Department of Global Political Studies

Master program of International Migration and Ethnic Relations

A Study of Unaccompanied Afghan Asylum-Seeking Children in Sweden

Migration Experiences: Reasons and Risks

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This research is devoted to the Afghan unaccompanied children who participated in this study and to all who struggle in each step of their life for a better future.
Abstract

This study aims to draw attention to the stories of Afghan unaccompanied asylum-seeking children in Sweden; their reasons to leave Afghanistan and to migrate to Sweden, the way that they migrate, and the problems they face during their journey to Sweden are investigated. In order to achieve the aims of this study, a qualitative method is used based on semi-structured interviews. Altogether, eight people are interviewed of which six are Afghan male unaccompanied asylum-seeking children, one is a legal guardian and one is an assistant (behandlingsassistent). Theories such as push and pull factors, migration industry theory, transit migration theory, and social network theory help to understand better the stories of Afghan unaccompanied children while analyzing the data.

The data obtained from interviews shows that the children who were leaving Afghanistan had mixed motivations. Factors such as lack of security, violence, threats, individual risks associated with their ethnicity, forced recruitment, economic hardship and political reasons push them to leave Afghanistan. My findings show that the main reason for the children to leave Afghanistan is the harassment and violence against the ethnic group Hazara.

Moreover, the data demonstrates that traveling with smugglers and crossing borders, by land or by sea, is a multiple-step procedure for Afghan unaccompanied children. They have many stops along the way and spend lots of time in different transit countries. The journey is full of risks for them. My interviews reveal that transit migration creates a number of problems for these children.

In addition, this study indicates that the role of social networks is of great importance for these children. The smugglers create strong incentives for their decision to claim asylum in Sweden. Moreover, co-migrants and friends of friend who live in Europe play a significant role in their decision-making. Furthermore, restrictive legislations as well as lack of protection in transit countries make onward migration inevitable. Other factors, such as the probability of getting a residence permit and family reunification, are important for Afghan unaccompanied children to choose Sweden as a destination country.

**Keywords:** Afghanistan, Afghan unaccompanied children, Asylum seeker, Migration reasons, Transit migration, Smugglers, Dangers, Social networks, Sweden
Acknowledgment

This paper is the result of a valuable experience in my life as a student participating in international master program on International Migration and Ethnic Relations.

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Last but not least, I would like to thank my lovely parents for their support, patience and love in every single moment of doing this research. Special thanks to Martin Andersson who has always strengthened my soul with his words and supported me with his encouragement. I love you all!
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Full Form</th>
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<tr>
<td>AIHRC</td>
<td>Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission</td>
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<td>CRC</td>
<td>Convention on the rights of the child</td>
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<tr>
<td>EURODAC</td>
<td>It is the database or system for fingerprinting of asylum and irregular migrants</td>
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<td>IOM</td>
<td>International Organization for migration</td>
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<tr>
<td>NGO</td>
<td>Non-Governmental Organization</td>
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<td>SWM</td>
<td>Swedish Migration Board</td>
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<td>UNHCR</td>
<td>United Nations High Commissioner for Refugee</td>
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<td>UNICEF</td>
<td>United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund</td>
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1.0 Introduction

Half of the asylum seekers in developed countries are children (Wallin & Ahlström, 2005: 130). The number of unaccompanied child migrants has been increasing in recent years in European countries (Migrationsverket: 2014). Sweden is one of the largest recipient countries for asylum seekers within Europe. Germany and France also receive a large number of asylum seekers. In 2013 Sweden received approximately 3800 unaccompanied children, an increase from 2012. The largest group of children came from Afghanistan, followed by Somalia (Migrationsverket: 2014). Approximately 1247 Afghan unaccompanied children arrived in Sweden in 2013. The majority of these children are boys between the ages of 13 and 17 (Government offices of Sweden: 2014).

The reasons why children flee from Afghanistan and migrate to Sweden are still not completely known (UNHCR, 2010:7). Therefore, I investigate the reasons why Afghan children leave Afghanistan and migrate to Sweden, as well as the problems they face before their migration to Sweden. The situation of these children who arrive in Sweden unaccompanied is different from that of children who migrate with their parents. These children are vulnerable because, besides suffering as other migrants from the loss of their home, their school, their language, and other things, they usually have lost their parents as well (Lundberg & Dahlquist, 2012: 54).

1.1 Research aims

The aim of this study is to increase the knowledge about what causes Afghan children to leave their home country and migrate to Sweden. The aim is also to increase the understanding of the process behind their migration to Sweden and the problems they are faced with during the journey to Sweden. This study is presented largely from the children’s perspectives, and additional information is provided by a legal guardian as well as an assistant (behandlingsassistent). Eight semi-structured interviews took place in Skåne, Sweden.

The reason I chose Afghan children as the focus of this study was because, in 2013, the number of Afghan unaccompanied children who migrated to Sweden represented the largest group of migrant children compared to other nationalities (Government offices of Sweden: 2014).
1.2 Research questions

1) Why do Afghan children leave Afghanistan?

2) How do they migrate and what problems do they face during their migration to Sweden?

3) Why do they choose Sweden as a destination country?

1.3 Motivation of the topic

The choice of studying Afghan unaccompanied children in Sweden is firstly result of my personal interest. As I remember from my childhood, Afghanistan, my neighboring country, has faced conflicts and external or internal wars for a long time. I was always concerned about the situation of children who are in danger in Afghanistan. It seems that the situation has continually deteriorated for different reasons, and these children do not have any option except escaping from Afghanistan and building their future somewhere else. Today, we witness an increasing number of Afghan children leaving their home country and moving to European countries such as Sweden.

Two months of voluntary work in a Non-Governmental Organization concerning refugee children, especially Afghan children, strengthened my decision to choose this topic.

Furthermore, studying this topic is important for society. By understanding these children, we can create a better society and then respond better to their specific needs. Children’s voices should be heard. If we do not understand these children, we cannot design a good supportive policy for their future.

The importance of this study lies in its contribution to the existing literature devoted to studying Afghan unaccompanied children. Although some scientific knowledge has been already gathered on this issue, as of yet there is not sufficient data to draw any conclusions on why so many Afghan children are leaving their home country and coming to Europe, and to Sweden in particular (UNHCR, 2010:7).

This research might also be valuable for children who are considering leaving Afghanistan and moving to Sweden in the future; it may be informative for them to be aware of the dangers and risks they might face during the journey.
1.4 Terminology

In this section, the meanings of particular terms will be defined in order to facilitate understanding and analysis of the material presented in this paper.

The term *unaccompanied minors* refers to “persons under the age of majority who are not accompanied by a parent, guardian, or other adult who by law or custom is responsible for them” (International Organization for Migration, 2004: 67). These children are under the age of 18. The term unaccompanied children or minors will be used interchangeably.

*Asylum seekers* is defined as “persons seeking to be admitted into the country as refugees and waiting decision on their applications for refugee status under relevant international and national instruments” (ibid: 8).

*Smuggler* refers to “An intermediary who is moving people in furtherance of a contract with them, in order to illegally transport them across an internationally recognized State border” (ibid: 60).

*Guardian* refers to “one who has the legal authority and duty to care for another’s person or property, usually because of the other’s incapacity, disability, or status as a minor” (International Organization for Migration, 2004: 28).

*Irregular migrant* refers to “someone who, owing to illegal entry or the expiry of his or her visa, lacks legal status in a transit or host country” (International Organization for Migration, 2004:34).

1.5 Material

The materials used in this study are from both primary and secondary sources. Primary sources include interviews with Afghan unaccompanied children, a legal guardian and an assistant (behandlingsassistent) and also figures and facts which were obtained about Afghan unaccompanied children by the Swedish Migration Board (migrationsverket) and governmental organizations such as Government Offices of Sweden. Secondary sources consist of research articles, books and materials from Non-Governmental Organizations and institutions.
1.6 Delimitation

This study investigates the reasons and motivations of Afghan children for leaving Afghanistan and seeking asylum in Sweden in 2013. It also examines the process behind their migration to Sweden. Issues such as the reception of these children by Swedish institutions, the integration process of the children and their well-being will not be considered in this study. However, issues such as push and pull factors, the migration industry theory, transit migration theory and social networks are considered in this study.

The children who were interviewed for this study were between sixteen and seventeen years old. This was because most of the children who emigrate from Afghanistan were between the ages of thirteen and seventeen (Government offices of Sweden: 2014). No interviews were conducted with Afghan girls due to the fact that the majority of the children escaping from Afghanistan are males (ibid, 2014).

1.7 Thesis outline

The disposition of the thesis is presented as follows; after this introduction part (chapter one), chapter two includes a literature review. Chapter three includes the historical background about Afghanistan and an overview of the situation of children in Afghanistan. Furthermore, it addresses the international and Swedish frameworks concerning unaccompanied child migrants. Chapter four includes research methodology and explains how the data was obtained. Chapter five explains the theories which are used in this research such as push and pull theory, the migration industry theory, transit migration theory and social networks theory. Chapter six presents the findings and analysis of the data and chapter seven concludes the study.
2.0 Literature review

With an increase in the number of unaccompanied children seeking asylum in European countries over recent years (Migrationsverket: 2014), this issue has become the center of attention for several groups including researchers. Numerous studies have been conducted concerning unaccompanied children in different parts of the world. Due to the broad scope of the field, the researchers have been investigating many different aspects of the issue.

To begin with, Dr. Andre Sourander (1998), a professor of child psychiatry at Finland’s Turku University, examined the problems and “traumatic events” experienced by unaccompanied children who were awaiting placement in an asylum center in Finland. He stated that the children had experienced a number of “threats,” “losses” and “persecution” (1998:719). His result showed that these children were in a “highly vulnerable situation” (ibid). “Post-migratory” pressures faced by unaccompanied minors intensify “their emotional symptoms”, and high-quality healthcare and a strong social security system do not guarantee an appropriate degree of care for these unaccompanied minors (1998: 725).

Some studies have indicated that social support is essential for maintaining mental as well as physical health of unaccompanied children (Schaefer et al.,1981 in Wallin & Ahlström, 2005: 131). According to Baker (1982), for “emotional adaptation,” refugees need access to “emotional support” from their compatriots or need to share their stories with people who speak the same language as them. In addition, religious ideas or conviction may also help some children (in Wallin and Ahlström, 2005: 131).

Anne-Marie Wallin& Gerd Ahlström (2005: 129) investigated the experiences of unaccompanied youth in regards to their lifestyles and well-being in Sweden after being granted permanent residence. The results showed that most of the youth attempted to adjust themselves to life in their new country. Their social networks were generally friends who shared the same ethnic background (ibid).

The issue of arrival of unaccompanied migrant children has also been investigated by scholars and researchers. Among European countries, there are wide differences in the practices of reception and admittance of asylum seekers. For example, Sweden allows unaccompanied children to enter the country and, after they have arrived, their residency applications are
investigated. Likewise, the United Kingdom does not detain or return children at the UK border if their status as a refugee is accepted at the beginning. On the other hand, France and Spain stop foreigners such as unaccompanied minors who arrive at their borders, and they are refused access to the territory (Council of Europe: Parliamentary assembly, 2011:10).

Christina Skrikas (2014: 32) conducted a comparative study concerning the welfare of these unaccompanied children. She showed in her research how Canada and Sweden follow the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) concerning the welfare policy on unaccompanied children. Skrikas mentioned that Sweden has a social democratic regime while Canada has a more liberal regime. In Sweden, it is the “government and municipalities” which provide accommodation for unaccompanied children, while in Canada there are “private organizations” that help unaccompanied children to find a place to live. Based on her research, Canada gives a “selective welfare” while Sweden gives a universal welfare and equality of rights as a “social democratic regime.” At the same time, she implied that there are similarities between the policies implemented in these two countries. For example, they do not discriminate against people based on their ethnicity (ibid:32).

