





UNDP Research Project (Population Movements first Draft)

RESEARCH STUDY A SOURCE OF POTENTIAL The Livelihood Aspirations Of Afghan Returnees from Pakistan

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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.



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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

As an organization committed to the long-term peace and prosperity of Afghanistan, it was a privilege for UNDP and MAGENTA to carry out this research on the livelihoods of returnees from Pakistan—an issue which has short and long-term effects on countless individuals. In line with UNDP’s vision of creating sustainable and long-term development in Afghanistan, this study was undertaken based on the assumption that Afghans who are migrating have untapped skills and capacities that could benefit the communities where they settle, and in particular could contribute to the economic development of these areas, if provided with the right resources. Recognizing the advantages of migration and of migrating families themselves—while still acknowledging that both returnees and the communities they return to need outside support, may help stakeholders make use of all available resources to support the development of Afghanistan. UNDP aims to use the findings from this research to support the design and implementation of programmes that invest in resilience-based development and facilitate sustainable, community-based re-integration for returnees.

MAGENTA would like to express its appreciation and gratitude to the team responsible for the production of this report. This unique research was made possible with the financial resources and vision of UNDP Afghanistan, and support of the following UNDP Afghanistan staff: Napoleon Navarro, UNDP Senior Deputy Resident Representative; Laura Rio, Chief Section, UNDP Livelihoods and Resilience Unit; Mohammad Salim, Programme Analyst Officer, UNDP Livelihoods and Resilience Unit, Sana Dawari, Research/Project Officer, UNDP Livelihoods and Resilience Unit and Sayed Omer Sadaat Communication Analyst.

MAGENTA also extends its appreciation to SP Knowledge, the primary author of the report; Saagarika Dadu for her support on developing the methodology and data collection tools; Paul Ader, Director of ThinkClarity for his input on the data collection tools and thorough review of the report; Mustafa al-Abdali for his work on designing the report; NOMA Consulting, which conducted the data collection for this research; and Sarah-Jean Cunningham, Elizabeth Robinson, Laramie Shubber, and Balqis Ehsan for their support during the data collection and analysis process.

MAGENTA and UNDP urge policymakers and donors to utilize these findings to support the sustainable integration of returnees, and to support national actors to mainstream migration into development plans.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Migration and movement have characterized Afghanistan and its people for decades, if not centuries. From internal displacement due to conflict and natural disasters; to cross-border migration to Iran, Pakistan, and Europe; to relocation from rural areas to urban communities, Afghans have generations of experience with picking up and re-starting their lives, elsewhere. With this experience comes unique skills, capacities and mindsets that have the potential to contribute to and build up the communities in which migrants settle. While many research studies commendably seek to evaluate and address the needs of migrants and communities, fewer studies examine the ways migrants could contribute to the communities where they reside and identify ways to support them. This contribution—and in particular economic participation—is critical to facilitate returnees long-term and sustainable re-integration in Afghanistan.

In early 2020, MAGENTA and UNDP undertook two studies that touched on both topics. One consisted of mapping the journey that Afghans take in their return from Pakistan, and the services they need or access along the way, with the aim of identifying gaps in service provision. The full findings from this

study are presented in an accompanying report, *The Return Journey*,¹ and are mentioned where relevant in the conclusion of this document. The second study, which is presented here, documents the perspectives, skills, capacities, and livelihood aspirations of Afghans who have returned from Pakistan in the last three years, with the aim of identifying opportunities for these returnees to contribute to and participate in their communities in Afghanistan. Acknowledging that the most likely—and, indeed, desired—way for returnees to contribute locally is through livelihoods, the study has focused on returnees’ potential to participate in local economies. **Together, these studies seek 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 results from this research show that returnees have a desire to re-integrate and contribute to their communities (especially economically), but face barriers in doing so that make integration more difficult. The vast majority of returnees had high hopes for their future when they first returned to Afghanistan, but by the time of the survey—which took place between three years and a few months after participants returned—their initially positive expectations had given way to a more realistic understanding of the challenges of return and the difficulty of making a living. What’s more, there is a gap between returnees’ expectations and economic realities: those who returned because they believed their economic prospects would be better in Afghanistan were more likely to have negative feelings about being in Afghanistan at the time of the survey. Economic integration also takes time—more recent returnees were more likely to be unemployed than those who had been back longer—and many more respondents were unemployed in Afghanistan than had been in Pakistan, both of which likely contributed to feelings of disappointment and frustration among returnees.

That said, there is a desire and potential for respondents to improve both their own economic situation in Afghanistan, and that of their local community. The fact that 97% of respondents had been employed in Pakistan suggests that they have both the skills and interest in maintaining a productive livelihood in Afghanistan as well. What’s more, about half of respondents (including those who were unemployed) said they wanted to change their occupation in Afghanistan, including—importantly—35% of women. A shop owner or a tailor were the most desirable jobs overall, and over half of women wanted to be a tailor.

