnees in their first phase of arrival, at the airport and with their first contact at the local IOM office.**
- **The arrival and registration are smooth and well run processes. IOM keeps a strong grip on the first moments of contact with returnees through a heavily staffed local team.**

### Objectives

The assistance received upon arrival starts at the airport, on the day of return, and continues at the IOM provincial office for registration by the AVR staff. The reintegration letter from IOM states that voluntary returnees have 3 months to report to an IOM office for registration.

### Process

The implementation of the reintegration assistance in Afghanistan starts at the point of entry at the Kabul International Airport. This assistance consists of:

- Reception at the airport terminal,
- Assistance with border control at the airport,
- Assistance in identification of personal belongings and custom clearance,
- Assistance with lost luggage and cargo,
- Medical assistance (if required),
- Transportation to final destination,
- Temporary accommodation (reception center at MoRR where returnees can stay for a couple of nights if they have no other place to go to),
- Counseling and information about Afghanistan such as mine awareness and currency exchange rates.

At the airport, the IOM staff provides a documentation package to each registered returnee with a leaflet with the address of the IOM office along with contact names and information. Once they arrive

at the IOM office, the AVR team, consisting of 2 staff members for registration and counseling, check the passports and the reintegration letters. There is first a thorough identity check before proceeding to the counseling support.

Once the identity is confirmed, the returnee fills out an interview form for VARRP with the help of the staff. The staff gives them a brief overview of the 4 categories of intervention, explaining that only 1 can be chosen: vocational training, education, job placement, business start up. Returnees are usually tired after having the registration and information process, they go home and come back within days with their final decisions. They take the time to speak with family and friends before rendering their decision final. The IOM staff encourages them to discuss their decision with their family and relatives, and to benefit from the local knowledge of their support network.

Once the assistance option is chosen, the same 2 AVR team staff members assist the beneficiaries through the required paperwork. This includes, for the business start up option, rental and partnership agreements, quotations for the required items to be purchased and so forth. Each document is checked for its veracity and for responding to the requirements set forth by IOM.

#### Feedback from Beneficiaries

**Only 8.0% of the respondents reported not having been assisted upon their arrival at the airport.**

**Only 1 case, that is a mere 2.0%, state not having received transportation assistance to their final destination.**

**All were assisted by the registration and counseling team once they reported to the IOM office.**

#### Strengths / Weaknesses

- The airport assistance process is run effectively by one IOM staff member assigned specifically to this role. He is accompanied by the IOM doctor available in the event that medical assistance is required.
- The registration and counseling team is also well structured and a well run routine in a welcoming and agreeable working atmosphere. Returnees observed during the evaluation felt comfortable, properly welcomed, briefed and counseled at the IOM office in Kabul. The process is defined by its flexible scope, adapting well to the different needs and profiles of returnees.

#### Conclusions

**The arrival and first phase of return stages are smooth and well run processes. IOM keeps a strong grip on the first moments of contact with returnees** by having a capable and experienced staff in charge of airport assistance and registration. Separate teams are assigned to the airport assistance on the one hand, and the office registration and counseling on the other.

**Step 6: Option 1: Business Start-Up  
Organization: IOM Afghanistan**

- **The business start-up package is the most popular assistance package offered by IOM: 86.0% of beneficiaries interviewed opted to start their own business.**
- **Positive assessment of beneficiaries with 81.4% satisfied of the business start-up assistance received as it responded to their goal of having an immediate source of income.**
- **Limits of business start-up model:**
  - **Short term rather than medium/long term development impact. Only 55.8% reported an operational business at the time of interview, and 74.4% reported an insufficient amount of assistance allocated to proper business development.**
  - **On-the-job training is only optional. It should be made mandatory within the first 2 weeks of the start of the business activity to diminish rate of failure of business initiatives.**
- **It is recommended that the Home Office provides increased support to the business start-up package through the creation of a credit and loan system to support sustainable business operations.**

Objectives

IOM Afghanistan provides beneficiaries with the option of starting their own business. The staff is present to assist them in creating their business plan, accompanying them on the site of their proposed business and acquiring the equipment and materials needed for the start of their activity. There is no cash directly given to the beneficiary, as such a supplier is chosen based on three quotations received from the beneficiary.