According to UNHCR, the Council of Europe conducted field research on unaccompanied children seeking asylum with focus on four countries, one of which was Sweden. One of the factors considered in this study was the integration process of children. The result showed that these children generally resided in suburbs, outside of city centers, in neighborhoods populated by a high number of immigrants. Children felt that they were segregated from Swedish society and that they had no contact with Swedish people (UNHCR, 2014: 34, 37).

Anna Lundberg and Lisa Dahlquist (2012:54) have conducted studies regarding the current situation of unaccompanied children in Sweden from the children’s perspective. They addressed the way the children perceive their situations and describe their perceptions and hopes. Furthermore, they found that lots of children were very concerned for the future, and also had a strong underlying need for support. According to the children in this study, the asylum process is a worrying process. Some could not attend school, some became ill after their asylum applications were rejected and others felt offended while authorities doubted their stories. Their research suggests that more needs to be done for these children. Possible developments could
include “continued information” from authorities regarding the asylum case, “more therapeutic care” and daily contact with friends (ibid:54).

All of the research which has been presented above brings us to the question of why, and how, do Afghan unaccompanied children migrate. Currently the research data is insufficient, particularly concerning Afghan unaccompanied children and their reasons for seeking asylum in Europe (UNHCR: 2010, 7). My research attempts to discover their reasons for leaving Afghanistan and migrating to Sweden. Furthermore, this research investigates the way children migrate to Sweden and the difficulties they are faced with during their journey.
3.0 Contextual background

3.1 Historical background of Afghanistan

In Afghanistan, there are different ethnic groups, religious groups and clans. Therefore, it is hard to keep the country as a unitary state. The wars and conflicts which have happened since 1978 divided the country further, and a balance has not been reached between the different groups (Säkerhetspolitik: 2013).

The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan between 1979 and 1989, and the subsequent military campaign, resulted in a huge humanitarian crisis. Thousands of people were killed and villages were bombed and irrigation system were destroyed (ibid). After the withdrawal of the Soviet Union, peace did not return to the country since different armed groups continued to fight for power and the country more or less fell apart. The conflicting groups had access to lots of weapons which they received from countries such as the USA to fight with the Soviet Union (Säkerhetspolitik: 2013).

In 1994, a new group emerged called the Taliban. “Taliban” is an Arabic word which means “in the pursuit of religious knowledge.” Most Taliban members came from refugee camps in Pakistan. They have been supported by Pashtuns. The Taliban have established an extremely conservative regime which requires the blind submission of Afghan citizens to the laws they are enforcing (Säkerhetspolitik: 2013).

The Taliban fights against westernization. They believe that women should be banned from working, children should not be allowed to go to school, and men should let their beard grow. If people do not follow their rules, the Taliban imposes punishments on people. They believe that their rules make Afghanistan a pure Islamic society (Säkerhetspolitik: 2013; see also BBC, 2014).

Most of the Taliban are Pashtuns. The Pashtuns are the largest ethnic group in Afghanistan, and they are the dominant group in the government. Tajiks make up a quarter of Afghanistan’s population and live in the north and northwest of Kabul. Uzbeks, Turkmens and Kirghiz also reside in the north of Afghanistan. Hazaras are a Mongolian people who live in central
Afghanistan. Most of the Afghans are Sunni Muslims, such as Pashtuns, while Hazaras and some Tajiks are Shia (Säkerhetspolitik: 2013).

Most of the civil wars which happened in 1998 were between the Taliban and the Shiites. When the Taliban occupied a city called Mazar –I Sharif in Afghanistan in 1998, they massacred thousands of Shia Hazaras (Säkerhetspolitik: 2013; see also Human Rights Watch: 1998).

The Taliban became increasingly isolated. They formed a terrorist network called Al-Qaeda led by Osama Bin Ladan (Nations Online, 2014). He recruited young Muslims and trained them to fight against the West through terrorist acts; for example, bombing the US embassies in Kenya and Tanzania in 1998 (Säkerhetspolitik: 2013). The following year, the UN imposed economic sanctions against Afghanistan as a punishment. The sanctions contributed to the deterioration of the security situation in Afghanistan. Severe droughts made the situation even worse; many people had to leave the countryside and move to refugee camps (ibid). In 2001, Al-Qaeda attacked the World Trade Center. As a response, the US and the UK bombed Afghanistan and then searched for the main Al-Qaeda members responsible of the event of 2001(Säkerhetspolitik: 2013).

Following this, in 2002 the UN gathered Afghans from different groups to a meeting in Germany in order to talk about the situation in Afghanistan, as well as to find a way to re-establish the government for the whole country. Hamid Karazi was elected president in 2002 (Säkerhetspolitik: 2013).

However, the government could never maintain total control of the country and many different individuals proclaimed themselves governors. The rural areas of Afghanistan in particular did not experience any development after the election. The Taliban moved more freely and found supporters by forcing and threatening people. The Taliban established a strong presence in the south and east of Afghanistan. They have carried out many military attacks against the army and foreign troops. The number of the suicide attacks has increased which mostly has affected the civilian population (Säkerhetspolitik: 2013).

The result of more than twenty years of wars and conflicts is the destruction of whole regions of Afghanistan (Säkerhetspolitik: 2013). The security situation in Afghanistan is complex. There
are around 600,000 displaced people in Afghanistan, and that number is predicted to rise in 2014. The restricted ability of the government to provide access to the main services, the “continued conflict,” periodic droughts, national disasters and “rapid urbanization” contribute to the rise of poverty and unemployment (UNHCR: 2014). Furthermore, the widespread corruption which exists within the police and the administration hampers the attempts to develop the country’s political institutions and security (regeringskansliet: 2014).

3.2 An overview of the situation of children in Afghanistan

Afghanistan is a country which ratified CRC in 1994 (UNICEF: 2009). However, it is evident that the rights of the child are not respected and their rights are violated in different ways. Reports indicate that the situation of children in Afghanistan is not good. Children are vulnerable in Afghanistan (Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission, 2008: 3). “The place of residency, the existing cultural sensitivity” and the economic situation are among the aspects which increase the vulnerability of Afghan children (ibid: 3).

Attacks against school children prevent access to education in different parts of the country, especially those areas which are under the control of the Taliban. The Taliban and other terrorists threaten and attack school children and burn their schools (US Department of State: 2014:43). They use children as “suicide bombers.” According to reports on human rights practices for 2013, children are recruited by “pro-government militia” and used for military purposes (Ibid: 17&18).

There is a high number of accounts of child sexual abuse in Afghanistan. These accounts detail that boys are abused by men outside their families while girls are abused by “extended family members.” In the majority of these cases, the sexual abusers are not arrested. The practice of “Bache Bazi” (translated as “dancing boys”) is a common phenomenon not only in the conservative rural regions of Afghanistan but also in Kabul. In “Bache Bazi,” boys are dressed in female clothing and taught to dance for wealthy and powerful men, and the men sexually abuse them (US Department of State, 2014:44).

Underage marriage is banned in both national law and international law. Despite a law setting the minimum legal age for marriage for girls at 16 and for boys at 18, reports indicate that many
children marry before the age of 15 (Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission, 2008: 20, 21). Some poor families, for example, insist that their daughters marry in exchange for “bride money.” This practice is also illegal (US Department of State, 2014: 45).

3.3 International and Swedish legal frameworks concerning unaccompanied asylum-seeking children

This part briefly provides some information concerning international and Swedish legal frameworks. These legal instruments give us a better understanding in regard to the rights and responsibilities associated with unaccompanied children. Such understanding brings up recommendations that can affect the lives of unaccompanied children.

3.3.1 The Dublin Convention

The original Dublin Convention was signed in 1990 but it came into force on 1 Sep 1997. The Dublin Convention is a collection of regulations in Europe. According to this convention, the application for asylum should be investigated in the first country which the asylum seeker came into contact with (Migrationsverket: 2013).

There are some necessary criteria and conditions which a country must take into account when considering the application of asylum seekers. These criteria include “illegal entry or stay in a member state,” the “principle of family unity,” and the “issuance of residence permits or visas” (Europa, 2011). However, there are some exceptions to these criteria; for instance, if no member states can be designated on the basis of the conditions mentioned above, the responsibility of the investigation goes to the first country with which the asylum application was lodged (Europa.eu: 2011).

In order to improve the weaknesses which were in the Dublin Convention, the Dublin Regulation II was adopted and came into force in 2003 in the member states, including Sweden. This regulation maintained the main criteria of the convention with some small differences (Europa.eu: 2011).

One of the rules which is implemented by the Dublin Regulation is identification of unaccompanied children. The identification of the children is done by fingerprinting. If a child is 14 years old or older, his/her fingerprint is taken and registered in the Eurodac database. With
this system it is possible to find out whether the child has previously applied for asylum in any other EU country (Migrationsverket, The Dublin Regulation: 2007).

However, the Dublin Regulation II prevented the asylum seeker’s access to protection in Europe. There were differences in the ways that the member states implemented the regulation. The member states did not have any common principles of information provision, or ways to evaluate people’s individual vulnerabilities or special requirements. They did not consider the benefits that the asylum seekers should have been entitled to. Many who were seeking asylum were transferred from one state to another state without having the opportunity to have their asylum application investigated completely (European Council on refugee and exiles: 2013).

Based on above reasons, the Dublin Regulation III was adopted and came into force in 2013. According to this regulation, the member state is responsible to consider the application of the asylum seekers “lodged in one of the Member States by a third-country national” (Official Journal of the European Union: 2013, 31). It is hoped that this regulation can solve some of the serious problems concerning the protection of the asylum seekers (European Council on Refugee and Exile: 2013).

3.3.2 General Comment No.6 concerning unaccompanied children

The General Comment No.6 is related to unaccompanied children who find themselves out of their home country. It is applied to the children regardless their reasons for leaving their home country (UNICEF, 2005: 6). The Committee for the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child created the General Comment No.6. The purpose of this General Comment is “to draw attention to the particularly vulnerable situation of unaccompanied and separated children; to outline the multifaceted challenges faced by States and other actors in ensuring that such children are able to access and enjoy their rights; and, to provide guidance on the protection, care and proper treatment of unaccompanied and separated children based on the entire legal framework provided by the Convention on the Rights of the Child (the ‘Convention’), with particular reference to the principles of non-discrimination, the best interests of the child and the right of the child to express his or her views freely” (UNICEF, 2005:5).

Furthermore, one chapter of the General Comment considers “applicable principles.” This deals with the issues such as legal commitments of states for unaccompanied children in their territory.
and criteria for their implementation, “right to life, survival and improvement,” right to freedom of expression and “respect for the principle of non-refoulement” and “confidentiality” (UNICEF, 2005:2).

Moreover, according to the General Comment, special protections should be given to unaccompanied children such as initial assessment, the “accommodation arrangements,” right to education, and the right to have “an adequate standard of living” (art 27 of CRC) (ibid: 3).

3.3.3 Swedish Alien Act

The Aliens Act is a Swedish instrument which was adopted in 2005 and came into force in 2006. This instrument is divided into 23 chapters, and in each chapter there are sections which include provisions concerning the conditions related to the migrants, their rights and the duties to stay in Sweden (Aliens act:2005).

Concerning unaccompanied asylum-seeking children, the Aliens Act includes several provisions highlighting on mainly the rights of the child. Some of the provisions are:

- The best interests of the child should be respected and special attention should be given to the rights of the child
- The child’s voice should be heard unless it is inappropriate
- In some exceptional cases such as exceptionally distressing situations, the child should be granted a residence permit (Government offices of Sweden: 2014)

3.3.4 Children’s rights in Sweden

Sweden is one of the countries which ratified CRC “following a decision by the Riksdag in 1990” (Government Offices of Sweden: 2012). Based on this convention, the best interests of the child should be respected (ibid). According to Article 3 of CRC, “In all actions concerning children, whether undertaken by public or private social welfare institutions, courts of law, administrative authorities or legislative bodies, the best interests of the child shall be primary consideration” (Eriksson, Mårsäter & Åkermark, 2007: 186).

