





UNDP Research Project (Population Movements)

PROVINCIAL PROFILES THE RETURN JOURNEY A Mapping of Services Needed, Available, and Accessible for Afghan Returnees from Pakistan

Submitted by: UNDP Livelihoods and Resilience Unit

On: August 17 2020

First Draft: 1st Report

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Foreword

The migration of Afghan returnees from Pakistan made headlines most recently in 2016, when over 600,000 people—including documented and undocumented refugees—returned to Afghanistan. While the flow of returnees has decreased since 2016, there are still approximately three million Afghan migrants in Pakistan who may return in the coming years. This mass return—and the possibility of future returns—has posed a challenge to the Afghan government, UN agencies, and other organizations supporting returnees.

UNDP recently conducted a research study to better understand returnees' experience with reintegration following their return to Afghanistan. This study sought to identify approaches to promote the sustainable and community-based reintegration of Afghan returnees, which is critical for the long-term development of Afghanistan.

The findings clearly show that returnees face barriers to reintegration that are linked to the limited services they have access to and receive. In particular, lack of employment support and lack of housing are the main barriers to reintegration. The research also demonstrated, however, that returnees have a great deal of potential—and interest—to contribute to the economic development of their local communities in Afghanistan.

By focusing on the “human dimension”, the research project identifies patterns in the way that returnees make sense of their everyday lives and how this influences their decisions on onward migration; it also assesses the extent to which they feel they have been, or are, able to successfully reintegrate in Afghanistan. Continued development of the approach used in this project will provide government and UN stakeholders to integrate migration, movement and return into long-term planning.

The research method used for this project presents an opportunity for humanitarian and development partners to better understand how to plan, integrate and deliver impact at scale, as well as inform national policies and priorities regarding return and reintegration.

The research forms part of UNDP's ongoing efforts to work with local, national, and international partners to address migration and displacement through a lens of development, as outlined in the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework, the Global Compact for Migration, the Global Compact on Refugees, the Global Forum for Migration and Development, the Platform on Disaster Displacement, the Plan of Action for the Guiding Principles for Internal Displacement (GP20), and other fora on migration and development.

UNDP is committed to using research to support investment in development approaches that prioritize cultivating and maintaining the resilience of returnees and other migrants. This resilience is the crux of communities' ability to cope with and recover from shocks in crisis and post-crisis contexts.



Abdallah Al Dardari

Resident Representative

UNDP Afghanistan

INTRODUCTION

This document outlines profiles of services provision to Afghan returnees from Pakistan at four points along their return journey: at the Torkham border, Nangarhar province, Laghman province, and Kabul province. This is a supplement to the full research study, which is provided separately. For more information about the purpose of the study, the methodology, and overall conclusions, please see the full report.

TORKHAM OVERVIEW OF RETURNEE EXPERIENCE

Torkham is the first location in Afghanistan where returnees from Pakistan usually access services during their journey. The majority of returnees interviewed reported receiving at least one or more services in Torkham before continuing on to their final destination. However, the quantity, quality, and type of services provided varied significantly. Some returnees only accessed vaccinations for children, while others were provided with assistance with things such as land documentation, food and non-food items, and cash services. The variation between returnees' experiences is partially dependent on a variety of factors such as gender, documentation status, etc., but experiences within these groups were highly diverse as well, revealing significant inconsistencies in service provision. Both returnees and service providers agreed that if employment opportunities were provided to returnees, most of the additional challenges could be resolved, but, at this stage in their journey, most returnees had more immediate needs such as food and medical care.

SERVICES

Housing and Shelter

All service providers agreed that housing and shelter is one of the most pressing issues for returnees in transit. While there are several organizations providing housing to returnees at their destinations, service providers interviewed were not aware of these organizations providing shelter and housing to returnees during their journey to Afghanistan. While in transit some returnees reported having to sleep outdoors in Torkham as there were no tents or shelters provided.

Upon reaching Torkham, returnees reported being granted "housing cards," and Voluntary Repatriation Forms (VRF forms), which support returnees to access housing and land at their destination. Regardless, most returnees reported that this service was never provided in their final destination. Some undocumented male returnees reported some access to land cards, but less frequently and with less ease than their documented counterparts. Female returnees, particularly those who were undocumented and/or widowed/traveling without male family members, reported little to no access to this service.