Over 60% of respondents who wanted a different occupation thought this change was realistic in the next two years. For those who didn’t think this was feasible, almost half said market conditions would be a barrier. Respondents generally had strong self-efficacy, and over half believed that they had the ability to change their own economic situation, with the other half reporting lack of skills to be the main barrier. Nevertheless, only 10% of respondents said that they themselves were the most suitable to improve their own situation, instead mentioning that the Afghan government, the UN, NGOs, and other entities would be best positioned. Two-thirds of respondents also said that financial support would be most helpful in changing their livelihood (despite also saying that lack of skills was the biggest barrier). This optimism about improving their personal economic situation also extended to the community at large: about half of respondents said that they could play a role in improving the economic situation of their community, and most said that getting a job was the best way to contribute. Returnees said that they have skills in agriculture, teaching, and construction that could be used to support their local economies.

The results from this research suggest that Afghans who have returned from Pakistan in recent years have notable self-efficacy and determination to improve the economic situation of their family and their community. At the same time, findings from the complementary study conducted by MAGENTA and UNDP on the services available to returnees demonstrate that there are many gaps in service provision,

¹ MAGENTA and UNDP, July 2020.

in nearly all sectors, including the most basic services at border crossings to longer term support once returnees have reached their destination. These gaps, not surprisingly, also apply to livelihood support. The findings of this study further highlight the relevance of the findings from the complementary research study on the services available to and access by returnees. Given that formal service provision is insufficient, it is all the more important to focus the services that do exist on supporting returnees to make their own contribution to the community, and assisting not only themselves, but also those around them. In particular, returnees' economic participation is critical to ensure their successful re-integration in Afghanistan, and the long-term development of the country.

This study aligns with UNDP's vision that national development must be tackled with a long-term approach that integrates migration and displacement, both of which will present a challenge for Afghans for the foreseeable future. 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 working with IOM and UNHCR to support people affected by displacement and their host communities by supporting multiple levels of government to mainstream migration into their development plans; address the root causes of displacement and migration; promote resilience based development that is sustainable and localized for each community.

INTRODUCTION

Starting in mid-2016, large numbers of Afghans in Pakistan began to return to Afghanistan.² Some of these were "deportees" evicted by the Pakistan authorities while others appeared to return out of choice.³ The returnees included documented and undocumented refugees.⁴ 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.⁵

There has been substantial research conducted around the material needs of the returnees and the difficulties returnees face meeting basic needs and generating incomes. However, there has been less focus on the reintegration process from the perspective of returnees' own aspirations, skills, capacities, and visions for how they might contribute to the communities to which they return. UNDP commissioned MAGENTA and ThinkClarity to conduct research to address these gaps.

METHODOLOGY

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

In June 2020, MAGENTA and ThinkClarity designed and deployed a structured telephone survey to better understand how the Government of Afghanistan and the international community might support the economic and social reintegration of returnees and encourage them to contribute to the

² 614,000 in 2016, 160,000 in 2017, 45,600 in 2018.

³ Many of the so called "spontaneous returnees" probably chose to return because of implicit or explicit pressure from the Pakistani government. This is particularly the case since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic.

⁴ Registered refugees are Afghan citizens who hold Proof of Registration cards. Unregistered refugees are Afghan citizen card holders.

⁵ European Asylum Support Office, <https://www.easo.europa.eu/news-events/easo-publishes-coi-report-situationafghan-refugees-pakistan>

communities where they have settled. The questionnaire investigated respondents' views and feelings on:

- The circumstances of their return and their feelings since returning.
- Their individual economic situation, and that of their household and community.
- The extent to which respondents felt equipped – and were motivated – to improve the economic situation of their household and the wider community and the most promising pathways for doing so.
- The extent to which they have started to integrate socially, economically and politically in the communities in which they have settled – including participation in elections and local leadership.

In turn, the specific research questions investigated by the study were as follows:

- What are the desires and aspirations of Afghan returnees to contribute to their community and life in Afghanistan?
- What are the skills, capabilities and capacities of Afghan returnees?
- Do they think these can be used to support their community and, more widely, contribute to local and national development in Afghanistan? If so, are they interested in engaging in this way?
- What barriers do returnees face when it comes to wanting to engage in their communities and, where applicable, in the local and national development of Afghanistan?

APPROACH

The survey sought responses from Afghans who had returned since Nowruz 2017 (March 2017) and were currently living in Kabul, Nangarhar or Laghman. A convenience sample was drawn from existing returnee databases with quotas set to ensure roughly equal representation of men and women and rural and urban respondents. After data cleaning, the final sample consisted of 1,062 respondents. This non-probability sampling approach is appropriate in situations such as these where limited administrative records and transience of the population makes it unduly costly to determine a reliable sampling frame. Therefore, while the data is indicative of the breadth of sentiment among returnees it is not possible to make statistically valid generalizations about all returnees.

