A profile of Afghan unaccompanied minors in the Netherlands

MPP Master thesis
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**List of acronyms**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Acronym</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>COA</td>
<td>Central Organisation for the Reception of Asylum Seekers</td>
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<tr>
<td>CRG</td>
<td>Child Residential Group</td>
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<tr>
<td>DT&amp;V</td>
<td>Repatriation and Departure Service</td>
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<td>EMN</td>
<td>European Migration Network</td>
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<td>HRT</td>
<td>Return and Reintegration Regulation</td>
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<td>IND</td>
<td>Immigration and Naturalisation Service</td>
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<td>IOM</td>
<td>International Organization for Migration</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kmar</td>
<td>Royal Constabulary</td>
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<tr>
<td>REAN</td>
<td>Return and Emigration of Aliens from the Netherlands Scheme (of the IOM)</td>
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<td>SRU</td>
<td>Small Residential Unit</td>
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<tr>
<td>UAM</td>
<td>Unaccompanied Minor</td>
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<tr>
<td>UASC</td>
<td>Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children</td>
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<td>UMFN</td>
<td>Unaccompanied Minor Foreign National</td>
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<tr>
<td>UNAMA</td>
<td>United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan</td>
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<tr>
<td>UNHCR</td>
<td>United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees</td>
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<tr>
<td>UNICEF</td>
<td>United Nations Children’s Fund</td>
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Acknowledgments

I am very grateful for all the support I received while working on this thesis. In particular I would like to thank the following people. First of all, Dr. Melissa Siegel, my supervisor, for her help throughout the process that resulted in this thesis. Secondly, this thesis would not have been possible without the opportunities granted by COA and Xonar to interview staff and Afghan children and to engage in participant observation. I am also grateful for the insights the IND gave me in the asylum process and their experience with Afghan unaccompanied minors and the IOM for the information on their voluntary return programmes. I would especially like to show my gratitude to all the Afghan young people who made me feel welcome during the many hours I spent at the UAM campus and who were willing to tell me their stories. Lastly, I thank my family and friends who always believed in me and to whom I am indebted for their continuous support and encouragements.
Executive summary

In the past few years Afghan unaccompanied minors (UAMs) have become the largest group of UAMs as defined by the Council of the European Union in Europe. This is also the case in the Netherlands. However, relatively little knowledge is available about these children. The aim of this study was to conduct a background study on Afghan unaccompanied minors in the Netherlands on the basis of a triangulation of research methods. Various information resources were consulted that provided information on previous studies conducted on Afghan unaccompanied minors as well as the (legal) situation minors encounter in the Netherlands. In addition, interviews were held with the following stakeholders: the Central Agency for the Reception of Asylum Seekers (Centrale Opvang Asielzoekers, COA), Xonar (which provides small-scale accommodation and guidance to UAMs in south Limburg), the Immigration and Naturalisation Service (Immigratie- en Naturalisatiedienst, IND) and the International Organization for Migration (IOM). Lastly, 15 Afghan UAMs were interviewed and over 80 hours of participant observations were conducted at one UAMs campus to study the day-to-day situation of unaccompanied minors in a campus.

The almost three decades of conflict in Afghanistan have forced many Afghans to seek refuge abroad. In the last few years the security situation in the country appears to have worsened. Furthermore, the socio-economic circumstances in the country are poor. This may explain at least partly the continuous and even increased number of Afghans and Afghan unaccompanied minors in Europe.

With regard to the background of Afghan minors, the results obtained corroborate the findings from other studies. The majority of Afghan UAMs in the Netherlands are boys claiming to be between the ages of 15 and 18 and the most common ethnicity is Hazara. They come from relatively small families and many of them have lost a family member. They tend not to be from the poorest families, because their families could pay for the expensive journey to the Netherlands and often owned land or a shop. However, economically the children who had been living in Iran seemed worse off. The educational background differed considerably with almost half being analphabetic before coming to Europe and the others had been to school either only one year or had almost finished high school. Their main motivation to leave Afghanistan was the violence there and in Europe they hoped to find a better future. The journey was in most cases arranged by their parents with the help of smugglers. In contrast to previous research, the maternal uncle was not mentioned when the arrangements
for the journey were discussed. The common route that was taken was from Iran to Turkey and with a boat to Greece and then to Italy and France. The last part of the route would normally be done by train. In a few cases children went by plane. The journey would generally last a few months, except when the minor had to earn the money to pay for the journey on his/her way to Europe.

Upon arrival the unaccompanied minor is received by the Royal Military Constabulary (Koninklijke Marechaussee, Kmar). In the case that the minor wants to claim asylum, the Kmar informs Nidos, which is responsible for the representation of UAMs. Since the amendments to the Aliens Act 2000, which were implemented in July 2010, the asylum procedure has changed. When the asylum claim is submitted the rest-and-preparation period of six working days starts, which allows the minor to prepare for the asylum procedure. This procedure lasts eight days and the asylum claim is assessed by the Unit for national unaccompanied asylum seekers tasks of the IND. This study found that age tests are not regularly used in the Netherlands and none of the interviewed Afghans mentioned age tests.

During the asylum procedure the minor is placed in a COA reception centre. The daily care and education is organized by Nidos and COA, who also arrange a guardian (Nidos) and mentor (COA) for the minor. Minors have free access to education, receive living allowances and there are possibilities to work depending on the age and immigration status of the child. There are special procedures for victims of trafficking and smuggling and detention is possible.

In the Netherlands it is considered important that a minor returns when his/her asylum claim is rejected and there are several voluntary programmes, including a project by the IOM specifically for UAMs and ex-UAMs. Nevertheless, not many Afghan minors return to their country of origin. Instead, they tend to stay in the Netherlands until they are 18, if adequate reception in Afghanistan is not available, and/or become illegal or try to go to a different country maybe with the help of the large network Afghans seem to have.

In 2010 almost 39,000 Afghans were registered in the Netherlands and approximately 20% of the Afghan asylum seekers that entered the Netherlands were minors. Afghan unaccompanied minors have been in first place in the top five of the inflow of UAMs since 2009. The majority of Afghan minors in reception centres are boys. The average length of stay in such a centre has decreased significantly in the last five years and in 2010 they stayed approximately 1.5 years. About one quarter of the Afghan UAMs disappear from the reception centres within the first three months after claiming asylum.
The main contribution of this study to previous literature concerned the experiences of Afghan minors in the Netherlands. Many Afghan children intended to go to Scandinavia, but appear to have claimed asylum in the Netherlands because they had been arrested by the police. The few whose final destination was intended to be the Netherlands generally seemed to have family there.

The amount of transfers to various reception centres the children had experienced was limited. The smaller forms of reception in a child residential group (CRG) or a small residential unit (SRU) were often preferred to a campus, because they provide more of a family atmosphere and offer more opportunities to speak Dutch. I suggest that those who have been granted asylum are transferred to CRG or SRU, as they will receive more guidance there to learn Dutch and integrate. The school attendance of Afghan children tends to be good and they were generally interested in learning, which may be related to the finding that Afghan minors seem to have an interest in integrating into Dutch society. It is important that unaccompanied minors should be able to attend school without delays and cooperation with regard to internship remunerations should be given.

Psychological difficulties are widespread among Afghan unaccompanied asylum-seeking children and therefore a fast and effective response to their mental problems is essential. Maybe the use of periodic screening for psychological and behavioural problems among unaccompanied minors can be considered or providing low threshold psycho-education. One positive note is that the length of the asylum procedure seems to have decreased as a result of the amendments to the Aliens Act 2000, which may mean that the uncertainty and stress caused by the asylum procedure is diminished.

Most Afghans indicated that their future is very uncertain as their asylum procedure had not ended yet. However, a definite intention to stay was expressed by everyone and interest in return programmes is very limited. The deportation of these children will not be in their best interest and reception in Afghanistan would be difficult to arrange, because they all claim not to have contact with their parents. Lastly, it will not be effective, because they will probably disappear before being deported. It might be a better alternative to prevent Afghan children from coming to Europe by informing people in Afghanistan about what they can expect if they go to Europe.

Although it is difficult to establish the truth in the stories told by the children and only a limited number of Afghan unaccompanied minors could be interviewed, it is hoped that this study will provide a better understanding of Afghan unaccompanied minors in the
Netherlands. The recommendations briefly discussed here are explained in detail in the last chapter and may be of help in the development of policies on a wide range of related issues, including the asylum procedure, the reception and possible return of Afghan children.
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1. Introduction

This study aims to provide a profile of Afghan unaccompanied minors (UAMs) in the Netherlands. In the past few years the number of Afghan UAMs arriving in various European countries has increased significantly. In Norway they even reported an escalating number of Afghan children arriving in the country (UNICEF, 2010). Nowadays, the largest group of unaccompanied minors in Europe are Afghans. Eurostat reports that in 2009 there were a total of 4,600 Afghan unaccompanied minors in the EU out of a total of 12,210 non-EU unaccompanied minors. In comparison to minors from Somalia, which came second place with 1,800 Somali children entering in 2009, Afghans are by far the largest group (Eurostat, 2011). Also in the Netherlands Afghan UAMs constitute the largest group of unaccompanied minors (COA, personal communication, 17 February, 2011).

However, relatively little is known about these children. Recently, three studies concerning Afghan unaccompanied minors have been conducted in various European countries and were published in 2010. The UNHCR conducted a large study based on 150 interviews with Afghan unaccompanied minors in six European countries (2010c). Another study, also conducted by the UNHCR, provides a more detailed insight into Afghan children that have sought asylum in Sweden (2010d). The last, smaller study was done by UNICEF on Afghan unaccompanied asylum seeking children (UASCs) in the UK and Norway and on families in Afghanistan who had sent children to Europe (2010).

As they constitute the largest group of UAMs in the Netherlands, knowledge on their background can be crucial for the development of policies on a wide range of issues, such as the applications for asylum, their economic potential and integration in the Netherlands, and their possible return. In addition, the research can be used as a guideline for future studies on other groups of UAMs as the countries of origin change over time due to situations of war or revolution, for example.

The purpose of this thesis is to conduct a background study on Afghan unaccompanied minors in the Netherlands. Specifically, the focus will be on four different aspects. First, the characteristics of these minors, including their age, gender, ethnicity, family, educational and economic background, will be examined. In addition, their motivations for leaving Afghanistan and their journey to the Netherlands will be discussed in detail. These three aspects can complement the information from the previous studies mentioned above. As this study specifically focuses on Afghan minors in the Netherlands, a large part of the study will be devoted to their experiences in this country.
Three different research methods were employed in this study. A thorough literature review has been done which provides information on previous research that was conducted on Afghan unaccompanied minors and the (legal) situation that they encounter upon arrival in the Netherlands. In addition, statistical information on this group will be examined. These insights will be complemented by the knowledge gained through conducting interviews with various stakeholders and Afghan unaccompanied minors and through participant observation.

Time was spent at one UAM campus from COA in which the objective was to learn about life on a campus and to establish contact with Afghan minors, which increased their willingness to participate in interviews and improved the quality of the interviews. In total 15 interviews were conducted of which 12 at this campus and three at a different, smaller form of reception provided by Xonar. During the participant observation at the campus an important source of information were the conversations with mentors. In addition, interviews were conducted with various staff members from COA, Xonar, the IND and the IOM. The IND provided statistical data on Afghan children, information on the asylum procedure, and their view on Afghan UAMs in the Netherlands. The IOM informed me on the voluntary return programmes for minors.

The rest of the study consists of nine main parts. Chapters two until six will primarily be based on previous literature and thereby provide a background to the study. In chapter two the term unaccompanied minor is explained. Chapter three gives a brief overview of the current situation in Afghanistan. Next, chapter four provides a background on Afghan unaccompanied minors in Europe. In this chapter their characteristics are presented, their motivations for leaving Afghanistan, the journey to Europe, and the general situation they face in a European country of reception. Then in chapter five an analysis of the entry, reception, and return of unaccompanied minors in the Netherlands will be provided. Here the focus will mainly be on the legal rules and institutions minors encounter in the Netherlands. Chapter six will deal with the situation of Afghans and Afghan unaccompanied minors in the Netherlands.

Chapters seven and eight discuss the investigations that were conducted. In Chapter seven the methodology used in this study is explained after which in chapter eight the results are discussed. The results are structured similarly to the findings on the background of unaccompanied minors presented in chapter four to make the comparison clearer and identify what this study contributed to the knowledge on Afghan UAMs in the Netherlands. Lastly,
chapter nine presents the conclusion and a number of policy recommendations related to
Afghan unaccompanied minors in the Netherlands.

2. What is an unaccompanied minor?
There are several definitions of the term unaccompanied minor. However, the discussion will
be limited to the definition of the Council of the European Union and the various ways in
which this group of minors has been termed in the Netherlands. This section will end with a
clarification of the definition that is used in this thesis.

The Council of the European Union provides the following definition of the term
persons below the age of eighteen, who arrive on the territory of the Member States
unaccompanied by an adult responsible for them whether by law or custom, and for as long
as they are not effectively taken into the care of such a person, or minors who are left
unaccompanied after they have entered the territory of the Member States.”

However, in the Netherlands this term has generally not been used. Instead, the term
“unaccompanied minor asylum seekers” (alleenstaande minderjarige asielzoekers) was
employed to refer only to those minors who have applied for asylum, whereas those minors
that were not seeking asylum were classified as “unaccompanied minor foreigners
(alleenstaande minderjarige vreemdelingen). Currently the latter term is employed for both
cases, i.e. it applies to those considered unaccompanied minors by the Council Directive and
to those who have applied for asylum in the Netherlands. Moreover, the term minor does not
only apply to those who have not turned 18 as is the case of the Council Directive. In the
Netherlands it also involves the condition that the person is not, nor has been married.
However, a minor will not come of age in case the marriage is not valid according to Dutch
and international law (EMN, 2010). In this thesis the term unaccompanied minors will be
used to refer to everyone who falls under the definition of the Council, including those who
are asylum seekers, i.e. the Dutch term unaccompanied minor foreigners is also applicable.
However, the focus of the study will be on unaccompanied asylum seeking minors.
3. Afghanistan: country information

Afghanistan has witnessed almost three decades of conflict because of which many Afghans have been forced to leave their homes and seek refuge either in different parts of the country or abroad. The internal armed conflict, that started after the Soviet Union invaded the country in 1979 has led millions of Afghans to become displaced. It is estimated that 3.8 million Afghans fled the country of which 2.3 million went to Pakistan and 1.5 million to Iran. However, after the invasion an insurgency was fought between the mujahedeen, or holy warriors, who were assisted by the West in terms of money and arms, and the Soviets who were struggling for control over the country (Kronenfeld, 2008). Between 1979 and 1992 more than 6 million Afghans were refugees, which involved over a fifth of the country’s population. Moreover, Afghans constituted the world’s largest group of refugees (AI, 1999).

After the fall of the pro-Soviet Najibullah regime in 1992 more than a million refugees repatriated (UNHCR, 2010c). However, the collapse of the government did not mean the end of the armed conflict and until 1996 when the Taliban took control, there was a civil war in the country. “By this time the Taliban had become a fearsome force, killing, pillaging, raping, stealing, and ethnically cleansing individuals and whole populations” (Jazayery, 2002, p. 233). Especially the Hazaras and Shi’a Muslims were targeted by the Taliban, who are mostly Pashtuns (Jazayery, 2002). The high levels of insecurity and violence and the deteriorating human rights condition forced many Afghans to leave the country again. Massive returns to the country only started after the intervention in 2001 led by the US. Approximately 3.5 million Afghans were estimated to have returned between the years 2001 and 2005 (UNHCR, 2010c). At the end of 2007 already over four million Afghans had returned since 2002 with assistance from the UNHCR of which approximately 3.2 million came from Pakistan and 860,000 from Iran, thereby constituting the largest assisted return operation (UNHCR, 2007).

Nevertheless, still a large number of Afghan refugees is residing in a different country, although the precise number is difficult to assess. The UNHCR reports that in January 2010 the number of registered Afghan refugees is almost 2.9 million of which 96% reside in Pakistan and Iran (UNHCR, 2010a). In addition, hundreds of thousands of Afghans are living in countries all across the world. As these are only the official numbers, large numbers of Afghans are assumed to live outside their country unregistered (UNHCR, 2010c). From January to September 2010 approximately 14,000 Afghans applied for asylum application, which is a 15% decrease compared to the year before (UNHCR, 2010d).
In the near future it is likely that the number of refugees will stay numerous as the security situation in Afghanistan continues to deteriorate. According to a report written by the UN Secretary-General (2010), 2009 was the most unstable year since 2001 with the largest number of security incidents and the situation worsened even more in 2010. The increase in the conflict-related violence has negative implications for the access of Afghan citizens to health care and education, especially in the south and south-eastern part of the country. Moreover, the level of corruption is high, the rule of law is weak and governance ineffective (UNHCR, 2010d).

In addition to the low insecurity situation, the socio-economic conditions in Afghanistan are poor. It is ranked at place 155 out of 169 on the Human Development Index and therefore is considered as one of the poorest countries in the world. Moreover, life expectancy is only 44.6 years and the mean years of schooling adults have is 3.3 years (UNDP, 2010). The poverty people experience in Afghanistan is also reflected in the food and water insecurities there. The level of food insecurity is 44%. A large percentage of loans are spent on food and access to water is available to only 31% of the households. In addition, there is a lack of housing and a large proportion of the urban population is living in slums (de Bree, 2008).

The consequence of the situation in Afghanistan characterized by insecurity and instability is that children are more vulnerable to violence as a result of the armed conflict in the country. Children are being murdered, exploited and even recruited by armed groups. Moreover, they have been used by the Taliban as human shields and are even reported to have executed suicide attacks. As a result children that are allegedly associated with armed groups have been detained by the Afghan government. However, the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) has reported cases of ill-treatment and human rights violations in which children are ill-treated, kept in custody for a long time and not provided access to legal help. The most vulnerable group are the unaccompanied and separated children as they are exposed to a large number of protection risks, such as human trafficking, smuggling, and child labour (UNICEF, 2010).

Another consequence of the insecure and unstable situation in Afghanistan is that the returnee absorption capacity of the country is limited. Previous research has shown that one third of the returnees are not satisfied with their return and that this dissatisfaction is mainly due to unemployment and the lack of housing. Moreover, Pakistan and Iran have been adopting stricter policies on Afghan refugees. For example, Pakistan has closed refugee
camps, thereby forcing Afghans to return while they often have nothing to return to. Iran has created more ‘no go areas’, which involves that if the government encounters Afghans in those areas they will be deported (De Bree, 2008). The poor socio-economic conditions of the country and the enormous number of returnees that Afghanistan already had to absorb together with stricter policies in neighbouring countries, means that Afghanistan will face even more pressure on its already limited absorption capacity of returnees.

4. Background of Afghan unaccompanied minors in Europe

The aim of this chapter is to provide a broad overview of the background of Afghan unaccompanied minors. This overview will start with an explanation of the characteristics of Afghan unaccompanied minors residing in European countries, such as their gender, age and family situation. Then a more detailed analysis of the motivations of these minors to leave Afghanistan is given. A large part of this chapter is devoted to the travel of Afghan UAMs from their country of origin to Europe, including the arrangements for the journey, the smugglers’ organisation and the routes these children took. Also a brief discussion is provided of the circumstances in which these minors live upon arrival in a European destination country.

This chapter will mainly be based on three studies concerning Afghan unaccompanied minors that have been conducted in various European countries and were published in 2010. The UNHCR conducted a large study based on interviews with Afghan unaccompanied minors in France, Greece, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway, and the UK. It focuses on the background of these Afghan children, their journey and their reception in each of these European countries (UNHCR, 2010c). Another study, also conducted by the UNHCR, provides a more detailed insight into Afghan children that have sought asylum in Sweden. Interviews were conducted with 42 Afghan children on their background, the reasons for leaving their country and their journey to Sweden. The reception in Sweden is only discussed very briefly (UNHCR, 2010d). The last study, named ‘Children on the move’, was done by UNICEF. In this smaller study 10 Afghan UASCs were interviewed in the UK and 10 in Norway. In addition, four families in Afghanistan with children that had been deported or had died on their travel to Europe, and three families with children who had reached their destination country were interviewed. By also conducting interviews in Afghanistan insights
were provided regarding the experiences of those children that did not make it to their destination country (UNICEF, 2010).