According to CRC, a person who is under 18 years old is regarded as a child and should be given special attention due to the child’s vulnerable nature (Government offices of Sweden: 2012).
Furthermore, children's rights should not be subjected to discrimination according to this convention. Therefore, unaccompanied children who arrive in Sweden have the same rights as the rest of the children in Sweden (migrationsverket: 2013). As an example, children who come to Sweden have the right to go to school and therefore, the municipality where these children live undertake to provide schooling for them on the same conditions as other children who live in Sweden. Also, migrant children have the same rights to health care as all other children in Sweden (ibid).

Family reunification is great of importance in Sweden (migrationsverket: 2013). According to Article 9 of CRC, children have a right to be reunited with their family (Eriksson, Mårsäter & Åkermark, 2007: 187). Therefore, the Swedish authorities attempt to find the child’s parents or their custodian while investigating the child’s asylum application. The main aim is to be reunited with its family in their origin country. However, if family is living in the unsafe area, there is a high possibility for that child to be reunited with its parent in Sweden (migrationsverket: 2013).
4.0 Methodology

4.1 Qualitative Research

This study is based on a qualitative method using interviews. According to Kvale and Brinkmann, “qualitative research can give us compelling descriptions of the qualitative human world, and qualitative interviewing can provide us with well-founded knowledge about our conversational reality. Research interviewing is thus a knowledge-producing activity (…)” (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009:47).

As mentioned by Kvale and Brinkmann, one of the most important instruments in gathering data in qualitative research is the qualitative interview. Interviewing is well suited for this type of study since it imparts children’s life stories, experiences, feelings, and opinions concerning their reasons for leaving Afghanistan and migrating to Sweden. Furthermore, it shows in details how the Afghan children migrate and the problems that are faced during their journey to Sweden.

Although a qualitative method is predominately used in this study, quantitative data is also used in order to show the number of unaccompanied children who are migrating to Sweden. These statistics are provided by the Swedish Migration Board and the Government offices of Sweden (Regerinskansliet).

4.2 Semi-structured interview

To proceed with a qualitative method, the semi-structured interview is chosen. The interviews follow a list of questions which is included in the Appendix II. By means of a semi-structured interview, the researcher starts with a set of general open questions which are in line with the research questions (Bryman, 2008:438). Having general open questions gives the interviewees the freedom to express their point of view, build confidence and feel comfortable with the interviewer. It furthermore makes the interviewees lead the conversation (Ibid: 438). After establishing trust, the main questions are asked. The questions are put to the children, a legal guardian and an assistant, and are related to the children’s reasons for leaving Afghanistan and migrating to Sweden. They are also asked how they migrated and what difficulties that they faced during their journey to Sweden.
The interview questions were tested in a pilot interview with an Afghan boy living in Sweden. This interview was conducted in order to check for possible problems. Necessary changes were made after the pilot study. This action helped the actual participants answer the questions with ease and without ambiguity.

4.3 Inductive Approach

This study is based on an inductive approach, grounded in the empirical data gathered by interviews with unaccompanied children, a legal guardian and also an assistant. According to 6 and Bellamy, “inductive research begins with question. Inductive research is used to develop such a statement from a position in which we have no real idea of what might turn out to be plausible, relevant or helpful about the subject of interest” (2012:76). One might argue that it is not possible to have a purely inductive study since researchers always have some kind of pre-knowledge about the topic of investigation. This pre-knowledge often helps the way the research questions are asked and the way the research is conducted. However, in this study I have attempted to be as inductive as possible in order to capture the reasons for and the ways of migration from the children’s perspective. Therefore, I attempt to minimize the bias.

4.4 Interviews

In this study, narrative interviews were conducted. As Kvale and Brinkmann (2009:153) mention, narrative interviews highlights the stories that are told by the respondents, either automatically by the participants or extracted by the interviewer.

The interview with an assistant was conducted in English while the interviews with children and a legal guardian were conducted in Dari, which is a dialect of Farsi. Therefore, there was no language barrier between the interviewer and the unaccompanied children. Having a common language made the children feel more comfortable with the interviewer when sharing their stories and experiences. According to Kvale and Brinkmann (2009: 166), “a good interviewer knows the topic of the interview, masters conversational skills, and is proficient in language, with an ear for his or her subjects’ linguistic style.”
4.5 Research Participants

Children were the main actors in my research. The purpose of doing interviews with them was to gain a wide picture of the causes of their leaving, their migration to Sweden and also to find out the ways they migrated.

I chose to interview a legal guardian since legal guardians are among the most important people in contact with the children concerning their problems, the financial issues and the decisions which are made by the Swedish Migration Board. Legal guardians mostly know about the children’s characteristics, stories and their life.

Furthermore, it was important to acknowledge the assistant’s perspective concerning unaccompanied children. Assistants spend lots of their time together with these children and know a lot about them since children often share their stories with them. Therefore, it was a good source for me to interview a representative from this group as well.

In total, eight interviews were conducted. Six interviews with Afghan unaccompanied male children, one interview with a legal guardian and one interview with an assistant were carried out. More information concerning the respondents is attached in the table in the findings and analysis part (page 35-6).

4.6 Access to the interviewees through snowballing approach

I chose to use a snowballing approach to find the interviewees, which means that the researcher initially establishes the contact with a small group of the people, then through them, the researcher establishes contact with others, as described by Bryman (2008,184).

For this study, I initially got in touch with an acquaintance who is a legal guardian. I explained to her about my aim of doing this study and the way that this research is conducted. After a while, she showed her interest and said that she can be a part of this research. After interviewing her, she helped me to find some Afghan unaccompanied asylum seeking children. Since she was a legal guardian, she had contacts with several children. Keeping in mind that she was informed of my aim of doing this research, she had all the important information as well as the consent form which is attached in the appendix (I). She confirmed that I could interview the children if the children give their consent to be interviewed.
Finally, I found three Afghan unaccompanied children through her and other children were introduced by their friends through the snowballing method. It should be mentioned that three of these Afghan unaccompanied children were living with their legal guardians and three others were living in different asylum homes (Asylum boende) in Malmö and Lund.

### 4.7 Arrangement for the interview

While arranging the interviews, I asked the participants to choose the date, time and preferable place to conduct the interview. The children wanted to have the interview in public places such as a library. Therefore, four interviews with children were conducted at Malmö Orkanen Library, one was carried out in a calm coffee shop and one interview was conducted through Skype since the interviewee was away from Malmö. The interview with the legal guardian was conducted in her home due to her choice, and the interview with the assistant was also carried out at Malmö Orkanen Library. The interviews were conducted in April, May and June 2014.

The children were also asked whether they would prefer to attend an individual interview or a group interview. This question was asked in order to build trust between the interviewer and the interviewee under safe and calm situation. All the children chose to be interviewed individually.

### 4.8 Subjectivity of the research

The topic chosen, the previous knowledge about living conditions of people in Afghanistan, work experience with refugee children and now face-to-face interviews with children who left their home country and came to Sweden to look for a better future entails the subjectivity of the research. The researcher attempts to go in depth of this study by interviewing these people and perceiving their experiences, stories from inside rather than taking the role of objective observer. According to Tim May (2001:14), in order to concentrate on the subjectivity, the researchers focus on people’s understandings and explanations of their social environments, “not the environment itself.”

### 4.9 Limitation of the study

While doing this research, I was faced with several problems. First, I decided to contact the Swedish Migration Board (SMB) and informed them that I was doing this research. Therefore, I contacted an acquaintance who was working with Afghan unaccompanied children in SMB. She
said that she would help me to get the material for this study. Everything was organized and I was ready to proceed until I contacted her for the last confirmation. She then informed me that her team could not help me in this research due to the sensitivity of the topic. Afterwards, I chose the informal way for finding the respondents (snowballing approach).

Several children that were asked to participate in the study decided not to participate after thinking about it for a while. Therefore, the reluctance and unwillingness of the children to participate in this study and to disclose the information about their reasons for leaving Afghanistan and migrating to Sweden was one of the limitations of this study. Many factors can explain their reluctance. Children’s past trauma and the unstable situation in Sweden at present make them not so eager to participate in this study. Moreover, children might get tired of being interviewed and having to tell their stories repeatedly.

Some of the children did not answer all the questions. One participant mentioned that he did not want all the details of his stories to be written down by the researcher. However, most provided clear information about their stories, which was helpful for analyzing the data. The researcher tried to build enough trust with the respondents in order to make them feel free when talking about sensitive issues.

The process of data collection through interviews took four months in total (March-June). This includes both the time devoted to finding the interviewees and the time spent to undertake the actual interviews. Having already devoted a significant amount of time on data collection, I had limited time to complete the translation, transcription and analysis.

4.10 Ethical considerations

According to Kvale and Brinkmann (2009:62), “an interview inquiry is a moral enterprise. Moral issues concern the means, as well as the ends of an interview inquiry. (…) Consequently, interview research is saturated with moral and ethical issues.”

As mentioned above, ethical issues should be taken into consideration while preparing and conducting an interview. I, as a researcher, was aware that interviewing children raises ethical challenges. I was also aware that the parental consent or their legal guardians’ consent is required if children are under 18 years old. Therefore, first of all permission was asked of their legal
guardians. I explained all the ethical principles to the legal guardians and children. I explained to the respondents that their presence is totally voluntary and that they were free to choose if they wanted to answer questions or not. The respondents could end the interview at any time, and they could even retract their participation after finishing the interview. They were informed that their names are kept confidential and they cannot be identified. For this purpose, I used fake names when analyzing and presenting the data. Moreover, permission was asked when recording or taking notes during the interviews. The majority of the children accepted the recording of their voices while one of them did not allow this and just accepted written notes being taken during the interview. Furthermore, it was explained to the subjects that the recorded data will be removed as soon as the data are analyzed.

In order to make the subjects aware of the purpose of doing this research and of the ethical concerns, all participating children signed a written consent form. One copy was given to the subject, one was also given to their legal guardians and one was kept by myself as a researcher. A copy of the consent form is attached in the Appendix (I).

It should be mentioned that these ethical issues were also taken into consideration while interviewing the legal guardian and the assistant.

Although the topic was sensitive, I did not see any possibility of the participants being harmed in the interview process. I did my best to ensure that none of the respondents were stressed physically or psychologically while interviewing them. I should say that I made friends with them after the interview. We are friends now and sometimes are in contact. Some of them have occasionally asked me to help them with something. I think being a researcher with an immigrant background affected positively how these children perceived me in this study. It helped me gain acceptance and possibly greater access than someone perceived as Swedish.

4.11 Validity, reliability and generalization

According to Kvale and Brinkmann, “validation rests on the quality of the researcher’s craftsmanship throughout an investigation, on continually checking, questioning, and theoretically interpreting the findings” (2009: 249). To ensure the validity of the findings and interpretations of the children’s stories in this study, all the recorded interviews have been reviewed and compared with my text in order to see if anything was incorrect or missing.
Furthermore, the validity of my study is increased by the pilot interview I conducted, as well as by having various sources of data (not only children, but also the legal guardian and the assistant). Considering that I checked my understanding of the interviewees’ answers with them during the interview, this also increases the validity of my study.