In addition, beneficiaries are provided with the option of following a training course to improve their skills in accounting, bookkeeping, computer and technology for their business. The duration depends on the need and the purpose of the training. They are provided with £350 for this training which they can undertake at training institutions in Kabul and in the provinces. They are provided the information by the IOM staff and it is up to the beneficiary to agree on undertaking a course and selecting the appropriate one for them. The fee for the training includes transportation and daily allowance for food so that they don't have to rely on an income generating activity on the side.

Feedback from Beneficiaries

**86.0% of the interviewed sample enrolled in the Business Start-Up program.**

**Overall, 81.4% were satisfied with the assistance and help received from IOM** as it responded to their immediate need to have an income generating activity.

**However, it stops short of a real medium to long term reintegration process:**

- 74.4% said the assistance package was helpful but insufficient, with
- 82% needing more money to make their business sustainable, with on average the need for an extra \$9,000 to be able to rely on the business as the main livelihood strategy for their families.

- As a result, **only 55.8% of interviewees reported their business as operational at the time of interview**. None of the interviewees blamed the lack of staff assistance for this failure. They pointed instead to the high living costs in Kabul (73.7%), the lack of financial assistance (42.1%), the lack of political and economic stability in Afghanistan (42.1%), and the lack of security (15.8%).

#### Qualitative survey feedback

The majority of returnees set up joint partnerships with friends or relatives who already are running their business. They use the business start-up funds not to create their own business but, for the majority, to bring an investment to support or expand an existing activity. This allows them to (1) benefit from the local knowledge and expertise of a trusted party, (2) not reinvent the wheel given the difficult business climate in Afghanistan and in Kabul specifically with soaring prices and competition and (3) have the time and opportunity to take on a second income generating activity. Almost all of the interviewees in this program had another job on the side.

Beneficiaries are offered the opportunity to take on a business training course to further their skills and help them towards their business activity. Based on the qualitative field work, this option currently isn't well suited for the profile of the respondents who are (1) not comfortable in a classroom environment and (2) they just want to get on with their business. IOM has taken on a flexible approach by offering the opportunity to have now an on-the-job training at any time during the 1 year of assistance. However, this has again not been widely used.

One common trend in the qualitative field work and interviews led with beneficiaries and IOM staff in Afghanistan, one of the main suggestions was to set up a credit / loan system to allow for the businesses to become sustainable. Given that almost half of all business start ups fail in their initial format, it is important to look into how to improve the longer term reintegration prospects.

#### Strengths / Weaknesses

- **The main strength of this program is that it responds to the immediate need felt by returnees to have a quick income generating activity.** Almost all returnees opt for this package for this reason. However, this does not always translate into medium or long term success.
- **The main weakness of the program is its limited and short term impact.**
- **Another shortcoming of the program design is the optional, not mandatory, nature of the business training course offered.**
  - **The flexible approach is important but given the rate of success and failure of businesses, it is our recommendation that on-the-job training be mandatory to all beneficiaries in the business start-up program within the first 2 weeks of the start of their activity.** This, however, can only be put in place with a team of well trained trainers, with a good ability to analyze local businesses in their context to become good mentors / advisers and provide with custom made recommendations & training.

#### Conclusions / Recommendations

It is worthwhile to use the basis built by IOM to create long term business opportunities for Afghan returnees. 79.1% of the interviewees who started their business explain that they have hired 1 or more employees. This means that they have a direct economic impact beyond themselves and on their communities. This is the type of initiative that has a trickledown effect in development terms.

**It is recommended that the Home Office provides increased support to the business start-up package through the creation of a credit and loan system.** This could be easily set

up for the beneficiaries as over 90% of them choose to relocate in Kabul, focusing the following industries: retail (grocery shops), textile, car industry, agriculture. In this regards, some linkages / partnerships with local banks and micro-credit organizations could be explored.