Health and Medical Facilities

Service providers and returnees both reported access to health care and medical information in Torkham. One organization described implementing programming targeting pregnant women and new mothers through informational sessions on prenatal and infant care. Additionally, several organizations work to vaccinate children and to care for children with malnutrition issues. For example, a DoPH official noted that they provide vaccination to returnees. When the returnees reach TTC Torkham Transit Centre, they are given a vaccination card. Measles and IPV vaccines are given by AADA (Agency for Assistance and Development of Afghanistan) and OPV is given by WHO. This project called REMT is

implemented under the Ministry of Public Health. It has a separate section in the ministry. Three kinds of vaccines are provided:

1. OPV: this vaccine is provided to all the people be it the returnees or the common Afghans who are coming or going back to Pakistan. This is provided to people of any age.
2. IPV – this vaccine is provided to the children who are 6 to 59 months old. This vaccine is provided to the returnees at the Torkham Border Crossing. And if DoPH see a child who is paralyzed, they report that to WHO and Ministry of Public Health. Tests are conducted to check if the kid has polio or if he is paralyzed by birth.
3. Measles – This vaccine is provided at Torkham to the children of 6-9 months old, to prevent measles in them. This is provided to all the children be it the returnees or common people who cross through Torkham. This is policy of the government as well to provide this vaccine to all the Afghans in all over the country within 9 months of their birth. This vaccine is first provided in 9 months of birth and then again after 18th month.

The majority of returnees said that regardless of their documentation status they were able to have their children vaccinated in Torkham. Returnees were largely satisfied with the care and vaccinations their children received: “The vaccination they gave us were very well and provided to us in an organized manner, we are happy from that.” Those returnees who were unable to access medical services in Torkham explained that this was because they did not know where to go to access these services or because doctors were unavailable at the time due to the high demand.

Information and Awareness

Many returnees reported accessing informational trainings in Torkham focused on the dangers of explosives. These trainings were a positive experience for participant returnees and considered useful: “We are happy from the instructions they shared with us, they were really helpful for us to understand about the hazards of the mines and other insecurities in the areas we are living, as it happens we settled in a place that has the dangers of mine.” Some returnees also reported being provided with information on vaccinations for children. The one recurrent request was to increase the availability of this programming and the length of the information sessions, so that returnees might be able to learn more. These informational trainings were accessible to both women and men regardless of documentation.

Legal Assistance

A few returnees reported being assisted in accessing Tazkira (identity cards) in Torkham and were provided information about access to legal services in their destination. However, the majority of individuals interviewed did not have access to these services and were not aware that they could be accessed in Torkham.

Protection

The only protection services returnees reported being offered by security forces was security of returnees. The majority of returnees found this a positive experience and felt safe and welcomed back to their homeland. “They [security forces] welcomed us very well, when we crossed Torkham they played National Anthem for us and they performed National Dance as well,” described one returnee who crossed the border at Torkham.

Food Assistance

Many returnees were provided food assistance in Torkham and reported this was one of the most important services they received at this point in their journey. According to one returnee: “Out of [the services] the food assistance was very good and most relevant to our needs.”

While some returnees, both documented and undocumented, were provided direct food assistance, such as “two sacks of flour, two cartons of cooking oil, one kg of dal and five breads.” Others were only granted cards to access food and non-food assistance at their destination. Those who were provided food were much more content with the services provided than those who received cards. Several returnees who were granted food provision cards were never able to access these services.

Psychosocial Support

One service provider described that their organization screens returnees in Torkham for individuals with mental health issues who are then given cards to access treatment at their destination. No returnees reported having accessed this service or any other like it.

Cash Assistance

Several service providers offer cash assistance to returnees in Torkham. Both documented and undocumented returnees reported having access to this service. However, the amount of cash assistance provided was raised many times in the interviews as a point of stress for returnees. The quantity of assistance returnees received varied significantly. As most of the cash assistance in Torkham is meant to assist returnees in paying for their transportation to their destination, the amount of assistance they receive is related to the distance they have left to travel and the size of their family. Though undocumented returnees who received cash assistance received about the same amount of money as documented returnees, they reported feeling that they had been discriminated against by service providers and granted less cash assistance than their documented counterparts.¹

Non-Food Items

Many returnees reported that the non-food items they received in Torkham were among the most useful services they received on their journey. Those who access these services received items such as home appliances, blankets, and warm clothing for children. However, returnees stressed these services were often provided in insufficient quantities. For example, several returnee families of ten or more members were given only two or three small blankets for their entire family. Several female returnees reported they were given only one or two sweaters for several children.

¹ This information provided by returnees contradicts information gathered through KIIs conducted by MAGENTA with UNHCR and IOM and could not be verified. The KIIs with IOM and UNHCR, as well as a literature review, suggested that different levels of assistance provided to documented vs undocumented returnees was due to the funding status of UNHCR vs IOM, respectively.

Employment Support

There was no reported employability support at this point in the returnees' journeys.

QUALITY OF SERVICES

Many of the returnees who were granted cards in Torkham for future food, medical, cash, and land assistance never receive those services. This has led many returnees to lose faith and confidence in INGOs and the government. Several reported that they would no longer trust service provider organizations to help them: "they promised us so many things they pampered us a lot and now they are unable to keep their promises, that is breaking our faith in the officials."

CHALLENGES AND LIMITATIONS

As Torkham is one of the largest re-entry points for returnees coming from Pakistan and the first location where returnees can access services, the demand for services far exceeds the supply that service providers can offer. This leads to unequal distributions of services, which subsequently causes returnees to feel as though they have been discriminated against when they receive fewer services than others.