4.1 Characteristics of Afghan unaccompanied minors

The following characteristics of Afghan children on the move will be discussed: gender, age, ethnicity, family situation and the economical and educational background. With regard to gender the data from Eurostat show that 97% of the Afghan unaccompanied minors who applied for asylum in a European Union country in 2009 were boys (Eurostat, 2011). This may explain why in all three studies on Afghan minors interviews were only conducted with Afghan boys (UNHCR, 2010c; UNHCR, 2010d; UNICEF, 2010). In the European-wide study it was mentioned that only a few number of cases of Afghan asylum seeking girls have been reported and that in these cases the girls had often travelled with an older brother (UNHCR, 2010c). A female minor would have to be accompanied by an adult male (UNICEF, 2010).

The age range reported differed per study. Eurostat reports that most of them fall into the category of the age group between 16 and 17 (2,010 children). In the category 0-13 years there were 365 Afghan children, 1,690 children were 14-15 years old and of 535 minors the age was unknown (2011). In the Swedish study (UNHCR, 2010d) the ages were between 13 and 15, the study by UNICEF (2010) reported an age range from 14 to 17 years, and in the European study the reported ages were between 9 and over 18 (UNHCR, 2010c). However, the latter two studies mention that the majority of Afghan boys claimed to be either 16 or 17. Another important finding was that upon arrival the claimed age of the Afghan children was often not believed, as they were considered to be older. Therefore, age tests were conducted (UNHCR, 2010c; UNICEF, 2010).

Most children had been born in Afghanistan with the largest group originating from the central eastern province of Ghazni. In terms of ethnicity the largest group was Hazara and the second ethnicity reported was Pashtun in the European study (UNHCR, 2010c). Two other ethnicities that were reported in all three studies were Tajik and Uzbek (UNHCR, 2010c; UNHCR, 2010d; UNICEF, 2010). In the UNICEF study (2010) similar percentages of children of Hazara and of Pashtun ethnicity were interviewed. However, in the UK all of them were Pashtun, whereas in Norway there were only three of Pashtun ethnicity and seven Hazara. The ethnicity of the families interviewed in Afghanistan was more diverse and all four ethnicities were reported. The study conducted in Sweden (UNHCR, 2010d) reported
Hazara as the main ethnicity of the Afghan boys. In addition, one Uzbek and one Tajik were interviewed. The reported ethnicities of the Afghan minors in Europe are remarkable, because these numbers do not match the distribution of the ethnic groups in Afghanistan, where 42% is Pashtun, 27% is Tajik, and both Hazara and Uzbek represent 9% of the population (UNHCR, 2010c). However, the large presence of Hazara minors in Europe may be the result of the threat this ethnic group faces by the Taliban, discussed in the section on Afghanistan.

Another observation from the data is that a pattern seems to exist of Hazara’s going to Norway and Sweden and Pashtun’s to the UK. However, the observed trend may be explained by the presence of communities of Hazara’s in Norway and Sweden and of Pashtuns in the UK. Once migrant networks are established they tend to facilitate further migration as they constitute social capital that can provide migrants as well as non-migrants with information and help in social, financial and cultural matters. For example, these networks can make settlement of people in a new host country easier as the network can provide help in finding work and housing. Migrants that are already settled in a certain country can therefore be seen as ‘bridgeheads’ that decrease the costs and risks of migration for future migrants (de Haas, 2009).

With regard to the family situation, the children who left Afghanistan were the oldest son of the family in the case of the European study. The other option that boys mentioned often was that they were the second oldest, but in many of these cases the older brother had died (UNHCR, 2010c). However, in the study by UNICEF the largest group of boys reported to be the second oldest, although the number of boys being the oldest son was also high (2010). In both studies the family size was normally quite small, around three or four children. The study in Sweden did not report information on this (UNHCR, 2010d). In all three studies it was mentioned that in many cases the father of the children was either missing or dead, mostly as a result of the war or the Taliban. Therefore, the children had often been living with their mother and siblings under the care of the maternal uncle. Sometimes children had lost their mother and some children were orphans (UNHCR, 2010c; UNHCR, 2010d; UNICEF, 2010).

In terms of economic background the studies seem to indicate that the boys are not from the poorest families as the money the families had to pay for the journey of a child was substantial (this will be discussed in more detail in the section on the journey). At the same time the study conducted in Sweden described that they experienced poverty and that there was a lack of social services. Many of them came from small-scale farmer families and
sometimes their family owned land or cattle. Economic factors were also reported as the main reasons why children could often not attend school or attended school only periodically; not enough money was available to pay for school (materials) and travel costs. Moreover, children often reported that they would help their family with farming and they were especially faced with economic and social responsibilities when the father died or had work in a different place (UNHCR, 2010d).

Due to the reasons mentioned above and the presence of the Taliban the children’s level of education was low. The UNICEF study mentioned that the children had not received education in Afghanistan or only a little (UNICEF, 2010). Only about half of the boys interviewed in Sweden said that they had attended school during a period of two and a maximum of six years (UNHCR, 2010d). Also in the European study approximately half of the children had attended school of which one third had between five and 11 years of education. Moreover, this study found that the level of schooling of Hazara and Tajik families was higher than that of Pashtun (UNHCR, 2010c).

4.2 Motivations for leaving the country

For many children that decided to go to Europe, it had not been the first time they left Afghanistan. All three studies reported that many boys had lived in Iran and to a lesser extent in Pakistan at some stage in their lives with most of them living there with family or relatives (UNHCR, 2010c; UNHCR, 2010d; UNICEF, 2010). Moreover, the UNICEF study (2010) found that the boys of Hazara ethnicity had previously lived in Iran and those of Pashtun ethnicity in Pakistan. This seems related to the geographical location and the religious background of these two ethnic groups. Pashtuns form the majority in the southern part of the country, close to the Pakistani border. In addition, they are generally Sunni Muslims (Embassy of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, 2011) and in Pakistan the large majority are Sunnites (CIA, 2011b). Although the Hazaras dominate the Central Highlands of Afghanistan and are therefore not geographically close to Iran, they are mainly Shi’a Muslims (Embassy of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, 2011) as is the majority of people in Iran (CIA, 2011a).

The reasons for children to leave the country were diverse, but most of them were related to the economic and security situation in Afghanistan. The children often did not see a future for themselves in Afghanistan thereby mentioning the poverty, the high unemployment rates, low wages and limited education opportunities (UNHCR, 2010d). A future in Europe
meant for them the prospect of guaranteed employment and education, of freedom and respect for human rights (UNHCR, 2010c). Children as well as family also mentioned that the money the child could earn in Europe will mean more wealth for the family in Afghanistan (UNICEF, 2010). However, specific events that were related to the security in the country were often the triggers for the boys to leave. The most common triggers will be discussed one by one.

All three studies mentioned that the majority of children described kidnappings and forced recruitment by the Taliban and other criminal groups as an important reason. The threat of becoming abducted even prevented children from going to school. Moreover, in all three studies many boys had mentioned the threat of being forcibly recruited by the Taliban militia groups. In quite a number of cases the father was working with the Taliban and/or had disappeared or been killed and families were afraid that the Taliban would recruit the boys (UNHCR, 2010c; UNHCR, 2010d; UNICEF, 2010).

Fear of retaliation was also mentioned, especially when a relative of the child had been working for the government and was therefore at risk of being killed by the Taliban. In several cases Afghan boys had lost their father for this reason Among these families with a relative working for the government many feared not just for the lives of those working for the government but also for the lives of the other relatives and this could have triggered the decision to leave the country (UNHCR, 2010d).

The general violence in the country is another important motive for leaving. Family members had died during the conflict, families had been forced to leave their homes or the Taliban controlled their village (UNHCR, 2010d). Moreover, in all three studies boys often mentioned specifically their desire for safety as an important motive for departure (UNHCR, 2010c; UNHCR, 2010d; UNICEF, 2010). Two of the studies also described how family conflicts could lead to the decision of departure (UNHCR, 2010c; UNICEF, 2010).

The boys who had been living in Iran described how there was no prospect for them there. The work opportunities in Iran were declining and they mentioned increasing harassment and discrimination. For example, they could not receive social benefits nor attend school, mainly as a result of their illegal status. Moreover, they feared being arrested and deported or had already returned forcibly to Afghanistan. As the employment situation in Afghanistan is even worse, often the only option they had left was to go to Europe (UNICEF, 2010; UNHCR, 2010). Overall, it seems likely that families in Afghanistan will continue
making the decision to let a child go to Europe as long as the level of security remains low and the prospects of work and education are limited.

4.3 The journey
In this section the journey of Afghan unaccompanied minors from their country of origin to a destination in Europe is described. First, the process of choosing a destination is discussed. Next, the arrangements for the journey, including the costs of the journey and contacting a smuggler, are dealt with. More information about the smuggler’s organisation is explained in the next section. The next two section deal specifically with the travel and discuss the common routes to a western European country and the journey and its dangers. Finally, the life of Afghan minors in the destination country is briefly examined.

Choosing a destination
The choice for a particular destination often was not made from the outset, but formed over time and was based on a variety of sources. The study conducted in Sweden observed that in about half of the cases the children’s initial destination was Iran or Pakistan. These children either went on their own or with families to mostly Iran and after a varying period of time decided to go to Europe. A bit less than half of the boys reported that they or their family had planned to go to Europe with Pakistan or Iran seen as a transit country. When this was the case, the period the children would stay in Iran or Pakistan would generally be a few weeks, whereas the period of time the children resided in those countries would normally last between one and three years when children went alone or between seven and 10 years when children went with their family at an early age. However, some of the boys ended up staying for quite a while in Iran either working to finance the journey or waiting for the chance to leave (UNHCR, 2010d).

In all three studies it was observed that in most cases children left Afghanistan to go to “Europe” or a “western country”, but did not have a clear destination country in mind. Instead this developed en route and was based on a decision by the child, an adult, or the smuggler. Quite a few children in all studies mentioned that decisions of where to go to were made at various stages during the journey. The children would arrive in a certain country, such as Greece or Italy and made plans there with a smuggler to continue their journey either by arranging their family to pay the money or in some cases by working and earning the money to continue their journey. Often children based their decision of their destination on
the basis of their experiences during the travel or on stories from other migrants that they met on their journey (UNHCR, 2010c; UNHCR, 2010d; UNICEF, 2010).

Other children were less aware of what their country of destination would be. In these cases their relatives had often agreed with an agent or smuggler for their child to go to a certain destination and the child only found out where he/she was heading to at some point during the journey or only upon arrival (UNHCR, 2010c; UNHCR, 2010d; UNICEF, 2010). The study by UNICEF (2010) described how some children would arrive at a certain place, such as at the docks in Greece, where they were met by a smuggler who checked their names and then arranged the next step of their journey. The study in Sweden (UNHCR, 2010d) mentioned how many Afghan boys did not know where they were going due to the confined situations in which they travelled. Then it was generally the smuggler who decided on their journey, probably based on agreements with the boys’ families.

The research by UNICEF (2010) also mentioned that none of the children had relatives living in the country of destination and that if they had already decided before their departure on their country of destination this was often based on information from neighbours or family who already had children residing in those countries.

The decision to leave the country was made in most cases by the parents and/or the maternal uncle, but the child accepted the decision (UNHCR, 2010c; UNHCR, 2010d; UNICEF, 2010). Often the child participated in the decision to leave and it has become more and more common for boys to decide themselves that they want to go to the west and they then try to persuade their family (UNICEF, 2010). Finally, those Afghan minors who had already been living alone decided independently (UNHCR, 2010c).

Arranging the journey
The general impression from the studies was that contacting an ‘agent’ or smuggler was relatively easy. The UNHCR argues that this is not surprising due to the widespread access to the Hawala system in Afghanistan, which “facilitates the transfer of money, goods and people across countries and even continents” (2010b, p. 16). In the majority of cases the parents or other relatives would contact the smuggler and arrange the travel. The child would not always now about all the arrangements, such as the price paid for the journey (UNHCR, 2010c; UNHCR, 2010d; UNICEF, 2010).

The travel to Europe is costly and large sums of money were paid to smugglers, although the payments that were made varied considerably. UNICEF (2010) mentions
amounts between US$7000 and US$20,000 and the UNHCR (2010b) reports prices up to US$15,000 that would take a child all the way to a western European country. It was also common for the journey to be paid in parts, for example amounts between US$3,000-5,000 were mentioned to get to Turkey (UNHCR, 2010c; UNHCR, 2010d).

Many minors told how their family, in order to raise the money for the journey, had sold possessions with the most common being land. In the case that the father had passed away, the maternal uncle arranged and paid for the journey (UNHCR, 2010c; UNHCR, 2010d). Due to the large sums of money involved, in the majority of cases the family would pay for the journey in instalments. However, this could be risky for the child on the move as a delay of the payment would mean that the child could not continue the journey and would have to stay at the place where he had arrived in unsanitary and even dangerous circumstances. Sometimes a boy would pay for his own journey, which could occur among those boys already living by themselves, often in Iran. This implied an even larger risk for them, because when they would run out of money they would not have anyone else to count on and they could be stuck in places where working is illegal for them and jobs are poorly paid (UNHCR, 2010c). Often children mentioned that they would have to pay back the money that their family raised for them to make the journey (UNICEF, 2010).

The price people paid to smugglers could include several attempts for the child to reach the destination, thereby providing some kind of safeguard for the families that the smugglers would try to have a child reach the destination country. However, if a child would reach the destination country but is deported from there, the price for the journey would have to be paid again if the child will make the journey again (UNICEF, 2010; UNHCR, 2010d).

The children's own preparations for the journey seem to be limited. The research by UNICEF suggests that due to safety reasons the decision to leave was often made in a very short time period (2010). Moreover, smugglers generally did not provide much information except for the price required for the child to reach a certain final destination. The children reported that they had not been informed about the travel conditions or how long it would take. Sometimes the information smugglers had given would be wrong as children reported being told a journey would take a certain number of hours, while in fact it took days. At the same time Afghan minors seem to be aware, at least to a certain extent, of the dangers that they could encounter during their travel, because they had spoken with other children or adults that had tried to go to Europe. They mentioned that the journey would be rough and
that they could be left behind, detained, and deported and mistreated, but they were planning to take the risk (UNHCR, 2010d).

**The smugglers’ organisation**

In order to provide a clearer picture of the children’s journey, the smugglers’ organisation will be discussed in more detail based mainly on the information from the UNHCR study in Sweden (2010d). The smuggler’s organisation seems to involve a transnational network that runs across countries of origin and transit. During the journey the smugglers that were accompanying the children changed, mainly around territorial borders and check points. However, according to the stories of the children there seems to be close and professional cooperation between the smugglers.

Moreover, the study describes how the smugglers’ network consists of various levels. The first level includes those smugglers who are situated in the country from where the journey started and the second level consists of smugglers who would guide the children from one place to another. These two levels need to be in regular contact with each other in order to arrange the journey and make sure payments are made. A second level smuggler could inform a first level smuggler about the progress of the child after which the first level smuggler could contact the family in the case the journey was paid in instalments, in order for the second smuggler to receive the sign that the child could continue the journey. A third layer of smugglers concerns those who are assisting with more day-to-day issues in the different places the children would pass, such as providing accommodation and food (UNHCR, 2010d).

The minors described the smugglers very negatively. In all the stories they did not show that they cared about the well-being of the boys, instead they were cruel and aggressive and would threaten the children (UNHCR, 2010d). The smugglers made false promises about the travel conditions and would even leave children behind if they could not keep up the pace of the rest of the group (UNICEF, 2010). Children would also complain about the conditions in which they had to travel and their accommodation, but this will be discussed in more detail when the journey is described. Moreover, the smugglers seem to prevent friendship and trust from building up among the children by separating them and forming new groups during the journey that would travel together. This results in higher levels of stress among the children and prevents the possibility of children working together to resist the authority of the smugglers (UNHCR, 2010c).
Common routes

The most common route for Afghan boys reported in all studies was through Iran to Turkey and then to Greece and Italy. Another option would be to go through Pakistan instead of Iran, but then the rest of the route would pass the same countries (UNHCR, 2010c; UNHCR, 2010d; UNICEF, 2010). From there they could take different routes to a number of countries. For example, a normal route to go to the UK would involve going from Italy to France and then to the UK (UNHCR, 2010c; UNICEF, 2010). Another less common route is to from Italy through Austria and Germany to arrive in Scandinavia or from Italy to France and then to another Northern European country (UNHCR, 2010c; UNICEF, 2010). Both UNICEF (2010) as well as the UNHCR (2010c) report that some Afghan boys had gone north from Afghanistan and that they would enter Europe via Russia. For example UNICEF (2010) mentions two such routes to arrive in Norway: from Afghanistan to Uzbekistan, Russia, to Sweden and then Norway or from Afghanistan to Kazakhstan, Russia, Ukraine, Hungary, Austria, Germany, Denmark, Sweden, and Norway. However, this is a less common way than through Greece.

The journey and its dangers

The journey of many boys started in Iran where they had lived or would only pass through on their way to Europe. The study in Sweden observed that the children who had lived in Iran would primarily work on the streets or in unskilled or low-skilled jobs in the manufacturing and construction sector. Although they had to make long hours doing hard work for low salaries, the children remarked that the working conditions there were still better than in Afghanistan (UNHCR, 2010d).

Travel from Iran across the Turkish border seemed to occur in many cases by trekking at night through the mountains that border the two countries or in parts by truck (UNHCR, 2010c; UNHCR, 2010d). During the day they would hide and rest in the open air in rough conditions, especially because many children complained of not being distributed food or water. Moreover, they were threatened by the smugglers if they did not keep up with the pace of the group or expressed complaints. Other travellers had to leave the group behind as a result of exhaustion or the lack of water and food. Another factor that increased the stress for the children when crossing the mountains were the reports of kidnapping groups active in the mountains in Turkey (UNHCR, 2010d).
Next, the boys would be transported from the border to Istanbul by truck, bus or taxi (UNHCR, 2010c). The conditions in the truck were described as bad, including having very little space, no toilet, smelling strongly of sweat and excrements and with hardly any food and water available (UNHCR, 2010d). Upon arrival in Istanbul they would be detained in difficult conditions, with children reporting being kept in small, bare rooms or cellars for days up to several weeks together with lots of other children and with hardly any food. Stories of abuse and mistreatment are also common, especially relating to smugglers demanding the money for the rest of the journey (UNHCR, 2010c). Some children were arrested and detained in Turkey in bad sanitary conditions and with no interpreter or legal assistance. These children would be imprisoned until they were deported back to Afghanistan or Iran. However, in most cases they would try again to cross Turkey (UNHCR, 2010d).

From Istanbul children would travel by bus or car to a certain location close to the Aegean Sea (UNHCR, 2010d). The most traumatic experience for most children on their journey to Europe was going by boat to Greece. The Afghan children were put into small, inflatable rubber boats with more children than the boats were meant for and then had to cross from Turkey to a Greek island. The children had to struggle to keep the boat afloat and they would see children fall off and drown (UNHCR, 2010c). The crossing would be made at night in order to avoid being discovered. Nevertheless, children often had to attempt several times before reaching Greece, because they were apprehended by the Greek police and then sent back to Turkey. Even upon arrival, children claimed that they were arrested, detained and then deported to Turkey. In some cases children mentioned that the police would bring the children to the Turkish shores and leave them there, whereas other children were sent back to Iran by the Turkish authorities (UNHCR, 2010d).

The two most common islands children went to were Lesvos and Chios. Upon arrival some children would present themselves to the police based on instructions they had received from the smugglers, whereas others were arrested by the police accidentally. The conditions of the Pagani detention facility on the island of Lesvos were described very negatively. The facility was overcrowded, adults and children were not separated, and the hygienic conditions were bad with not enough toilets for the amount of people and no shower. The amount of food they were provided was not sufficient and some reported that they were physically abused by the staff. Cell phones were confiscated, no interpreter or organisation was there to give them advice and no information was provided on how to apply for asylum. Furthermore, the Afghan boys reported staying there from a few days up to a number of week or even
months (UNHCR, 2010d). These problems have been dealt with to a certain extent as the centre has been closed since the end of 2009 and children from the age of 14 are being held in Hyos. However, Greece has been criticized heavily for its treatment of refugees and in particular of unaccompanied minors (UNHCR, 2010c).