As Kvale and Brinkmann mention, reliability refers to “the consistency and trustworthiness of research findings; it is often treated in relation to the issue of whether a finding is reproducible at other times and by other researchers” (2009:245). Since there has not yet been so much research concerning Afghan unaccompanied children in Sweden, it is possible that future studies could be inspired by my study and conducted based on my findings. In this paper, the researcher attempted to increase the transparency related to reliability by recording the data. Furthermore, such transparency has been achieved through using the appendixes (which include the questions that I asked and consent form document I used) as well as providing clear presentation of data analysis and results.

It can be said that this research is reliable because the results of this study show that Afghan unaccompanied children had some shared experiences. Children had almost similar reasons to flee Afghanistan and also had the same problems during their migration to Sweden. However, a high level of reliability might be hard to achieve since this study is just focused on children in Skåne, the experiences/stories of the children might be different in different parts of the country or the world.

Furthermore, it is important to see whether the informants’ experiences in this study can be generalized. In this study, the data was obtained through interviewing six Afghan unaccompanied children, a legal guardian and an assistant who works with unaccompanied children. Therefore it is not possible to generalize the result to all Afghan unaccompanied children. The results only reflect the stories and experiences of the Afghan unaccompanied minors, the legal guardian and the assistant who took part in this study. However, this study could offer insights into some possible patterns of migration that could be better investigated through a quantitative approach in future research.
5.0 Theoretical framework

5.1 Introduction of theories

This chapter provides a theoretical framework for understanding descriptive accounts of Afghan unaccompanied children and their migration to Sweden. The reasons and motivations for Afghan children to leave their home country can be understood more easily by using the theory of Push and Pull factors. This theory provides an explanation for why people leave their home countries (Push factors) and why they move somewhere else or choose a specific destination (Pull factors) (Castles & Miller, 2009:22). This theory will be used to answer the first question of this thesis about why Afghan unaccompanied children leave Afghanistan.

Transit migration theory and migration industry theory (the role of smugglers) are used in order to answer the second question about how Afghan children migrate to Sweden. Transit migration theory helps to explain the problems children face during their journey. Migration industry theory explains the importance of smugglers in the migration of unaccompanied children.

Social network theory is used in order to answer the third question which is about the children’s reasons to migrate to Sweden, or in other words, their reasons to choose Sweden as a destination country. Social networks provide information to migrants about what constitutes a good destination country.

5.2 Push and Pull Theory

The push and pull theory is inspired by Ernest Ravenstein, who was a geographer during the 19th century. As he argues, migration is influenced by the push and pull process, in which, on the one hand, unfavorable situations in one place such as governmental oppression, economic hardship, etc “Push” people out, and on the other hand, favorable situations in an external place that “Pull” them in (Vassilopoulou, Samaluk & Seierstad, 2014:196).

Many factors cause people to emigrate from their country of origin. Civil war and persecution are factors which force some migrants to cross national borders. Other push factors include lack of educational facilities, inadequate health care and “slavery and political fear” (The Levin Institute, 2014).
Whereas push factors make some people leave their home country, pull factors attract people to a new location. Much like how “discrimination and persecution” act as push factors for people to leave their country of origin, the existence of tolerant societies which respect people regardless of ethnicity, race, religion and political perspectives, make some specific countries more interesting for potential migrants (The Levin Institute, 2014). This pull factor is mainly important for those migrants who are escaping from persecution and armed groups (ibid).

Along the same lines, Castles and Miller argue the same idea of Push and Pull factors. Castles and Miller state that the causes of migration shed light on the theory of Push and Pull factors. “Push factors” motivate people to leave their home countries while “pull factors” attract them to specific receiving countries. Push factors can be low living standards, political violence, lack of economic opportunities and discrimination. On the contrary, pull factors involve better possibilities and political freedom (Castles and Miller, 2009:22).

Parkins states that emigration is a phenomena that has increased considerably during recent years. He explains that there are several factors which influence this phenomenon. “Crime,” “violence” and “lawlessness” can be regarded as important factors (Parkins, 2010:6). Apart from these reasons, lack of economic and social opportunities may also lead to emigration (ibid).

Also in agreement with the above points, Lee’s study (in Parkins, 2010: 13) indicates that the migrants’ reasons for migration lie in a combination of factors associated with their home countries and factors related to the destination country; other factors might also be such as “intervening obstacles, and personal factors” (ibid).

Generally speaking, by using this theory one might get a picture of the migrants’ reasons for migration. Connected to the case of Afghan unaccompanied children, it might not to be surprising why children decide to leave their home country. However, this issue is mainly researched based on the data obtained from interviews that are analyzed in the light of this theoretical framework.

5.3 The migration industry theory

The migration industry theory claims that a large number of people earn their livelihood by establishing migratory movements. These people can be “brokers,” “labour recruiters,” “travel
agents,” “interpreters,” “housing agents,” “lawyers,” “smugglers” or even “counterfeiters” who make official-looking passports (Castles & Miller, 2009:201).

The absence of legal entry channels to many countries has created an increased market for smugglers. It is estimated that between 30-80 percent of illegal entries to Europe are assisted by smugglers (Papadopoulou: 2008, 71). It is hard for migrants (such as refugee, asylum seekers) to make the journey without the aid of smugglers. It is not deniable that in the migration process where smugglers are involved, migrants become vulnerable and cases of abuse occur repeatedly (ibid:72).

Papadopoulou (2008: 72) mentions that the public seems to use the terms “people-smuggling” and “people-trafficking” interchangeably; however, there is in fact a difference between them. According to the United Nations High Commission for Human Rights, “smuggled migrants are moved illegally for profit; they are partners, however unequal, in a commercial transaction… By contrast, the movement of trafficked persons is based on deception and coercion whose purpose is exploitation. The profit in trafficking comes not from the movement but from the sale of trafficked person’s sexual services or labour in the country of destination” (in Castles and Miller, 2009:202).

Icduygu and Toktas (2002) point out that smuggling is coordinated by networks of localities, with a number of helpers such as drivers during the entire journey (in Papadopoulou, 2008: 77). The function of smugglers is to “facilitate migration,” “entry into transit and destination countries” (Koser, 2003:188). Assisting migration also includes organizing tickets and documents. The three main strategies applied by smugglers are “clandestine entry,” “entry with false documentation” and “entry without documentation” (ibid:188). Furthermore, smugglers provide information for the migrants. They can even affect the choice of destination country for the migrants (ibid:188). However, it is a dangerous journey and full of risky events for those who travel with smugglers. Many asylum seekers (referred to as illegal migrants) face risks such as imprisonment, deportation and even death, while the smugglers are seldom arrested (Koser, 2003: 188; Castles and Miller, 2009: 204).
According to Papadopoulou, “smuggling is a crime” (2004, 173). In a way, the migrants and their families are economically exploited in their home country as well as in the destination country. Smuggling is also considered to threaten “human security” (ibid: 174).

Using the smuggling service is short term. It is a transaction between the one who is offering the service and the migrant “client,” and it ends when the migrant reaches their destination (Papadopoulou, 2004: 172-3). Smuggling fees are usually paid partially in advance and partially after arrival. However, those who cannot afford the smuggling fees are often required to spend some time in transit countries, working in order to save money before continuing with the rest of the journey. Therefore, each part of their trip is financed after spending some time in the transit countries (Papadopoulou, April 2008: 9).

It is not possible to measure the exact number of people which are being smuggled and trafficked due to the underground nature of the activity. Customers of smuggling bands are not only economic migrants but also people who are escaping from war, conflict, or persecution in their home countries and seeking protection in another country (Castles and Miller, 2009: 203). In my research, human smugglers seem to be an essential part of the migration of unaccompanied asylum seeking children, therefore the role of smugglers requires taking into consideration the theory of migration industry as a lens for understanding the empirical material gathered with interviews with Afghan unaccompanied children.

5.4 Transit migration theory

The concept of transit migration has been heavily debated among scholars. As of yet, there is no standard definition of transit migration due to its ambiguous nature. Therefore, information on transit migration is mainly derived from empirical case studies which provide a description of the phenomena. Most of the studies emerged in the beginning of 1990s, when the International Organization for Migration (IOM) published a series of reports (Papadopoulou, 2008:3; Suter, 2012:18).

As Papadopoulou explains (2008:4), transit migration can be defined “as the situation between emigration and settlement that is characterized by indefinite migrant stay, legal, illegal, and may or may not develop into further migration depending on a series of structural and individual
factors.” He adds that the intention of the migrants is not a crucial factor because migrants often do not have a clear idea about where they would like to migrate. Another remark in this definition is that migrants do not know the duration of their stay in any given location (Ibid:4).

According to Papadopoulou, transit migration is a process which cuts across different categories. By that he means that transit migration includes not only irregular migrants but also asylum seekers, refugees and regularized migrants because they find themselves in transit in some ways (2008:141).

For transit migrants, the route is surprising and unpredictable. They often spend large amounts of time in many countries, before settling somewhere (Papadopoulou, 2008:142). It can be said that “transit migration is a state of insecurity which renders migrants and refugees particularly vulnerable” (ibid:149).

Papadopoulou illustrates that states overlook transit migration because they assume that the migrants will not spend long in the country before migrating to another location; in fact, this assumption is wrong because most transit migrants stay for significant periods of time, with many migrants eventually staying permanently in what was initially intended to be only a transit country (ibid,2008: 7,142).

One of the definitions which are offered by UNECE (United Nations Economic Commission for Europe) is that transit migration is a “migration in one country with the intention of seeking the possibility there to emigrate to another country as the country of final destination” (in Papadopoulou, 2008: 3). What is important here is that the continuation of travel depends on the opportunities available en route.

One of the most recent discussions of transit migration is conducted by Düvell. He defines transit migration as “a blurred and politicized concept” (Düvell, 2010:415). He explains that the scientific treatment of the issue is obstructed by the politicized nature of the discourse and concept of transit migration (Ibid: 424). In order to develop the analysis, Düvell suggests two further factors in specifying the course of movement, the role of limited policies and that of class (Papadopoulou, 2008:4).
According to Düvell (2008:1), “the concept of transit migration is dynamic and loaded” and due to this reason it might pose difficulties when generating policies to deal with transit migration. He adds that “transit migration has become a political code for unwanted, often irregular immigration into and/or within the EU” (2008:1).

Transit migrants appear from different locations. They can come from the neighboring areas of their destination country or from distant countries (Düvell, 2008:3). Migrants whose country of origin is far from the destination country spend a long time travelling, passing through many countries along the way to their intended final destination (ibid:3).

However, irrespective of if transit migrants originate from neighboring areas of the destination country or not, the transition period can be prolonged and stressful, especially for unemployed and irregular migrants whose survival relies on their efforts and informal networks (Papadopoulou, 2004:175).

Papadopoulou explains that “transit migration is a way to surpass restrictive structures and administrative deficiencies by residing in more than one country in Europe – sometimes illegally – and by gaining time and money until the opportunities allow migration to another, more promising destination” (2005:14).

All above points can bring us to the conclusion that transit migration creates a number of problems. Dangerous journeys, human rights violation and human abuse are few examples showing the negative effects of transit migration. Addressing “human suffering” and “safeguarding fundamental rights” and protecting of those who need help should become the priority (Papadopoulou, 2008:149).

5.5 Social networks theory

In recent years, social networks theory has gained significant ground in the field of migration. Among famous authors, Massey et al (1998) state that “migration is shaped, facilitated and maintained in multiple ways by the social ties in which migrants remained or become embedded” (in Morosanu, 2010:1). According to Koser (1997:594), social networks can consist of family, friends, and communities, and can be created by middle-men such as recruiters, travel agents,
smugglers, and immigration consultants. Networks provide information and emotional support (ibid: 602).

The International Organization for Migration (IOM) reported in 2003 that “The network paves the way for establishing and perpetrating migration channels, given their multiplier effect. As they are cumulative in nature, migration networks tend to become denser and more ramified, thereby offering the migrant a vast choice of destinations and activities” (IOM, 2003:14). Informal networks work in different ways. Some help migrants to finance their travel or to find a job while others help the migrants to cross the border illegally (ibid:14).