KABUL OVERVIEW OF RETURNEE EXPERIENCE

Kabul was the final destination for the majority of the returnees interviewed. However, poor quality, unreliable, unevenly distributed services provided have led many returnees to lose faith not only in service providers—government and INGOs—but in their own ability to reintegrate as well. Returnees report that the most significant barrier to their successful reintegration is unemployment and homelessness. However, while both documented and undocumented returnees report difficulty in accessing these services, the barriers are much higher for undocumented returnees.

SERVICES

The following services were cited by interviewees—service providers and returnees—as either services already provided or gaps in necessary services that need to be addressed. Interviewees were largely in consensus that services currently being offered are insufficient to address returnees' most urgent needs and that improving the provision of the following services is critical: education, employment assistance, shelter and housing.

Housing and Shelter

The most frequently mentioned service needed by both documented and undocumented returnees is assistance with housing and shelter. Service providers acknowledge this gap, but stress that the situation has improved drastically now that returnees are not living outdoors, but in either tents or rented homes.

While current housing assistance may be an improvement, it was described as insufficient by all returnees interviewed. One undocumented returnee described the stress caused by his family's current housing: "We have not been assisted at all. No social or economic services have been provided to us. We

are living here in container and it is difficult to live comfortably here in winter. Nobody helped us financially nor anyone allotted us land.”

Several documented returnees have reported receiving housing assistance for an initial period of three months, after which they were supposed to be granted a plot of land by the government. According to one returnee in this situation: “We have documents, but not the plot that is allotted to us.” Several years have passed, the families were never granted land. They only received housing assistance for a period of three months leaving them to find shelter on their own without any support. Returnees report that the lack of reliable housing is a significant barrier to their reintegration.

Health and Medical Facilities

Service providers are operating mobile clinics, public hospitals, and community clinics for returnees in need of medical assistance, guidance, and first aid treatment. These public- and INGO-funded services are free to returnees.

Despite service providers’ reports, female returnees, both undocumented and documented, face significant challenges in accessing this service. One undocumented female returnee explained: “Services aren’t enough as we have not access to doctors due to financial problems.” Other documented female returnees had not received health care the duration of their time in Kabul. Only their children had been able to get vaccines.

Women described a financial barrier to healthcare that male returnees, documented and undocumented, did not. Male returnees describe having comparably easy access to medical services: “There are so many clinics and hospitals, both private and public, but we got public governmental hospitals as they are free.”

Information and Awareness

Service providers report there are informational sessions of a variety of subjects ranging from situational awareness to women’s rights and domestic violence prevention. However, none of the returnees interviewed had accessed these types of services.

Legal Assistance

No returnees reported needing legal assistance while in Kabul, but several mentioned knowing how to access these services if they were to need them. Service providers said that alongside more traditional legal assistance, a few organizations offer informational programs on how returnees can obtain a Tazkira (Afghan identity card) and courses on individual rights with a focus on land tenure and property rights.

Protection

Female documented and undocumented returnees raised concerns about the safety of their families and spoke of high rates of violence and petty crime, as well as their fears of leaving home after dark. One female returnee recounted that a few days prior to the interview, a woman was stopped and killed by robbers in the camp. The women were troubled that there have been no efforts made to either provide them or their children physical protection or reduce crime in the area.²

² Presumably, such protection would have been provided by the police, who were not interviewed as part of this project.

Service providers reported that the government provides social protection,³ but minimal security for returnees in Kabul. However, the social protection from the government is difficult to access and rarely provided in a timely manner. Both male and female returnees reported that they were not aware of any social or physical protection services available.

Food Assistance

While service providers report that market access is not a pressing concern for returnees and that food assistance is widely provided, many returnees report that they do not have reliable access to food or sufficient food to meet their household's needs. Several returnees reported that the market is far from their location and difficult to access, further impeding their access to food. Female returnees expressed distress over not being able to access food assistance despite having malnourished children. Another returnee noted: "It is good that we have a market near us, but if you don't have money, what good will the markets do to you."

Psychosocial Support

Returnees report receiving no psychosocial services from either aid organizations or the government. There are private counselling services available, but few returnees can afford this. Several women stressed the importance of counselling given the trauma experienced by many returnees in the camps, during the journey from Pakistan, and when they initially fled Pakistan. Service providers said psychosocial support is available, but no returnees interviewed were aware of the services nor how to access them.

Cash Assistance

Service providers spoke of the efficacy of the cash assistance programs currently being operated through a system of direct deposits into recipients' accounts. However, few returnees reported receiving cash assistance during their time in Kabul. Those who had received cash transfers said the service was unreliable and there were significant delays. The cash assistance received was described as "insufficient" to meet the needs of returnees and too "unreliable" to provide any long-term security.