Once released from detention (it is not clear why or how this occurred), children would go by boat to Athens, where they would stay in accommodation provided by the smuggler, in guest houses, or if these options were not available on the streets (UNHCR, 2010d). From there the most common route is to go to Italy and from there to other parts of Western Europe. If a child is able to afford a fake passport it can travel from Athens by plane, but in most cases children go to the port of Patras where they try to go by truck which takes a ferry to Italy. However, the children reported how difficult and dangerous it is to hide beneath a truck, including the possibility to incur severe injuries. This journey could take months to accomplish if multiple attempts have to be made and the boys are detected and deported back to Greece (UNHCR, 2010c).

In Italy, if children are apprehended by the policy, they are interviewed to establish the age and nationality and to inform them about the possibility to request asylum. In addition, every unaccompanied minor is subjected to an age test (UNHCR, 2010c). Detailed information about the journey from Italy to other countries is not provided in the three studies. The study by the UNHCR in Sweden (2010d) only mentions the journey the children made up to their time in Greece and the other two studies only present a limited discussion of the rest of the journey (UNHCR, 2010c; UNICEF, 2010).

In the European study it is mentioned that the rest of the journey is normally uneventful, except children risk being arrested and deported. Whereas France is considered a destination country by unaccompanied minors of different nationalities, Afghan minors generally regard it as a transit country. The circumstances in which children live in Calais when trying to go to the UK are difficult and dangerous with gangs controlling who is allowed on the trucks that go to the UK. The measures taken by France and the UK to tackle irregular migration seem to have made the situation worse for these children (UNHCR, 2010c).

The amount of time it took Afghan children to reach their destination varied considerably (UNICEF, 2010). Some could complete the journey in a number of weeks or a few months, which would mainly apply to those whose complete journey was paid for from the start. In contrast, those Afghan minors, whose journey was paid in instalments and even
more so for those who had to earn money on the way to pay for the journey, took much longer. For them the journey could even take a few years (UNHCR, 2010c).

It is difficult to establish how much contact the children have with their parents as the children feared that by confirming this contact they could be deported. However, the studies seemed to indicate that the boys did have contact with their parents or other relatives, but that this contact depended on the smuggler. The smugglers would put the children in touch with their relatives, so that they could hear from the children that they had reached a particular destination and then the relatives would pay the next part of the journey. In other cases smugglers had taken away the mobile phones of the children (UNHCR, 2010c; UNICEF, 2010). However, in general the contact appears to be limited. Children who did not have contact with their family had contacted the Red Cross in order to trace them (UNICEF, 2010).

4.4 Life in destination country

Once Afghan children arrive in their country of destination they have a definite intention to stay. Previous research on Afghan unaccompanied minors in Western European countries seems to confirm that these minors are determined to stay in the destination country. They express a desire to study, acquire a good job and in general want to fully utilize the opportunities the destination country has to offer. Obtaining a good job was considered very important as most boys have to repay the debt their family made to sponsor the journey and intend to send money to their relatives to support them (UNICEF, 2010).

However, as a result of their uncertain future, children residing in European countries mentioned that they felt anxious and distressed. They had to wait for the outcomes of age tests and asylum applications (UNICEF, 2010). The study conducted in Sweden also reports that many children were distressed for different reasons and suffered from post-traumatic stress disorder, feelings of anxiety and sleeping problems (UNHCR, 2010d). Moreover, previous studies have shown that refugee and asylum seeking minors have mental health problems and these problems are more severe for unaccompanied minors. Moreover, “an enforced return to the home country after a period of over five years may contribute to the children’s developmental damage, as a result of pre-existing vulnerability from their former experiences in the home country, their flight to safety, and the suffering from developmental mental and emotional problems in the host country as a result of the long lasting insecure asylum procedures” (Kalverboer, Zijlstra, & Knorth, 2009, p. 63).
Normally, children are subjected to age assessment tests upon arrival in the destination country, because it is well-known that there are reasons why asylum seekers would report an incorrect age so that they are considered minors (UNHCR, 2010c). However, age tests are assessed differently across the EU. Methods such as checking documents, conducting interviews or medical tests are employed. Even when it comes to medical examinations there is not a standardised approach, but for example dental and bone examinations and radiological tests are used (FRA, 2010). As age tests and their results can have large impacts on a child’s life, a holistic approach is required in which social and medical examinations are combined in order to get more accurate results (UNICEF, 2010).

In terms of their legal position, unaccompanied minors often fall in a migration trap as they are treated as migrants while their needs and vulnerabilities as children are not given much consideration. Most of the time two sets of laws apply to unaccompanied minors: immigration and child-protection laws. However, these minors are often treated first as migrants and not as children. Moreover, as two forms of legislation apply this can result in the children falling “through the bureaucratic traps” (Troller, 2009) as the organisations involved refer the responsibility for these children to each other. As unaccompanied children are underage they are assigned a guardian, but these guardians are many times ineffective or do not have the capacity or power to promote the child’s best interests. Lastly, return is often seen as the easiest solution by governments without taking the child’s best interests into account (Troller, 2009).

“At present, no comprehensive or articulate system exists for the protection of separated, asylum-seeking children in the EU” (FRA, 2010b, p.48) Fortunately, the Stockholm Programme stipulated that an action plan on unaccompanied minors should be created that would provide strands for actions on issues such as prevention, protection and durable solutions. In 2010 the European Commission has written such an action plan for the period 2010-2014 in which the rights and best interests of the child are respected (European Commission, 2010). This may be a positive step towards the improvement of the position of unaccompanied minors in EU member states.
5. Entry, reception and return of unaccompanied minors in the Netherlands

This chapter will provide insight into the Dutch policies and procedures that apply to unaccompanied minors. The different steps unaccompanied minors have to go through once they get to the Dutch border and the organizations they come into contact with will be discussed. A map of the institutional framework of the organisations involved with unaccompanied minors in the Netherlands is provided on the next page in figure 1. In addition, the findings from a research study (FRA, 2010A) on the experiences of separated, asylum-seeking children in 12 European Union member states, including the Netherlands, and the adults who work with or are responsible for these children, are examined.

The first step is entry into the Netherlands, which involves the Dutch government granting unaccompanied minors the permission to enter the Netherlands. The term entry should be distinguished from the term admission, which will be discussed next. Admission concerns the conditions in which foreigners are granted a temporary or permanent residence permit (EMN, 2010). The focus in this section will be on the asylum procedure. After this a brief discussion of the age tests conducted will be given after which the reception of the minors is explained. Subsequently, the legal aid and representation and detention of these minors is described. Finally, the return procedure is discussed. A schematic overview of the asylum process for UAMs is provided on the last page of this section in figure 2.

5.1 Entry at the Dutch border

The most important law that deals with the rules relating to the entry and stay in the Netherlands is the Aliens Act 2000 (Ministry of Justice, 2000) and the amendments to this law, which came into force on 1 July 2010 (Ministry of Justice, 2010a). In addition, the Aliens Act discusses the application for a residence permit and for asylum, the organizations involved, and the return and deportation of aliens in the case their applications are rejected. This law applies to all aliens and no distinction is made in the treatment of unaccompanied and accompanied minors (Ministry of Justice, 2000). The aim of the amendments was to make the asylum procedure faster and more conscientious and to reduce the number of repeated asylum claims. Where applicable the Aliens Act and its amendments will be compared (Spijkerboer, n.d.).
Figure 1. Institutional framework of unaccompanied minors in the Netherlands

**Ministry of Defense**
Policy development, provision of resources and people to Kmar

**Ministry of Justice**
Asylum and migration policies, statistics.

**Ministry of Interior**
Policy development, internal affairs

**Ministry of Foreign Affairs**
Preparation of official country and expert reports

**Royal Constabulary (Kmar)**
Border control, surveillance

**Foundation Nidos**
Representation of minors, arrangement of foster families

**Central Agency for the Reception of Asylum Seekers (COA)**
Reception of asylum seekers

**Repatriation and Departure Service (DT&V)**
Implementation of return policy, coordination of return

**Immigration and Naturalisation Service (IND)**
Implementation of policies regarding foreign nationals (Aliens Act; Netherlands Nationality Act), assessment of aliens' applications.

**Aliens Police**
Supervision of lawful residence of foreign nationals, removal of aliens

**Stichting Duurzame Terugkeer (SDT) (including IOM)**
Non-governmental
Voluntary return and family reunification

**Vluchtelingenwerk**
Non-governmental
Refugee and asylum seekers’ rights, informs aliens of asylum procedure
The organization that is involved with border control and surveillance is the Royal Military Constabulary, which is part of the Ministry of Defence. Therefore, the Kmar is the first organization that unaccompanied minors come in touch with. It observes the Schengen Borders Code (Regulation EP & EC, 2006) and in cases in which this code cannot be applied article 3 of the Aliens Act 2000 states the following reasons for denying an alien entry to the Netherlands:

- The alien does not possess a valid document to cross the border or does possess such a document but the required visa is missing.
- The alien constitutes a danger to public order or national security.
- The alien does not have adequate resources to cover the costs of his/her stay in the Netherlands or his/her journey to a place outside of the Netherlands in the case that entry is guaranteed.
- The person does not meet the conditions laid down by or made by an administrative order.

That same article also stipulates that in the case an alien applies for asylum, entry is at first refused. However, this does not imply that the person is not permitted to submit an asylum application (Ministry of Justice, 2000). When an unaccompanied minor is subjected to an entry ban, the Kmar informs Foundation Nidos which is responsible for the representation of unaccompanied minors. Nidos will then submit a request for the representation of the minor to the court (EMN, 2010).

Different procedures apply for unaccompanied minors who request asylum and those who do not. In the case of the latter, which involve regular unaccompanied minors, the Kmar evaluates whether the minor may be removed from the country and then the responsibility for the minor is transferred to the Repatriation and Departure Service (Dienst Terugmeer en Vertrek, DT&V). This service is involved in the forced departure of those aliens who do not apply for a residence permit. As this study focuses on those unaccompanied minors who are in the Netherlands, the focus will be on the procedure that applies to those who apply for asylum. For these minors the asylum procedure starts after they have received an entry ban (EMN, 2010).

5.2 The asylum process
As was explained above, in the Netherlands the term admission refers to the circumstance in which an alien has a residence permit. For unaccompanied minors this will normally involve
being granted asylum. Therefore, this section will discuss the Dutch policies relating to the asylum process. In the first stages of this process no specific procedure applies to unaccompanied minors and they are treated similar to adults (EMN, 2010).

After an unaccompanied minor, who applied for asylum, has received an entry ban from the Kmar, he/she is brought to the central reception location (centrale ontvangstlocatie, col) in Ter Apel. This is a change from the old procedure where the responsibility of the minor was transferred to the IND. During the intake that takes place at this location the identification of the asylum applicant will be investigated, his/her documents are examined, details are registered and fingerprints are taken. The fingerprints are compared to several databases in order to find out if the asylum seeker is registered as a so-called ‘unwanted foreigner’ or has already applied for asylum before in the Netherlands or in another country. These investigations are conducted by the IND, which is responsible for the assessment of the asylum claim (Ministry of Justice, 2010d).

On the day an asylum request is made the so-called rest-and-preparation period (rusten voorbereidingstermijn, rvt) starts, which lasts a minimum of six days. In a few exceptional circumstances, such as when the alien constitutes a danger to national security, this period is not granted (Ministry of Justice, 2010d). This new aspect of the Aliens Act allows the asylum seeker to prepare for the asylum procedure (Spijkerboer, n.d.). During this time the asylum seeker is offered a medical examination. Moreover, the organisation Vluchtelingenwerk, which defends the rights of asylum seekers and refugees in the Netherlands, informs an asylum seeker about the asylum procedure. Furthermore, a lawyer will prepare the asylum seekers for the procedure. On the second or third day of the rest-and-preparation period the asylum seeker will be transferred from the central reception location to a trial reception location (proces opvanglocatie, pol). This location will be close to the site where his/her asylum procedure will take place. The organisation responsible for the pol is COA. The asylum seeker will stay at this location during the remaining time of his/her rest-and-preparation period and during the asylum procedure, thereby limiting the amount of transfers (Ministry of Justice, 2010d).

The early investigation into any previous asylum applications done by the IND during the rest-and-preparation period is meant to make the asylum procedure more efficient. As a result of the Dublin II regulation (EC, 2001) an asylum seeker can be transferred to another EU member state if he/she first entered the EU as an asylum seeker through that country. When the investigation into the asylum seeker’s identity is conducted early already during the
rest-and-preparation time a request can be made to another state to transfer the asylum seeker to that country (Ministry of Justice, 2010d). As a result of a judgment by the European Court of Human Rights on the case M.S.S. v. Belgium and Greece (2011) no asylum seekers are allowed to be sent back to Greece, due to the unsatisfactory circumstances of the reception conditions and the asylum procedures in that country. This means for the Netherlands that approximately 1950 asylum seekers, who would have been sent back to Greece, are still able to claim asylum in the Netherlands (Rijksoverheid, 2011).

After the rest-and-preparation period has come to an end the asylum procedure starts. This procedure takes eight days and can be extended to 14 days (Ministry of Justice, 2010d). This is an extension of the 48-hours procedure stated in the Aliens Act 2000 (Ministry of Justice, 2000). The aim of the extension is to allow more time for legal aid to asylum seekers, because of which it is expected that more asylum claims can be dealt with during the asylum procedure and an extended procedure is not necessary. It is estimated that this change in the asylum procedure will mean that the procedure takes eight weeks less and asylum seekers will be aware sooner of their position in the Netherlands (Rijksoverheid, 2010a). Two other differences that were the result of the amendments in the Aliens Act implemented in 2010 are that during the asylum procedure medical impediments are dealt with as well as whether the asylum seeker is a victim of trafficking. Under the Aliens Act 2000 the assessment of a (temporary) residence permit on these two grounds was done separately from the asylum procedure. The purposes of these amendments is to prevent repeated asylum claims and shorten the asylum procedure (Ministry of Justice, 2010d; Spijkerboer, n.d.).

On the first day of the asylum procedure a formal asylum application request is submitted and a first cross examination takes place. However, no questions can be asked that relate to the reasons for the asylum claim. On the second day the alien has time to prepare him/herself for the more extensive cross examination that takes place on day three in which the motives for claiming asylum are investigated. On the fourth day further information can be provided by the alien either on his/her own account or as a result of requests by the IND. On the fifth day the asylum seeker will receive the preliminary intention to reject the asylum claim, if this is the intent of the Minister, which allows the asylum seeker to respond to this on the next day. On day eight the decision is made public. In the case the asylum procedure cannot be dealt with in the period of eight days nor during the extension period of 14 days, the asylum claim will be processed in the extended asylum procedure, which can take up to
six months and can still be extended in particular circumstances (Ministry of Justice, 2010d; Spijkerboer, n.d.).

At the IND the assessment of the asylum claim of unaccompanied minors is conducted by a department that is specialised in dealing with these minors. This department is called the Unit for national unaccompanied asylum seekers tasks (Unit Landelijke AMA-taken). This unit is involved in interviewing unaccompanied minors and deciding on the asylum claim. In addition, it deals with all the other applications of unaccompanied minors, such as the extension and withdrawal of residence permits (EMN, 2010). People from this unit are specifically trained in the hearing of minors. As the unit is located in Den Bosch unaccompanied minors will be transferred to a trial reception locations close to Den Bosch (IND, personal communication, 28 February, 2011).

When a minor is at least 14 years old, EURODAC is consulted during the asylum application process to check the details of the minor. Moreover, if there is data on the minor in EURODAC a Dublin claim will be made if the Netherlands is not considered appropriate for the minor (EMN, 2010).

In previous research on unaccompanied minors in 12 European countries, including the Netherlands, the children often complained about the interview process and it was seen as an unpleasant experience. One complaint was that tricky questions were asked that were designed to catch them lying, such as questions about street names which are not used in Afghan villages. In addition, children reported that they would have liked to have a person with them during the interviews that they trusted (FRA, 2010a).

Although the asylum procedure is supposed to be dealt with in that period of eight days, in practice this does not seem the case. The IND mentions that in about 40% of the asylum claims the IND makes a decision within three to five days, whereas in 60% of the cases more time is needed, which normally means approximately six months. The asylum procedure can even take longer if the asylum seekers appeals the decision or an examination is conducted to establish the language or dialect of the asylum seeker, for example (IND, 2011). As appealing the decision of the IND seems quite common practice (this will be discussed in more detail in the discussion section), the asylum procedure often seems to take longer than the eight days it is expected to be.

If the asylum claim is accepted the asylum seeker can stay in a reception centre until he/she turns 18. Then this ex-UAM will decide, together with the guardian and mentor, where he/she can live (Xonar, personal communication, 24 March, 2011). In the case the asylum
claim is rejected the IND will investigate whether the child has adequate reception in the country of origin with family or in a reception facility (IND, 2009). If this is not available, the child can remain in a reception centre in the Netherlands until he becomes 18. From my observations in the campus, the latter is what happens in most of the cases.

5.3 Age tests
If the IND has doubts concerning the reported age of an unaccompanied minor and the minor cannot provide documents that prove his minority, the minor will be informed of the option of having age tests done to establish his/her putative age. Informed consent must be given by the minor for these tests to take place. The tests involve an X-ray of the wrist joints, and if deemed necessary, of the collarbones as well, which are assessed by a radiologist (EMN, 2010). As a result of complaints concerning the age tests, the protocol concerning age testing has gone through several reviews of which the latest was adopted in 2010 (Ministry of Justice, 2010b).

5.4 Reception
After Nidos has been granted the representation of an unaccompanied minor by the court, the organisation has the authorisation to protect the interests of the minor during the application procedure of the residence permit, including the assistance of a lawyer. The main task of Nidos is providing all unaccompanied minors with a guardian. In 2009 the total number of guardianships was 2,641. Over half of all the minors registered at Nidos were between 16 and 18 years old and Afghan young people were the second most represented group. In 2009 Nidos was the guardian of 940 Somalis and 490 Afghans. In addition to providing guardianship Nidos takes care of the reception of minors that are below the age of 13, who are placed in foster families. When placing minors into the care of these families particular attention is given to the cultural background of the minor and these families are screened by Nidos (Nidos, 2010). Research has observed positive reactions from unaccompanied minors about living with foster families and the care and support they receive there (FRA, 2010a).

Minors that are 13 years or older are placed with the Central Agency for the Reception of Asylum Seekers (Centrale Opvang Asielzoekers, COA). There are different options for the reception of unaccompanied minors which depend on the age and the level of development of these minors. They can either be placed in a Child Residential Group (CRG), a Small Residential Unit (SRU), or in a campus. The first consists of a residence in which no
more than 12 unaccompanied minors between the ages of 13 and 17.5 live. In a small residential unit there are at most four unaccompanied minors between the ages of 15 and 17.5 living. A campus is meant only for those minors between the ages of 15 and 18 and has a capacity for 100 minors. All three facilities have 24-hour supervision. Moreover, children are given a mentor who provides them with daily guidance and prepares them for either return or integration (EMN, 2010). COA has 53 campuses in the Netherlands spread around the country (COA, 2011a). The small scale reception in CRGs and SRUs is outsourced to other organisations, the majority of which are youth health organisations (COA, 2011b).

A research study among separated asylum-seeking children found that social workers and guardians of unaccompanied minors were concerned about the conditions on these campuses for these minors. Issues that were raised involved the personal care and support that was not considered enough, especially because there was a lack of places specifically for this target group. Moreover, some minors did not feel safe there. On the other hand, minors in the Child Residential Group and Small Residential Units as well as adults who worked in these small scale centre were more satisfied as they felt that the smaller scale provided more privacy and care and it resulted in more of a “family atmosphere”. Another concern that was expressed by the minors related to the location of the centres. Children argued that the isolated location of the centres made it difficult for them to have contact with locals or with community members, which is important for a child’s development. As a result these children expressed that they felt insecure. Finally, children were distressed about what would happen when they turn 18 as they would probably have to leave the place where they were living, they would not have a guardian anymore and they could be sent back to their country of origin if their asylum claim was refused (FRA, 2010a).