***Step 7: Option 2: Job placement  
Organization: IOM Afghanistan***

- **Only 12.0% of beneficiaries interviewed chose the job placement program.**
- **The satisfaction rate is mixed with 50.0% being satisfied with the program.**
- **Limits of the job placement assistance package:**
  - **The IOM staff office does not actually match returnees with jobs, a major obstacle to returnee reintegration.**
  - **There is room for quality improvement through job counseling and an active role to guide beneficiaries through the local labor market.**
- **It is recommended that IOM takes a more active role in matching skills with available job opportunities either upon arrival or prior to arrival in Afghanistan, similar to other existing programs (e.g. RQA).**

Objectives

IOM provides beneficiaries with the option of finding a job suited to their skill and expectation with assistance offered to undertake a training course for the job. They can receive a financial assistance and temporary accommodation for the duration of the training (typically between 2 and 6 months). The staff briefs them on the benefits of the vocational training. The returnee has to identify an employer that is ready to grant a 12 month contract. IOM pays for the 1<sup>st</sup> three months. If salary is below average, the support will be extended for longer.

The beneficiary's qualifications are reviewed and each beneficiary is provided with a vacancy file updated every week by the IOM local staff. Help is provided in writing up CVs, preparing for job interviews and any other necessary counseling. But it remains the beneficiary's responsibility to identify a job that they want to apply for.

Feedback from Beneficiaries

**Only 12.0% of the interviewee pool mentioned choosing the job placement program.**

**50.0% said it corresponded to their skills and only 33.3% said it corresponded to their expectations.**

**The satisfaction rate here is mixed with 50.0% feeling satisfied about the program they enrolled in.**

Qualitative survey feedback

**The IOM Afghanistan office does not actually match returnees with jobs which has been identified by beneficiaries as a major limit of the assistance package.**

**There is room for improvement through job counseling and an active role to guide beneficiaries through the local labor market.** The reasons for the low satisfaction rate and the very low enrollment in this assistance program are linked to the lack of knowledge of the local labor market, the lack of education of interviewees and their lack of marketable skills.

### Strengths / Weaknesses

- The returnee has to identify an employer that is ready to grant them a 12 month contract. Due to the low skill set of returnees and their lack of knowledge of the local context, returnees are not well suited to find a job on their own. The biggest weakness of the program is therefore the lack of assistance in actually finding a job, as they only receive information and guidance by being referred to the Employment Service Centers and being provided with an online roster of job opportunities.
- There are only a couple of cases where IOM has been able to identify employers suited for the profile of returnees prior to departure from the UK. The staff however finds it difficult to create such opportunities because returnees are not highly qualified. They therefore encourage self initiative and family connections for the returnee to find a job on his own.

### Conclusions / Recommendations

Given the difficulties faced in assisting returnees to find jobs suited to their profile and the fact that most returnees are not capable of finding a job on their own, **it is recommended that IOM takes a more active role in matching skills with available job opportunities either upon arrival or prior to arrival in Afghanistan, similar to other existing programs (e.g. RQA).**

#### ***Steps 8/9: Options 3 and 4: Education and vocational training Organization: IOM Afghanistan***

- **None of the respondents chose either the education or vocational training packages.**
- **Limits of the assistance model: The packages are not competitive and adapted to the local context**
  - **Respondents do not consider that a 2-month long vocational training or a 1-year education course will allow them to learn a skill or gain sufficient knowledge to find a job.**
  - **The majority of respondents indicate that the financial offer did not meet their needs.**
  - **An existing bias in favor of income generating activities does not allow to fill in the educational and skills gap needed for a sustainable reintegration.**

### Objectives

University or college fees can be paid for adults for up to 1 year as well as the payment of other material and school-related costs. Children returning home can benefit from the education assistance in the form of school fees paid for one year plus school materials and uniforms.

Returnees can also receive assistance for 2 months with prepaid fees for specific training programs at a third party institution. Subsistence and travel allowances can also be provided as well as other material costs. £500 pounds are given for the training and £300 for the subsistence allowance.

### Feedback from Beneficiaries

**None of the beneficiaries interviewed chose either the education or vocational training packages.**



The education option was not chosen because the financial offer was seen as insufficient (68%), the need was for an income generating activity upon return (58%), the offer did not meet their needs and expectations (54%) and the IOM staff did not advise the beneficiary to choose this option (28%).

The vocational training option was not chosen because of a lack of skills to benefit from such a training (88%), the lack of a sufficient financial offer (62%) and because the program did not meet their needs and expectations (58%).