Da Vanzo (1981) (in Haug, 2008:587) mentions that “social relationships provide specific capital that is connected to the actual place of residence and that significantly influences decisions.” Haug explains while the increasing number of migrants strengthens social networks, potential migrants are enabled to profit from the social networks and ethnic groups established in the country of destination (ibid:588).

The empirical evidence indicates the effect of social networks on the lives of migrants (Morosanu, 2010:1). As an example, Koser & Pinkerton (2002) argue in their article “Social Networks of Asylum Seekers and Dissemination of Information about Countries of Asylum” how social networks affect the decision making of the migrants. When asylum seekers leave the country of origin, they do not have any clear idea of where they want to go. Here the role of the transit countries and smugglers are of great importance. Smugglers fulfill the functions served by social networks. Smugglers are seen as an important source of information for the potential asylum seekers (Koser & Pinkerton, 2002: no page number).

Sutter (2012:191) mentions in Tales of transit: Sub-Saharan African Migrants’ Experiences in Istanbul that “social networks are formed by the social ties that people share with each other, i.e. relations between individuals whose interpersonal transactions are guided by expectations, obligations, norms or shared interest.”

Social ties can be different, based on their strength. Mark Granovetter distinguishes between two sets of personal ties - strong and weak ties. Strong ties include families, kinships and communal organizations. This is defined by emotions, transactions and endurance (1973:1361-2; Faist, 2000: 6). Weak ties “are characteristic of indirect and superficial relations, such as the relation to
a friend of a friend, or to a new acquaintance, i.e. to people outside the immediate sphere of kinship or social similarity” (Faist in Suter, 2012:191; Faist, 2000:6). Importantly, weak ties are not an “inferior carrier of social resources” (Faist, 2000:6). They are useful “for the division of information, provided they establish links between more dense networks of persons or even groups” (Faist, 2000: 6).

Granovetter’s theory rests on the assumption that “local bridges and weak ties not only represent opportunities for the occurrence of the cohesive phenomena….but they actually do promote the occurrence of these phenomena” (Granovetter, 1983: 219). By saying this, it can be illustrated that local bridges and weak ties improve the flow of information in “differentiated structures” (ibid:219).

All these above points bring us to the conclusion that social networks are seen as a key to understanding migration (Morosanu, 2010:4). In the case of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children who migrate to Sweden, social networks theory offers a background for explaining in what way social networks are crucial in the decision-making of Afghan unaccompanied children.
6.0 Findings and analysis of the stories of the Afghan unaccompanied children

The aim of this chapter is to present the data obtained from semi-structured interviews with respondents and to analyze this data with the help of the theories presented above in order to answer the research questions.

This chapter displays the presentation of informants, their motivations for leaving Afghanistan, transit in neighboring countries, the role of the smugglers in their journey, their migration routes and the threats they faced during the journey, and finally the reasons for their migration to Sweden.

6.1 Presentation of informants

The aim of this part is to provide a brief introduction about the people interviewed; six Afghan unaccompanied children, the legal guardian and the assistant.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fakenames</th>
<th>Place of birth</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Time when left Afghanistan</th>
<th>Time in neighboring countries such as Pakistan and Iran</th>
<th>Time in transit European countries</th>
<th>Arrival in Sweden</th>
<th>Unaccompanied or accompanied with parents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ahmad</td>
<td>Ghazni</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>Hazara</td>
<td>2011</td>
<td>One month</td>
<td>Two years and half</td>
<td>2013</td>
<td>Unaccompanied from Afghanistan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Karim</td>
<td>Bamiyan</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>Hazara</td>
<td>2013</td>
<td>Around one month</td>
<td>Around four months</td>
<td>2013</td>
<td>Unaccompanied from Afghanistan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rahim</td>
<td>Urozgan</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>Hazara</td>
<td>2010</td>
<td>Two months</td>
<td>Around three years</td>
<td>2013</td>
<td>Accompanied till Iran, then unaccompanied</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ghasem</td>
<td>Bamiyan</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>Hazara</td>
<td>2000</td>
<td>Twelve years</td>
<td>Around two years</td>
<td>2013</td>
<td>Accompanied till Iran, then unaccompanied</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mortezia</td>
<td>Helmand</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>Hazara</td>
<td>2006</td>
<td>Seven years</td>
<td>One year</td>
<td>2013</td>
<td>Unaccompanied from Afghanistan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hassan</td>
<td>Ghazni</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>Hazara</td>
<td>2011</td>
<td>One week</td>
<td>Two years and half</td>
<td>2013</td>
<td>Unaccompanied from Afghanistan</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As showed in the table, there are some similarities among the children, such as their ethnicity and the time of their arrival to Sweden. All children who participated in this study are from the Hazara group, which is the minority group in Afghanistan. However, there are some differences among them, such as how much time they spent in neighboring countries and in transit through European countries. The majority of the children travelled from Afghanistan unaccompanied while a few travelled with their parents till Iran, and from there travelled unaccompanied.
Stefan is a 29 year old man who studied International Relations at Malmö University. He has been working as an assistant (behandlingsasistent) in a transit camp, an asylum camp and a PUT camp for around five years (PUT boende: permanent uppehållstånd is devoted to those who get the permanent resident permit). His duties include supporting children in their daily life and creating an active lifestyle for them.

“Elin” is a 57 year old woman who studied Human Rights and International Communication at Malmö University. Furthermore, she studied child psychology in her home country. She first started working with children and unaccompanied asylum-seeking children eighteen years ago. She is a legal guardian and also works as an expert of foreign affairs in different committees within Malmö city. Moreover, she is familiar with the Afghan culture, people and their language since she lived in Afghanistan for a few years. Last but not least, she has accommodated around 100 unaccompanied children in her home over the years. Many children lived with her and her husband who is a legal guardian as well.

6.2 Question 1: Motivations for leaving Afghanistan

The causes of migration can be explained by Push and Pull theory. Portes and Böröcz (1989:607) state that the Push and Pull theory describes how a set of push factors in the home country make people move away, while a separate set of pull factors attract people to a new country. Push factors include elements such as lack of economic and social opportunities and political repression in the origin country, whereas pull factors consist of “comparative advantages” in the richer country (ibid: 607). Previous studies (UNHCR, 2010) have shown that the factors which affect child migration are diverse. In this paper, the detailed reasons why children flee Afghanistan are considered from my respondents’ perspectives in order to answer my first research question.

Multiple motivations

In the interviews, the children were asked to explain their reasons for leaving Afghanistan. This included a question about the situation of Afghanistan when they were living there.
6.2.1 Threats and forced recruitment

“When a Taliban soldier is killed in war, they look for a replacement who can be trained for
different strategies to deal with the enemy. Children are the best category for their goals. The
Taliban take children as hostages and send them to military training camps where they learn to
fight against the Taliban’s enemies. These children are also used as suicide bombs; the Taliban
strap bombs onto children and send them to blow up US soldiers in Afghanistan.” (Ahmad from
Ghazni)

“The Taliban threaten families if they allow their children to go to school, and in most cases
children are captured by the Taliban on the way to and from school” (Ahmad from Ghazni).

“Ahmad” explained to me that he was living in Ghazni, an area which was dominated by the
Taliban. One day after school, the Taliban attacked his home, beat his mother, brothers and
sisters and took him with them. Ahmad was sent to training for around six months. He was
taught different things such as how to fight against the Taliban’s enemies. Sometimes the
Taliban took him to some areas which were controlled by their enemies and showed him how he
should shoot them. During the time he spent training, he witnessed that the Taliban used children
as instruments for killing their enemies, like the US Army. When Ahmad finished training, the
Taliban let him go to say a final goodbye to his parents; however, Ahmad decided to use this
opportunity to leave Afghanistan and escape from all threats, violence and forced recruitment.

“My mother put some money in my hand and told me to get away from here. ‘Go somewhere that
the Taliban cannot find you and kill you,’ she said” (Ahmad from Ghazni).

As Ahmed explained, when he and other children were coming and going from school, the
Taliban and other criminal groups would threaten them. Because of these threats, some children
stopped going to school and had restricted freedom of movement.

Ghasem from Bamiyan said that “My father was threatened by the government and there was a
risk that we all would be killed by the governmental forces. Therefore we left Afghanistan.”

Hassan from Ghazni stated that “You are not only threatened by the Taliban but also sometimes
your life is at risk because of relatives. It is hard to trust people.”
He explained that after the Taliban killed his father, Hassan’s uncle came to his family and demanded that they give him the farm that his father had left them. They could not do this because they did not have anything else except this farm. However, Hassan had to start working outside of the farm in order to support his family. One day when he was on his home way after work, three people attacked him and beat him. At first, his mother thought that the perpetrators might be alcoholics and not linked to the Taliban or any other groups, until the same thing happened again. Then the family decided to move to Kabul and live there instead, but after a while Hassan was attacked and beaten there too. Finally, his mother provided the means for him to leave Afghanistan.

This boy's story illustrates that there are dangers on both sides. On one side, the presence of the Taliban puts harsh pressures on the Hazaras people, and on the other side, close relatives can represent a possible threat. Hassan left Afghanistan due to the presence of the Taliban in the area where his family was living, as well as the threats which were imposed on him personally for unclear reason. From his point of view, it is hard to distinguish a friend from enemy.

6.2.2 Individual risks associated with their ethnicity

“We are Hazara, which is the minority group. We have no rights in Afghanistan. Pashtuns and the Taliban do not see us as a human. It is their slogan that Hazara should die” (Karim from Bamiyan). He said, according to Pashtun’s Mullah “If one kills one Hazara he is a good person but if one kills seven Hazara people he is going to heaven.”

Karim was a businessman in Afghanistan, buying and selling land. He explained: “I bought a piece of land in a Pashtun area, but when a Pashtun Representative of Parliament noticed that, he said that we Hazaras are not allowed to buy land in any Pashtun area. He said 'You can either give us 70% of the land you bought and keep 30% for yourself, or else you are not allowed to buy and sell land in this area at all.'” But, as Karim explained to me: “I had already sold the land to someone belonging to the Tajik group before this warning from the Pashtun Representative of Parliament. The Pashtun people got angry. One day, they attacked the Tajik place. A fight broke out between these two groups. During the fight, a young boy - the son of one of the Pashtuns - was killed” (Karim from Bamiyan).
Karim said that since the Pashtuns do not have so much power over the Tajik, they attacked Karim’s home in Kabul one night. They wanted to kill him because he was the person who initially bought the land and he was from Hazara.

As we can see from Karim’s statement, there are individual risks which are associated with ethnicity. Different ethnic groups do not receive equal treatment. Pashtuns or the Taliban kill other ethnic groups such as Hazara simply because they are the minority group and "deserve to die." Karim said “killing a Hazara is much easier than killing a bird in Afghanistan.”

When Stefan was asked why children to leave Afghanistan, he pointed out: “sometimes their parents are tortured or killed by the Taliban. Children are warned by friends or neighbors that they are at risk of being killed by the same group; therefore, they have to leave Afghanistan.”

(Assistant)

Morteza also had a similar reason for leaving Afghanistan. He said “When I was nine years old, I lost my parents. They were killed by the Taliban. It was just me and my younger brother who was three years old. We did not have anyone in Afghanistan. A friend of my father provided the means for the journey for us and then we fled from Afghanistan.” (Morteza from Helmand)

6.2.3 Economic hardship

“The economic situation in Afghanistan between 2005 till 2011 was a bit better. There was an influx of capital into the country. Furthermore, foreign forces and the US army were in the country. People began to feel that Afghanistan was progressing. When foreign forces left the country, all the non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and the US army took the foreign capital with them too. The economic situation made things harder for people. Unemployment increased and poverty grew” (Karim from Bamiyan).