Nidos and COA together are responsible for the daily care of unaccompanied minors and for their education. The most important concern for both organisations is that the amount of transfers these minors have to experience is kept to a minimum. Their decisions on where to place the minor are mainly influenced by his/her age. In addition, the level of development of a minor as well as his/her prospects of either return to the origin country in the case that the asylum request is refused or residence in the Netherlands for the unaccompanied minor when the asylum application is granted.

Minors for whom it is estimated that they will have to return receive guidance so they are better prepared to deal with a rejection of their asylum application. This guidance involves for example an exploration of the steps one needs to take to prepare the return and
training courses that can give practical help regarding job opportunities in the country of origin (EMN, 2010).

In the Netherlands education is mandatory for all minors irrespective of one’s residence status under the Compulsory Education Act 1969 (Ministry of Justice, 1969), except for those in protected reception or in detention (FRA, 2010a). Although an unaccompanied minor could attend regular classes immediately, in practice this is often impossible as the minor first has to learn Dutch. Therefore, unaccompanied minors normally first learn Dutch in special classes before they attend a regular school (EMN, 2010). Research has shown that unaccompanied minors enjoy the opportunity to go to school and are very keen to learn Dutch (FRA, 2010a). Education is free up until the age of 16 when one has to start paying tuition fees. However, COA pays for the tuition fees and school materials, which means that even when an unaccompanied minor turns 16, he/she still has free access to education. Since the school year 2009-2010 the government reimburses the money for the books directly to the schools (COA, personal communication, 12 April, 2011). The responsibility for the education of unaccompanied minors lies in the hands of the municipality where the minor resides, which means that the educational reception of minors can differ per municipality (EMN, 2010).

Unaccompanied minors also receive living allowances. The possibilities minors have to work depend on the type and status of the residence permit process. In the case that the asylum claim is still pending an unaccompanied minor is only permitted to work for 24 weeks a year, whereas this restriction is not applicable to a minor who has been granted asylum. Access to medical care is free and in the case of serious psychiatric and/or behavioural problems the possibility exists of special care services for these minors (EMN, 2010). One difficulty in diagnosing and treating separated, asylum seeking children is the lack of medical records and problems obtaining a medical history from them (FRA, 2010a).

5.5 Victims of trafficking and smuggling

Special procedures apply to (potential) victims of trafficking or smuggling. As a result of disappearances of Indian and Nigerian unaccompanied minors in respectively 2004 and 2006 it was decided that protected reception should be provided to those who are at risk of becoming a victim of exploitation. Therefore, since 2008 a pilot project of two years started in which every unaccompanied minor between the ages of 13 and 18, who applies for asylum and has been identified as running the risk of disappearing, is placed in this special form of
reception. Not only are these minors put under intensive supervision, but they also receive coaching in order to enhance their knowledge concerning trafficking and smuggling and to make them more assertive. Nidos is responsible for the decision to put unaccompanied minors in protected reception (Kromhout et al., 2010).

Although the number of disappearances seems to have decreased as a result of the pilot project, several problems have been identified, such as the unclear definition of the target group and the different approaches of the reception centres concerning the daily care. Moreover, it has become clear that unaccompanied minors are deprived of their liberty by placing them in protection reception and this is against Dutch as well as international law (Kromhout et al., 2010). Research among unaccompanied minors has observed diverse feelings among these minors about the protected reception. For example, some felt safe there whereas others complained that they had not done anything wrong for them to be kept in something that felt as detention (FRA, 2010a).

5.6 Legal aid and representation

Every unaccompanied minor has the right to have legal aid during the asylum and the appeal procedure. In addition, they have to be represented by an adult or a legal person. This is done by the court in the case a minor is not under parental authority nor is represented by a legal person. However, the representation of minor asylum seekers is arranged by Nidos who has to apply for this to the juvenile court. Contact between the minor and a representative from Nidos is established within five days of the minor’s entry to the country. When a minor is below the age of 12, he/she does not have the permission to submit an asylum claim. This is therefore the responsibility of the representative. Another duty of the representative together with the guardian, that is assigned by Nidos to every unaccompanied minor, is the minor’s education and they have to set up a guidance programme (EMN, 2010). In a research study the unaccompanied minors said they were very satisfied with their guardians, the amount of contact they had with them, and the legal representation provided. However, social workers as well as NGOs in the Netherlands complained that the information concerning legal procedures and the manner in which this was communicated to the minors was not child friendly (FRA, 2010a).
5.7 Detention

Unaccompanied minors can be placed in detention or freedom-restricting measures can be imposed. Reasons for which such measures may be employed are the suspicion that the minor will evade return to his/her country of origin or if the minor presents a danger to public order or national security. The agencies who can enforce detention are the Aliens Police and the Kmar. However, care is taken to ensure that this measure is only used in exceptional cases and for the shortest appropriate time period. Moreover, if detention is not necessary on the basis of the principles of proportionality and subsidiarity, it is avoided and other measures are preferred such as a more secure form of reception or the obligation to report. When a minor is detained it has the right to have a lawyer and can appeal the freedom-depriving measure. The detention of unaccompanied minors in the Netherlands is a sensitive topic and one that has been subject of discussion not only in the Netherlands but also internationally (EMN, 2010). Children complained about different aspects of life in these detention facilities, such as that they could not receive Dutch language classes, that adults only talked to them about their return, that guards sometimes shouted at them, that there were not enough activities planned and that the children in general did not know what the rules are (FRA, 2010a).

5.8 Return of unaccompanied minors

In the Netherlands the aim is for those aliens, who have not been granted a residence permit, to leave the country and to prevent them from disappearing and becoming illegal. When an unaccompanied minor’s application for asylum is refused, he/she has to leave the Netherlands. If the return takes place before the minor turns 18, the independence of the minor is evaluated in order to establish if he/she is able to adequately provide for his/her own subsistence. If the minor is not considered to be sufficiently independent, the IND assesses whether the minor can count on adequate reception in the country of origin with family or whether other adequate options, such as a shelter, are available. One of the measures that may be used in this context is tracing in order to find the family of the minor in the country of origin. If this is not possible, the minor has the right to stay in a reception centre until he/she turns 18 (EMN, 2010).

Due to the Dutch policies it is considered important that the minor returns before turning 18 as the coming of age results in the end of the reception conditions. Therefore the Repatriation and Departure Service (DT&V) gives priority to unaccompanied minors by guiding them extensively during the preparations for their return (EMN, 2010).
All asylum seekers, whose applications are refused, have a period of 28 days within which they must leave the country. During this time they can stay in a reception centre. Although the Dutch policy is based on the alien being personally responsible for his/her departure, they can receive help from different institutions and are provided with information concerning agencies that can aid them. The DT&V helps them prepare for their (forced) return (EMN, 2010).

In the case of voluntary return the minor can receive assistance from the Stichting Duurzame Terugkeer (Foundation for Sustainable Return, SDT). This is a cooperation between nine different organisations, including the IOM and Nidos, which supports ex-asylum seekers in their return to and reintegration in their country of origin. This is achieved by a person in-kind fund that can be used for various purposes, such as education and guidance in the setting up of a company. It is a pilot project that started on 1 February 2010 (Research voor beleid, n.d.).

Support can also be provided by the IOM through the Return and Emigration of Aliens from the Netherlands Scheme (REAN), with which the organisation can assist an unaccompanied minor who has turned 18 in the Netherlands in several ways, including providing them with information about return, financial support, guidance to Schiphol, and making contact with the family or organisations with which the ex-minor will reside in the country of origin. Moreover, the IOM can assist in the reception and reintegration in the country of origin (IOM, 2010c). More information on the assistance provided by IOM to Afghan unaccompanied minors will be provided in the next section.

After 28 days have passed they are transferred to a freedom-restricting centre where they are prepared for their departure. If the alien refuses to return voluntary, he/she can be put in a so-called House of detention (Huis van Bewaring), although in the case of unaccompanied minors this measure is only taken in exceptional circumstances (as has been discussed above). If it is expected that the unaccompanied minor will resist the return he/she will be accompanied by the Kmar during the return to the country of origin (Rijksoverheid, 2010b).

It seems that the amount of UAMs that return to their country of origin is limited. Although the DT&V does not make distinctions in their annual report on the basis of age or nationality, the report does make clear that only a limited percentage of the outflow was under supervision of the DT&V. In 2009 the outflow of foreigners amounted 13,000. Of these only 1,000 left independently and around 4,000 were compelled to leave. This means
that only 38.5% of the foreigners left under guidance of the DT&V. Another 5,000 aliens left without supervision, meaning that the DT&V does not have an indication as to where they are. Around 3,000 cases involve new applications for admission to the Netherlands or the individuals have received a permit to stay (DT&V, 2010).

Moreover, although there are several voluntary return programmes offered by the IOM of which some even are specifically aimed at minors, in practice not many UAMs make use of the return programmes that are available for them. These IOM programmes and the number of Afghans that participated in them will be discussed in the next section. Another indication that the number of returns is limited was mentioned above, namely that most minors stay in a reception centre until they become 18, as there does not appear to be adequate reception in the country of origin. In a letter from the Ministry of Foreign affairs (2010) addressed to the Parliament it was stated that the government would like to work together with the British and Norwegian government to create an institute in Afghanistan where returning Afghan children can receive an education that will help them to find a job and to sustain themselves. If this institute would be implemented it could mean that more minors will be required to return.

5.9 IOM assistance

Unaccompanied minors from Afghanistan have several options of assistance by the IOM. General support, that is provided to everyone who applies for voluntary return assistance at the IOM, consists of the following: return information and advice; assistance in acquiring travel documents including the purchase of a flight ticket and contribution towards the travel costs; help with tracing family; assistance at Schiphol and at the airport in the country of return; transfer to family or reception organisation; and a financial contribution of 500 Euros (IOM, 2008).

One project is specifically aimed at Unaccompanied Minor Foreign Nationals (UMFNs) and those who have been Unaccompanied Minor Asylum Seekers (ex-UAMs). This project, which started in July 2008, is meant for those unaccompanied foreign nationals who arrived in the Netherlands before they were 18 and are below the age of 25 when they request return assistance from the IOM. In addition to the general assistance one receives from the IOM the UMFNs and ex-UAMs receive additional help. The main focus is to help them with their reintegration in their country of origin. For this reason they receive up to 2500 Euros in the form of help not cash, with which they can work on their future, such as
setting up a business or going to school. Furthermore, they can receive help with the translation of documents before their return and with language courses in a language that is relevant in the country of origin either in the Netherlands or upon return. (IOM, 2008). In the case a person is still under 18, suitable reception needs to be found. However, a minor cannot receive guidance from the IOM if no family is available in the country origin who is willing to take care of the person. Anyone who is considering to voluntary return with the IOM can go to a consultation hour within which further appointments can be made to plan the return and reintegration. When drawing up a future plan attention is being paid to how realistic the plan is, the resources that are needed and the time it will take to execute it. A distinction is made between the assistance to UMFNs and to ex-UAMs, because for the former permission is necessary from the guardians (IOM, personal communication, 26 January, 2011).

In addition to the UAM project, ex-UAMs can also apply for the Return and Reintegration Regulation (Herintegratie Regeling Terugkeer, HRT) that was implemented in 2010. This is a form of additional assistance to migrants who have applied for asylum in the Netherlands. Migrants, including ex-UAMs, who satisfy certain conditions, receive a financial contribution of €1,750 (IOM, 2010b). Ex-UAMs therefore have the option of applying for the HRT or for the UAM project.

Lastly, in 2009 a project was started by IOM Afghanistan specifically for the reception and reintegration of Afghan nationals. In terms of reception Afghan returnees are helped with issues such as onward transportation, temporary accommodation and information about the country. The reintegration support consists of €800 in cash and up to 3000 Euros in kind which can be invested in a reintegration plan the Afghan returnee has. Moreover, the returnee receives counselling in which his/her reintegration interests and needs are assessed. IOM Afghanistan offers educational training and vocational courses for those who are interested and help with setting up a business (IOM, 2009). Once again, one can only partake in one project and in general UAMs and ex-UAMs are assisted under the UAM project.

Over the years IOM has assisted thousands of people to return to their country of origin. In table 1 an overview is given of the number and percentage of Afghans that have returned with the assistance of the IOM over the last six years. Over the years the number and percentage of Afghans that were assisted by the IOM with their return decreased, although an increase is noticeable again in 2010 (IOM, 2010a). In 2010 of the 56 Afghans that returned, nine took part in the UAM project of which four were minors and five ex-UAMs. In addition,
23 were assisted on the basis of the Afghanistan project and 19 returned under the HRT (IOM, personal communication, 26 January, 2011).

Table 1. Number and percentage of Afghans assisted by IOM from 2005-2010

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>2005</th>
<th>2006</th>
<th>2007</th>
<th>2008</th>
<th>2009</th>
<th>2010</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of Afghans</td>
<td>282</td>
<td>158</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of total returns</td>
<td>8.1%</td>
<td>5.5%</td>
<td>2.5%</td>
<td>0.8%</td>
<td>0.9%</td>
<td>1.8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: IOM, 2010a
Figure 2. The Dutch asylum process for unaccompanied minors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time period</th>
<th>The asylum process for the minor</th>
<th>Activities undertaken by other organisations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Arrival</td>
<td>UAM is received by Kmar</td>
<td>Kmar informs Nidos</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rest-and-preparation period of 6 working days</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Day 1</td>
<td>Period starts when asylum claim is submitted</td>
<td>IND conducts preliminary inquiry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Minor is brought to central reception location.</td>
<td>COA investigates which trial reception location is most convenient (protected reception for (potential) victims of trafficking or smuggling)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>If minor is &lt;13, Nidos arranges foster family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RTV day 2 or 3 until day 6</td>
<td>Minor is brought to trial reception location</td>
<td>Nidos and COA arrange daily care and education of minors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Minor prepares for asylum procedure and receives advice from lawyer and Vluchtelingenwerk</td>
<td>Nidos also arranges a guardian for each minor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asylum procedure starts of 8 working days¹</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Day 1</td>
<td>First hearing with IND regarding identity, nationality and travel route of minor</td>
<td>Day 5  Preliminary decision is provided</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Day 2</td>
<td>Preparation second hearing</td>
<td>Day 6  UAM can respond to decision</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Day 3</td>
<td>Second hearing, which concerns the reasons for the asylum claim</td>
<td>Day 7  IND assesses asylum claim</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Day 4</td>
<td>UAM can correct or add to the information discussed during the second hearing</td>
<td>Day 8  Asylum decision is made public</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final decision which should be made by the IND within six months</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asylum claim is accepted</td>
<td>Minor receives residence permit</td>
<td>OR</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asylum claim is rejected</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Option 1: Appeal the decision of the IND</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Option 2: Stay in reception centre until turning 18</td>
<td>This is possible if IND has assessed that minor is not sufficiently independent and there is no adequate reception in the country of origin</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Option 3: Return home involuntarily</td>
<td>Help from DT&amp;V. If minor has not left the Netherlands after 28 days, he/she is moved to freedom-restricting centre before being deported</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Option 4: Return home voluntarily</td>
<td>Guidance by Stichting Duurzame Terugkeer</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

¹ If more time is required → The asylum procedure can take a maximum of 14 working days. However, further extensions are possible.
6. The situation of Afghans and Afghan UAMs in the Netherlands

In this section a general overview of the situation of all Afghans in the Netherlands will be provided in which the main focus will be on the facts and numbers relating to Afghans, Afghan immigrants and asylum applications. In addition, one particular group of Afghans, namely the unaccompanied minors, will be discussed in more detail. Insights will be given into the number of Afghan unaccompanied minors that enter and apply for asylum in the Netherlands, the amount of asylum claims that are rejected, the ethnicity, gender and age of these minors and the number of disappearances.

6.1 Afghans in the Netherlands

As was mentioned in the section on Afghanistan, the overwhelming majority of Afghan refugees has gone to Pakistan and Iran. This is also demonstrated in the table below, which shows the total Afghan refugee population in five countries of destination at the end of 2000, 2005 and 2009. It also indicates the number of asylum applications made by Afghans in five destination countries in the same years. Within Europe most Afghan refugees went to Germany, but especially in the early 2000s many Afghan refugees were residing in the Netherlands and the number of asylum applications was relatively large.

Table 2. Refugees and asylum seekers from Afghanistan in five countries of destination

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pakistan</td>
<td>2,000,000</td>
<td>1,084,208</td>
<td>1,739,935</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1,450</td>
<td>1,178</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iran</td>
<td>1,482,000</td>
<td>920,248</td>
<td>1,022,494</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>31,055</td>
<td>30,320</td>
<td>5,380</td>
<td>711</td>
<td>3,375</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Netherlands</td>
<td>23,629</td>
<td>25,086</td>
<td>9,383</td>
<td>5,055</td>
<td>902</td>
<td>1,281</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
<td>5,675</td>
<td>22,532</td>
<td>23,658</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>3,540</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: UNHCR, 2006; UNHCR, 2010b

In 2010 a total of 38,664 Afghans were registered in the Netherlands. Although they are residing throughout the country, they can mainly be found in the four largest cities. In Amsterdam a total of 3,552 Afghans are registered, in Rotterdam there are 2,897 Afghans, in The Hague 2,062 and in Utrecht 1,145. Also in Eindhoven many Afghans are living amounting to a total of 1,124. In terms of their economic position, data from 2007 are available which report the (un)employment condition of Afghans in the Netherlands. In 2007
there were 25,900 Afghans between the ages of 15 and 65 residing in the Netherlands of which 42.6% were employed and 31.2% was receiving social benefits (CBS, 2010).

In the Netherlands the word ‘allochtoon’ is used for every person who is not originally Dutch. A distinction is made between first and second-generation allochtonen. A first generation immigrant is a person who lives in the Netherlands but was born in a different country, whereas a second-generation immigrant is born in the Netherlands but at least one of his/her parents was born abroad. In 2010 out of the 38,664 Afghans residing in the Netherlands 31,060 were first generation Afghans and 7,604 second generation. In table 3 below an overview is given of the inflow of Afghan immigrants during a ten-year period starting in 1999. As becomes clear, until 2001, when the US-led intervention started, the number of Afghan immigrants that entered the Netherlands was large. From 2002 the amount of Afghans migrating to the Netherlands decreases, only to increase again 2009. In terms of the gender of the immigrants, until 2001 and in 2009 when the inflow of immigrants was large, the amount of female immigrants was lower than that of men, after which the pattern changed and women in some years even outnumbered men. The last characteristic of Afghan immigrants that is demonstrated in the table is their age and it becomes clear that the immigrants are young with a large share of them being below the age of 20 (CBS, 2010).

Table 3. Total inflow of Afghan immigrants between 1999 and 2009

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Men</th>
<th>Women</th>
<th>0-20 years</th>
<th>20-65 years</th>
<th>65+</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1999</td>
<td>5506</td>
<td>3218</td>
<td>2288</td>
<td>2515</td>
<td>2887</td>
<td>104</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>4610</td>
<td>2724</td>
<td>1886</td>
<td>2173</td>
<td>2387</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>4473</td>
<td>2631</td>
<td>1842</td>
<td>2039</td>
<td>2375</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>2824</td>
<td>1562</td>
<td>1262</td>
<td>1329</td>
<td>1448</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>1838</td>
<td>917</td>
<td>921</td>
<td>864</td>
<td>942</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>865</td>
<td>358</td>
<td>507</td>
<td>351</td>
<td>501</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>773</td>
<td>288</td>
<td>485</td>
<td>312</td>
<td>443</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>648</td>
<td>273</td>
<td>375</td>
<td>238</td>
<td>400</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>521</td>
<td>251</td>
<td>270</td>
<td>139</td>
<td>369</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>620</td>
<td>313</td>
<td>307</td>
<td>133</td>
<td>478</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>1094</td>
<td>615</td>
<td>479</td>
<td>371</td>
<td>706</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: CBS, 2010

The next table shows the number of Afghan asylum seekers in the Netherlands. The number included in the column total asylum applications includes first asylum claims as well as subsequent asylum requests. The majority of the asylum applications were done by Afghan
men. That many young Afghans come to the Netherlands becomes apparent when observing the percentage of Afghan minors that applies for asylum, which is around 40% (CBS, 2010).