#### Qualitative survey feedback

The case studies carried out with returnees and beneficiaries points out to the fact that they do not consider that a 2 month vocational training or a 1 year education course can allow them to properly learn a skill or gain sufficient knowledge to find a job on their own upon the termination of the course.

#### Strengths / Weaknesses

- The education and vocational training packages are not chosen in part because the job placement program offers exactly the same assistance package but it has the benefit of actually landing a job at the end of the process.
- The duration of the education program is for 1 year and the vocational training on average 2 months. This does not respond to the reintegration needs of returnees as they do not consider such a short term training to allow them to build the skills needed to succeed on their own.

#### Conclusions / Recommendations

**The recommendation is to increase the duration and financial assistance to fill in the educational and skills gap. One common problem highlighted by the evaluation team is that returnees opt for the program that fulfills their most immediate need for cash, resulting in a bias on the choice of programs in favor of income generating activities.**

With a lack of skills, the prospects for a successful business start up or job placement look grim. The priority is therefore to create more appealing educational and vocational skills package that will favor the decision making process of returnees towards these programs. This will allow them to build the basis for a successful and long term reintegration.

**Step 10: Additional Support  
Organization: IOM Afghanistan**

- **Shelter programs respond to the needs upon return to Afghanistan and are well adapted to the local context. They are essential to a sustainable reintegration.**
  - **Almost half of respondents identified housing as their most immediate need upon return to Afghanistan.**
  - **75.6% of beneficiaries would have chosen the Return and Rebuild program had it been offered at the time of their return.**
- **Shelter-based approach plays in favor of increased voluntary return numbers. The Return and Rebuild program should be funded beyond its 12-month pilot phase.**
- **Limits of the assistance model:**
  - **Child care assistance is not adapted to Afghan culture. Instead, respondents indicate that medical assistance would be a more valuable contribution to their return and reintegration.**
  - **Psychological and social counseling needs were identified as a missed opportunity in the assistance framework. The return process causes a trauma which remains unaddressed.**

Objectives

In addition to the 4 reintegration packages beneficiaries are entitled to choose from, they are also entitled to receiving assistance with housing, rent and child care. The standardized VARRP package works with varying degrees of success and effectiveness in different countries depending on the local context, the standards of living, price and inflation levels, cultures and traditions of self employment and initiatives, etc.

From 2006 to 2007, the Afghan program saw the number of its voluntary returnees drop by 50%. The voluntary returns program had become less attractive to Afghans living in the UK for reasons related to their perceptions of return. In an effort to encourage voluntary returns for 2008, the Home Office and IOM discussed elements that could positively affect the decision making process of Afghans in the UK. The local expertise of IOM showed that if housing assistance was to be increased, Afghans would feel encouraged to opt for a voluntary return to their country of origin. The Home Office added funding to create a shelter-based approach designed and developed by IOM for Afghanistan and Iraq. The new pilot, the Return and Rebuild program, started on September 1, 2008 and will last 12 months.

Return and Rebuild Program

Based on anecdotal evidence collected from local IOM staff, one issue that was recurrent in the needs of returnees was housing. Many had to think about rebuilding their homes upon return, after years of conflict and absence. To meet this need and help returnees to re-start their lives back home, IOM launched this extra component to its VARRP program.

Under this new initiative, Afghans who voluntarily return between September 1, 2008 and August 31, 2009 can receive up to £2,000-worth of support for building materials to assist in the reconstruction or repair of their family home.

#### *Feedback from Beneficiaries*

Only 10% of the sample pool interviewed benefited from the most recent addition to the AVR package, as it has option only been an option since September 1, 2008. However, **75.6% of interviewees who returned prior to the launch of this program indicated that they would have chosen this assistance as it responded to their housing needs upon arrival.** Based on the qualitative interviews held by our teams, the need to either restore or expand family houses to accommodate the returning family members was a common denominator in otherwise different returns experiences.

#### Rent

The accommodation program consists of approximately 3 months of rent support (this can be extended to up to 6 months if the rent amount allows for it). Returnees rent a space that fits their need. They are then responsible for providing details on the size, location and the landlord's contact details to the IOM staff. The beneficiary then brings the contract from the property dealer with the signature from the landlord. If this takes place in a village where contracts do not exist, the IOM staff gets the confirmation from the village elder or checks on the information through its own network. Once approval from IOM UK is received, the IOM staff pays the landlord directly for the rent amount. There is therefore no cash amount given out to the beneficiary.