When the children were asked about their reasons for leaving Afghanistan, all of them first referred to the harsh economic situation. They mentioned that the high unemployment rate and low salaries caused poverty in Afghanistan. Some children had to work and helped their parents in order to manage life instead of studying at school. As explained by Castles and Miller, lack of economic opportunities and poverty are one factor which pushes people to leave their home country and look for somewhere better (2009:22).
6.2.4 Lack of security

“There is no security in Afghanistan. The Taliban attack your home whenever they want to and abduct you, or they catch you when you are out of home. Society is not safe. You do not even dare to take a bus since you think there might be a bomb on the bus” (Ahmad from Ghazni).

Hassan from Ghazni said: “People do not leave their homes after sunset because it is not safe.”

As Hassan said, due to the danger in most areas, particularly the area where Hazaras live, people do not dare to leave their homes after sunset. It can be seen that one of the causes of migration is the lack of safety and security (BBC: 2014).

6.2.5 Lack of democracy

“President Hamid Karzai was doing a good job until 2009. He supported democracy, but when he saw that he could not stay in power, he changed his policy and became a Taliban supporter. He called the Taliban a friend and called the west an enemy” (Karim from Bamiyan)

As Karim stated, there is no democracy in Afghanistan. The government looks out for its own benefit. In order to have more power, they support the extremist groups. The government cooperates with the Taliban in different ways and does not attempt to resolve the conflicts and problems between ethnical groups.

6.2.6 Child labor

According to Stefan, “Some children are recruited for child labor by groups like the Taliban. These children are taken against their will. They are forced to work under constant fear” (assistant).

He said that some children explained to him how they had to carry heavy loads for the construction of buildings. They had to work very hard, and if they said that they were tired or disobeyed orders, they were beaten. The children told Stefan that if they had stayed there, they would have had to serve the Taliban for the rest of their lives. Therefore, they tried to escape and managed to get away.
6.2.7 Political reasons

Rahim from Urozgan said that “My father had a political problem in Afghanistan. Therefore, we had to emigrate Afghanistan.” As stated by him, political problems are one of the reasons why children leave their home country, with family or without them.

6.2.8 Violence, conflicts and war

“Elin” explained that “Afghanistan has faced many problems over the last forty years. First, it was attacked by Russia due to its geographical area and natural resources. Then, the US stimulated Pakistan to attack Afghanistan. After that, the Islamic revolutionary group Mujahidin took power in Afghanistan. Furthermore, there have been several internal conflicts over the years. Also, the presence of the Taliban makes life very hard for Afghan people” (legal guardian).

She said that all this violence has had an impact on the lives of Afghan children, especially the conflicts between the Taliban and the US forces in different parts of the Afghanistan. This can also be considered a reason why children flee from Afghanistan.

As my respondents explained, the children had mixed reasons for leaving Afghanistan. These included Taliban threats and forced recruitment, risks associated with their ethnicity, poor economic situations, lack of security, lack of democracy, child labor, discrimination, political reasons, violence, and also internal and external wars. These reasons indicate that there was no opportunity for these children to have a good future in Afghanistan. They could not safely grow up surrounded by violence, war, and poverty. These reasons are seen as push factors for Afghan unaccompanied children. Castles and Miller state that “push factors” like political violence, lack of adequate living conditions and poor economic opportunities motivate people to leave their home countries (2009:22). Parkins explains that other factors which serve as push factors for emigration are “crime,” “lawlessness” (2010: 6). Apart from these factors, persecution and discrimination also push people to migrate and look for somewhere safe to live (The Levin Institute: 2014).
6.3 Question 2: How do they migrate and what problem do they face during their migration to Sweden?

6.3.1 Transit in neighboring countries

Half of the informants who participated in this study had a short stay in Pakistan before going to Iran, whereas some went directly to Iran without passing Pakistan. They moved to these countries with the aid of smugglers. They explained the living situation in Iran and Pakistan as below:

“We did not have a right to freedom of movement and expression in Iran. The government did not treat us as humans. However, I liked staying there but I did not have the same opportunities that I have in Sweden now. We know Farsi. It was easier for us to be integrated in Iran rather than Sweden” (Rahim from Urozgan).

“There is no respect for Afghan people in Iran. No place for us there” (Hassan from Ghazni)

“We face discriminatory treatment regardless of how long we stay in a country and whether we are a child or an adult” (Ahmad from Ghazni).

“We were worried all the time. If the police or Iranian authorities found us, first they sent us to the detention center and then deported us; therefore we had to hide ourselves in order not to be captured by police” (Ahmad).

“The situation in Pakistan is worse than in Afghanistan; I did not want to stay there” (Karim from Bamiyan). It should be mentioned that the children did not explain much about the situation in Pakistan since they were staying there for just few days. A few of them mentioned that they did not pass through Pakistan because the smugglers chose another route.

Stefan mentioned “When children move to Pakistan and Iran, they work there in order to collect the money for the rest of the journey. They work under severe conditions as unskilled laborers in the manufactory sector. They work long hours but they receive low salary. They are not treated well in their neighboring countries and their rights are violated” (assistant).
As it is understood from their statements, children were excluded from all benefits which each person should have. Furthermore, the fears of detention and deportation forced some of them such as Ahmad to stay in restrictive living conditions until they left Iran.

Among the children who were interviewed, two of them had stayed in Iran for several years. Ghasem from Bamiyan along with his family stayed for 12 years in Iran while Morteza stayed for almost 7 years. These children also explained the living situations of Iran as below:

Ghasem from Bamiyan said that “Twelve years living in Iran was equal to living in prison.” He explained to me that they had no rights in Iran but at the same time they had no option except living there because they had no money to move on. He told me due to a problem he faced with the police, he left Iran unaccompanied. He said “If I did not leave Iran, the police would have caught me and then I would have been deported to Afghanistan.” He added “Due to economic problems, I could only leave Iran without my family.”

Morteza from Helmand said “I was working for smugglers for 7 years in Iran in order to pay for my travelling from Afghanistan to Iran. It was a painful situation.” After seven years, he managed to escape from the smugglers and continue the journey.

As it is seen from the children statements, they stayed in Iran for both short term and long periods of time. They were deprived of basic rights (have the right to education and health care). They were an invisible population. In support of the replies of my respondents, Papadopoulou explains that being “in transit” is often a “period of vulnerability and insecurity” when the undocumented migrants live with the fears of being deported (2004:175). The transit period can be stressful and long for them. They are seen as faceless population living on the fringe of society without any rights (ibid: 175).

6.3.2 The role of smugglers

As asylum polices have become more restrictive, it has become much more difficult for asylum seekers to legally enter Europe without assistance. Asylum seekers often have no option except to migrate illegally. The routes of illegal migration are dominated by smugglers (Koser, 2003: 189). The function of smugglers is to assist migration and “entry into transit and destination countries” (ibid:188).Organizing travel tickets and documents provided by smugglers facilitate
the migration. The three main entry tactics used by smugglers are “clandestine entry,” “entry without documentation” or “with false documentation” (ibid: 188).

Smuggling increases because there is a demand for it. Asylum seekers form the largest group of migrants being smuggled. They need assistance from smugglers in order to enter the destination countries. (Koser: 192,184,188).

The journey of the unaccompanied asylum-seeking children without the presence of smugglers seemed impossible, as stated by them. The children used the service of smugglers in order to enter the destination countries. When I asked the children how they migrated, they all answered that they were assisted by smugglers. Some of the children contacted the smugglers by themselves, while several said that their family, relatives and friends contacted the smugglers to facilitate their journey to Europe. It should be mentioned that these children were not interested in giving more information concerning how they had access to the smugglers and how much money they spent for it.

The children mentioned that they did not receive any information from the smugglers about the length of journey, the routes which would be used and the potential dangers of the journey like the risks being deported, being left behind or suffering from hunger and thirst. Castles and Miller state that the smuggling is risk-free for smugglers while illegal migrants who are smuggled are at risk of many things during the journey (Castles & Miller, 2009: 204). Koser explains that the smuggling can often expose asylum seekers to vulnerability (2003: 181). They are exposed to economic and political insecurity. Economic vulnerability is the result of the high prices charged by smugglers while political vulnerability includes the risks of being identified by the authorities (Koser, 2003: 183).

However, smugglers exploit asylum seekers in different ways (Koser, 2003:181). When I asked children about the behavior of smugglers during the journey, they said:

“Smugglers are real criminals. They don’t care about you. They just want to have their money. If you have money, they are nice to you, otherwise they keep you for as long as they want, sometimes for a long time. They sometimes threaten to kill your parents in your home country if you do not have money” (Ghasem from Bamiyan).
“Smugglers are immoral people. I did not have money to pay them. They kept me as a hostage. I was working for them as a brick baker for around 7 years with very restricted conditions until the debt was paid. I was tortured a lot during these years” (Morteza from Helmand).

“Smugglers are very aggressive and unhuman. They behave with children in any way they want. Some children are raped by smugglers during the journey” (Stefan as an assistant).

“They just want the money, no matter where you are going” (Rahim from Urozgan).

While most of the children and the assistant described the smugglers as criminals, Ahmad and Karim stated that the behavior of smugglers was not so bad.

“Smugglers are not bad people. They did not want to be smugglers. The situations made them work as a smuggler. Sometimes they are forced by the government to work as a smuggler” (Karim from Bamiyan).

“My smuggler was not a bad person. I did not have money to continue the journey but he helped me. We made a deal. I found 19 people who wanted to flee and instead he took me free” (Ahmad from Ghazni).

As it can be understand from the above statements, human smuggling is an illegal business. Children were helped by smugglers in order to cross the borders and arrive in Europe but they were threatened by them in different ways. Papadopoulou explains that migrants are vulnerable to exploitation from smugglers and in most cases, abuse does occur (2008:72).

6.3.3 Migration routes and the threats they faced during the journey

The interviewees described how they traveled by car, mini-bus and truck. They travelled across the mountains by foot. Most of their journey took place at night. They were with smugglers in groups of 15 to 60 people, pregnant women, single men, families, children and boys from different countries. Smugglers warned the migrants if they make noise during the way, they hit them. The children mentioned that if police were checking the area, they had to get out of the truck and walk for long hours.
6.3.3.1 Risks faced between Iran-Turkey border and staying in Turkey

“I saw several dead bodies during the journey to Turkey. Some had become like statues and ice-people” (Ahmad from Ghazni).

Some children claimed they saw dead bodies along the road. They also mentioned that they lost members of their group along the way.

Hassan from Ghazni said that “During the journey in the mountains, some people could not continue the way due to exhaustion. There was a pregnant woman who was extremely sick. Some of us helped her to continue the journey. We managed to reach a village in which she could stay and decide what to do.”

Most of the children said that the slippery mountain conditions and lack of materials caused exhaustion and mental stress. Furthermore, the threat of the smugglers and border police made the children live in perpetual fear.

“Around 15-20 persons had been crammed into a small car which had the capacity for 5 people” (Morteza from Hemland).

One can understand from the above statements that the situation was difficult for children irrespective of if they had walked, came by car, mini-bus or truck.

“Around 60 persons had to live in a small room. There was not even space for us to lay our feet. Smugglers just provided us with bread and water” (Karim from Bamiyan).

As can be observed from Karim’s statement, there was not enough food distributed and the conditions of staying in Turkey were difficult for the children.

Some of the children illustrated that they did not know when they would continue the journey. Ghasem from Bamiyan said: “I asked smugglers when would be continue the journey. They said tomorrow, and then the next day they said no. We had to stay another day. They did not answer how long we would stay there. They lied all the time.”