Table 4. Afghan asylum applications on the basis of gender and age from 2007 till 2010

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Total asylum applications</th>
<th>Men</th>
<th>Women</th>
<th>% below 18</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>520</td>
<td>340</td>
<td>180</td>
<td>30.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>700</td>
<td>480</td>
<td>230</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>1400</td>
<td>1010</td>
<td>390</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>1590</td>
<td>1110</td>
<td>480</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: CBS, 2010

In 2010 of the 1590 asylum applications, 1360 were first applications. Thereby Afghans came third place in terms of the number of first asylum applications with applications from Somalia and Iraq taking the first and second place, respectively (IND, 2010a). In the first half of 2010 almost 42% of all the asylum applications that were dealt with were accepted with most of them being accepted on the grounds of article three of the European Convention on Human Rights. Unfortunately, data per nationality are not available (Ministry of Justice, 2010c). Furthermore, in 2010 Afghanistan was in fourth place behind Morocco, Turkey and Iraq with regard to the number of naturalisation requests. A total of 670 Afghans applied for this (IND, 2010b).

6.2 Afghan unaccompanied minors in the Netherlands

In the European study on Afghan minors it was found that the Netherlands is a destination country to Afghan minors. It was found that most of the Afghans in the Netherlands were Tajiks or Hazaras and that many of the Tajiks came to the Netherlands because they reported having family in this country. Nevertheless, this study also found that the Netherlands is considered a transit country for those who are on their way to Scandinavia (UNHCR, 2010c). In a Dutch study on irregular (former) unaccompanied minors a relatively large number of Afghan minors intended to go to Scandinavia, but were detained at the border with Belgium or Germany (Staring & Aarts, 2010).

In the last few years Afghan minors have become the largest group of unaccompanied minors in the Netherlands. In January there were 748 Afghan unaccompanied minors in a COA reception centre (COA, personal communication, 13 January, 2011). What is striking is the sudden increase in the inflow of UAMs from Afghanistan. From 2000 until 2007 the
highest position Afghan UAMs had was the fifth place with most years not even appearing in the top 5. However, in 2008 they suddenly came fifth place and in 2009 and 2010 the largest number of UAMs were Afghans with over 300 Afghan UAMs entering each year and constituting over one-third of all UAMs that were received by COA (see table 5). This is probably the result of the increased violence in the country that was discussed in the Afghanistan section. The top five from the IND is quite similar (see table 6), although Afghanistan is second place in 2009 instead of first place as in the data from COA. The differences in the information from the IND and COA are the result of the distinct ways in which the two organisations record the inflow of unaccompanied minors. The IND registers the number of asylum requests, whereas COA records the UAMs that are in a reception centre. In the past, when the 48-hours procedure was still in place, asylum claims could have already been processed before a minor was transferred to a reception centre. In the case that the asylum request was rejected a minor would have been registered by the IND, but not by COA. Since the new asylum procedure in July 2010 everyone who claims asylum is first brought to the central reception location of COA, which means that the numbers from the two organizations should be much more similar (COA, personal communication, 12 April, 2011).

Table 5. Top 5 of inflow of UAMs 2000-2010

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Sum others</th>
<th>Total sum</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>Angola 903</td>
<td>China 818</td>
<td>Guinea 485</td>
<td>Sierra Leone 462</td>
<td>Somalia 311</td>
<td>2,979</td>
<td>1,575</td>
<td>4,554</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>Angola 1,487</td>
<td>Sierra Leone 417</td>
<td>Guinea 401</td>
<td>China 296</td>
<td>Afghanistan 198</td>
<td>3,159</td>
<td>1,275</td>
<td>4,434</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>Angola 824</td>
<td>Sierra Leone 298</td>
<td>China 162</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1,284</td>
<td>1,438</td>
<td>2,722</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>Iraq 121</td>
<td>Angola 106</td>
<td>China 97</td>
<td>Somalia 63</td>
<td>Sierra Leone 57</td>
<td>444</td>
<td>593</td>
<td>1,037</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>India 63</td>
<td>China 55</td>
<td>Somalia 34</td>
<td>Iraq 27</td>
<td>Afghanistan 26</td>
<td>205</td>
<td>258</td>
<td>463</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>India 93</td>
<td>China 74</td>
<td>Iraq 37</td>
<td>Somalia 32</td>
<td>Afghanistan 17</td>
<td>253</td>
<td>172</td>
<td>425</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>Somalia 51</td>
<td>Iraq 50</td>
<td>India 46</td>
<td>Nigeria 38</td>
<td>China 20</td>
<td>205</td>
<td>118</td>
<td>323</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>Somalia 107</td>
<td>Angola 101</td>
<td>Iraq 51</td>
<td>Nigeria 48</td>
<td>Guinea 43</td>
<td>350</td>
<td>319</td>
<td>669</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>Somalia</td>
<td>Iraq</td>
<td>Afghanistan</td>
<td>China</td>
<td>Guinea</td>
<td>572</td>
<td>173</td>
<td>745</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 6. Top 5 of origin countries UAMs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>2006</th>
<th>2007</th>
<th>2008</th>
<th>2009</th>
<th>2010</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Iraq</td>
<td>Somalia</td>
<td>Somalia</td>
<td>Somalia</td>
<td>Afghanistan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Somalia</td>
<td>Iraq</td>
<td>Iraq</td>
<td>Afghanistan</td>
<td>Somalia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Nigeria</td>
<td>Nigeria</td>
<td>Afghanistan</td>
<td>Iraq</td>
<td>Guinea</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>India</td>
<td>India</td>
<td>China</td>
<td>Guinea</td>
<td>Iraq</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>China</td>
<td>China</td>
<td>Guinea</td>
<td>Eritrea</td>
<td>Eritrea</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: IND, personal communication, 28 February, 2011

Another observation is the difference between the top 5 of UAMs and of all asylum seekers in terms of inflow and reception. Whereas Afghans are in first place in 2010, they are third place (behind Somalia and Iraq) when looking at the entire population of asylum seekers (Ministry of Justice, 2010c). This can be explained by the fact that Afghan UAMs comprise between 17% and 25% of all asylum requests made by Afghans in the Netherlands and by the fact that they make up a large part of all the UAMs, which is shown in the table below (IND, personal communication, 28 February, 2011). The UNHCR reports that 55% of the asylum applications made by unaccompanied children in general are refused (2010b). The IND was not able to provide more detailed information on this.

Table 7. Inflow of Afghan UAMs 2006 – Jan 2011

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Afghan UAMs</th>
<th>Total nr UAMs</th>
<th>Total nr Afghan asylum seekers</th>
<th>% of total Afghan asylum seekers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>410</td>
<td>932</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>433</td>
<td>156</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>726</td>
<td>395</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>322</td>
<td>1039</td>
<td>1281</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>246</td>
<td>701</td>
<td>1364</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jan 2011</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: IND, personal communication, 28 February, 2011

When looking at the characteristics of the Afghan minors that reside in a COA reception centre it becomes apparent that almost all of them are boys with Afghan girls comprising only 8% of the Afghan UAMs. In terms of age most of them are between 15 and
17 years old with the largest group reporting to be 16 years old (table 8). The European-wide study by the UNHCR has found that the ethnic background of Afghan boys in the Netherlands is mainly Tajik or Hazara (UNHCR, 2010c).

Table 8. Gender and age of Afghan UAMs, 2000-2010

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1-11</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>123</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>137</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>314</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>334</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>531</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>566</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>237</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>249</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>1,361</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>1,481</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: COA, personal communication, 17 February, 2011

On average the amount of time a UAM spends in a COA reception centre seem to be three years (see table 9). However, the last few years it has decreased substantially, from almost three years in 2006 to about 1.5 years in 2010. This can be explained by a lower inflow of UAMS, which in general results in a faster completion of the asylum procedure. Several developments have led to this, including the Aliens Act 2000 which made migration laws stricter, the general pardon rule that was implemented in 2007 and which allowed asylum seekers that had applied for asylum before 1 April 2001 to stay in the Netherlands (certain restrictions applied) and lastly the amendments to the Aliens Act implemented in 2010 (COA, personal communication, 12 April, 2011). The average length of stay should not be equated with the length of the asylum procedure, as UAMs are allowed to stay in an asylum centre until they are 18 if they cannot be sent back to their country of origin. Unfortunately, the IND could not provide the information on the length of the asylum procedure.

Table 9. Average length of stay of UAMs in a COA reception centre at 1 Jan 2000-2011

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Average length of stay in months</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>21.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>30.55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>34.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>37.60</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Around one quarter of the Afghan unaccompanied minor asylum seekers disappear within three months after they applied for asylum. The general assumption is that they have left for Scandinavia, because that was their intended destination and/or because they had expressed that they wanted to go to Scandinavia. The asylum application in the Netherlands serves as a sort of safety measure in the case they are deported (UNHCR, 2010c). As a result of the Dublin II agreement Afghan minors who are then arrested somewhere in Europe would be sent back to the Netherlands instead of to Greece for example (Council Regulation (EC) No 343/2003). It may also be the case that they are still in the Netherlands but irregularly. In the table below the number of disappearances of the most common nationalities of minors that disappear are listed and the total of all disappearances. What is apparent is that in 2009 relatively many Afghans disappeared although they are hardly placed in protected reception. However, this seems related to the recent large increase of Afghan UAMs (Kromhout et al., 2010).

Table 10. Disappearances from UAM campuses from 2005-2009 from six nationalities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year of disappearance</th>
<th>India</th>
<th>Nigeria</th>
<th>China</th>
<th>Afghanistan</th>
<th>Iraq</th>
<th>Somalia</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>213</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>143</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>156</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>533</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Kromhout et al., 2010
7. Methodology

In this study a combination of various research methods was employed. A wide range of information resources was consulted including academic journals and websites of the government and of non-governmental organisations. These sources provided insights into previous research that is conducted on Afghan unaccompanied minors and the (legal) situation that they will encounter upon arrival in the Netherlands. It has proven difficult to acquire statistical information on this subject. As Afghan UAMs are a specific group that requires data on the country of origin and the age of asylum seekers, information was often unavailable either due to the level of detail required or the information was not publicly available. Furthermore, the IND is setting up a new information system and consequently it is difficult to acquire current information (Ministry of Justice, 2010c).

The insights acquired through consulting various information resources were complemented by the knowledge gained by conducting interviews with various stakeholders and Afghan unaccompanied minors and through participant observation. These two methods will be discussed in more detail.

Interviews were conducted with the following organisations: COA, Xonar, IND, and IOM. The aims of these interviews were manifold. All organisations were of assistance in providing me with more statistical details about Afghan unaccompanied minors and with their view on the background and experiences of these minors in Afghanistan, during their journey and in the Netherlands. More detailed information on the interviews with stakeholders will follow below. Due to the sensitivity of the topic and/or the type of work done by the various stakeholders it is not possible to provide a list of interviewed persons. Instead only the positions of the persons interviewed and the organisations they work for are mentioned.

First an interview was conducted with the project manager of COA to discuss the work of the organisation and the possibility to conduct research there. During this meeting it was decided to focus on one UAM campus with relatively many Afghans for my interviews and participant observation. In this centre 82 minors were being accommodated and 31 of them were Afghans. At the campus I conducted one interview with the UAM coordinator and a staff member of which the main purpose was to discuss my interest in conducting interviews there. In addition, they provided me with information about life on this campus. One other official interview was conducted with a mentor. All the other conversations I had with various mentors were part of the participant observation I did at this campus. These
conversations provided me with information from mentors on the daily life of minors in a campus and on the image mentors have of the behaviour and background of Afghan minors, their motivations to come to the Netherlands, their journey to the Netherlands and their situation here. As mentors tend to have intensive contact with the minors, a relationship of trust can be built up. Therefore it is likely that these mentors have more reliable and elaborate information about Afghan minors that is a valuable contribution to the interviews I conducted myself with the children. Furthermore, the mentors could help in guiding my interpretation of the observations I made during my time at the campus.

Xonar is an organisation in the south of Limburg that offers help with the upbringing of children and it helps women who are experiencing difficulties and/or are the victim of domestic violence. Moreover, Xonar provides accommodation for and guidance to UAMs. In contrast to the campus accommodation provided by COA, at Xonar minors live in small residential units or in children residential groups (Xonar, 2011). Thereby, the interviews conducted at Xonar gave me insights on a different type of reception for these minors. Moreover, it broadened my research base. At this location I also conducted one official interview with the team leader of the UAM department in order to gain permission to conduct interviews with minors at Xonar. In addition, two interviews were conducted with mentors.

One interview was conducted with three (senior) policy officers/advisors from the IND. As the IND is the organisation which decides on the asylum claims, the IND could provide me not only with more information about the asylum procedure, but also could inform me of their image of Afghan UAMs in the Netherlands, including their motivations to leave Afghanistan and their journey. Lastly, a project officer of the IOM offered me more information on the voluntary return programmes that exist for minors.

In addition to interviews with various stakeholders, 15 interviews were conducted with Afghan unaccompanied minors. The main goal of these interviews was to gain more knowledge on the problems Afghan unaccompanied minors face in their countries of origin, their journey and their situation in the Netherlands. The majority of minors who were interviewed was residing in the UAM campus in Baexem. This centre was selected not only because of the largest amount of Afghan unaccompanied children living there, but also because the focus on one centre made it possible to establish more trust between the children and the researcher. The latter point will be discussed in more detail in the next paragraph. In addition, three interviews were conducted with minors at Xonar. At the time of the interviews approximately 15 minors were residing in the different Xonar accommodation centres of
which two were girls. At the location where I conducted the interviews, seven of the 14 residents were Afghan.

Due to time constraints it was not possible to arrange with Nidos interviews with children that had been placed in foster families. Nidos could not provide exact numbers on the number of Afghans in a foster family. The only data available is that in 2009 there were 840 children in a foster family (Nidos, 2010). Moreover, no interviews were conducted with Afghans in protected reception, mainly because Afghans are not a risk group (Kromhout et al., 2010).

Unfortunately, it was difficult to find subjects for the interviews. The main reason was the language barrier. As I did not have access to an interpreter, I was only able to conduct interviews with Afghans that could speak sufficiently Dutch and/or English to have a conversation with. Another reason was that UAMs tend to be distrustful of others. In my case this distrust is likely to be explained by their fear of the connection I could have to the IND, which would mean that I would have an influence on their asylum claim. One of the minors that I interviewed even told me that groups of Afghans had discussed whether I would be from the IND. He thought this fear might also have to do with the fact that in Afghanistan it is very uncommon for people to go to university. Therefore for them it is strange that a university student would do a research study about them. A final reason why Afghan children did not want to participate was that they had already been through several interviews with the IND and were not interested in being part of more, especially because they could not see the benefit for them to participate.

The final method employed in this research was participant observation. I spent over 80 hours at the UAM campus in Baexem. During this time the day-to-day situation of unaccompanied minors who live in such a campus was observed and their experiences with this life were investigated. Furthermore, the contact that was established with the Afghan minors helped in developing a relationship of trust between the minors and I, which increased the quality of the interviews.

The strong qualitative approach of this study was considered to be the most suitable for this research as it allowed for the investigation of the life stories of the Afghan children and to explore their thoughts and feelings regarding their situation in Afghanistan and the Netherlands and their journey to the Netherlands. Moreover, due to the sensitivity of the information, only individual interviews were conducted and permission had to be granted to the researcher from the two organisations at which the interviews were conducted, from the
children’s guardian and from their mentors. The confidentiality and anonymity of all participants was respected throughout the study and especially the children were reassured about this and had to consent to being interviewed.

The study faces the following limitations. Only a small number of Afghan children were interviewed which limits the generalizability of the findings of this research. In addition, only those children were interviewed who applied for asylum and were living in two accommodation centres. Therefore, this study is not representative of those Afghan children who have not applied for asylum, are not registered, and/or are not residing in these asylum centres. Also only children who were available, could speak English or Dutch sufficiently to have a conversations with, were interested in being interviewed and gave consent were included in this study. This could indicate a selection bias.

Other limitations refer to the kind of information that was provided by the children. The responses that Afghan minors gave during the interviews may not be completely accurate. Their responses can be influenced by the contact they have had with people such as relatives, smugglers and persons they came into contact with in the Netherlands. Moreover, language problems proved to be an issue not only in the selection of participants but also during the interviews as well.

Another factor that could have affected the quality of the interviews is stress. Not only as a result of the children’s experiences, but also because of the interview situation. However, the latter source of stress was limited as much as possible. No recorder was used as this could be associated with an interview by the IND. Instead, a more relaxed and natural atmosphere was sought in which to conduct the interviews. For that reason, almost all the interviews were conducted in the rooms of the children. The only interviews that were recorded were the one with the IND and one of the interviews with a mentor.

The analysis of the interviews depended to a certain extent on the way the interviews were conducted. As the interviews with the minors were not recorded, notes were taken during the interviews and elaborated immediately after each interview to make sure all the issues that were discussed were written down. These notes were then processed using the interview guide as the structure for the individual case reports. This structure aided significantly in the analysis of the interviews. A different procedure was used for the interviews that were recorded. These interviews were transcribed and afterwards categorized and sorted, which made it possible to pull all the information together about a certain topic. Most of the coding that was employed was concept-driven as it was based on the issues
discussed in the literature review and the interview guide. Open coding was only employed when parts of the interviews discussed a certain issue that was not covered by the pre-determined codes. The framework that was used to integrate the analysis into one coherent story was achieved by comparing the data from the interviews with the children to those interviews conducted with mentors and other stakeholders as well as with the knowledge gained through participants observation and during the literature review. The triangulation of research methods helped to ensure the validity and reliability of the study. One important advantage of using this framework was that the comparison of the knowledge gained from the interviews with those issues covered in previous research, made it clear what this study complemented to the research on Afghan UAMs.

8. Discussion of the results
In this section the findings from the interviews and the participant observation will be discussed. The structure of the results is largely similar to the structure of the chapter on the background of Afghan minors. The exception is the section on the experiences of minors in the Netherlands as this has not been the focus of previous research and was therefore not covered in such detail in chapter four. Therefore, this chapter starts with an analysis of the characteristics of Afghan unaccompanied minors in the Netherlands after which their motivations for leaving Afghanistan (or Iran) are discussed. Next, the journey will be dealt with and the section will end with the situation and experiences of these minors in the Netherlands. Each part intends to provide a complete picture of the situation of Afghan children in the sense that the answers given by the minors will be complemented with the knowledge gained through participants observation and through the interviews with stakeholders. Moreover, these results are compared with the findings of previous research, so as to provide an indication of the extent to which the results match with, differ or complement previous studies. As no recorder was used during the interviews with the minors and almost all interviews were conducted in Dutch, no literal quotations will be given.

8.1 Characteristics of Afghan unaccompanied minors in the Netherlands
The characteristics that will be discussed are the gender, age, ethnicity, family situation, economic situation and their level of education. An overview of these characteristics is presented in table 11 below. The number of children in a family is presented as an indication
of the family size. The economic situation of the children is shown in terms of the education of the father. In addition, it is indicated whether the child worked. Therefore, the numbers mentioned in the table do not necessarily total the number of cases it represents. Furthermore, a distinction is made between those children that had been living in Afghanistan and Iran as their economic situation differed substantially. This will be discussed in more detail below. With regard to education a distinction is made on the basis of the school level a child attained. In Afghanistan primary school lasts for six years, classes seven until nine are lower secondary school and ten to twelve involve upper secondary education (Ministry of Education of Afghanistan, 2008).

Table 11. Characteristics of interviewed Afghan minors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>14</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>17</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnicity</td>
<td>Hazara</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Pashtun</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Tajik</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Sadat</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family size</td>
<td>Two</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Three</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>More than 3</td>
<td>8</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economic situation in Afghanistan (10 cases)</td>
<td>Store</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Farmer</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Business</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Child worked as translator</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economic situation in Iran (5 cases)</td>
<td>Child worked on streets</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Child worked in factory</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Electrician (Child at home)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nr of years at school</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>up to six years</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7 - 9</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>10 - 12</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The first characteristic that will be discussed is gender. Of the 31 Afghans residing in the UAM campus only one was female and she had travelled together with her brother. At Xonar of the 15 Afghans residing two were females. Also during the interview with the IND it was mentioned that a large majority of Afghan minors are boys. The large amount of boys among Afghan unaccompanied minors is in accordance with the findings from previous studies (UNHCR, 2010c; UNHCR, 2010d, UNICEF, 2010). The finding that if girls come to Europe they are normally accompanied by an (older) brother is also in accordance with research studies, because girls have to be accompanied by an adult male relative (UNICEF, 2010).