The telephone survey was active from 20th May to 20th June 2020 and was followed by data analysis. Returnees in the sample were contacted ahead of interviews to explain the research and obtain informed consent.

A trained team of enumerators obtained consent for a second time at the outset of each interview and reminded respondents of their right to withdraw from the research at any time. Data analysis took place using descriptive statistics. Contingency tables compared respondents' characteristics and survey questions of interest. Descriptive statistics analyze the data within the sample and do not generalize results to the wider returnee population.⁶

However, Table 1 shows that some practical similarities between the sample and the wider population, notably: An even gender split in the sample and the wider population. A more Pashtun sample than the wider population, as would be expected given the regional focus of the survey.

⁶ Generalisation of results to the wider population is not possible because the sample is not representative of the wider population. Z-tests and a chi-squared tests were used to check that the reported results differed meaningfully from sample averages

Table 1. Comparison between the demographics of the study sample and the Afghan population

National statistics		Study Sample			
	% Population	Total sample	Kabul	Nangarhar	Laghman
	100%	1,062	42% (444)	30% (314)	29% (304)
GENDER					
Male	51% ⁷	51% (537)	52% (229)	49% (154)	51% (154)
Female	49%	49% (525)	48% (215)	51% (160)	49% (150)
ETHNICITY					
Pashtun	42% ⁸	89% (944)	84% (373)	95% (298)	90% (273)
Tajik	27%	7% (76)	11% (49)	3% (9)	6% (18)
Pashaye	1%	2% (20)	1% (3)	1% (5)	4% (12)
Hazara	9%	1% (14)	3% (14)	0% (0)	0% (0)
Other	21%	1% (8)	1% (5)	1% (2)	0% (1)
AGE					
18-29	45% ⁹	30% (317)	28% (125)	34% (107)	28% (85)
30-44	31%	44% (465)	44% (195)	43% (134)	45% (136)
45+	24%	26% (280)	28% (124)	23% (73)	27% (83)

CHALLENGES AND LIMITATIONS

There were several challenges and limitations encountered during the data collection, summarized here:

- During data collection, enumerators observed that some respondents expected to receive aid as a result of participating in the survey. This was likely a result of respondents being promised

⁷ United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, World Population Prospects 2019, <https://population.un.org/wpp/Download/Standard/Population/>.

⁸ CIA (2014) The World Factbook, <https://web.archive.org/web/20131014200908/https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-worldfactbook/fields/2075.html?countryName=Afghanistan&countryCode=af®ionCode=sas&#af>
<https://web.archive.org/web/20131014200908/https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-worldfactbook/fields/2075.html?countryName=Afghanistan&countryCode=af®ionCode=sas&#af>.

⁹ Percentages of data obtained from national statistics are calculated out of the total Afghan adult population.

long term support at the border crossing to Afghanistan and this support so far not transpiring. Additionally, returnees were given a mobile SIM card at the border crossing and told that they would be contacted via that number leading to an expectation of services when organizations contact them. It is possible this expectation of support influenced some respondents' answers.

- There was no pattern to those who refused to take part in the survey or among those who refused to answer certain questions. The most common question which was refused was 'do you think you can change the situation of yourselves or your community?'. Almost half of respondents reported no or refused to answer the question. According to the observations of the data collection team, it's believed that this is due to low self-efficacy of the respondents who don't believe they possess the skills or have the ability to change their situation.
- Many respondents were not familiar with the names of specific agencies that offered assistance, and some reported that God was helping them.
- It was often difficult for enumerators to reach women over the phone, especially in Laghman. To meet the quota of women for the survey, enumerators would ask men to give the phone to a woman in the household, but this was sometimes not possible (if, for example, the man was out of the house at the time of the survey), and sometimes the man refused to do so. Other times it was clear that the man was influencing how the woman responded; in these cases, the survey was cancelled.
- Data collection occurred during the outbreak of COVID-19, which could have an effect on results.

RESPONDENT DEMOGRAPHICS

Summary of section:

- Female and older respondents more often lacked formal education
- Respondents born in Afghanistan were less likely to be educated.