Employment Support

Unemployment is one of the most significant challenges faced by returnees. Service providers acknowledge the impact of unemployment among returnees in Kabul: "This is one of the biggest needs: They don't have access to jobs, they can't find work, and they don't have money or any other resources to start their own business, most of the times they are seen begging in the markets and streets solely due to the lack of jobs." Organizations working in this sector are focused on providing returnees with employability skills.

Returnees have been disappointed with the quality and usefulness of these programs. One male returnee explained: "An NGO has started course of electronics where my son is enrolled for six months. NGO has promised him with instruments, but still he hasn't got anything." Another male returnee recounted a similar experience when an NGO distributed tools to assist individuals in starting

³ The KIIs did not provide additional information about the specific type of social protection, but it is likely to include cash and land subsidies/vouchers

businesses: “I have got a sewing machine but what to do with it.” The challenge is that the barrier to returnees gaining employment is not their skill level, but the availability of jobs.

While there are mechanisms through which to acquire a loan to start a new business, they are difficult to access and often are accompanied with high interest rates and other burdens. Banks are the most well-known source of loans, but according to returnees, “we just know that banks are giving loans, but they want the land deed and charge interest as well so we can’t have loan from Bank.”

Unemployment is a significant barrier to returnee reintegration. One returnee explained: “if there is no assistance from the government then we are obligated to go back to Pakistan, because here in Afghanistan there are a lot of expenditures and no income, it is difficult to live in rental houses, we are jobless and it is difficult to make money.”

Education

Service providers are working to deliver schooling to returnee children, and many organizations are focused on building schools and distributing necessary supplies to families. However, at present, most children still do not have access to education. Children from families living without permanent shelter cannot be admitted to any school.⁴ There are also limited numbers of schools and several returnees report living too far from the school for their children to attend.

Additionally, there is limited educational opportunity for girls. Several returnees report that there is no public school near them, so their children are sent to a religious school (Madrassah), which is for boys only. The girls in these families do not receive an education as there is no school available to them.

QUALITY OF SERVICES

Returnees interviewed expressed little faith in service providers, as the assistance they were promised throughout their journey and time in Kabul never materialized. Many returnees reported traveling back to Kabul because of government announcements regarding provision of assistance to returnees, but the returnees have yet to receive any government support. One returnee stated: “We have been promised a lot of things but none of those promises were delivered and yet we are still suffering, we haven’t been provided with any assistance.” Another returnee expressed similar disillusionment: “we relied on the Government and other NGOs but they gave us nothing other than vague promises.”

Overall, returnees report disappointment in the quality of services received: they are undependable, often delivered late, and vary in quality and utility. The sole services that returnees have been satisfied with is vaccines provided to children. Other returnees complained that, despite having documentation, they have received no attention from service providers: “Since the day that we have arrived none have bothered to enquire about us, so I must say that the government or the officials should be aware of the people and they should know what problems the people are facing.”

There are no clear mechanisms for returnees to lodge these complaints, leaving them feeling “unheard” and “ignored.”

⁴ It is assumed that this is due to the lack of a land deed or other similar documentation

CHALLENGES AND LIMITATIONS

Service providers recognize that the support offered to the returnees in Kabul is insufficient. Organizations are constrained by their funding and cannot serve the entire returnee population. This means that decisions regarding the allocation of services are particularly critical. According to service providers from both INGOs and the government, there is a lack of cooperation between service providers which impedes their ability to effectively support returnees. INGO service providers complain cooperation is complicated by delays in government ministries granting permits and documents needed to legally provide assistance to returnees.

Returnees continue to have difficulty identifying the limited services available and how to access them. As one returnee explained: “We don’t know who are providing these services, if we knew then we would have asked them to help us too.” The Malik of the village is the main source of information about services available, but often the information that is shared with the Malik is village specific, and cannot help returnees access more general assistance.

NANGARHAR

OVERVIEW OF RETURNEE EXPERIENCE

Nangarhar is the final destination for many returnees, but for others this is simply a stop on their journey to their own villages. Returnees still in transit reported discrimination and challenges in accessing services that those intending to stay in Nangarhar did not. However, both groups of returnees—returnees intending to stay in Nangarhar and those still in transit— reported that the services available to them were insufficient to meet their needs and the lack of services available impeded their ability to reintegrate into the community.

SERVICES

The following services were cited by interviewees—service providers, returnees, and community leaders—as either services already provided or gaps in necessary services that need to be addressed. The most pressing needs of the returnees in the region are housing, employment, and access to education.

Housing and Shelter

Returnees describe their lack of housing as one of the most significant barriers to their reintegration. Almost every interviewee conveyed some variation of the following: “Once we have our own houses we’ll feel like home.” Homelessness remains a significant issue for returnees despite substantial efforts on the part of service providers to build and provide housing and land. “The demand is too much” expressed one service provider in reference to the housing shortages.

One community leader explained that the most recent returnees are more likely to not have housing, and that as more and more returnees arrive, the situation becomes more dire. Some returnees have been provided housing, but the majority of those who own their own homes arrived between 2008 and 2010. NGOs have worked to build housing for returnees, but these have only two room homes, and are insufficient for families in the camp, which have, on average, over 12 members. Returnees renting houses describe the conditions as poor. As one undocumented woman described her home, “This place is not suitable for living at all.”