In terms of age, the range lies between 15 and 18. Of the 15 persons that were interviewed two were 15, four were 16, eight were 17 years old and one had already turned
18. This is also in accordance with the view of the IND that the average age is between 15 and 18. The data seem to be similar to previous research in which it was found that the age of the majority of Afghan boys was reported to be either 16 or 17 (UNHCR, 2010c; UNICEF, 2010). However, mentors at the campus and at Xonar argued that the actual age of the unaccompanied asylum seekers is higher with most estimating the minors to be in their early twenties. Mentors at both locations even talked about cases in which they estimated and/or heard that the actual age was 23 or 24 years old on average. It appears that the mentors have a more accurate idea of the ages of the Afghan minors as they know the children better and minors can be more honest towards their mentors about issues such as their age, because the mentors are not the ones deciding on the asylum claims. One of the Afghan boys even admitted that his real age is 21, even though he is registered in the Netherlands as being 17. Age tests will be discussed in the section on the asylum procedure.

A third characteristic is their ethnicity. The largest group of Afghans that I interviewed were Hazara. Three Afghan boys were Pashtun, three Tajik, and three called their ethnic group Sadat. One boy explained that the Sadat are a special group in Afghanistan as they are considered direct descendants from Mohammed. At Xonar the mentors also confirmed that most of the boys are Hazara and the next common group is Pashtun. In addition, there are a few Tajiks. The IND confirms that the largest group of Afghans are Hazara (44%). These findings are very similar to the European-wide study conducted by the UNHCR (2010c) in which Hazara was found to be the largest group and the second largest group were formed by the Pashtun. In terms of language all of them, except for the three Pashtuns, spoke Dari. However, during the interviews and the time I spent in the living room it became clear that many spoke Pashto as well as Dari and some could also speak Farsi. They originated from different parts of Afghanistan with the most common regions mentioned being Herat, Wardak, and Kandahar.

Next, the family situation will be discussed. Most people seem to have come from relatively small families. The Afghan children grew up in homes with between two to seven children. However, approximately half of the children grew up with only or two siblings. This is also in accordance with the view a mentor had of the family size of Afghan minors on the campus, which tend to be small. In almost all the cases the oldest son of the family left the country. The same applied to the siblings that I interviewed. The two brothers were the oldest sons in the family and the brother and sister that I had a conversation with were the only two children of the family. In the other cases the older brother was dead (two cases) or
he was the second oldest son (one case). Only in one case one Afghan boy had two older brothers. However, this case may be exceptional, because the oldest brother was already living in the Netherlands. Six of the participants had lost someone in their family. One boy had lost his parents in a car accident. In the five other cases mostly the father and/or a brother was murdered. The general picture that emerges, that the oldest son is sent, who is from a relatively small family and had lost someone in their family, is largely similar to the findings of previous studies (UNHCR, 2010c; UNHCR, 2010d, UNICEF, 2010).

The economic situation of most of the Afghan boys seemed to be quite good, not only because their family would have to be able to pay the expensive journey to Europe, which will be discussed in more detail in the section on the journey. In four cases the family had a small shop and they would sell shoes, electronics or in two cases the shop was a sort of small supermarket. Four of the boys (two were brothers) came from farmer families and they normally produced potatoes, apples and rice. One Afghan boy mentioned that he was rich in Afghanistan, because his father was a car dealer and he owned the company with a business partner. In only one of the cases in which the boy was living with family in Afghanistan he had to work (as a tailor). Nevertheless, the image seems to arise that the Afghan children who came to the Netherlands were not from the poorest families, but their families had money enough to own a small shop or farm fields. This image was confirmed in the interviews with mentors at the campus. When comparing the results with previous research it therefore seems that the economic background of the interviewed children was a bit higher, although this may also be attributed to the small sample size of the study.

In general, the economic situation of the five children who had been living in Iran was worse. Three of them had been working either on the streets or in a factory making plastic bags. The two other children, who were brother and sister, mentioned that they moved to Iran when they were very young and basically lived inside the house, while the dad was working as an electrician. As they were not Iranian they could not go to school. It seems from the different stories that life in general is hard for people from Afghanistan, especially because none of the persons interviewed seemed to have resided their legally. They were discriminated against and without documents they could not do anything legally, including something as small as buying a sim card for your phone. Moreover, they were afraid of being arrested by the police, because then they could be deported to Afghanistan. One of the boys who had moved to Iran when he was three, left Iran after eight years when his parents had died, because of the issues mentioned above as a result of which he did not enjoy life in Iran.
Thus, although most Afghan minors did not come from the poorest families, those that had been residing in Iran mentioned that life there was more difficult not just economically, but also socially. The general finding on the economic background of the Afghan minors is in accordance with previous studies on migration. A certain level of wealth is required to cover the costs and risks involved with migration. Especially migrating from Afghanistan to Europe is costly, which partly explains why in the chapter on Afghanistan it was reported that the majority of Afghan refugees had gone to Iran and Pakistan (de Haas, 2008).

The educational background of the Afghan children differed significantly and these differences appear to be associated with one’s ethnic background. Six of the 15 children had never been to school and four of them were Hazara and two Sadat. The others had been to school either 1, 2, 3, 6, 7, 8 (2 boys) or 10 years and one of them had even made it to the last class of secondary school, namely the 12th, before you can go to university. What is striking is that the three Pashtuns all had been to school for a long period of time, because they had been in the 7th, 10th and 12th class. However, although the general impression of the often low educational background of the children, in which approximately half of the Afghans did not receive any education, is in accordance with previous studies (UNHCR, 2010c; UNHCR, 2010d, UNICEF, 2010), the relationship of educational and ethnic background is markedly different. In the large UNHCR study (2010c) the Hazara had a higher level of schooling than the Pashtuns.

One reason that was mentioned a few times as to why someone had not been to school or only for a short time was the presence of the Taliban, because of which it was not safe to go to school. One boy told me that the Taliban would throw acid into the faces of children who go to school and that especially for girls it is not safe to go to school. Another minor spoke about the school in his village having been destroyed and that he was the only sibling that could go to school as it was expensive and far away. Another reason was the cost, because of which not always all family members could go to school. Also those who had been living in Iran only had received a limited amount of education depending on how long they had been living in Afghanistan, as due to their illegal status in Iran they could not attend school there.

8.2 Motivations for leaving the country
One of the most difficult parts of the interviews involved the minors’ motivations for leaving the country. Not all of them were capable and/or felt enough at ease to discuss this. However,
overall their motivations seemed to be related to the violence in the country, including murder, kidnapping, retaliation and general violence.

The most common reason mentioned was fear of being killed by the Taliban or other criminal groups. Often a family member, such as the dad or brother had already been killed by the Taliban and the family feared for the life of the boy. In one case the boy’s father had been killed by the Taliban, his older brother had died as the result of a car bomb and he had fled to Iran five years ago, because he feared for his own life as well.

The fear of being killed could also be related to the threat of being kidnapped or recruited by the Taliban or other criminal groups. One boy told the story about how he was shot by the police while he was being robbed by two people, because the police thought that he was one of the robbers. The scars on his leg are still visible. After this incident he was being threatened and he feared that he would be kidnapped. The kidnappers could even kill him if his parents did not pay the full ransom that was demanded. This seemed to indicate the presence of certain criminal groups that kidnap children for money.

Recruitment by the Taliban was mentioned in two cases. The Taliban recruits boys to fight for them. In one case the boy mentioned that his older brother had already been taken by the Taliban and he believes his brother is dead. The two brothers who left the country also mentioned how their family had wanted to prevent them from being recruited.

In two cases fear for retaliation was mentioned and this fear was the result of the connections the boys themselves had with the foreign military forces in Afghanistan as two boys had been working as a translator for them. One of the boys explained how the Taliban had found out about his work and threatened his family that they would kill him if they found him. For that reason his father had decided that his son had to leave the country and he had to hide two months in his home while the journey was being arranged. However, the Taliban had also threatened to murder his family if he did not turn himself in. He is therefore afraid of what has happened to his family and he feels guilty for putting his family at risk. The other boy had also been working as a translator for the foreign military troops. The Taliban had found out about this and had captured his father. Therefore, he had moved with his mother and siblings to the house of a friend. As he was afraid of being captured as well, he decided with his mother that he had to leave Afghanistan.

General violence seemed to have been a reason for families to leave Afghanistan and go to Iran. In Afghanistan it had not been safe for them or they mentioned that they had to
leave the country. In these cases they came to Europe not only for safety, but often as well for the reason mentioned in the next paragraph.

A last, more general motivation for leaving Afghanistan was to find a better future in Europe. One boy, who had moved to Iran when he was three and had lost his parents there, went back to Afghanistan after eight years, because of the discrimination and hardship he experienced in Iran. In Afghanistan he kept working and saving for the journey to Europe where life is better. Especially the children who had been living Iran, mentioned how in Europe the prospects are better regarding education and work. However, the search for a better and safer life in Europe seems to be a more general reason for all of the minors that were interviewed.

One case was related to the violence in the country, but not as a result of the Taliban or other criminal groups. Ever since he was young he had a girlfriend. The only problem was that the rich parents from the girl found out that they had slept together. In response they murdered his mother and brother and captured his father and would have also killed him if he had not fled the country.

Thus, the motivations seem mainly related to the security situation in Afghanistan, such as the fear of being killed, kidnapped or recruited by the Taliban or another criminal group and the general violence in the country. In addition, the children were looking for a better future in Europe. This is an outcome in line with previous studies (UNHCR, 2010c; UNHCR, 2010d, UNICEF, 2010).

The impression the mentors and IND have of the motivations for the children to come to Europe are markedly different. One mentor at Xonar described how the children have a ‘hidden agenda’ and mentions that some children seem to come for the purpose of family reunification. This also appears to be the impression of the mentors at the campus and of the IND, because after children receive asylum they try to find their family and have them come to the Netherlands as well. Unfortunately, no indications could be given about how often this has actually taken place.

8.3 The journey

Choosing a destination

For almost none of the participants the Netherlands was the intended destination of their journey. Moreover, most of the children had heard of the Netherlands before their arrival. Some of the boys had already been living in Iran due to problems in Afghanistan. However,
the difficult situation in Iran led them to also leave Iran and to come to Europe. One boy, who had fled Afghanistan five years ago, said how going to Europe seemed like the only option. Due to safety reasons he could not return to Afghanistan, but life in Iran was difficult as an illegal. So when a Kurdish friend told him about going to Europe he decided to join him.

In four cases involving five persons the final decision was a Scandinavian country or the United Kingdom, because the minors had heard it was relatively easy to be granted asylum there or they had a relative there. For example, one of the boys had heard this about Denmark from a colleague at work who had family there. The two brothers who came intended to go to Norway as they had an aunt there. Also the IND has the impression that most Afghans had the intention to go to a Scandinavian country. However, the problem with Scandinavia and the UK, that was mentioned by mentors at both locations and the IND, is that it is difficult to get to these countries (e.g. that you have to cross a sea) and these countries are further away with the result that the minors often get arrested on their way there, which is why they end up in the Netherlands.

In four cases the children did not know what their destination was and all they knew was that they were going to Europe. The parents had made the arrangements with a smuggler for them to go to Europe to a place where he would be safe and have a good future.

In three cases the Netherlands was the final destination. For example, one boy has an uncle living in the Netherlands with whom he has contact. Another boy has a sister who is living in the Netherlands with her Afghan husband. The husband seemed to have had a visa for him and his wife. However, one boy went to the Netherlands because his smuggler had informed him that it was quite easy to get asylum status in the Netherlands. However, this boy feels that he has been misled by the smuggler as he has encountered difficulties here in getting asylum and he is sure that he would have been granted asylum if he had gone to a different country. Nevertheless, the image that the mentors also have is that the decision to come to the Netherlands is often based on the presence of a family member in the country, although they may not tell the IND about these connections.

Except in the cases in which the intended destination was the Netherlands, the children appeared to have ended in the Netherlands as a result of coming into contact with the police. Two of them had been arrested in Germany on their way to Scandinavia. However, they had a train ticket that said they had come from the Netherlands and where therefore sent back to the Netherlands. Most minors reported that during their arrest they were told that they
had to stay in the Netherlands and therefore claimed asylum there, even though this was not their initial attention.

Normally the decision to come to Europe was made by the parents and in most cases the father was the one who decided that the child should leave. However, the children reported that they had been aware of why this decision was made and had agreed with the decision. In two cases it was a friend who decided that they should leave, although this friend seemed to have been someone close to the family. In one of the cases the parents of the boy had been killed and a friend of his father had made the decision. The two boys, who had been living on their own before coming to Europe, had made the decision themselves.

In comparison to previous research this study found that none of the participants mentioned that the choice of the destination changed during their journey. Instead, the final destination often seemed to be the country in which they were arrested. Nevertheless, the findings that children did not have a specific destination in mind other than Europe or were not aware of their destination country, is in accordance with the literature (UNHCR, 2010c; UNHCR, 2010d; UNICEF, 2010). A finding that was similar to a Dutch study was that many children intended to go to a Scandinavian country (Staring & Aarts, 2010). A last difference with previous research is that no child mentioned the influence of a maternal uncle (UNHCR, 2010c; UNHCR, 2010d; UNICEF, 2010).

Arranging the journey

The journey was normally arranged with the help of a smuggler. In all of the interviews it appeared common sense that the way to come to Europe was with a smuggler and none of the interviewees indicated any difficulties in contacting a smuggler. One boy, who had been living in Iran before coming to the Netherlands and the brother and sister, mentioned that a ‘friend’ had arranged the journey. However, it is not clear whether this friend was in fact a smuggler.

The children appeared not to have been involved in the arrangements, which not only becomes clear when they mentioned that they did not know their final destination, but also because they often were not aware of the money that was paid for the journey. One minor claimed that he did not know how much was paid for his journey, but that he heard amounts from other people ranging between 6,000 and 20,000 dollars with most of the families having paid around 10,000 dollars. Two persons mentioned amounts of 10,000 dollars for the whole trip. One of them said that his mother (his father had been killed by the Taliban) had sold the
house to a smuggler in order to pay for the journey. In addition, some boys spoke about amounts that were paid to cover parts of the journey. For example, one person mentioned that he paid 200 dollars to someone he met in Turkey for his crossing to Greece and another explained that he paid 1,500 to get from Greece to Italy. The mentors confirmed that the amounts paid for the journey vary between 10,000 and 20,000 dollars with most children mentioning 10,000 dollars.

Thus, the image that arises and that is in accordance with previous literature is that the journey seemed to have been arranged by the parents who contacted a smuggler with relative ease and paid them around 10,000 dollars for the journey. In addition, the children often seemed to have a limited knowledge of the arrangements made (UNHCR, 2010c; UNHCR, 2010d; UNICEF, 2010).

The smuggler’s organisation
The smuggler’s organisations seemed to involve large networks that are connected across countries as the smugglers are able to arrange a journey to a specific destination in Europe. This is not only confirmed by the stories from the children, but also by the mentors. Along the way the children have different guides, which appear to change at every border. However, these guides are all connected. Moreover, the smugglers’ organisations include houses in different locations where the minors are kept for some time before continuing the journey. Furthermore, many people seem to be involved in smuggling. One indication for this is that it does not seem to be a problem to contact one in Afghanistan or Iran. One of the boys even mentioned how in Patras there were many smugglers who would offer their services.

The smugglers would arrange everything without (much) involvement of the children. Several children mentioned how they received different travel documents and a different guide in every country. They were told to throw away the old documents. One of the boys regrets having done this, as he needed documents for the asylum claim. However, the smugglers did not seem to tell them about the journey and what they could expect. In almost all stories the children express how they did not know exactly where they were at different points in time. When they were put in a room they would not know for how long and the periods of time they would be in a room differed.

A few boys also mentioned how they felt misled by the smugglers. For example, one boy regretted listening to the smuggler who told him to go to the Netherlands, because the asylum procedure was supposed to be easy there. Another boy, who went by plane, arrived in
Amsterdam and had been told that he would be picked up there by another person who would take him to the plane that would fly to London. However, he waited there for eight hours with nothing to eat or drink. Moreover, he could not speak English and therefore could not ask anyone for help. In the end he was found by the police.

Thus, the smugglers seem to be well-organized as they are connected across all the countries on the route to Europe, have locations for the children to stay, and are able to forge travel documents. This has also been confirmed by the literature (UNHCR, 2010d). The children did not tell much about the way they were treated by the smugglers other than not being informed or even misled and therefore the findings of previous studies on the smugglers’ cruel treatment cannot be confirmed (UNHCR, 2010d). Maybe the children were not comfortable talking about the smuggler as in general they mentioned that they preferred not to think about the journey due to the hardships they experienced.

**Common routes**
The route that was taken by the minors that were interviewed was remarkably similar. All of them, except three who came by airplane, seemed to have taken approximately the same route. From Afghanistan the journey would go to Iran and then to Turkey. From there the children would go to Greece and then to Italy or they would go directly from Turkey to Italy. The rest of the journey normally went from Italy to France and then through Belgium to reach the Netherlands. One of the boys who went by plane talked about being transported in a car at night for two days after which he took a plane and arrived at Schiphol airport where he was arrested. Thus, the study confirmed previous research that found that the common route would go from Afghanistan, to Iran, Turkey, Greece, Italy and France (UNCHR, 2010c, UNICEF, 2010). The only difference is that in this study a few children had gone directly from Turkey to Italy.

**The journey and its dangers**
The impression the minors gave of the journey was that the journey was difficult, especially the part until Italy. Not everyone seemed to know exactly how they went as parts of the journey would take place at night or in a container of a truck or ship. Moreover, if the children would stay at a certain place they would often not know where they were as they would be stuck in a room for days or even weeks. On the other hand there were also three
who went by plane and who arrived in the Netherlands relatively fast. In the next paragraphs the different parts of the route to the Netherlands will be discussed.

From Afghanistan to Iran the journey would normally take place in a car and some parts on foot. For those that lived far away from the Iranian border, they seemed to have gone from one large city to the next. For example, one boy had gone from Jalalabad, to Kabul and then to Herat by car and on foot. Another boy even flew from Kabul to the west of Afghanistan and crossed the border to Iran walking. Only one boy went from Afghanistan to Pakistan and then to Iran. This may be explained by the fact that he was living in Kunar, which is a region close to Pakistan. Two boys had stayed in Iran before continuing their journey to Europe. They lived there for four and six months, both working in the construction sector. In Iran life was difficult without papers, because they could be arrested by the police and deported to Afghanistan. The border to Turkey would be crossed on foot at night. It was hard walking at night for several days. One of the boys who went with his family to Europe lost his family at this point.

Parts of the journey the children would spend in a house where they would be stuck in a room for days and sometimes even weeks. The circumstances in these houses were not pleasant as the children mentioned being cramped in one room with many other people from different nationalities, which meant that there was hardly enough room for everyone to sit down. In addition, only a little bit of food and water was provided once a day, mostly a piece of bread and sometimes an egg.

The most difficult part of the journey was the crossing to Greece. Everyone who went through Greece mentioned having arrived on a small boat with too many people on it. They had to row for hours and the journey was complicated by the large waves. The crossing took place at night and in some stories various boats would leave at the same time. One boy, who gave an elaborate account of his journey, told how he was on a small boat with about seven others. His boat left together with two other boats. The last boat had problems, because water was coming in and people started panicking and some even fell in the water. However, there was nothing you could do. It was everyone for himself. Another participant needed two attempts to go to Greece as the first time he was arrested by the Turkish police. However, he told them he was from Palestine as his smuggler told him to say this, and then he was released. He said he was lucky to survive the second crossing as water entered the boat. However, he thought his boat survived it, because he was on a boat with mainly boys like him. So they stayed calmer and when water entered the boat, one of the boys thought of
cutting open a plastic bottle and using that as a bucket to get the water out. On another boat there were more families and they panicked when water came in and the boat toppled over and they could do nothing to help.