Table 2. Places of education attended by the sample population

<i>Highest level of education attended in Pakistan or Afghanistan¹⁰</i>	<i># respondents</i>	<i>% sample</i>
No formal, informal or religious education	608	57%

¹⁰ Respondents were asked all places of education attended, either in Pakistan or Afghanistan. Lower secondary refers to grades 7-9 in Afghanistan and 9-12 in Pakistan; upper secondary to grades 10-12 in Afghanistan and 9-12 in Pakistan

Elementary/ primary school	155	15%
Lower secondary school	122	12%
Upper secondary school	103	10%
University – bachelors, master’s or higher	43	<1%
<i>Other types of education</i>		
Madrasa or other religious institute	143	13%
Other non-formal education (e.g. literacy classes)	3	0%

More than a third (37%) of the sample overall had some form of education (Table 2). Education backgrounds differed by age. Older respondents were less likely to have attended any form of education than younger respondents: two thirds (67%) of over 40s had attended no form of education compared to half (51%) of 18-40 year old. Conversely, 16% of under 40s had reached at least grade nine compared to 10% of over 40s. Female respondents were more likely to have no education (76% of females) than male respondents (39% of males). It follows that housewives too were more likely to lack education, albeit by a small majority of 55%. There was no significant difference in gender age profiles that might contribute to educational differences between men and women.

By province, respondents living in the province of Kabul were more likely to lack education than in other provinces. Exactly half (50%) of the Kabul-based sample had some form of education compared to 60% in Nangarhar and Laghman. Respondents born in Afghanistan were more likely than those born in Pakistan to lack education. Two thirds (67%) of respondents born in Pakistan were educated at primary, lower secondary and upper secondary level education compared to 55% of Afghanistan-born respondents. This may be explained by the fact that the more educated Pakistan-born population is younger, and older respondents had childhoods in 1960s and 1970s Afghanistan, when access to education was more restricted than it is now.

FINDINGS

MIGRATION AND RETURN PROFILE OF RESPONDENTS

Summary of section:

- Younger respondents were born in Pakistan, older respondents in Afghanistan.
- Most respondents had returned in the spring and summer months of 2017 and 2018.
- Harassment in Pakistan and desire to be with family in Afghanistan drove most return overall, with harassment and pressure from Pakistani officials more widely cited among earlier returnees.
- Among more recent returnees, family and economic prospects were more important motivators of return.
- Almost all respondents intended to stay in their current location at the moment of the survey.
- Most respondents said they were hopeful about the future at the time they returned to Afghanistan. Fewer respondents had maintained a positive outlook by the time of the survey.
- Respondents with economic motives for return were more likely to have developed negative feelings about being in Afghanistan. However, a bad economic situation in itself was not linked with negative feelings.

Location of Birth

Most respondents said they were born in Afghanistan (Table 3). Respondents above 40 years old were almost exclusively born in Afghanistan (96%) while younger respondents from 18 to 34 years old were mostly born in Pakistan (63%). The definition of return varies between agency.¹¹ This report emphasizes respondents’ own identification with Afghanistan as their country of origin, even if they were born in Pakistan, and so refers to all respondents as returnees.

Table 3. Countries and provinces where respondents were born

Countries/Provinces	Respondents		
	Total	18-34	35+
TOTAL	100% (1062)	100% (504)	100% (558)

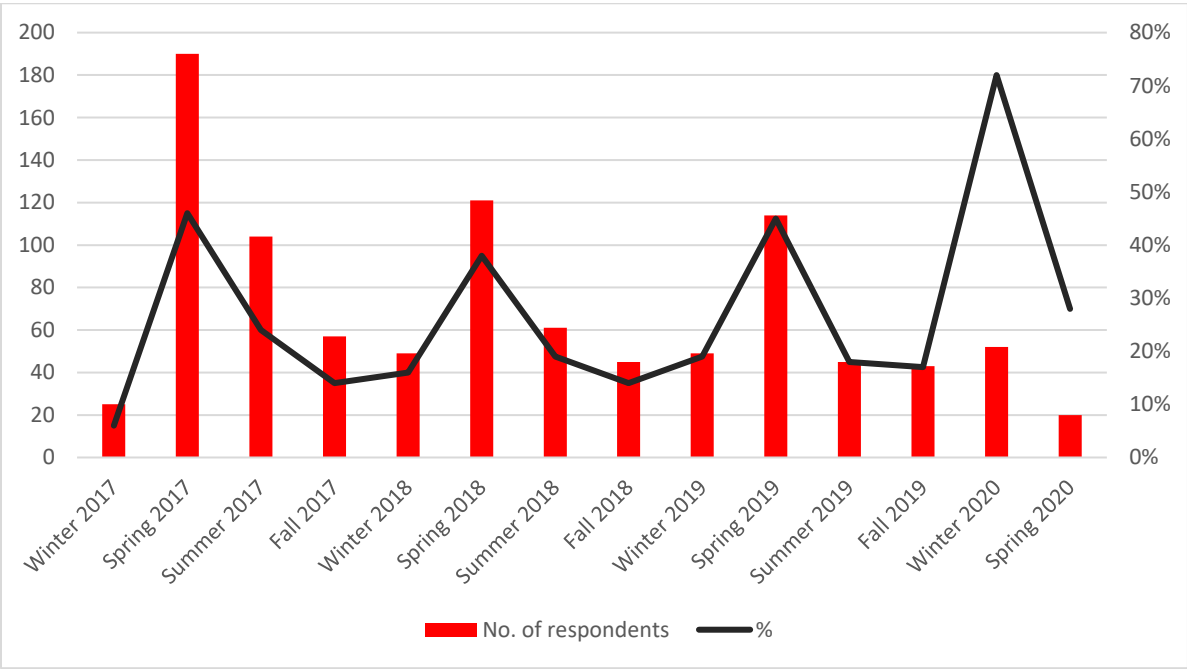
¹¹ “For statistical purposes, the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA) defines returning migrants as “persons returning to their country of citizenship after having been international migrants (whether short term or long term) in another country and who are intending to stay in the country for at least one year”. See https://publications.iom.int/system/files/pdf/iml_34_glossary.pdf, 198