Theoretically, documented returnees have easier access to housing and shelter than those who are undocumented, as they are granted land cards and have better access to services. However, the majority of the documented returnees who were promised land never received it, and report receiving about the same quality and quantity of services as undocumented returnees.

Health and Medical Facilities

Service providers stress that there are significant efforts being made to provide medical care to returnees in Nangarhar and that the services are sufficient for the whole of Nangarhar. There are midwife and family planning services, emergency clinics in the camps, a large public hospital nearby, and a team of doctors that work to vaccinate returnees.

However, community leaders and returnees have not found medical services as accessible or high quality as service providers describe. Despite midwife services, there are a considerable number of childbirth complications as there are few facilities that offer more than basic services and mothers have to travel a significant distance to a hospital. The clinics and hospitals are often too far for returnees to reach easily and the quality of services is poor according to the Head of Gulabad Shura and Representative of the Provincial Directorate: “the local clinic is very far from here and that too is ill equipped and very crowded, a number of people are always left out of receiving the services.” While there is no financial barrier at medical facilities as hospital and clinic visits are free, returnees have to pay for their medications, which many cannot afford.

Information and Awareness

Returnees expressed the greatest satisfaction with the informational services they have received in Nangarhar. Both documented and undocumented returnees accessed trainings on mines and explosives, women’s rights and domestic abuse, and market access. One returnee who took part in a training on markets described his experience: “We are happy as we got some very good and beneficial information and we learnt how to sell things in markets.” A frequently voiced request from returnees is that these trainings should be made more frequent and longer so that more returnees can get involved, and that those who have already participated in one informational session can learn more.

The enthusiasm for informational services did not extend to programs focused on entrepreneurship and employability. Returnees described these programs as “un-useful” and “unhelpful.” Few of the returnees who accessed these services ever received the participation certificates meant to help them find employment.

Legal Assistance

According to one community leader there is a significant need for legal assistance, as most returnees are involved in disputes over land. Many returnees left Afghanistan before the Soviet Union invaded, and, in their absence, their land was claimed by others. While there are service providers who work on these issues, returnees report that these legal services are difficult to identify and access. Often, returnees turn to local community members to assist in resolving disputes rather than the government as “in most cases they do not trust the government.”

Protection

There are no social protection services available to returnees in the region according to community leaders and returnees. Service providers explain that these services are likely offered by the government, however are challenging to access.

Food Assistance

There are several organizations that provide food assistance to returnees, and both documented and undocumented returnees report that they have had access to these services. There are several facilities that focus on food assistance for pregnant women and children with malnutrition. Returnees have easy access to several markets throughout the camps where they can purchase food and non-food items.

That said, there are still many returnees who report struggling to access enough food for their families. One documented male returnee described his families urgent need for food: “Currently, our most desperate need is food items assistance, so that we won’t faint due to hunger and thirst.” Most returnees struggle to purchase food as they are unemployed and “very poor.” While there is food assistance available, returnees report that it is infrequent, unreliable, and insufficient to meet their needs.

Psychosocial Support

Several service providers explain that their organization offers psychological counselling to returnees in the Nangarhar region. However, none of the returnees or community leaders interviewed had accessed or were aware of these services. Returnees express a desire to access counselling services to help them to deal with the trauma they have faced. One undocumented male returnee explained that he had hoped there would be psychological counselling services available in Afghanistan: “We expect that there should be a psychiatrist in clinics as we are suffering from mental disorders due to the problems we face. We have a lot of problems here.”

Cash Assistance

Most returnees reported receiving cash assistance during their journey yet have received minimal to no assistance since arriving at their camp in Nangarhar.

Employment Support

While service providers are working to support returnees in finding employment, they recognize that the demand for employment far exceeds what they can provide. According to one service provider: “Joblessness is the problem, that should be taken care of, the main gap in services is joblessness and they should work for it. Once that is taken care of, the rest of the problems will automatically reduce or it will most probably vanish by itself.”

One of the most common services provided to returnees are professional skills trainings to teach them skills such as embroidery, curtain making, mechanic works, carpentry etc. However, community leaders raise the concern that, “people have received professional skills but there is not work opportunity for them, so that these professional people can find work.” The reason most returnees have not found employment is not due to their lack of skills, but that there are simply no jobs available. Those who do manage to find jobs are often paid such low wages they still cannot cover basic expenses.

Unemployment is the most significant barrier to reintegration among returnees. One documented male returnee described: “Joblessness is the reason that we don’t feel like home in this community as we don’t have anything to do, so we feel bored and unwanted.”

Electricity and Water

Service providers explain that they provide water systems in the camps so that returnees can have easy access to potable water. However, returnees report that the wells are located far from their homes, so it is very difficult to access them.