Two thirds of the boys who went to Greece were arrested there and their fingerprints were taken. The time they had to spent in prison was relatively short with the longest period mentioned being eight days after which they were released. One boy mentioned how strange this was because he was just set free without knowing what to do next. He thought that when he would arrive in Europe, it would mean the end of his journey and he could just find a quiet place to live. However, he realised that it was not that easy. He continued his way to Athens where he was arrested again by the police and told that he had to leave the country. However, he did not know where to go to or how to go somewhere else. Fortunately, he met an Afghan family who gave him food and clothes and found him a job painting houses. He ended up staying in Greece for 1.5 years working illegally to earn money for the rest of his trip.

From Greece different methods were used to go to Italy. The same boy went to Patras, where there seem to be many homeless people and/or immigrants. The situation there is bad and people are sleeping outside in parks, for example. According to him some people try to hide underneath a truck to get to Italy. However, this is dangerous and one can die trying to do that, which may explain why he argued that it is mainly those that do not have the money to pay a smuggler who try that. Another boy actually talked about having done this. The first boy paid a smuggler 1,500 dollars to go to Italy. The smuggler took him at three or four in the morning to a truck and arranged to be loaded in the truck in such a way that the boy was hidden. Another boy has a similar story about being hid in a truck. However, he described it as much more difficult, because he was hidden away in the truck without water and food for three days with six others.

The three persons who went directly to Italy from Turkey, including the brother and sister, came in a container by ship. The siblings talked about being on one boat with about 27 others from different countries, such as Pakistan, Afghanistan and Iran, most of whom were adults. The journey took one week. The other person was locked up in a container for two days without food and water before arriving to Italy.

From Italy onwards the journey seems relatively uneventful. In Italy one boy was arrested, but apparently treated nicely by the police. He was given water and when he told them that he wanted to go to France they showed him how to get to the train station. Another boy was arrested in France but they also released him. Three minors went by car/truck, but all
the others went by train to France and then continued to the Netherlands. It seems to be the case that the children were accompanied by a smuggler on the train. One boy even mentioned how that person would warn the minors when a ticket inspector would come by. A smuggler had provided the child documents and instructions of how to get to the Netherlands by train, because he was told that with his knowledge of English he could make the journey on his own.

From the Netherlands two boys had tried to go by train to Scandinavia. However, they both were arrested in Germany on the train. One of the boys even showed me his train ticket, which demonstrated that he intended to go to Hamburg and then to Kopenhagen.

Three boys had gone by plane. They all had travelled by car and sometimes also on foot to another country, maybe Iran or Turkey, and then took a plane to Amsterdam. One of the boys had flown from Turkey, but getting to Turkey took him more than three months as parts of the way he had to go by foot or stay in a certain room. Another minor had a similar story and it took him already 1.5 months to get to Iran and the whole journey lasted about 3.5 months. However, he does not know from where he took the plane. The last boy who went by plane had a much shorter journey. He was in a car for two days, but they only drove at night. Then he spent two days in a room. However, this experience is in contrast with the other stories mentioned above, as he was in the room by himself and provided sufficient food and drinks. On the fifth day he flew to the Netherlands. However, in general, it seems to be the case that even though they went by plane the journey was not particularly fast nor easy.

In the majority of cases the journey would last a few months. In eight cases the journey was estimated to have lasted between one and three months. Some other children had travelled longer, mentioning periods up to half a year. One boy said his journey had taken one year of which he spent four months in Iran working in construction to earn money for the journey. Another boy had been on his way for 2 years. The longer duration can be explained by the fact that he had to earn most of the money for the journey by himself, which is why he spent six months in Iran before starting his journey. Moreover, in Greece he had lived for 1.5 years in order to earn money for the rest of the journey. The shortest time period mentioned was five days and this was possible because this boy went by plane. The other boy, who also went by plane, needed almost three months to come to the Netherlands of which he spent 1.5 months going to Iran. Overall, it appears that for those who do not have to pay for the journey themselves are able to do the journey on average in one to three months. For those who have
to earn (part of) the money for the journey themselves the duration of the journey can be more than a year.

The image that the IND and mentors have is similar. They all mentioned that the journey that is taken normally goes from Iran to Turkey and then to Greece from where they go to Italy and then to France and the Netherlands. The majority of the way is done by car and truck and parts on foot. From Turkey to Greece the minors normally come by boat. The last part to the Netherlands is often done by train. In an exceptional case someone comes by plane, because this is more difficult as you need a visa to get through security checks at the airport. The duration of their journey differs and depends on how well the journey was arranged beforehand as some children stay for months in one country, mostly Greece, and work there illegally. This is also the image that previous studies have given (UNHCR, 2010c; UNHCR, 2010d; UNICEF, 2010). Issues that were not mentioned by the minors were the bad conditions in the Greek detention centres. Moreover, in contrast to the literature the boys gave the impression that they stayed in detention for a short period at time of at most one week. What also was not mentioned in other research was the frequent use of the train as a mode of transport to get from Italy to countries in Western Europe.

8.4 Their experiences in the Netherlands

Arrival in the Netherlands

The IND reported that from 2008 there has been a significant increase in the number of Afghan unaccompanied minors, not only in the Netherlands but in Western-Europe in general. The time that the minors had spent in the Netherlands varied, but seven persons had arrived either five or six months ago. The others had arrived approximately one year ago and the longest time mentioned was two years ago. The finding that in general the children had arrived at least five months ago is not only related to the fact that I went to reception centres that were not central or trial reception locations where minors go to first. It is also a result of not having an interpreter and therefore having to rely on those minors who could speak English and/or Dutch.

Upon their arrival in the Netherlands four of them reported themselves to the police as they had the intention to stay in the Netherlands. All the others were found by the police, of which two had been arrested in Germany in a train coming from the Netherlands. They were then brought back to Schiphol where the first interview took place and their fingerprints were taken. For those who arrived on the old asylum procedure (seven persons) the
experience at Schiphol appeared to have been difficult as they mentioned being there for about one week while they had to go through various interviews with different persons. The procedure for the ‘new arrivals’ was distinct as they tended to have had only one interview in Schiphol before they were brought to a trial reception location, which in most cases was Eindhoven. This location was close to Den Bosch were the other interviews with the IND would take place.

Several boys mentioned how they did not understand why the police had told them that they had to stay, while they heard that the Netherlands was a small country and could therefore not accept everyone who claims asylum. However, especially the minors who intended to go to Scandinavia seemed angry and confused about why the police or the IND did not let them go if they are not wanted in the Netherlands, because then they could look for asylum somewhere else.

Reception
All of the children that were interviewed had resided in at least two different locations. The first location was normally Eindhoven (4 persons) or Oisterwijk (4 persons). Only the ones who entered under the old procedure named other locations, such as Groningen and Deventer. After approximately three months they were transferred either to a child residential group or a campus. The amount of transfers these children had experienced seemed to be limited. Almost all of them had only been in two locations and only one boy mentioned four transfers including three different locations as he went twice to Maastricht. Moreover, in the decision-making about the locations family connections are taken into account. The two brothers who had arrived separately as they lost each other on the way to Europe were put in the same location after the IND found out that both brothers were in the Netherlands. Also the brother and sister had been transferred together. They had even been transferred together with a friend they met at Schiphol. In general the children would stay in a reception location until becoming 18 as all of them claimed not to have contact with their family and/or did not know where their family was in Afghanistan and therefore cannot be sent back.

In terms of the experiences of the children in the reception locations, the CRG was preferred by more persons as it was smaller, which made them feel more comfortable. This is in accordance with a previous study (FRA, 2010). Moreover, they had more opportunities to speak Dutch as there is more contact with the mentors and with people from other nationalities. In contrast, on the campus there are many people from Afghanistan with whom
they can speak their own language. This is also what became clear during my time there as people from the same country or at least those who can speak the same language tended to spend time together. Also in the living room people with the same nationality would hang out together. For example, the pool table was always occupied by Afghans. A final reason for the preference of the CRG was the fact that food was provided for them, especially because none of the Afghan children knew how to cook before their arrival.

On the other hand, one boy expressed a clear preference for the campus as there are more people with whom he can speak his language and they have more freedom. For example, in a CRG the meals are at certain times of the day and one has to be at the location before 10pm. These rules may be especially hard to deal with for those who are actually older than the age they claim to be. At the same time almost all of the children at the campus were complaining of the rules becoming stricter and stricter. For example, the time that the living room is open had been reduced as well as the opportunities they had to use the internet.

One of the children was in the process of arranging a foster family with the help of Nidos. He expressed happiness for being able to live with an actual family and that he could speak with them in his language. The process of arranging a foster family seems to be done with care and attention is paid to whether the child appears to connect and is able to fit in. The boy had visited his potential foster family twice. During the first time he was there just to meet them, whereas the second time he spent several days there so both the family and the boy would get to know each other better and how life would be with him there. From a mentor at Xonar I heard that this happens more often and in fact another Afghan boy was going through the same process. At the CRG the minors can stay or go to a campus, SRU or a foster family depending on the age and level of independence of the child and their preferences. According to the IND Afghan minors in general are not a vulnerable group that needs protected reception.

School
At both locations there exist special school arrangements for UAMs. At the campus there was a school at the site and at Xonar the children go to a regular school, but they attend so-called ‘internationale schakelklassen’. At the school they test the children to find out at which level they can enter the school.

The Afghan children that I spoke to were all attending school regularly and the majority expressed that they enjoyed going to school. The regular school attendance was
confirmed by their mentors. The persons that I interviewed were in general the ones who behaved well, because I also observed boys that were not going to school. However, a mentor at the campus did argue that in general the school attendance of Afghans was good. Moreover, he argued that as relatively more children from Afghanistan than from some other countries had received education in their country of origin, they tend to learn faster. For example, they would achieve a higher level of Dutch in a shorter period of time. However, the two mentors at Xonar that were interviewed said that for those who had never been to school and cannot write or read in their own language, learning Dutch is much more difficult. For them it is possible to go to a school called Wereldwijd, which is actually meant for those minors who have to return and can learn a craft there that they can use upon return. For three days a week they go to school to learn Dutch and the other two days they can attend Wereldwijd.

At the same time the level of Dutch the young Afghans had, differed significantly and tended to be relatively low. This seemed to be due to a combination of the large amount of Afghans at the centre and the status of the children’s asylum claim. For example, when comparing two boys, A and B, who both had been in the Netherlands for about a year, A’s Dutch was quite good and it was possible to have a conversation with him while with B this was much more problematic. Although A expressed much more motivation to learn Dutch, it seems likely that this is related to the fact that he had been granted asylum and B’s claim was rejected. Mentors quite regularly encounter the problem that young people are not motivated to go to school and this is lack of motivation is particularly apparent among those whose asylum claim has been rejected. The mentors try to get the children out of bed in the morning and to convince them to go to school. The asylum process seems to influence the school behaviour in a different way as well. Those whose asylum claim has not been decided on or has been rejected talked about how the uncertainty of their future made them feel worried. Most of them also said that their mind being occupied by problems, because of which it was hard to concentrate and to learn.

Another reason which may explain why the Dutch level seemed to be quite low is the Dutch classes. Several boys complained about the method employed, which seemed to involve that the children study themselves out of a book called Zebra. One boy even expressed frustration about the classes, because he argued that if going to school meant studying on your own he could just as well stay in his room and do that. It seemed that they would like to have more opportunities in class to practice Dutch. Furthermore, several
Afghan boys expressed complaints about the noise in the school and that it was hard to concentrate. One mentor agreed and argued that in the school the situation is often chaotic with teachers not knowing or not being able to control the children.

At Xonar several boys had not been able to go to school yet as there were not sufficient places at the school to accommodate them. This applied to two of the three Afghan children I interviewer there. As a result their time at Xonar had been very boring and they would spend most of the time at the centre. However, both of them were happy that after the carnival break they could starting going to school. Two of the boys at the campus also complained about the long time they had to wait before they were able to go to school.

Work

None of the young people that I spoke to worked. A mentor clarified that as minors they are obliged to attend school and they are only allowed to work a limited number of weeks in a year. As COA is paying all the expenses for the UAMs, they have to give a percentage of what they earn to COA. However, this percentage depends on the amount of money UAMs earn. Sometimes mentors discover that minors are working, often illegally, in a supermarket or for a farmer. One boy, who has asylum, expressed an interest in working. However, he believed he first needs to improve his Dutch before he can find work, because with English alone he will not find work. At Xonar a mentor told me that one Afghan boy was working in a restaurant.

A mentor also informed me that some of the UAMs are doing an internship as part of their study for which they can get paid. However, he has encountered a lot of problems trying to arrange this, because they need a permit (tewerkstellingsvergunning) and the IND does not cooperate. One of the Afghan children that was transferred to another centre before I could interview him, told me how he has been doing an internship to become a tailor. He even had a sewing machine in his room.

Life at a reception location

All unaccompanied minors receive 50 Euros a week on the campus, of which 13 Euros is pocket money and the rest to buy food from. However, the children are allowed to spend this money as they wish. Someone’s pocket money can be withheld as a penalty if that person misbehaves or does not report him/herself. Every morning and night the children have to report themselves to a staff member and for every time they miss, one Euro gets deducted.
from their pocket money. Extra money can be earned by cleaning the living room and the kitchen. At Xonar the 50 Euros is split up in different parts, such as money for food, clothes, activities (e.g. cinema, sim card) and pocket money. Per week the minors receive 10 Euros of pocket money. If they buy other things for which they can ask money back, such as clothes, they have to show receipts.

There are several activities that the minors can engage in after school. In the CRG the children have access to a living room with a TV, sofas, table soccer, pool table and two computers, which is open the whole day. At the campus the living room is open in the afternoon and evening for a particular period of time. There are sofas and tables and they can play board games, pool, table tennis and table soccer. The living room appears a good place for people to get to know each other and also for the mentors to interact with the young people in a fun way. Nevertheless, I never observed any women spending time there and according to the mentors they tend to be in their rooms which are in a separate area of the campus. Moreover, the same boys tend to go to the living room consisting of about 20 minors, most of whom are Afghans. The Afghans also tend to hang out together and during my time there they always occupied the pool table. Therefore, it seems as if the possibilities the living room has for the minors to interact with people from different nationalities and with the mentors, are not used as extensively as they could be. At the campus the minors also have access to internet in a computer room that is open one hour every day from Monday to Friday and during that time they can also play sports such as soccer in the sports hall.

However, a common complaint by the minors is that life at a campus or CRG is quite boring. All of them that can go to school, tend to go there during the day. In the afternoon they come back from school and they play games, talk with their friends or watch TV in their room until going to bed. There is not much else to do. After the carnival break the general response from the children was that they had spend their days sleeping. One complaint that was also expressed in previous studies (FRA, 2010) is that the campus is located outside of a city and it costs quite a lot of money to go by bus to the nearest city centre.

Two mentors at the campus mentioned how the large number of Afghans at the centre causes problems because the tensions that already exist in Afghanistan between people with different ethnic and socio-economic backgrounds get played out in the centre as well. However, according to another mentor the large number of Afghans does not pose particular problems. Therefore, it is not possible to establish whether there are ethnic issues between Afghans in the campus.
At the campus there is a UAM council, which consists of minors who can discuss any issues that they encounter during meetings with the UAM staff members. The only requirement to join the council, which consists of approximately eight persons, is a sufficient level of Dutch and/or English.

_Psychological difficulties_

The lives of the children also seemed to be filled with worries. Those whose asylum claim had been rejected or had not yet been decided were stressed about what would happen, especially because all of them expressed that going back to Afghanistan was not an option. Moreover, all of the children, including those who received asylum, were worried about their relatives. The concerns expressed by the children relating to the uncertainty about their immigration status and the well-being of their family have been confirmed by previous research on unaccompanied minors. The chronic uncertainty about their immigration status may make the psychological problems unaccompanied minors experience worse and can damage their dreams and confidence about the future (Sourander, 1998; McCarthy & Marks, 2010).

Moreover, unaccompanied minors suffer from multiple losses and their migration entails uprooting. They lose their social and cultural environment, including their home, their family, friends, and enter a country with a different way of living. Moreover, unaccompanied minors often experience traumatic events (Derluyn & Broekaert, 2008) and the severity level of traumatic stress is high (Bean, Eurelings-Bontekoe & Spinhoven, 2007b). It has also been found that an older age is associated with more negative life events (id; Bean, Derluyn, Eurelings-Bontekoe, Broekaert, & Spinhoven, 2007a). These traumatic events can be related to predeparture experiences (such as violence in their country of origin), the journey (which can take months in trucks and containers in difficult circumstances and with the fear of being found by the police and being dependent on smugglers), transitional stress (which mainly involves the waiting time associated with the asylum procedure and living in a reception centre) or the postarrival stress (adjusting to life in destination country) (Bean et al., 2007a; Derluyn & Broekaert, 2008).

Although it is difficult to establish which type of trauma was the most common among the Afghan migrants that were interviewed, from their stories all the different types of traumatic stress events seemed to apply and appear a common cause of the psychological problems of the Afghan minors interviewed. The first three types of stress have already been
discussed in the sections above. The last type of stress, postarrival stress, seems to be related to acculturative stress. Acculturation “is a process that individual undergo in response to a changing cultural context” (Berry, Poortinga, Segall, & Dasen, 2002, p. 349). One source of acculturative stress that was mentioned by the interviewed Afghans is racism. The minors do not feel comfortable in the city as people tend to look at them more suspiciously. In part this may be related to the location of the asylum centre as the children indicated that they preferred to live in other places in the Netherlands, such as Eindhoven and Rotterdam, where more immigrants live. Moreover, the children reported that they were struggling with the Dutch language and this prevented them from participating fully in the Dutch society. For example, some boys mentioned that they needed Dutch to work or to find a girlfriend.

As a result of stress almost all of the minors and in particular those without an accepted asylum claim reported various somatic complaints, the most common being headaches and sleeping and concentration problems. Many of these somatic complaints together with the depressed mood that was mentioned by several boys, appear to indicate the presence of symptoms related to depression. Two of the boys at the campus were visiting a psychologist. Also at Xonar the mentors mentioned that many children have problems with sleeping and suffer from headaches. Several are using sleeping pills and some are visiting a psychologist. Thus, it appears that it is common for the Afghan minors to suffer from mental health problems.

Previous research has confirmed the higher level of psychological distress among unaccompanied (refugee) minors (see e.g. Bean et al., 2007a; Kohli & Mather, 2003; Sourander, 1998; Wiese & Burhorst, 2007) and also particularly among Afghan unaccompanied minors (UNHCR, 2010d; UNICEF, 2010). Moreover, in a study that compared unaccompanied refugee minors with young immigrants/refugees and natives that had parental caregivers, it was found that a significantly higher level of internalizing problems and traumatic stress reactions were reported among the unaccompanied minors compared to the other two groups (Bean et al., 2007a). Other studies have found that the separation from relatives when migrating to a new country is a critical threat to minors’ well-being (e.g. McKelvey & Webb, 1995; Ager, 1992). The overall conclusion from this study and previous studies is that (Afghan) unaccompanied minors seem to suffer severely from psychological distress.

Therefore, it is important that a high level of health care and support is available to prevent further harm to the well-being of unaccompanied minors. One mentor at Xonar
mentioned how nowadays it is relatively easy to have a UAM visit a psychologist. However, one boy at the campus told that it took half a year before he could finally visit a doctor and receive medication and it took another two months before he was able to visit a psychologist. Nevertheless, this is only one case, so it is difficult to draw firm conclusions. However, a large study conducted on the need and utilization of mental health services among unaccompanied refugee minors in the Netherlands found that of the 60% of the minors who expressed a need for mental health services, less than 12% actually received help (Bean, Eurelings-Bontekoe, Mooijaart & Spinhoven, 2006). Another observation relating to the health care facilities is, that it appears a very lengthy and complicated process to have an unaccompanied minor admitted to a mental clinic if this minor is suffering from serious mental problems. In fact, a mentor at Xonar mentioned that they had never been able to get a child admitted, which is not beneficial for the child nor for the atmosphere at the reception location. These findings suggest that access to health care for unaccompanied minors should be improved.