Afghanistan	63% (672)	37% (185)	87% (487)
Laghman	19% (203)	31% (58)	30% (168)
Nangarhar	19% (200)	32% (60)	30% (165)
Kabul	10% (107)	15% (28)	17% (93)
Other provinces	15% (162)	21% (39)	11% (61)
Pakistan	37% (389)	63% (319)	13% (71)
Iran	≈ 0% (1)	0	≈ 0% (1)

Time of Return

Respondents varied in the length of time they had spent in Afghanistan (Figure 1 for time of return). Most had returned in 2017 (40%), then around a third (30%) in 2018, and fewer again in 2019 (24%) and 2020 (7%, 72). Return mostly took place in the spring and summer: May/June (17%, 177) followed by the months of April/May, June/July and March/April (14%, 11% and 11% respectively).

Figure 1. Respondents' season of return. The black line indicates the % of people who returned that season, out of everyone who returned that year.



Reasons for Return

Overall, respondents most often said they returned to Afghanistan because they faced harassment in Pakistan (30%), because of their desire to live with their extended families in Afghanistan (18%), and because they were no longer feeling safe in Pakistan (16%), followed by economic prospects in Afghanistan (12%) and being told to leave by officials (11%) (Figure 2). Harassment and safety concerns combined constitute nearly half (46%) of the sample.

Figure 2. Reasons for returning to Afghanistan



Respondents who returned in 2017 (32%) and 2018 (36%) were more likely to cite harassment by Pakistani authorities as the main reason to return than those who returned in 2019 (23%). Respondents who returned in 2017 were also more likely than those who returned in later years to state they were told by officials to leave Pakistan (15% versus 8%). However, note that female respondents were more likely to state they were told by officials to leave Pakistan than male respondents (15% versus 6%). Although male family members are more likely to interact with officials, respondents reported that women were sometimes troubled by Pakistani officials who came to their homes and at times, entered. Respondents who returned more recently were more likely than those who returned earlier to believe they would improve their economic situation by returning to Afghanistan than those who returned in earlier years (17% in 2019 and 26% in 2020 thought this compared to 9% returning in 2017 and 8% returning in 2018). However, harassment remained just as important a driver for more recent returnees (23% in 2019 and 24% in 2020 citing this).

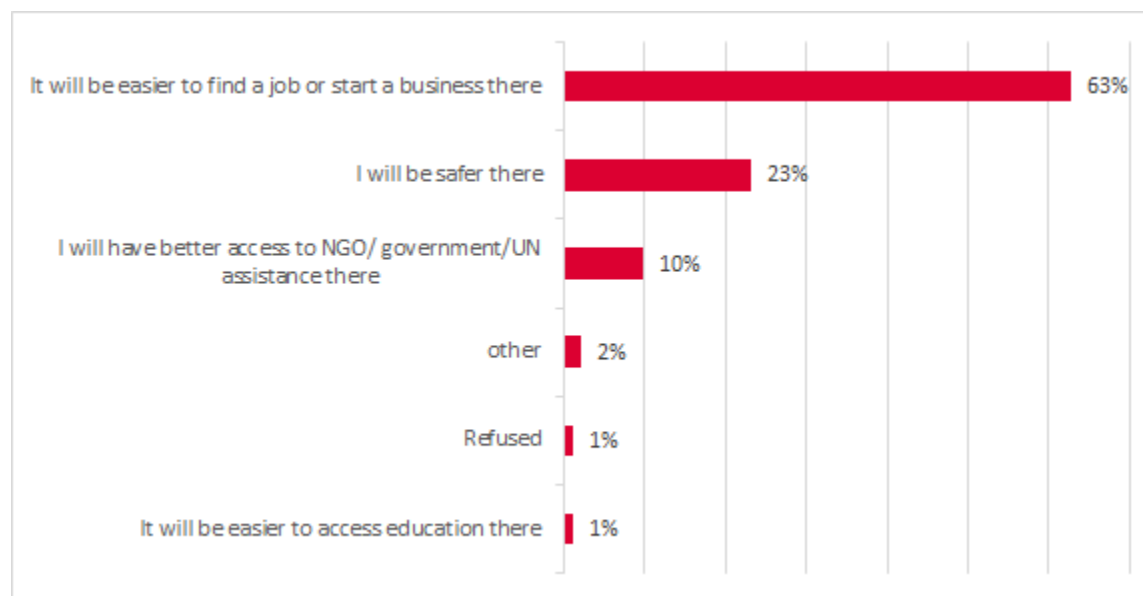
A substantial proportion of returnees in 2018 and 2019 cited family reunion as the motive for returning. This included 21% of 2018 returnees (though harassment remained more widely cited) and 23% of 2019 returnees.