#### *Feedback from Beneficiaries*

The demand for housing and shelter assistance is further exemplified by the fact that 40% of interviewees benefited from the rent assistance offered by IOM. This is in line with the feedback received from beneficiaries as **almost half of them (48%) identify housing assistance as their most immediate need upon return to Afghanistan.**

#### Child care

The child care assistance is available for returnees who come back with family members, and in cases where the two parents work or where there is a single parent. IOM grants the beneficiary £450 to pay for child care services. It usually can be used up to 1 year, or as long as needed and as judged necessary by IOM staff.

#### *Feedback from Beneficiaries*

Only 2% of the interviewed pool relied on the child care services. Given the culture and tradition of Afghanistan, households prefer to take care of their children alone or rely on the extended network of families and friends to provide for children's needs. They therefore do not deem it necessary to use external child care services.

Recent returnees included individuals who were mentally ill and were not in a position to provide IOM staff with the required documents or go through the standardized assistance application process.

*"Upon return to Afghanistan, my main need was to find work but my main difficulty was health related. I have an illness for which the treatment is not available in Afghanistan. If the IOM office could help me to obtain an effective treatment, I will be in better shape to work and provide for my family."*

*- IOM beneficiary living in Pule Khumri, Baghlan. He spent 5.5 years living in the UK and returned voluntarily in 2007.*

### Strengths / Weaknesses

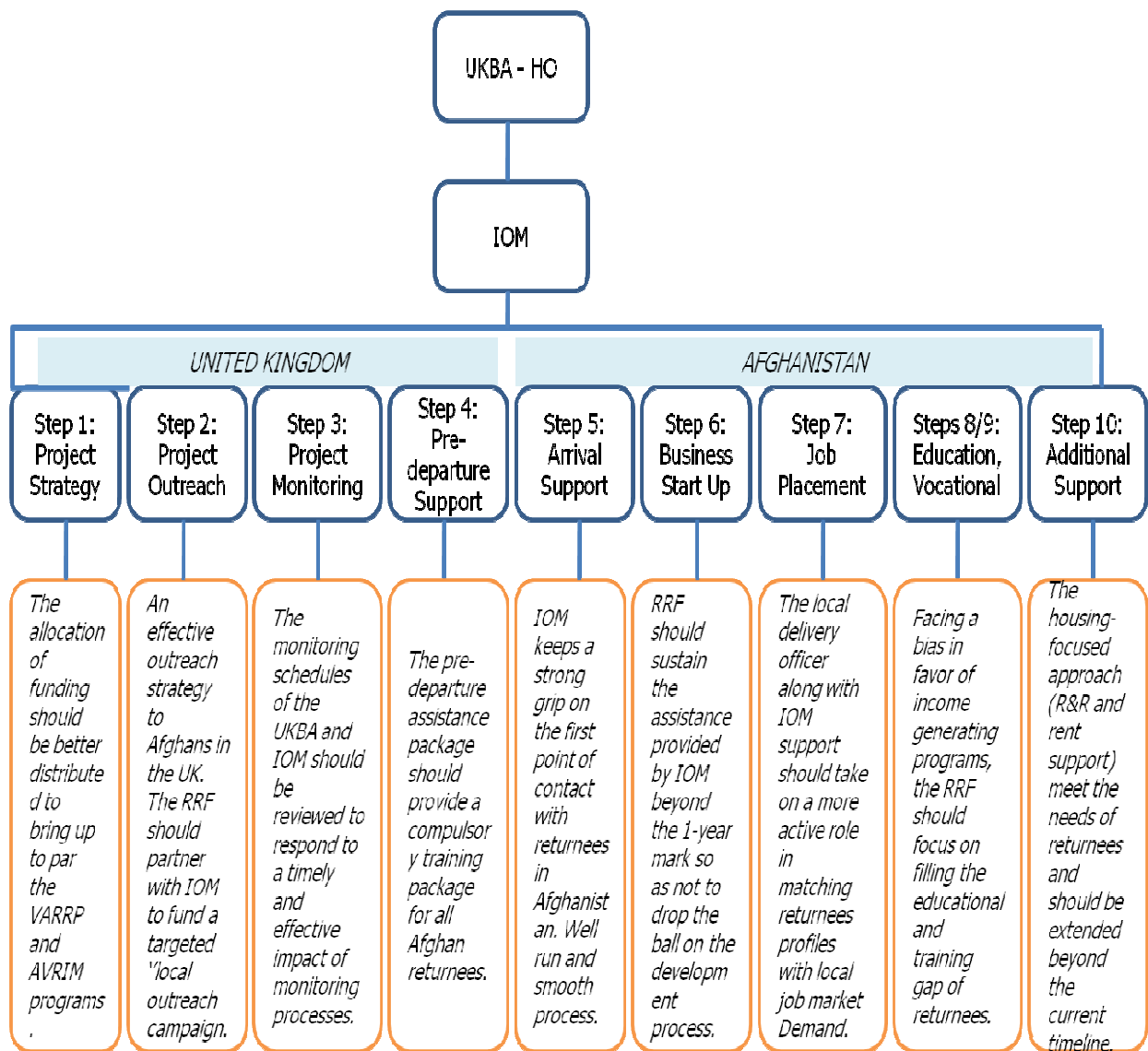
- The coordination between the HO and IOM in London has been successful in creating assistance packages and adopting a forward looking and reactive package to best address the overall returns goal of the UK government. The new approach and the Return and Rebuild program are additions that respond to the needs of returnees.
- **The rent assistance is a vital need for beneficiaries and responds to their expectations upon return. It is a successful and highly praised component of the assistance package.**
- **The missing component, based on conversations with IOM staff, is for in-depth medical assistance services.**