**Acculturation**

It is difficult to establish which type of acculturation is most common among Afghan unaccompanied children. There are four types of acculturation: integration, assimilation, separation and marginalization. Integration involves maintaining one’s own culture, while at the same time participating in and interacting with people from the destination country. When individuals have no interest in maintaining their own culture and instead look for interaction with the culture of the destination country the acculturation strategy assimilation applies. Separation is the exact opposite and marginalization involves no interest or possibility in maintaining one’s own cultural identity nor in interacting with the culture of the host country (Berry et al., 2002). Among unaccompanied minors the acculturation process can cause stress as they often have to find a balance between integrating into the country of destination and retaining one’s own culture (Derluyn & Broekaert, 2008).

When analyzing the data obtained in this study with regard to the acculturation strategies, it is complicated to draw a firm conclusion. In terms of the clothes that the children were wearing they seem to have adjusted to the Dutch culture although one boy would also sometimes wear a traditional Afghan outfit. Moreover, most of them express an interest in going to school and learning Dutch. At the same time, the Afghan minors hold on to their culture in several aspects. This is particularly clear when entering a room in a reception
centre where Afghans live. In general people from the same country are sharing a room and all the Afghan have put either blankets or actual carpets on the floor as they are used to in Afghanistan. They take of their shoes before walking on these blankets or carpets. This has become an issue, because the mentors often have to enter the rooms and it would not be practical if they had to take off their shoes every time they enter a room where Afghans reside. Moreover, the Afghan minors tend to listen to music from their home. Another indication that the Afghan children seem to hold on to their culture is the finding that most Afghan children tend to hang out primarily with other Afghans.

The Afghan minors’ attempts to hold on to their culture and adjust to life in the Netherlands seem to suggest integration is the most common strategy. However, Afghan unaccompanied minors face several obstacles with respect to their integration. Their lack of Dutch and/or English language skills, the location of the campus outside of a city limits, and the racism the children reported limits the possibilities of interaction with people in the Netherlands. Moreover, the large presence of Afghans in the centres provides the children with less opportunities to practice Dutch. Another important obstacle for the integration of (Afghan) unaccompanied minors is the uncertainty about their asylum situation. This uncertainty does not only result in stress among the Afghans interviewed, but it also makes it difficult for them to plan their future. These obstacles to integration have also been found in previous research on the integration of refugees (Mestheneos & Ioannidi, 2002).

Contact with guardian and mentor
Overall, the children did not express much about their guardians and mentors. If they were specifically asked about their contact with them they tend to express satisfaction, which seems in accordance with previous research on separated asylum-seeking children (FRA, 2010). Only a few had complaints and these were related to requests being made to them that were not granted or not granted fast enough. For example, one boy complained that he had to wait half a year before he could go to see a doctor for his depression. Only one minor mentioned that he thought the mentors at his previous location were nicer.

Contact with parents
During the interviews all of the Afghan minors said they had not been in contact with their parents ever since they left their homes. In two of the cases, boy T and the brothers who all have asylum, the Red Cross is looking for their family. These responses of the minors may be
influenced by the apprehension that if someone finds out that they still have contact with their parents, they will be deported. This is at least the opinion of the mentors, all of whom mention that they heard that minors do have contact with their family, on the phone for example.

Previous literature also mentioned that children are afraid of answering this question and that if the children did not have contact with their family the Red Cross would try to trace them (UNICEF, 2010). One finding from other literature that was not mentioned by the minors in this study is that they had limited contact with their parents during the journey, which in general was arranged by a smuggler (UNHCR, 2010c; UNICEF, 2010).

**Legal situation**

The legal procedure normally started for most of the minors when they were detained by the police. The IND confirmed this by saying that it is noteworthy that many asylum claim seem the result of the children being arrested by the police. Then the children would in most cases be brought to Schiphol airport where they had one interview, which was normally followed by two more interviews in Den Bosch where the Unit for National Unaccompanied Asylum Seekers Tasks is located. After the preliminary decision was made public the minors received time to respond to it.

Both the IND and the mentors argued that it is hard to find out how much of the story is true and most mentors argue that the majority of the stories that the children tell to the IND are not accurate. The children seem to be well aware of what they have to tell the IND in order to get asylum. Moreover, one mentor at the campus mentioned that the children can buy asylum stories from the smugglers. None of the children mentioned age tests, which was reported as a common procedure in the large UNHCR study (2010c) and the IND confirmed that this procedure is not regularly used in the Netherlands.

Although only a limited number of people was interviewed, the new asylum law seems to have decreased the time of the asylum procedure, especially for those who have been granted asylum. Five of the six children that received asylum or the UAM residence permit entered the country after the new law was implemented. The fastest time mentioned was one week (two cases) and in the other three it took between two and four months. Unfortunately, not much information was obtained during the interviews about the length of the asylum procedure for those who had entered the country before the new asylum laws came into force, although the persons about whom this information was available mentioned
longer asylum process durations. One boy received a response from the IND after ten months and another boy mentioned almost one year. In a different case the delay seemed the result of the Dublin claim that had to be investigated with his case. His claim has not been decided on, even though he entered the country 1.5 years ago. The only thing he knew is that he does not have to go back to Greece. One other remarkable case is the boy who said that at the IND they had forgotten about him. He had his second interview after six months after he had been to Nidos to ask why he had not heard anything about the asylum procedure anymore. The mentors at Xonar estimated that the asylum procedure takes approximately one year or one-and-a half years, but the current procedure appears faster. One mentor argues how it is beneficial for the child if the asylum procedure would be dealt with fast as living with uncertainty means a lot of stress for these children and makes it impossible for them to plan their lives.

It seems that the asylum procedure tends to take quite a long time. The explanation given by the IND for the length of the asylum procedure is that minors can appeal the decision of the IND. This happens quite often according to a mentor. Moreover, investigations into the possibilities for reception in the country of origin can take up a lot of time. The rest of the procedure can also take up time. For example, one boy received news in January that his asylum claim was accepted, but in March he had not received yet his residence documents. In one of the discussions that minors were having in the living room they mentioned how it could take a long time to find housing after the minors with asylum status turned 18.

In general the asylum procedure had ended in negative results. Of the 31 Afghan boys at the UAM campus only five had been granted asylum and one had received UAM status allowing him to stay in the Netherlands until turning 18. I interviewed these six persons. The asylum claims of the other six minors I interviewed had all been rejected, except one, which had not been decided on yet, but who already received a negative preliminary decision. One other boy’s claim had been rejected, but he received new information and was starting a new procedure. None of the three boys that I interviewed at Xonar had received asylum. Instead two of the asylum claim were still pending and the third had been rejected. However, the other four Afghans residing there had received asylum.

Both mentors as well as Afghan minors argued that the asylum decisions are not always fair. The main reason for this view was the behaviour the minors displayed in the centres is unrelated to the decision the IND makes about their asylum claim. Those who go to
school every day and are motivated to learn the language and integrate may not receive a positive decision, whereas those who spend their days in bed and tend to get into problems do receive one. One mentor argued that the decisions sometimes are also seen as random as one family member can be granted asylum, whereas the claim of the other is rejected. Moreover, one boy thought it was not right that the IND has not given him asylum as he developed a depression during his journey and everyone who is sick should have the right to receive asylum in his view.

A possible explanation for the large number of Afghan minors coming to the Netherlands that was brought up by the IND as well as by mentors is that the family decides to send a child as it is believed that a minor has a higher chance of receiving asylum. Once the child has been granted asylum, he can ask for family reunification. It does not seem possible to confirm whether Afghan children are indeed sent to have the rest of the family also enter the Netherlands, because all of the minors claim not to have contact with their families. However, it seems that migration is partly a household strategy to secure the safety and well-being of the rest of the family. The household livelihood approach argues that migration is part of the strategy of a household to spread the sources of income and to deal with the restrictions in the economic, political and social environment of the origin country by having one person in the household migrate (de Haas, 2008). The stories from mentors and the IND do not seem to indicate that families are trying to diversify their sources of income, especially because the motivations expressed by the children indicate that they had to flee the country for security reasons. Therefore, the household livelihood approach does not seem to apply. Nevertheless, the migration of Afghan unaccompanied minors may still be seen as a household strategy. It seems that by sending the oldest son, the family may be able to secure not just the safety and well-being of their son, but also of the rest of the family if the son can apply for family reunification in the destination country or is able to save money that he can remit. Moreover, sending the oldest son may be the best option as it might be too expensive for a family to go to Europe together and a minor may have more chances of receiving asylum status.

The future
One finding that is similar to other research is that the children have a definite intention to stay in the country where they claimed asylum (UNICEF, 2010). All of them also mentioned that they would like to continue their education. Some of them even have a field of study in
mind, such as medicine, psychology and engineering. One boy expressed that he would like to study something related to technology as he is interested in machines and working with his hands. Most of them are very motivated to go to school and learn, which is also confirmed by their mentors.

Those who received asylum stay at a centre until turning 18. A mentor at Xonar explains that when a child with asylum turns 18 he/she will decide together with the guardian and mentor, where the child can live on his/her own. Often they are independent then and work for example as taxi driver or in a restaurant.

However, the future is very uncertain for most minors as many are still waiting for the decision of the IND and therefore do not know whether they are allowed to stay or not. Some even mentioned that they preferred not to think about the future, because it worries them and it is not of much use as they cannot plan anything before the end of the asylum procedure. Those whose asylum claim has been rejected talk about how worried they are about the future, especially because they argued that they cannot go back to Afghanistan where there is no future for them and/or their lives are at risk.

At the same time they can often only stay in the Netherlands until they turn 18. This is why some have mentioned that they will try to claim asylum in a different country. This claim is also confirmed by the mentors one of whom talked about how some children would disappear when the date that they have to leave comes closer. Moreover, all of the mentors I interviewed spoke about the large social network Afghans tend to have, which can help them if their claim is rejected in terms of providing them with a place to stay, work, or advice about where to go to.

In general, no Afghan minors seem interested in the voluntary return programmes offered by the IOM. This is confirmed by statistics of the IOM that showed that only nine (ex-)UAMs had participated in a voluntary return programme. One mentor mentioned that she even tries to convince minors of participating in such a programme as it is not likely their asylum claim will be accepted elsewhere after having applied for this in the Netherlands due to the Dublin II procedure. Moreover, if they return voluntary they will at least get support in building up a life in Afghanistan. Nevertheless, minors do not seem interested, which might be due to the amount of money that is invested in the children to come to Europe and the humiliation they would feel and cause their families if they returned, as was suggested by mentors.
When the mentors were asked about their opinion on the view of deporting Afghan children to their country of origin, they responded that it will not work as returning to Afghanistan is not an option for these children. One mentor argued that although the children who are older than they claim to be may be able to return, it would not be fair to deport children who are really still children, especially not if they really do not have family there. Another mentor argued that if the Dutch government wants to prevent children from coming to the Netherlands and claiming asylum it would be better if they focused on prevention instead of sending them back. It is better to inform families in Afghanistan about what it really means to come to Europe and what possibilities they have here, because then they might not send their children away. Some children indicated that they would not have come to Europe, if they had known that they would end up in the situation they are now in, namely with a rejected asylum claim living in a reception centre.

9. Conclusions and policy recommendations

The aim of this study was to provide a profile of Afghan unaccompanied minors in the Netherlands on the basis of a triangulation of research methods. In addition to consulting various information resources, interviews were held with COA, Xonar, the IND and IOM and with 15 Afghan UAMs. Furthermore, over 80 hours of participant observations were conducted at one UAM campus to investigate the day-to-day circumstances of unaccompanied minors in a campus.

Although this study was based on a limited number of interviews with minors, the information obtained corroborate the findings from other studies. In accordance with previous research it was found that the majority of Afghan minors in the Netherlands are boys claiming to be between 15 and 18 years old, with the largest group being Hazara. They come from relatively small families and most of them have lost a family member. They tend not to be from the poorest families as their families owned land or a shop, although the economical situation of those who had been living in Iran seemed worse. The level of education differed considerably with almost half being analphabetic before coming to Europe. They fled their country as a result of the violence there and to look for a better future in Europe. The journey, which was almost always arranged by the parents with the help of smugglers, generally went from Iran to Turkey with a boat to Greece and then to Italy and France. In a few exceptional
cases children went by plane. The duration of the journey was in most cases a few months, except when the child had to earn the money for the journey on their way to Europe.

Although it is difficult to establish the truth in the stories told by the children, the Dutch authorities are asked to continue carefully considering the asylum claims of the children as their stories seem to indicate the violation of human rights, including the fear of persecution, abduction and recruitment. Those who had been living in Iran had suffered from poverty, discrimination and the constant threat of being deported. Moreover, it should be kept in mind what children travelling unaccompanied have endured on their journey to the Netherlands. The journey normally takes at least a few months during which the children endured exploitation and fear, had to travel in, to say the least, uncomfortable circumstances and sometimes would even see other travellers die. Therefore, it is important that this knowledge is taken into account when asylum claims are assessed and during the reception of these minors.

This study contributed to previous literature mainly with regard to the experiences of Afghan minors in the Netherlands. One finding was that the majority of Afghan children intended to go to Scandinavia as they claimed it is easier to get asylum in those countries and they often had acquaintances or relatives there already. The main reason they claimed asylum in the Netherlands was that they had been arrested by police who appear to have told them that they had to stay. The few who had the intention to come to the Netherlands generally seem to have relatives there.

In terms of reception the majority of the children had been in a location near Den Bosch where the interviews with the IND take place and then were transferred either to the campus or the CRG where the interviews for this study were conducted. This meant that the amount of transfers the children had experienced was limited. Most children who had been in a CRG preferred this to a campus because of its smaller scale and the opportunities it offered to speak Dutch. In my view it would be good for those who have received a positive (preliminary) decision regarding their asylum claim to move as quickly as possible to a CRG or SRU, because they will receive more guidance there to learn Dutch and integrate. This is particularly relevant at the moment as the number of Afghan unaccompanied minors is so large that on a campus Afghans are hardly required to speak Dutch except at school.

The children expressed enjoyment about being able to go to school and the school attendance of Afghan minors tends to be good. One way to maybe increase the motivation to attend school of especially those whose asylum claim has been rejected is to offer more
English classes, because knowledge of English can still come of use in their country of origin. Although information is only available on one school, the circumstances at this school seemed chaotic. Moreover, the waiting times for children to be able to attend school should be limited as much as possible and more cooperation with regard to internship remunerations should be given. It is important that (Afghan) unaccompanied are able to receive good education, not only because they enjoy going to school and research has shown that access to school has positive effects on the well-being of unaccompanied minors (McCarthy & Marks, 2010), but also because it helps them to adjust to life in the Netherlands.

Psychological difficulties are common among unaccompanied asylum-seeking children and have also been found in this study. Therefore, it is important that the mentors and other significant adults in the lives of minors are aware of the psychological distress and the need for mental health services among minors. If necessary, minors should be provided mental help and long waiting times, as was observed in one case in this study, should be prevented. Moreover, the complicated process to have a minor admitted to a mental clinic should be addressed, because a fast and effective response to serious mental problems is beneficial to the child as well as for the atmosphere at the reception centre. It may be worth considering the implementation of periodic screening for psychological and behavioural problems among unaccompanied minors to prevent any further damage to the child and to provide health care professionals with an instrument to measure whether and what type of treatment is necessary (Bean et al., 2006; Bean et al., 2007a; Bean et al., 2007b). Another suggestion given in by Bean et al. (2006) would be to provide “low threshold psycho-education (residential or school-based) programs on active coping skills [which] can empower URM [unaccompanied refugee minors] to manage the trauma and stress they have had to endure and reduce the great (unmet) need these young people have reported for mental health care” (p. 353).

There are some indications that Afghan minors want to integrate into the Dutch society as they adjust their way of dressing to what is common in the Netherlands and most of them are interested in going to school, while at the same time they maintain aspects of their own culture. However, several obstacles hinder their integration, such as their insufficient knowledge of Dutch and/or English and the racism they experience.

There seem to be indications that the amendments to the Aliens Act have decreased the time of the asylum procedure. This is an important step forward as the asylum procedure causes a lot of uncertainty and stress among the children and therefore should be as short as
possible. Many of the children reported mental health problems, such as sleeping problems, that were the result of the worries they had, especially as a result of their uncertain situation in the Netherlands. On the other hand, it might be worth considering the observations of mentors regarding the behaviour of the children in the decision-making process of the asylum claim. Thereby, the asylum procedure may need to take more time, but can be made fairer.

The future is for most Afghan minors very uncertain as many were still waiting for a decision on their asylum claim. However, they all expressed a definite intention to stay and want to continue their education. For those with a negative asylum decision going back to Afghanistan is not an option and interest in return programmes is very limited. Instead it is common for Afghan children to leave the reception centre and either continue living in the Netherlands illegally or they try to go to a different country. Thereby, the large networks of Afghan minors are helpful. The deportation of these children does not seem as a suitable option. Not only because it will not be in their best interest to deport those Afghans that are truly minors, especially considering the fact that they all claim not to have contact with their parents, which means it will be difficult to arrange reception in Afghanistan. Moreover, I support the UNHCR’s view (UNHCR, 2010d) that return should only take place when the Afghan child has family or community connections there. “Residential care is the least preferred form of care for any separated child” (UNCHR, 2010d, p. 59) and should only be temporary. In addition, it will not be effective to send Afghan children back to their country of origin as they will most likely disappear before they are deported thereby using their large network. Furthermore, it will not prevent Afghan children from coming to Europe. Therefore, a better alternative would be to inform people in Afghanistan about what they can expect if they go to Europe and thereby maybe reduce the chance that families will decide to send their children to the Netherlands and Europe in general.
10. References


Council Directive (EC) 2001/55/EC of 20 July 2001 on minimum standards for giving temporary protection in the event of a mass influx of displaced persons and on measures promoting a balance of efforts between Member States in receiving such persons and bearing the consequences thereof.

Council Regulation (EC) No 343/2003 of 18 February 2003 establishing the criteria and mechanisms for determining the Member State responsible for examining an asylum application lodged in one of the Member States by a third-country national.


McCarthy, C., & Marks, D.F. (2010). Exploring the health and well-being of refugee and


Appendix A. Interview guide

Background
1. What is your age?
2. What is your ethnicity?
3. How many years have you been to school?

Situation in Afghanistan
4. Tell me about your family?
   ➢ Siblings, order, parents, living with whom?
5. Where did you live before going to the Netherlands?
   ➢ If not Afghanistan, what was the reason for leaving Afghanistan?
6. How would you describe the situation in which you were living?
   ➢ Housing, parents’ job, going to school/working?

Contacts with family
7. Do you still have contact with your family?
   ➢ How, how often, with whom?
8. Have you told your family about your situation in the Netherlands?
9. Do you have any relatives living in the Netherlands?
   ➢ If yes, do you have contact with them?

Departure
10. Could you tell me the reasons for leaving Afghanistan?
11. Who made the decision?
   ➢ If this was not the child, how did the child feel about the decision (choice?)
12. Where did you want to go to, final destination?
   ➢ Why, who decided
   ➢ If final destination was not the Netherlands, why did you decide to come here?
   ➢ What did you already know about the Netherlands?
13. When did you leave?
14. Did you leave alone or with others?

Journey
15. Can you describe your journey to the Netherlands?
   ➢ Countries, duration, organization, mode of transportation, guide, circumstances, problems
16. How much did the journey cost?
17. Who paid for the journey?

Experiences in the Netherlands
18. When did you arrive in the Netherlands?
19. Can you tell me more about your arrival?
   ➢ Alone, met someone from Afghanistan, received help, spend the first night?
20. When and where did you meet government officials for the first time?
21. When did you move to a COA reception centre?
   ➢ Did you move to another facility afterwards?
   ➢ What do you think of the reception centre?
22. What does your day look like?
   ➢ School (where, what level, Dutch)
   ➢ Work (where, how much)
23. Are you experiencing any problems in your daily life?
   ➢ Do you know where you can go for help?

Legal status in the Netherlands

24. Have you applied for asylum here?
   ➢ If yes, how is the asylum process going? (stage, reasons, help)
25. How is the contact with your lawyer?
26. How is the contact with your guardian?

The future

27. How do you see your future?
   ➢ If you are able to stay in the Netherlands, what are your plans?
   ➢ If you are not able to stay, what are your plans?