Intentions to Move

Those who return to politically and economically fragile countries often struggle to resettle in their homes, and tend to gravitate towards cities in pursuit of economic opportunities. Almost all respondents (91%) declared they did not intend to leave the location they lived in at the time of the

survey. This may indicate that not many people in the sample were being prevented from reaching home and few intended to re-migrate, although this was not explicitly asked. The 91 respondents (9%) who did intend to move were mostly young, unemployed and had recently arrived. Most (75%) considered the location they were living in was not their village or district, though 36% did not intend to return to their home village or district in any case. Eight respondents intended to move back to Pakistan. There was no significant difference between men and women. Further, movement by returnees was motivated mostly by economic reasons, with nearly two thirds (63%) indicating that it would be easier to find a job or start a business at their new destination¹² (Figure 33).

Figure 3. Respondents' reasons for wanting to leave their current location (91 respondents)



Feelings About Return

The survey asked respondents to compare how they felt at the time they returned to Afghanistan to how they felt at the time of the survey (Figure 4). The majority of respondents felt positive at the time they returned to Afghanistan (89%) and very few (5%) reported negative feelings associated with return. While most (63%) retained their positive outlook, nearly a fifth (19%) of respondents reported that their initial positive feelings towards being back in Afghanistan had subsided over time.

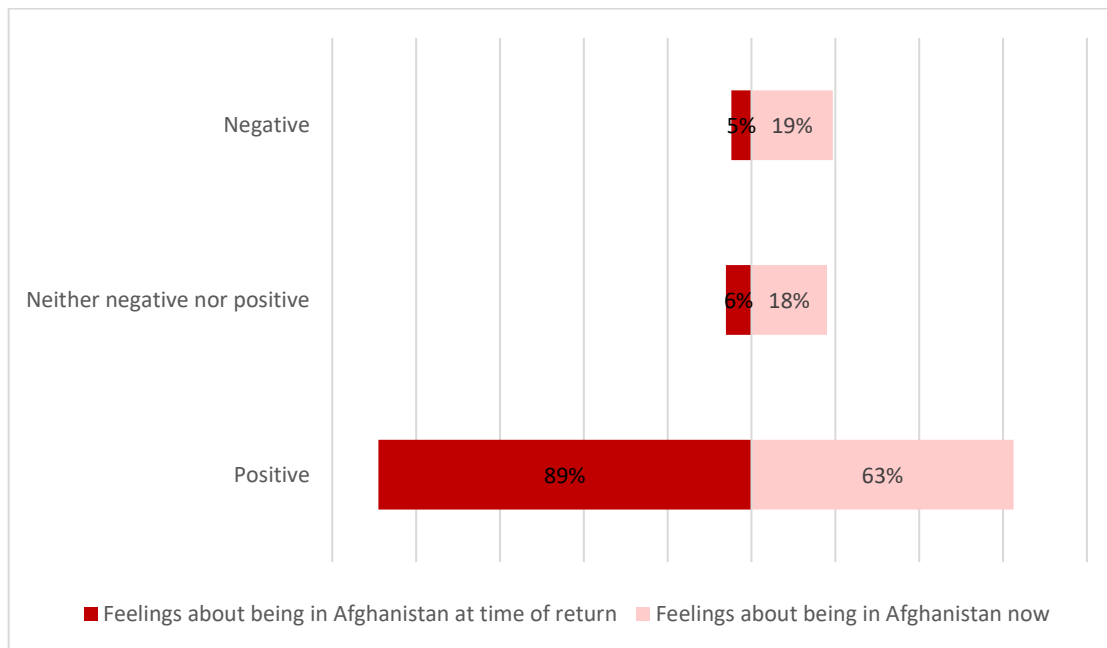
Respondents with a university education, though a small subgroup of the sample, were most likely to say they felt negatively or very negatively at the time of the survey. Of the 43 respondents with a bachelor's degree, 13 (30%), and 20% of those with secondary school education reported feeling negatively. There was less difference between secondary school-educated respondents and those with no formal education.

