

HOMEWARD BOUND – THOUGHTS AND FEELINGS ABOUT VOLUNTARY REPATRIATION

A difficult period

There is often much at stake emotionally for people contemplating a return to their homeland. Many decisions must be made and many emotional reactions must be dealt with – both in one self and in one's family.

In this folder we have gathered the experiences of people who have considered a return to their homeland. You can read about the emotional reactions in connection with voluntary repatriation and get some ideas as to what you can do to get a clearer picture of what you, yourself, want.

Time

It is important to take time to consider whether you want to return to your homeland. The more firmly committed one is to return, the better one is prepared to deal with the opposition one meets, in one's homeland, upon returning. While considering your decision, it is a good idea to take the time to investigate conditions in your homeland so that you and your family can form an impression of how life will be if you choose to return.

An individual decision

"There is so much to build up now. Afghanistan is like I little child which has just begun to crawl. And we want to go home and help Afghanistan to stand up again." Family from Afghanistan (anonymous)

"We choose to remain in Denmark out of regard for the safety of our children. If we didn't have children, we would probably have decided to return to Iraq." Ali og Ahlan Al-Kaabi from Irak

People choose to return to their homeland or to remain in Denmark for widely differing reasons. Considerations are individual and outcomes can vary widely - even for people from the same country, the same town and the same family. Returning to one's homeland is right for some, remaining in Denmark is right for others.

Strong feelings

"Despite being certain that we want to go home, it is a dilemma and a very difficult decision. But unless we return we will never be whole again, and that is the most important thing for us." Natalia from Bosnia and Hercegovina

Speculation about repatriation often sets off strong and mixed feelings in an individual. Those who choose to return home may experience confusion or fear – despite their decision being completely voluntary, and that; generally speaking, they are glad to have made it.

Preparation

"In the months following 9/11, when the Taliban fell, it became clear to us that we wanted to go home. We have since then followed the situation closely through family in Afghanistan, the BBC, CNN etc. We would actually have been back in the summer of 2003, but it took a long time to plan our return journey. There has been a lot of paperwork to get through in Denmark."

Family from Afghanistan (anonymous)

The people who have returned to their homeland emphasize that returning is easier if one has a realistic picture of conditions in the homeland, because one avoids being disappointed when confronting reality.

It is therefore very important to determine conditions in the homeland as thoroughly as possible. Ask your relatives and friends in your homeland and be sure to get replies to the questions that are important to you, for example, questions concerning safety, housing conditions, the job market, schools and health services.

Personal development

“I have learned many things in Denmark that I can use in Iraq - for example, that education is important and that women should have the same rights as men. I have all these things with me when I return to Iraq.”

Khayria from Iraq

When one has lived in Denmark for a few years, one has had experiences, which are different from those one would have gotten in one's homeland. This can mean that one's personality has changed or that one has changed attitudes to certain things. One has perhaps learned to speak Danish and has acquired Danish friends. Perhaps one thinks well of the Danish educational system. Maybe one has found new interests and has gotten used to the Danish standard of living.

If one is considering returning to one's homeland it is important to think about what has actually happened during one's stay in Denmark. One's stay can have made impressions on one that can turn out to be important for the future in one's homeland, even if one does not expect it.

The family

“It was I who wanted to return. I had a very good opportunity to get a job and I wasn't very happy in Denmark. My wife was more in doubt about returning. She spoke much better Danish than me and also had Danish friends. It has taken her somewhat longer to get used to being home again.”

Ismael from Bosnia and Hercegovina

Reactions within the family to the question of returning home can be very different. Some family members may have gotten more attached to Denmark than to their homeland and therefore thrive better here than others in the family. It can be difficult for children and youngsters who are happy in Denmark, to leave it. They may have many pleasant memories of Denmark and may only know about their homeland what their parents have told them. They often speak Danish well, go to Danish schools and have friends in Denmark. If the family is considering returning home, children may be concerned about losing all that they already have – a good teacher, a good friend or girlfriend. Children can also be worried about how their life will be in their homeland. They may be concerned about not being able to speak their mother tongue as well as the other children, or they may worry about being teased. Parental understanding in such situations is crucial. The responsibility for making the decision to return carries with it the responsibility for giving children the support and backing they need if they do not understand or are dissatisfied during this process.

Relationships between spouses can also have changed during the stay in Denmark. Life in Denmark may have been organized differently than life in the homeland. Perhaps only one of you worked, or only one speaks Danish. Upon returning to your homeland, roles may be reversed once again and your relationship will change again as well. Before making a decision it is, therefore, important to discuss the ways in which your relationship has developed in light of the changes that have occurred and how you wish it to be in the future. Such a discussion will give both spouses a better basis for mutual support regardless of whether the choice is to return or to stay in Denmark

Painful reminders

Many of those who return find that memories of episodes in the homeland come to the surface and become more poignant than they were while in Denmark. Painful memories from before and during one's flight can help to make one vulnerable to other impressions.

