

1.4.3. Stigma and shame

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Sharan described Afghanistan as a guilt- and shame-based society, and returnees' sense of self-worth may diminish if they are excluded from the local community, struggle to find a job and provide for their families.[531] The MMC reported on a combination of social stigma and debt posing 'a major barrier to effective integration'. In their research, securing an income and shame were the most pressing difficulties for returning Afghan men. This sentiment mainly applied to those returning after having moved relatively recently to earn an income abroad, in contrast to 'long-term migrants' returning from e.g. Pakistan. Stigma and shame were *inter alia* connected with the costs of emigrating, often funded by the extended family, which could result in unsolved debts and profound economic implications for their relatives. One of MMC's respondents explained that deportations from Europe were particularly associated with stigma, and those returning often hid that they had been deported to avoid being scrutinised by people.[532] Sources reported on deportations bringing assumptions of engaging in criminal activities abroad,[533] and rumours easily spreading around being 'contaminated' with Western ideas and values,[534] having 'lost' one's culture and done prohibited acts, such as not praying, converting to Christianity,[535] drinking alcohol or engaging with women.[536] Accusations that seem small may cause conflicts,[537] and some older sources reported on deportees being exposed to potential robbery, due to assumptions that they have become rich in Europe.[538]

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