There was little difference between men and women. Women were marginally more likely to feel negatively (22% compared to 17% of men). Among the 117 women who felt negatively or very

¹² 57 respondents said they wanted to move within Afghanistan because it would be easier to get a job or start a business. They included housewives (18 respondents), unemployed (19), farmers/ agricultural workers (6), street vendors/ peddlers (4), students (2), maid/ cleaners (2), mason/ bricklayer/ brickmakers (1), tailor (1). 36 were men and 21 women. None were above 60 years old; 27 respondents were 35-60, 30 were 18-34.

negatively were 97 housewives. Alongside housewives, unemployed respondents (23%) were also among the most likely to feel negatively or very negatively about their return to Afghanistan at the time of the survey.

Figure 4. Respondents' feeling about returning to Afghanistan at the time of the survey compared to the time of return



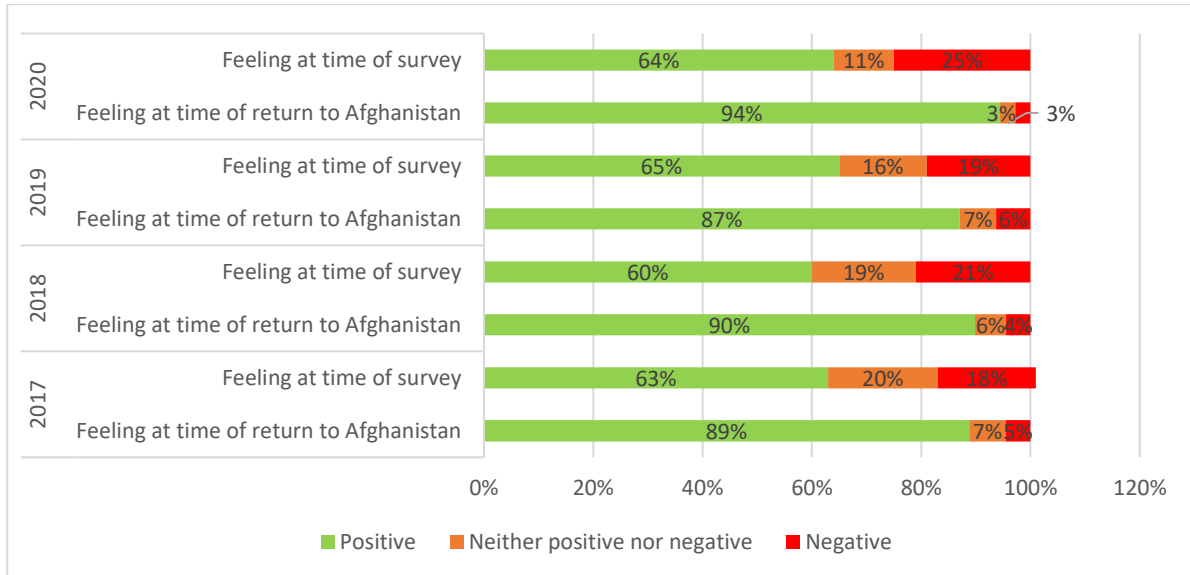
There was a complex relationship between respondents' economic situation and feelings about return. First, despite the fact that most (63%) respondents continued to feel positively about their return, a greater proportion (76% overall and 83% in Laghman) considered their own economic situation to be mostly bad. This indicates that it is possible for returnees to feel simultaneously pessimistic about their economic situation but hopeful for the future. Respondents who returned to Afghanistan in 2020 were more likely to consider their personal and household economic situation as mostly negative (86%) than those who came back in 2018 (77%) or 2019 (75%). Other respondent groups that were more likely to consider their economic situation to be negative included:

- Women respondents (80%) compared to men (73%).
- Respondents with no formal education (81%), despite their higher employment rate.
- Respondents living in Laghman (74%, 225 of 304), a notably higher rate than those in Kabul (50% of Kabul-based respondents) and Nangarhar (51%).
- Respondents who returned to be with extended family in Afghanistan (36%) than returned for other reasons. This was followed by those who returned because they did not feel safe in Pakistan (25%) or expected an improvement of their economic situation in Afghanistan (25%).

Second, and seemingly in contradiction with the first point, respondents who returned because they believed their economic prospects would be better in Afghanistan were more likely than average to say they felt negatively or very negatively about being in Afghanistan at the time of the survey (28%, 35 out of the 125 who had returned for this reason). In comparison, fewer of those who wanted to live with their extended family (15%) or said they were no longer safe in Pakistan (8%) had negative feelings.