“Ghasem” was one of the people who stayed with smugglers in Turkey for around 4 months. Smugglers did not let him continue the journey since he did not have enough money to pay them.
They kept him for a long time. In general, the children stated that they did not know what criteria the smugglers used to decide which migrants could leave and when. The length of time that they stayed in Turkey was between one week and four months.

The children in this study mentioned that they had not been detained by Turkish police authorities. They said after crossing the Iranian-Turkish border area, they arrived in Van and from there they travelled to Istanbul while a few claimed that have continued the journey from there to Izmir.

6.3.3.2 Problems faced from Turkey to Greece

The children explained that they continued the journey with the help of smugglers from Istanbul. They were mostly transferred to a new smuggler. They used a car and a mini-bus to get one of the cities which was close to the sea. From there, the children used boats to the Greek Islands. Most of the children did not say the names of the cities and islands they travelled to. The majority of the children mentioned that they travelled by plastic row boats while a few had motor boats. It seemed that the children came from different directions in order to reach Greece. While some said that the route to Greece was long, a few claimed that the distance between Turkey and Greece was short.

When the children were asked about dangers along the way, Karim from Bamiyan stated that “One cannot even imagine how we passed through these places. When we were in the ocean and a storm began, we were just thinking about what life is, how much value has this life that we are struggling for and how much pain we will feel before dying.”

Karim expressed the fear he felt when he crossed the ocean. He indicated that this was the most dangerous part of the whole journey. He said that he just looked for a safe place and hoped that the danger would end soon.

“Many people were crammed into the small row boats which only had the capacity for a few people (Hassan from Ghazni).

Most of the children referred to the quality of the boats. They mentioned that these plastic boats were not good. The boats were overloaded which made the situation harder for them. They
explained that they had been very close to drowning in the sea. Some witnessed other groups drowning and some claimed that they saw the dead bodies in the water.

Hassan from Ghazni mentioned: “When we were very close to Greece, the boat was torn. I could not swim but one of my friends saved me. I was lucky that I survived.”

Karim from Bamiyan illustrated that “when we came close to Greece, we were happy that we had made it to Europe, to a country where everybody has rights, and the Greek police are European police; so we thought they would be nice to us, but we were wrong. The police saw us and showed us the way back to Turkey. They even made a hole in the boat so that we had to try to reach Turkey faster.”

As one can see from the interview quotes, the majority of the children experienced hardships during the journey. At times, they were sure they were about to die. However, a few of the children claimed that they did not have so many problems in this part of the journey since they travelled with motor boats, which decreased the length of journey and had fewer hazards.

6.3.3.3 Transit in Greece

The children explained that after their arrival in Greece, they presented themselves to the Greek police or they were caught by the police. They were then taken to detention centers. They were detained for various amounts of time in the detention center. They claimed that it is really hard to apply for asylum in Greece, since Greece has a very restrictive immigration policy.

When questioned about the behavior of police in the detention center, Ahmad from Ghazni said that:

“I was beaten by the police in Greece a lot. I did not have money to give them to take me to Athens. Therefore, they kept me for a month in detention centers. They behaved violently. They hit me as much as they could.”

“Greek police and smugglers are working together” (Elin, the legal guardian).

“If the children have money, they are not detained. If they do not have money, they are detained and beaten by the police until they provide the money” (Stefan, the assistant).
“The police do not consider whether they are children or adults. Children and adults are treated the same. In the detention center, they are mixed with other groups such as killers and robbers” (Elin, the legal guardian).

Most of the children who were interviewed in this study had been in a detention center more than once. They explained that if one had money to give to the police, they helped the migrants and released them; otherwise they were kept for a long period of time in the detention center and were treated awfully. The majority of the children mentioned that they were not fingerprinted in Greece. However, a few said that they were fingerprinted and then sent to the reception center but after a while they escaped from there. They explained that the situation of the reception centers was very poor.

The majority of the children stayed in Greece for a long period between one and three years in order to collect money for continuing the journey. They were working with fruit picking on farms and they were also living on the farms. The children explained that living in Greece gave them the picture that Greece is not a good country to live in. They expressed that they had no rights there and it was not possible to get a residence permit.

When asked about the living conditions and behavior of people in Greece, Hassan from Ghazni mentioned: “People are racist in Greece. There is so much discrimination between foreigners and Greek people.”

“The economic situation in Greece is not good. There are no jobs even for Greeks” (Rahim from Urozgan).

“We were deprived of basic rights in Greece” (Hassan from Ghazni).

The data obtained from my interviews is also supported by other research. Papadopoulou explains that the migrants come to Greece because it is the first European country they reach and they hope that Greece is a safe country (2008:80). “Their aim was to reach Europe, perceived as an idealized broad space of safety, protection and opportunities” (Papadopoulou, 2008:80) but they realize that there is no space for them and the law does not cover them (Ibid: 80). The best interests of the child according to Article 3 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child are not respected. There is discrimination in Greece as children stated, while according to Article 2 of
the CRC, the rights of children should not be discriminated irrespective of the child’s nationality, sex, ethnicity, religion, and political opinion (Eriksson, Mårsäter & Åkermark, 2007: 186). Papadopoulou also illustrates that transit migrants live on the margin without any rights. Those who lived in the camps or were detained suffer from different health problems and “psychological strains” (Papadopoulou, 2008:87). Unemployment and social exclusion are other factors which strengthen the process of “marginalization” (ibid: 88). Furthermore, he mentions that the migration policy does not permit long-term residence for migrants in Greece, and the asylum policy is very restrictive, so it is difficult for asylum seekers to receive protection there (ibid:47). According to UNHCR (2010: 25), Greece has come under criticism because of the way that it deals with refugees, asylum seekers and particularly unaccompanied children. Greece is a country which issues “illegal deportation orders” and also has inhuman situations of detention. Besides, unaccompanied children are detained while they should be entitled to special protection (UNHCR, 2010: 25).

6.3.3.4 Problems faced from Greece to Italy

The children explained that the onward travel to Italy took place in groups or individually. While some were helped by smugglers, others traveled without help from smugglers since they did not have any money. Karim from Bamiyan said: “Some smugglers talk with truck drivers who let us get into the truck at night. In that case, they provide a better place for us who are hiding, but if the smugglers hide the children under the truck without the driver’s knowledge, it is very hard and it might lead to the death of the children.”

Most of the children mentioned that it is horrible to be under the truck for around 34-36 hours. Karim from Bamiyan mentions: “Can you imagine that I was under the truck for 34 hours, without food and water? Can you imagine how painful it is when every little pebble on the road hits your face? You just wish to die during all these hours.”

A few said that they were hiding in the container of the truck for long hours. According to Stefan (assistant), “sometimes smugglers put the children in a container which has no oxygen and there is a risk of death.”

Several claimed that they were captured and identified by the police on the way and had to go back again to Greece since they were fingerprinted. After a while, they found a way and
continued the journey again. This finding is also in line with Papadopoulou’s research that transit migrants pursue unexpected routes and stop in countries for long periods before they settle somewhere (2008: 142).

6.3.3.5 Problems faced from Italy to different European countries and finally in Sweden

Onward travel from Italy to France, the Netherlands and other countries on the way to Sweden was almost uneventful for these children. The length of the journey was short for the majority of them. They stayed in each country from a few hours to a few days.

The children mentioned that the most stressful part of this journey was when the police and conductor of the train checked their tickets on the train and they did not have any identification card. They had to hide themselves in the toilet or escape in other ways. In most cases, they had to get off the train and take another train. The children said that they were scared that the police would catch them and send them back to Greece since they were fingerprinted there. The fear of being deported to Greece due to the Dublin Regulation II was stressful for them.

One of the children (Hassan) said that he was unlucky and was caught by the police in the Netherlands. He explained that he was in a detention center in the Netherlands for a month. Then he was fingerprinted. After he was fingerprinted there, he was taken to the reception center. After two years living in the camp, his application was rejected. The Migration Board in the Netherlands told him that he should go back to Afghanistan. He explained to me that he could not go back to Afghanistan; therefore, he found a way and escaped from there. He continued the journey to Sweden.

The majority of the children had almost the same main migration routes (refer to Appendix V) while few of them had longer migration routes. They did not explain why they chose this way.

When the children were asked about the accommodation in different countries, some mentioned that there were camps in France where they could register one day and then sleep there the following night. Several illustrated that they were mostly sleeping in a park which was famous for homeless people. Karim said in France there is a park which is called “Gardelis” and lots of homeless people as well as thieves, smugglers, unaccompanied children and drug addicts can sleep there. He also mentioned that children can find smugglers in the park if they intend to
continue the journey with them. However, all the children continued the journey after Greece without smugglers. They were accompanied by some co-migrants who became their friends during the journey. The children mentioned that they did not have any contact with their families on the way to Sweden due to the economic issues and the fear of being identified by the police in transit countries.

After the long journey and the problems they were faced with during the journey, they arrived in Sweden in 2013 and applied for asylum. During the time of my research they became refugees.

6.4 Question 3: Why do they choose Sweden as a destination country?

Mixed motivations

This part attempts to answer the question why Afghan unaccompanied children choose Sweden as a destination country and what factors determine the direction of their movements.

6.4.1 Social networks

As Massey et al (1998) explain, migration is formed, facilitated and maintained in different ways by the social ties (in Morosanu, 2010:1). According to Koser (1997:594), social networks can be explained “as existing through family, friendship, community practices and membership in associations, and through intermediaries such as labor recruiters, immigration consultants, travel agents, and smugglers.”

When I asked my respondents why they choose Sweden as a destination country, Ahmad from Ghazni mentioned that “Smugglers told us which country has a better living situation.” Ahmad said that he did not know about Europe before leaving Afghanistan and did not have any clear idea of the destination country. Smugglers had an important role in his decision.

Stefan said that “children get some information from smugglers about living conditions in Western countries such as Sweden” (Assistant).

Apart from smugglers who are seen as the informal networks for children, the role of co-migrants is also important. Morteza from Helmand said “children share information during the journey. We consider which countries are good for living, where to go and where not to go. In this way the information is distributed among us.” He added: “Some of the co-migrants had
some friends in Sweden who recommended that we go there.” Ahmad stated that “my friend’s brothers were living in Germany and Sweden and gave me good information about the policies of Germany and Sweden concerning migrants.” He added that his friend even told him how they should take a train to Sweden and how they should apply for asylum. The presence of countrymen which have already been in Sweden was an important factor influencing the decision of these children for migrating to Sweden. The children wanted to go to a country which has an established community and where they can get support.

As it is seen, social informal networks provide information for these children about Western countries such as Sweden. They create rumors and reputations which seemed to play an important role in the choice of destination country of the unaccompanied children. Boyd explains (1989) that the networks are important at different steps in the “migration process,” i.e. “departure” and “arrival” (in Morosanu, 2010:4). Granovetter illustrates that there are two different types of social ties. While the strong ties include families, kinships and communal organizations, weak ties include “superficial personal contact” such as relation to a friend of a friend or to people outside close family (Faist, 2000:6). In this research, the children’s responses show that the role of weak ties such as smugglers, co-migrants and friends of friends is important. As stated by Granovetter, “Weak ties provide people with access to information and resources beyond those available in their own social circle” (1983: 209).

6.4.2 Residence permit and family reunification

The children would like to stay in a country where they can get a residence permit. According to these children, the possibility to receive permanent residence in Sweden is high. The smugglers recommended that they go to Sweden since it is a country which protects people who are in need of protection.

Rahim from Urozgan said that “my goal is to get a residence permit in Sweden. In that way, I can bring my family here.”