### Conclusions / Recommendations

**The “housing”-focused approach should be encouraged and the Return and Rebuild program renewed over its current 12-month funding as it responds directly to the reintegration needs of beneficiaries** interviewed. It also shows that beyond the standard VARRP package, additional services can be designed to respond to specificities of the local context. A “custom made approach” through cooperation between the Home Office and IOM can help increase the number of voluntary returns. This will benefit the policy goals of the UK government by benefiting from the local and sectoral expertise of IOM, while keeping as a priority the needs of beneficiaries and the greater impact of programs.

**In addition, funding should be provided for medical, psychological and social counseling for returnees.** Some people have been traumatized by their experiences, others have been in limbo for years, and all arrive in Afghanistan to see a completely different context than the one they left. It is recommended to push for networking among returnees prior to departure and for medical and social assistance upon return. Secondly, it is recommended that the UK government not agree to send back people with mental illnesses as there are no appropriate medical facilities in Afghanistan.

**Graph 2. IOM VARRP Evaluation Summary Chart**



## 2.6 Conclusions and Recommendations

The IOM assisted voluntary programs met the goals set forth in the contractual agreement. IOM achieves its role of contributing to the reintegration process however the long term social impact is limited. The social outcome of the program is still limited in terms of an actual and sustainable reintegration prospect. This leaves a window of opportunity for the Returns and Reintegration Fund to recommend an increase in funding for programs specifically designed to respond to the needs of Afghan returnees.

The following matrix summarizes the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of the IOM VARRP program with respect to the key findings and recommendations presented in this chapter.