Education

Community leaders and service providers report that there are easily accessible educational facilities throughout the camps for returnees. However, community leaders clarified that while there are many primary schools, there are limited high schools and many are located too far for returnees to attend.

While some documented returnees struggle to send their children to schools so distant from their homes, many undocumented returnees face a more significant challenge. Without identification cards, many returnees are unable to attend schools. Several undocumented returnees expressed that while they were eager to enroll their children in school, they were unable to because of their documentation status.

QUALITY OF SERVICES

Many returnees have lost faith in service providers, who have promised them services and failed again and again to deliver. A common belief is that service providers are corrupt. According to one returnee, "In NGOs the corruption is available if you know someone in NGOs they will help you otherwise you will never receive the services." Service providers express similar concerns about both government and INGO services: "Only the people who have contacts or reference are served, sometimes they receive the assistance multiple times, but the poor people who do not know anyone in those organizations do not receive any sort of assistance." To fix this issue, community leaders and service providers suggest that organizations must complete proper needs assessments so that they can deliver their services in the most effective way possible.

Another significant issue that negatively impacts the quality of services provided is the lack of a coordination mechanism between organizations and governmental bodies. One service provider reported that the Department of Refugees and Repatriation does not coordinate with organizations and will allot land and build homes for people who have already received those services from another organization. This compounds returnees' sentiments that these organizations are corrupt.

CHALLENGES AND LIMITATIONS

Lack of connections to local community leaders was mentioned as a challenge by returnees trying to access services. Generally, the village Malik informs returnees of the services available and distributes them. Returnees explain, "The Malik of the village gives us all the information, he is our main source, and whenever there are any kinds of services or assistance to the returnees, he informs the people about it." This is normally an effective way to share information about services and available aid. However, many undocumented returnees and returnees who do not originate from Nangarhar report that they are treated poorly by the Malik, and do not receive services that other returnees do. According to one undocumented male returnee, "when there are any sort of services being provided the Malik first introduces their own people and then the people from this community. We are totally excluded from these things. None even think of us as humans." This barrier to services prevents returnees who are the most vulnerable from accessing the services they need.

Another vulnerable group which faces additional challenges in accessing services are women. Multiple female returnees, both documented and undocumented, spoke of the additional barriers they

experience in accessing services as compared to men. One female returnee explained, “my brother in law is my main source of information, as he is a male, he goes out and meets other men outside, and then he informs me about different things.” This is the experience of many returnee women who are reliant on men to access services. Women traveling alone or with children who lack the protection and support of a male figure have a difficult time accessing services: “I had to approach everyone by myself. It is much difficult for ladies to get the aids as compared to men.”

LAGHMAN

OVERVIEW OF RETURNEE

EXPERIENCE/COMMUNITY LEADER FEEDBACK

Most returnees report that Laghman or villages in the surrounding areas are their final destination. Though many have returned to their communities, and report that they have been welcomed back by the local community, they continue to struggle with reintegration due to insecurities such as lack of housing, insufficient educational services and unemployment. The Head of Council at the “Baba Saib Camp” reports that while services and conditions have improved, there are still significant gaps in assistance provision that prevent returnees from fully feeling at home.

SERVICES

The following services were cited by interviewees—service providers, returnees, and community leaders—as either services already provided or gaps in necessary services that needed to be addressed.

Housing and Shelter

In 2008 and 2012, when returnees first began arriving to Laghman, there was little to no shelter or housing available to them, leaving most returnees living in makeshift tents and shelters. Ghazigul, the Head of Council at the “Baba Saib Camp,” reports that though housing and shelter was a significant challenge in the early stages of returnee arrival in 2008 and 2012, that is no longer a significant barrier to reintegration. He stated that all 973 households in the camp have access to housing. INGO service providers reported that the housing and shelter challenges for returnees in Laghman have been more or less “overcome.” These providers do not list housing as one of the main needs of returnees in Laghman. There are several organizations that have already worked to assist returnees in finding and building housing.

This is contradictory to the experiences of both documented and undocumented returnees in Laghman for whom housing remains significant obstacle to reintegration. The conditions in which returnees often live are crowded and difficult. One documented returnee described renting space in shared housing where more than 16 family members live in two small rooms.

Undocumented returnees face even more significant obstacles to accessing housing and shelter as they do not receive land or shelter from authorities because they lack official migration documents and face additional stigmatization over their housing status. One undocumented male returnee explained:

“The people of this area also do not treat us well because they have their own house, and we are living in rental houses, and the landlords increase the rent day by day.” Another undocumented returnee responded that “The lack of our own house is the main reason that prevents us from feeling like home here in this community. If we are given house or land then it will feel like home in this community.”

Health and Medical Facilities

Though health clinics are available for returnees in Laghman, the medical services provided are widely regarded to be inadequate. Quality health services are difficult to access due to insufficient supplies of medicine and poor treatment in clinics. One undocumented woman reported that the medical treatment in the camp clinics was so unsatisfactory that when she or her family members were unwell, they paid for a private doctor in the city which they could hardly afford. Multiple returnees reported that the clinics have one single medication, which is provided to all sick patients suffering from a range of illnesses. Another common concern is the lack of medical support during night hours. The clinics are only open during the day, leaving returnees who have medical emergencies during the night without any assistance.