Meeting with countrymen

"Sometimes it's difficult to be back again. My neighbors weren't very friendly when I returned. In the beginning I felt that many spoke about me behind my back. Today, after almost two years, much has changed. It is as if people now have realized that I also belong. I also think that they have become convinced that I didn't become a millionaire in Denmark." Mustafa from Iran.

At the outset, many feel great happiness at being back in their homeland. It is very satisfying to understand all that one hears being said when stepping out of doors, turning on the radio or reading a newspaper. Being reunited with family, friends and acquaintances is, naturally, also a source of much happiness.

Along with all the positive experiences, however, many feel that also here, in their homeland, a myth flourishes about life as a refugee. Countrymen who did not take flight feel, perhaps, that running away was a betrayal and find it difficult to understand that life, as a refugee, was not a dance on a bed of roses. Neighbors and acquaintances often believe that refugees return home with their pockets well lined. Experiences of this kind can stand in the way of attempts to build the desired cooperation with neighbors or previous acquaintances.

It is a good idea, in this regard, to avoid discussions in which people compete as to who suffered most. It is, after all, impossible to measure. Instead, it may be important to listen carefully to other people's problems and, not least, speak openly about one's own problems, if anyone is interested.

Housing

"I don't live in my own house. I don't even live in my own town. That took a long time to get used to. Still, I feel that I belong here. I belong here, 200 km from my home town, more than I do in Denmark, many thousands of kilometres away." Abdi from Somalia

Coming back to one's homeland, it is not certain that one will return to the home one lived in prior to one's escape. For some, this thought can be difficult to bear. Before making the decision it is, therefore, important to consider whether one is ready to settle somewhere new, somewhere which is not "truly home" and yet again adapt to new surroundings.

Back in the homeland

"My first reunion with Afghanistan came as somewhat of a shock. I had expected to find my country as the Afghanistan I left, and it was therefore a shock to see how changed and destroyed my country is today. But I chose to return to Afghanistan out of love for my country." Abdul from Afghanistan

Most of those who return, experience the first period in their homeland as turbulent. On the one hand, everything is familiar and known. On the other, much is changed – both in one's surroundings and in one self. It is not uncommon, during the first period, to experience doubts and conflicting feelings. One can feel happy and unhappy at the same time and be in doubt as to whether one has made the right decision. Many feel a desire to use their right of cancellation as soon as they meet resistance in their homeland. It can be a help, in that situation, to remember that it can take a long time to get used to being in one's homeland again, even though it seems that one knows it all so well.

Departure

If one decides to return it is important to consider how to make one's departure from life in Denmark, from specific persons or from something particular that one likes very much. Once back in one's homeland, it can be a source of pleasure to have rounded one's stay in Denmark off in a good fashion.

There are no shortcuts

Experience has taught us that in repatriation, or, for that matter, in making the decision to repatriate, there are no shortcuts. To achieve greater certainty one can make enquiries regarding conditions in the homeland and discuss one's deliberations with family, friends and acquaintances. They can help by looking at things from new perspectives. It is important to take as long as is necessary to find the best solution for one's self and one's family – irregardless of whether in the end one returns, or decides to remain in Denmark.

MORE INFORMATION ABOUT VOLUNTARY REPATRIATION

Telephone counseling:

Telephone counseling about voluntary repatriation is available from The Danish Refugee Council (Dansk Flygtningehjælp) in the following languages:

Bosnian/Serbian/Croatian:

Tuesdays and Thursdays 1:00 pm – 4:00 pm on tel. 3373 5229

Arabic and Farsi

Tuesdays 1:00 pm – 3:00 pm on tel. 3373 5094

Danish and English:

Monday to Friday 9:00 am – 3:00 pm on tel. 3373 5000

Newsletters

The Danish Refugee Council publishes newsletters in Arabic and Afghani concerning voluntary repatriation. You can find them on our website at: www.flygtning.dk/atvendehjem

Informative material

Værd at huske, inden du rejser

At vende hjem – tanker og følelser om frivillig hjemvenden

Website:

www.flygtning.dk/atvendehjem

Address:

Dansk Flygtningehjælp
Borgergade 10
Postbox 53
1002 København K.
Tel.: 3373 5000

Useful addresses:

Udlændingestyrelsen (The Royal Danish Immigration Service)
Ryesgade 53
2100 København Ø.
Tlf.nr.: 3536 6600
www.udlst.dk

Integrationsministeret (The Ministry for Refugee, Immigration and Integration Affairs)
Holbergsgade 6
1057 København K.
Tlf.nr.: 3392 3380
www.inm.dk