### IOM Evaluation: SWOT Analysis

<p><b>Strengths</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Effective client/contractor relationship</li> <li>● Effective UK-based communications strategy</li> <li>● Smooth pre-departure administrative and operational process</li> <li>● Successful first contact upon return: airport assistance and registration</li> <li>● Well staffed UK and country teams</li> <li>● Business Start-Up program responds to the immediate income generating need of returnees</li> <li>● Additional support addresses the second most immediate need for returnees, namely housing through rent assistance and Return and Rebuild</li> </ul>	<p><b>Weaknesses</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Insufficient use of technology and communications tools to enhance sustainable reintegration. E.g. video conferencing</li> <li>● Untimely Home Office evaluation system</li> <li>● Lack of pre-departure package. E.g. counseling activities and workshops</li> <li>● Limited impact of the Business Start-Up and job placement programs</li> <li>● Lack of mandatory on-the-job training</li> <li>● Education and Vocational Training packages not adapted to the needs of returnees</li> <li>● Education and Skills gap remain unfilled.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Opportunities</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Increase AVRIM financial support package</li> <li>● Enhance IOM presence at detention centers</li> <li>● Invest in communications and technology tools: video conference with local staff and returnees to better prepare future returnees</li> <li>● Support networking opportunities to heighten a sense of initiative and solidarity upon return</li> <li>● Modify evaluation schedule: 6 months after return and again at the 12-month mark</li> <li>● Standardize a pre-departure assistance package</li> <li>● Render certain optional package components mandatory. E.g. Training course for the business start-up beneficiaries</li> <li>● Create credit and loan system to support businesses</li> <li>● Take on a more active job placement role</li> <li>● Integrate psychological and social counselling in the additional services provided locally.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Threats</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Limited medium and long term development impact.</li> <li>● High rate of business operation failure</li> <li>● Unsolved educational and vocational training gap</li> <li>● Unaddressed psychological needs</li> <li>● 34.0% of beneficiaries evaluate the assistance as helpful but not towards a permanent resettlement</li> <li>● 68.0% are prepared to leave Afghanistan again and migrate to another country as a coping mechanism.</li> </ul>

## *Building a sustainable return:*

### *Towards a longer term assistance and Sense of self-initiative*

#### **Disappointment upon return**

**Only 34% of all beneficiaries rank the help received as useful in resettling permanently back in Afghanistan.** Afghans who sign up to leave the UK voluntarily with IOM do so with the expectation that their economic reintegration will be guaranteed. With high expectations, an overall dependency on the assistance structure and a lack of self-initiative often means that expectations are not met upon return, thus translating in a poor self-evaluation of any type of permanent reintegration success.

#### **Intention to leave Afghanistan**

**68% show a willingness to leave Afghanistan again because of insecurity (66%), low income (42%) and difficulties in finding employment (32%).** The specific context of insecurity, war and lack of economic development in Afghanistan hinders the success of IOM programs. The standard VARRP assistance offered is therefore not sufficient to fulfill sustainable reintegration goals.

Given these two trends – disappointment and willingness to migrate again – the recommendations in this section focus on ways to increase the long term social impact of the IOM assisted voluntary returns program. The priority is to adopt a more holistic approach addressing the immediate needs of return – employment and housing – paired with programs of interaction that will trigger the sense of initiative of returnees and help re-energize their hearts and minds upon return.

#### ***Recommendation 1: Increase the development impact of programs***

The Returns and Reintegration Fund reflects a step in the right direction to see voluntary returns as part of a developmental process. The role of DFID should be stepped up as a partner to IOM locally in order to increase the chances of a sustainable and dignified return for Afghans. IOM implements a micro-scale development process and provides the opportunity to begin a reintegration process. Based on the conclusions and recommendations provided in this chapter, the process still remains to be strengthened.

It is worthwhile to invest in an enhanced assistance package as returnees can:

1. Help the local economy,
2. Benefit their immediate families and communities,
3. Serve as a network to facilitate the reintegration of future returnees,
4. Provide success stories that will encourage increased voluntary returns.

This evaluation has identified areas of action for the Returns and Reintegration Fund to follow up on the process IOM triggers through its assistance package:

- **The priority is for the Home Office / DFID to not drop the ball on the development process initiated by the assisted return program.** IOM does not have the funds to cover more than 1 year of assistance. The VARRP program is therefore limited in time. The feedback collected from beneficiaries through this evaluation project illustrates the developmental opportunity which exists to continue and sustain the work started by IOM. The evaluation has shown that VARRP has a real potential to contribute to a sustainable return as it responds to the needs of returnees; however its means being limited it falls short of fulfilling the long term and permanent resettlement goals of voluntary returnee populations. This is clearly the case for the Business Start-Up beneficiaries who benefit financially from IOM's support but report, for almost half, a failure of their business to succeed in the long run.