Information and Awareness

Several organizations are providing informational programming to raise awareness on how returnees can protect themselves from the dangers of mines and bombs. Both documented and undocumented women reported participating in these programs. However, no men mentioned partaking in these trainings. The women expressed that they wished there were more frequent trainings on these subjects available as they are critical to returnees’ safety.

Legal Assistance

Significant disputes over land granted to returnees by MoRR between returnees and local community members necessitated legal support and assistance when returnees first began arriving in Laghman. The Afghan government provided legal support services, and the majority of the land disputes have been resolved with land being granted to returnees. At the time of this survey, no returnees, documented or undocumented, reported needing legal assistance.

Regardless, legal assistance services are available to returnees, according to Ghazigul, the Head of Council, who outlined two main means of resolving disputes or legal issues. First, there is a Shura of elders who work to resolve disputes within the camp. If the dispute cannot be resolved in this manner, the matter is referred to the government, which assists the returnee with the legal matter. Service providers also report that there are organizations that provide legal assistance to returnees in cases of family, land, or heritage disputes.

Social Protection

Returnees report that though they are in need of social protection programming, there is none available. This is a service that returnees believe the government should provide. Service providers report that only the government is providing these services and that information on how to access government-provided social protection services is circulated, however this is limited and these services are not easily accessible.

Food Assistance

All returnees have easy access to the small markets in the Baba Saib Camp and the Laghman city market, which is easily reachable by public transportation. Most returnees reported that access to food was not a significant challenge for them. Of those returnees who reported needing or receiving food assistance, the vast majority were women. Several documented and undocumented women reported receiving some food assistance from WFP: "We have been given a sack of flour, a carton of cooking oil and biscuits for our kids two times, which was very helpful." A few documented women reported needing assistance so that they could have reliable access to food, but that they were unaware of organizations providing this service regularly.

Psychosocial Support

Service providers, returnees, and the Head of Council raised the importance of the provision of psychosocial counselling to returnees. Despite this, only one male documented returnee reported having access to this service. Though he described the experience of counselling as positive and expressed interest in continuing, the mechanism through which he accessed the counselling no longer functioned. The rest of the returnees interviewed were not aware of counselling services being provided.

Several service providers were unsure if counselling or other psychosocial support services were available to returnees. Others reported that NRC and the Swedish Committee provide psychosocial support services such as counselling, but exclusively to disabled individuals.

No returnees were aware of any safe spaces or shelters available in the camp, but also stated that these services are not needed.

Cash Assistance

Both documented and undocumented women stressed the need for additional cash assistance far more than men. For female returnees, cash assistance was one of the most important forms of support they received. However, this type of assistance was infrequent and often difficult to access. Several women reported that the cash distributions returnees rely on are rarely delivered on time, and it often takes six to seven visits to the distribution location to receive payments.

Employment Support

Service providers, returnees, and the Head of Council stressed that one of the most significant needs in the returnee community is employment support, as most returnees are jobless and employment status is the one of the most significant barriers to reintegration. Returnees reported that the men in their families might be forced to return to Pakistan for work as there are no jobs available in Laghman. One documented male returnee explained: "We don't feel like home here because we don't have jobs and works here and it is very difficult for us to make a living here so the poverty is the biggest reason some people go back to Pakistan."

There are employment training programs provided to returnees, but there is no market for the skills they are taught. One documented male returnee expressed his satisfaction with the training he had received: "I am happy as I learnt in this training about how to mend shoes, but since I don't have mending machine, I can't take benefit from my skill." Others raised similar concerns that, although they are taught skills meant to assist them in finding employment, the trainings are of no use as the barrier to employment is not skill level, but job availability.

Unemployment has caused increased tensions in the community. There is resentment between returnees who have jobs and those who do not, as well as increased friction between the host community and the returnees who are viewed as taking already limited employment opportunities. Service providers are not currently addressing this challenge, which represents a significant need for returnees.

Electricity and Water

For the majority of returnees interviewed, access to clean water and electricity is among the most pressing and critical needs they face. There have been no successful efforts made to provide electricity to the camp. The camp Head of Council stated, “We do not have electricity. Our rights that we have are to have access to electricity and proper jobs, the government has not worked in this sector, they should help us in this regard.” A male returnee complained: “if there isn’t sun we are sitting in dark.”

Although there have been deep wells dug to provide clean drinking water (seven by UNICEF and two by DACAAR), these wells are insufficient for the number of people living in the camp. One female returnee spoke about the implications of the clean water shortage on children: “We have huge problems with water supply, lack of pure and healthy drinking water makes the life so difficult here. Our children bring water from far places. We should be helped to dig wells and erect water pumps over them.”