Ahmad from Ghazni said: “There is a much better chance to be granted a residence permit in Sweden compared to other countries.”
From information children received from smugglers, co-migrants and friends of friends who were living in Sweden, they were aware that it is possible to get a residence permit in Sweden and through the resident permit they can bring their family there. In support of the responses of my interviewees, the Swedish Migration Board mentions that family reunification is of great importance in Sweden. While processing the child’s asylum application, Swedish authorities attempt to find the child’s parents or their guardians. The main goal is to reunite the child with its family in their home country, but if the area where they live is unsafe, there is a high possibility that the child will be reunited with its parents in Sweden. Therefore, the child’s closest family shall be granted residence permits in Sweden (Migrationsverket: 2013).

6.4.3 Human rights reputation

The children said that they wanted to go to a country which offers security and respect human rights. They mentioned that they were aware of the good reputation of human rights in Sweden. With the information they received from smugglers, co-migrants and also friends of friends who were living in Sweden, they knew that Sweden is a country which helps people in need of protection such as children, in particular unaccompanied. The children were informed that they have a right to go to school, a right to medical health care as other Swedish children. In support of the replies of my respondents, the Swedish Migration Board mentions that all children including asylum-seeking children have the right to go to school and have the right to health care (Migrationsverket: 2013).

When Stefan was asked why children migrate to Sweden, he said: “The policy regarding children in Sweden is one thousand times better than that of some other countries. Sweden is a country that feels the same as you feel. It is a country which helps other countries and also helps people especially children who are suffering from war and conflicts in the war zone” (assistant). According to Stefan, “Sweden has a generous migration policy. Even though it is a small country, it takes lots of responsibilities concerning unaccompanied children.”

Elin illustrated that “authorities who are investigating the asylum applications of the children are experts and they are familiar with the children’s rights. They respect the best interest of the children” (legal guardian).
6.4.4 Hardships faced during the transit countries

Based on the problems the children had during their journey, they reached the conclusion that Sweden could be a better place to live than other countries they had travelled through. The living conditions in the neighboring countries were so difficult for these children that they decided to migrate somewhere else. Lack of access to education and medical health were some examples which they mentioned.

Living in Greece, its attitude and policies toward asylum seekers such as unaccompanied children gave the children the picture that Greece is no place to live. In support of the replies of my respondents, Papadopoulou (2008:47) states that the migration policy in Greece does not give any opportunity for long term residence and the asylum policy is so limited that makes it hard for asylum seekers to ask for protection.

Elin, a legal guardian said that “No child wants to stay in Greece. The situation is so terrible there that Sweden has not sent children back to Greece for the last three years.” She added that “the fingerprints which are taken from children in Greece are being overlooked by Sweden due to the poor migration system in Greece. Therefore, children are not sent back to Greece in order for their applications to be investigated in the first country they reached in Europe.”

The children were asked when did they decide to migrate to Sweden, and they answered that by the time they reached Greece or Italy, they knew that they wanted to go to Sweden. It should be mentioned that children went through this decision making more than once. When they left Afghanistan, majority of them had first selected to live in Iran but due to the fears and the problems they were faced, they went through a second decision making process and decided to go to Europe where they could settle permanently.

As it can be understood, the Afghan unaccompanied children used the resources available for them. These children relied on weak ties. Weak ties include smugglers and co-migrants and also friends of friends who live in Sweden. These weak ties provide information for Afghan unaccompanied children. Other research supports this finding. Koser and Pinkerton (2002) mentions that the social networks provide information which is important in the migration of asylum seekers. Bilger, Hofmann & Jandl (2005:13) explains how the preferred destination of smuggling is chosen by paying attention to the conditions in the destination country. Depending
upon how desirable the conditions in the destination country would be, migrants could be motivated to reach that country, even by accepting the risks of smuggling. Making such a decision is not easy. It requires a process of information-gathering that cannot be possible without the assistance of others. This is how the importance of networking emerges. By using “network’s information,” migrants are able to gain data based on which they could make decisions (Bilger, Hofmann & Jandl, 2005: 13). In this study, the information was obtained by children mainly through weak ties and it helped them to choose Sweden as a destination country.

7.0 Conclusion

My purpose of doing this research was to increase the knowledge about why Afghan children leave their home country and migrate to Sweden. The aim was also to examine the process behind their migration to Sweden and the problems they are faced with during their journey to Sweden. In order to achieve these aims, three research questions were asked: 1) Why do Afghan children leave Afghanistan? 2) How do they migrate and what problems do they face during their migration to Sweden? 3) Why do they choose Sweden as a destination country? In order to find answers for my questions, I interviewed six Afghan unaccompanied asylum-seeking children. In addition, I interviewed a legal guardian and an assistant who work with these children in Sweden. The interviews with three different categories of respondents helped me to gain a clear picture of the children stories. Analyzing the data was conducted with the help of theories such as Push and Pull factors, migration industry theory, transit migration and social networks theory.

The data obtained from interviews showed that the children who were leaving Afghanistan had mixed motivations. Factors such as lack of security, violence, threats, individual risks associated with their ethnicity, discrimination, forced recruitment, economic hardship, political reasons and external and internal wars pushed them to leave Afghanistan. My respondents mentioned that being Hazara is a big problem in Afghanistan. Therefore, the main reason for the children to leave Afghanistan was the harassment and violence against the ethnic group Hazara. They were not treated as humans by different groups such as the Taliban and Pashtuns. Therefore, they left Afghanistan for somewhere which protected their safety. This study revealed that push factors influence the migration decision of Afghan unaccompanied children.
The Afghan unaccompanied children explained their transit experiences. Traveling with smugglers and crossing international borders was a multiple-step procedure for them. They had many stops along the way and spent lots of time in different transit countries. The journey was full of potential risks for them. Despite the hard living conditions in transit countries, they had to stay there for some time for different reasons such as financial problems. Many worked in Greece for a while in order to collect the money for the rest of their journey. My interviews revealed that transit migration created a number of problems for these children. Dangerous journeys and human rights violations are a few examples showing the negative effects of transit migration. My findings corroborate with Papadopoulou’s research (2008:90).

Furthermore, this study showed that social networks raise awareness among Afghan unaccompanied children about Sweden and its relative advantages as a destination country. Smugglers, co-migrants and also friends of friends who live in European countries, such as Sweden, played a significant role in their decision making. Moreover, strict legislations as well as lack of protection in transit countries made onward migration inevitable for the Afghan unaccompanied children. Other factors, such as the probability of getting residence permit and family reunification, were important for the Afghan unaccompanied children to choose Sweden as a destination country. Through their networks, they were aware that Sweden was more likely to grant them a residence permit.

However, the path to knowledge is long and never-ending. Depending upon different perspectives and looking into the issue from different angles, there is always room for further research. I hope my qualitative research findings based on eight semi-structured interviews could constitute a background for future research and possible recommendations in this area.
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9.1 Appendix I

Informed Consent for interviews

My name is Marziyeh Momenian, a student of International Migration and Ethnic Relations at Malmö University, Sweden. I am doing a research about Afghan unaccompanied asylum-seeking children in Sweden. The aim of this study is to increase the knowledge about what causes Afghan children to leave their home country and migrate to Sweden. The aim is also to increase the understanding of the process behind their migration to Sweden and the problems they are faced with during their journey to Sweden. For this reason, I would like to interview Afghan unaccompanied minors, their guardians and also an assistant (behandlingsassistent) who works with unaccompanied children.

I as an interviewee agree to participate in this study under these conditions:

- Each interview will be between 80-100 minutes
- The interviews and the information will be used only for the purposes defined by the study
- I can end interview at any time or refuse to answer certain questions or stop to participate in the interviews
- The interviews will be recorded in order to make the interviewer's job easier
- Confidentiality and anonymity of data will be maintained at all times
- All data will be destroyed at the end of study
- Participation is voluntary

I, as a researcher, fully assure you that confidentiality and anonymity will be kept concerning your responses. Since I am the sole researcher responsible for doing this study, I assure you of
my honesty about the academic nature of the research. Moreover, I have designed the questions for interviews; therefore, I am the only one responsible for them.

If you have any doubts, comments or complaints about this study, feel free to contact me Marziehm_yekta@yahoo.com

Date: Signature of interviewee:

Best Regards

Marziyeh Momenian

You will receive copy of this form
9.2 Appendix II: Semi-structured interview questions

Interview questions for children

1) Where are you from in Afghanistan?
2) How was the situation in Afghanistan when you left?
3) Why did you leave Afghanistan?
4) How did you leave Afghanistan?
5) Did you face any problems during your journey?
6) How smugglers did treat with you and others?
7) Can you tell me which countries did you pass on your way?
8) How have you been treated in other countries?
9) How long did it take to come to Sweden?
10) Did you have any information about Sweden before leaving Afghanistan?
11) Did you know from the beginning which country you were going to reside in?
12) Why did you decide to come to Sweden?
13) Is there anything else you consider important and would like to share with me about your experience?

Interview questions for a legal guardian and an assistant

1) Male                        Female
2) Nationality
3) Age
4) What is your profession?
5) What is your educational background?
6) For how long have you been working with unaccompanied asylum seeking children?
7) Has it ever happened that the children share their stories with you? Do the children usually share their stories with you?
8) In your opinion, what is the reason of Afghan Children to leave the country?
9) How do the children explain the situation of Afghanistan for you? (if they do)
10) Do you know how did the children come to Sweden?

11) Do you know what the problems they were faced with during their journey?

12) In your opinion, why do the children choose Sweden as a destination country?

13) Is there something you would like to add before finishing the interview?
### 9.3 Appendix III: A model of Afghan unaccompanied children decision-making

**Step 1: Why leave?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Effects</th>
<th>Push factors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Push factors | - Threats and forced recruitment  
- Risks associated to their ethnicity  
- Insecurity  
- Economic hardships  
- Loss of democracy  
- Violence, conflicts and war |

**Step 2: How to leave?**

- **Availability of the resources**
  - The existence of smugglers

**Step 3: Choice of Specific destination (Sweden) is based on**

- The role of informal networks: weak ties (such as smugglers, co-migrants and friends of friends in the receiving country,  
- Family reunification  
- Permanent resident permit  
- Human rights reputation about Sweden  
- Harsh living condition in transit countries also made them think that Sweden might be a good country and search for a better life there

Source: Robinson & Segrott, 2002:61
9.4 Appendix IV: This table shows the number of Afghan Unaccompanied Children who seeking asylum in Sweden in 2013

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Citizenship</th>
<th>Year 2013</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Afghanistan</td>
<td>1247</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somalia</td>
<td>576</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Syria</td>
<td>364</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eritrea</td>
<td>345</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Morocco</td>
<td>315</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stateless</td>
<td>303</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iraq</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>654</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>3852</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Regeringskansliet, Government Offices of Sweden 2014

9.5 Appendix V: Migration Routes of the Afghan children

**Ahmad:**
Afghanistan…>Pakistan…>Iran…>Turkey…>Greece…>Romania…>Serbia…>Macedonia…>Austria…>Italy…>France…>Germany…>Denmark…>Sweden

**Karim:**
Afghanistan…>Pakistan…>Iran…>Turkey…>Greece…>Italy…>France…>Germany…>
Denmark…>Sweden

**Rahim:**
Afghanistan…>Pakistan…>Iran…>Turkey…>Greece…>Italy…>France…>Belgium…>Germany…>
the Netherlands…>Denmark…>Sweden

**Morteza:**
Afghanistan…>Iran…>Turkey…>Greece…>Italy…>France…>Germany…>
Denmark…>Sweden

**Ghasem:**
Afghanistan…>Pakistan…>Iran…>Turkey…>Greece…>Italy…>France…>Belgium…>
Germany…>Denmark…>Sweden

**Hassan:**

Iran…>Turkey…>Greece…>Italy…>France…>Belgium…>the Netherlands> Denmark >Sweden

**9.6 Appendix VI: Map of Afghanistan**

Source: The University of Texas library, 2014 (Obtained 4 July 2014)