- Concrete steps should be taken to reinforced the two most popular reintegration programs, namely the business start-up and job placement packages. Additional funds should be allocated to:
  - 1. Increase funding for business start-ups:**
    - Additional initial investment,
    - Mandatory training courses,
    - Enhanced monitoring and counseling.
  - 2. Adapt the job assistance package to provide:**
    - Direct job placement activities instead of the actual IOM strategy of counseling which does not trigger a proper matching of supply and demand in the local labor market.
  - 3. Fund an association of returnees that will act:**
    - Prior to departure by providing advice and counseling to Afghans in the UK,
    - Upon return to identify common goals and needs,
    - To initiate common ventures to avoid duplication of efforts and misuse of funds allocated for business start-ups.

### *Recommendation 2: Improving Project Design*

Although IOM programs respond to the contractual agreement agreed upon with UKBA, and respondents are overall satisfied with the content of services and programs offered to them, several modifications can be implemented to improve the services provided to returnees. The following suggestions can be made:

- **The evaluation shows that pre-departure assistance for Afghans should be strengthened through a formalized and standardized approach to better prepare returnees for return.** The current IOM UK strategy contains pre-departure measures which are not utilized by future returnees because of a shortsightedness of the needs and the difficulties of return. A full preparation is the key to a well planned and timely reintegration process. As such, it is the evaluation teams suggestion that pre-departure activities for Afghan returnees should:
  1. Offer a curriculum based on successes in IOM VARRP programs worldwide and fine tuned to the Afghan context:
    - This can take the shape of a series of week-long workshops and compulsory series of sessions in the UK to encourage networking initiatives between past, present and future Afghan returnees.
    - These would build on video conferencing with local IOM staff as well as with past and current beneficiaries.
    - Examples of successes of returnee networking (such as in Sri Lanka) to provide them with a more acute sense of the need to not only build on assistance, but on self-initiative, to succeed.
- **Build a more thorough in-house business training course for all participants to respond to the lack of operational businesses in the long run.** Participants have a short sighted view of the process and focus on the need for an immediate income generating potential. The IOM staff needs to provide an on-site training through its Kabul and provincial offices covering the basic steps of business creation and management.
- **The job placement option falls short of helping beneficiaries find and placing them in employment opportunities suited for their needs.** The job placement approach needs to be revised to provide for an increased involvement of the IOM staff in matching returnee profiles with job opportunities locally. This can be started even before the arrival of



the beneficiary in Afghanistan by collecting CVs and having a skills assessment run by the IOM staff in London.

1. A proper job placement can offer a chance not only to obtain a stable source of income but also provides a unique chance to reintegrate Afghan society and reacquaint with local processes.
  2. The package should therefore be strengthened through the increased:
    - Involvement of IOM staff in placing returnees in employment opportunities,
    - Resources dedicated to outreach in the local labor market and skills assessment processes,
    - Incentive and stimulus to encourage employers to hire returnees coming through the VARRP program.
  3. The recommendation here is not to reinvent the wheel as there are current structures, such as Employment Service Centers (ESCs), which provide the local expertise and employment services. However, the point here is for IOM to take on a more active role given the fact that counseling is not sufficient in helping returnees take on permanent positions *and* that ESCs may have a limited appeal in the eyes of Afghan returnees today, or might have to be challenged and assisted to adapt their standard approach to the specific case of returnees (custom made job-identification program).
  4. The incentives to employer need not only be monetary (i.e. salary support). It can also include a preferential access to financing and credit to help employers expand and improve their business through the help of IOM. This will also fulfill the more macro level goal of helping communities develop through the return of Afghans.
- **The vocational training program is financially less advantageous for beneficiaries than other programs as its components are currently offered in other assistance packages.** The Business Start-Up and Job Placement packages currently include a vocational training (although albeit optional) component. As such, beneficiaries do not take up the vocational training program as they do can have access to better financial support by opting for other programs.
    1. It is worth revising the strategy here to include a higher allowance and a longer duration for the vocational training in order to support the learning and development of a population which, according to the evaluated sample, lacks proper marketable skills.
    2. Packages should be made more equal in terms of financial backing and benefits in order to allow beneficiaries to choose from a homogeneous set of packages and more importantly, to choose a package that is in line with their long term needs.
    3. As almost all returnees chose the Business Start-Up option, it should include a mandatory training component to build up the skills that would have otherwise been sought in a vocational training program.