Education

The government has constructed schools for returnee children, and service providers report this need having been met. However, documented and undocumented female returnees raised concerns regarding the quality of the education provided. Male returnees did not raise these same concerns. One female returnee elaborated: “The teachers are not punctual. The school is located far from the children. The environment is not good for education.” Several other returnees were disappointed that there are no seminaries where children could receive an Islamic education and described the current schooling system as useless: “Their teachings are not good. The kids have not learnt anything. They are just going and coming back.”

Moreover, several of undocumented female returnees reported that their children did not even have access to schooling, which was a major barrier to their reintegration: “We don’t have schools here for our kids, so that is why we don’t feel like home, here in this community.”

QUALITY OF SERVICES

Overall, returnees were distressed by the quality of the services they have received in Laghman. “Our problems are somewhat addressed, as compared to the past, now we have a school, we have a clinic, we have a house. The only thing we are suffering from is the quality of the services,” explained one returnee.

Although a few returnees expressed satisfaction with the services they had been granted, most returnees responded that service providers have made many promises that have not been followed through on. For example, according to one returnee: “They are going to give us documents or participation certificates for the course we have attended, but they haven’t given us those documents yet, when we are opening a workshop or other business we cannot obtain a permission letter from the government as they say you don’t have documents.”

Moreover, most returnees feel that aid and services are not being distributed justly, and there is little confidence in the integrity of service providers. Returnees interviewed expressed that people with

connections receive more aid, and that neither INGOs nor the government is actually interested in assisting the poorest people in most need of support.

CHALLENGES AND LIMITATIONS

Returnees continue to struggle to locate and access the services available to them. According to service providers, far more services exist than returnees are aware of or have access to. At present, the village Malik is the main source of information about services offered for returnees and is responsible for directing returnees towards the resources best suited for them. However, returnees expressed concern about the efficacy of this system, as some individuals have shared information with their Malik, but have never been directed toward services.

CONCLUSION

These provincial profiles demonstrate that, across all locations, service provision to Afghan returnees from Pakistan is insufficient to meet existing needs. Services are often of low quality, inconsistent and unreliable, inadequate to meet the needs of large families, and returnees must also navigate corrupt service providers and impossible bureaucracies in order to access services, which many are unable to do. In many cases, returnees are simply unaware of the services that exist, or how to access them.

At the Torkham border crossing, shelter and housing was one of the most needed—but frequently lacking—services for returnees, with many reporting that they had to sleep outside during their first nights in Afghanistan. Legal assistance was also rarely available at the border, though this was also something that many returnees needed; in particular, they wanted to access a Tazkera, which would also be helpful in facilitating further services provision. On the other hand, vaccinations for children were relatively easily obtainable at Torkham, and many respondents were pleased with the information and awareness services, which covered topics such as the dangers of mines and explosive hazards in Afghanistan. Returnees were also pleased with the food assistance provided, though direct assistance was more useful than food provision cards, which returnees were often unable to exchange for actual food. Cash assistance was commonly reported to be provided at the border, and was a main need of returnees at this point in their journey, though the amount of cash provided was often reported as insufficient. Similarly, many returnees were able to access NFIs, which were useful, though not enough for a large household.

In Kabul, poor quality, unreliable, unevenly distributed services led many returnees to lose faith not only in service providers—government and INGOs—but in their own ability to reintegrate. Shelter was a common need among returnees, though both returnees and service providers acknowledged that the shelter assistance was insufficient to meet returnees' needs. This was a significant barrier to returnees' reintegration. Food assistance was also difficult for returnees to access; despite there being many markets for food in Kabul, returnees mentioned that they didn't have enough cash to purchase food, frequently leaving them in a state of food insecurity. Women also mentioned that money was barrier to accessing health services, in Kabul, which were also reported to be of low quality. Employment support was a very common and substantial need among returnees, and while services existed in the form of trainings, returnees and service providers mentioned that the lack of jobs in the economy was a main barrier. Unemployment remains a significant barrier to returnee reintegration.

The service provision landscape in Nangarhar was broadly similar to that in Kabul, though returnees faced additional challenges in Nangarhar, in part related to the less-urban nature of the province (compared to Kabul). Health facilities were reported to be far away and hard to access, and legal assistance was needed to resolve land disputes, but was hard to access. Community leaders were also reported to be a gateway to information and services, though did not support all returnees or community members equally as discrimination was sometimes reported by returnees.

Returnees in Laghman shared many of the challenges mentioned by returnees in other areas. In addition, returnees in camps in Laghman reported that access to clean water and electricity was among the most pressing and critical needs they face. On the other hand, returnees in Laghman mentioned did not have trouble accessing food, as markets were available and easily reachable. Unemployment has caused increased tensions in Laghman, as there is resentment between returnees who have jobs and those who do not, as well as increased friction between the host community and the returnees who are viewed as taking already limited employment opportunities. Returnees also reported being discriminated again by community leaders, who they said did not facilitate equitable access to information.



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