Figure 5 compares how respondents reported they felt at the time of arriving in Afghanistan against how they felt at the time they were interviewed. It shows that recent arrivals were more likely to tell enumerators they felt positively about their current situation but, as with other cohorts, dissatisfaction had grown significantly between the time of arrival and the time of the survey.

Figure 5. How respondents felt about being in Afghanistan at the time they returned versus at the time of the survey, according to their year of return



Economic Situation, aspirations, beliefs

Current and Previous Employment and Occupations

Summary of section:

- Respondents' rate of unemployment since arriving in Afghanistan was much higher than it had been in Pakistan.
- Half of respondents would like to change their occupation, and housewives are motivated to find paid work.
- Respondents who were less confident about achieving their desired occupation blamed market conditions.
- Nearly half of respondents lacked self-efficacy – the belief they have the ability to improve their own economic situation. Women were less confident than men.
- Insufficient skills were most widely cited as preventing respondents from improving their economic situation.
- Respondents did not believe stigma to be a barrier to economic integration.
- Respondents most often wanted financial support from the government or international organisations.
- Respondents were more positive about the economic situation of the community than their own.
- Only half of respondents agreed they could play a role in improving the economic situation of their community.
- Respondents most often suggested that them getting a job would most help them improve their local economy.
- Respondents suggested their agricultural, teaching and construction skills could help local economies to improve, while women emphasised agricultural, teaching and tailoring skills.

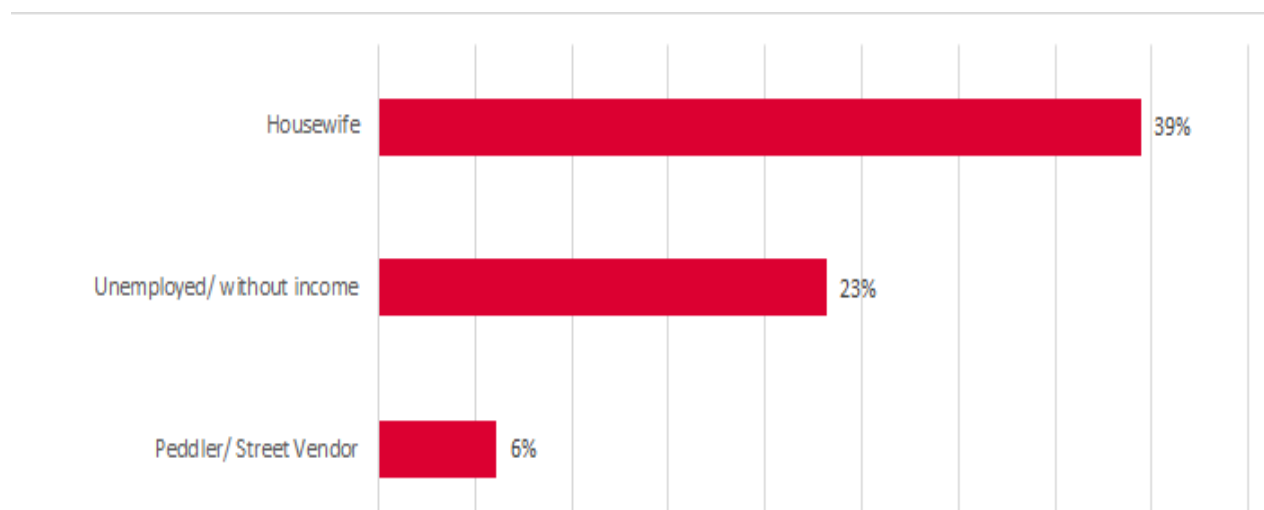
Current and Previous Employment and Occupations

Over half of the sample was either a housewife (39%) or unemployed (23%) and therefore not earning anything. Only 9% of women respondents said they were unemployed compared to 37% of men. Low reported unemployment by women respondents follows the fact that they overwhelmingly (80%) reported their occupation as housewife; indeed, the label of 'housewife' for women is considered to, in many cases, be a proxy for unemployment.

Respondents were more likely to be unemployed if they:

- Were older, including 40% (23 of 57) of over 60s and 51% (37 of 72) 50-64s.
- Were living in Kabul (30%, 131 of 444 Kabul residents).
- Arrived more recently (35% of 2020 arrivals compared to 21% of 2017 arrivals)
- Were male (37% of 537), on account of most women respondents without paid work identifying as housewives.

Figure 6. Respondents' three top current occupations



Of the 20% (106) women who were not housewives, nine were students, leaving 97 who might be considered economically active.¹³ Of the 97 economically active women, 46 (9%) said they were unemployed, 37 (7%) were tailors, and the rest worked in handicrafts (4), small kiosks (3), as maids or cleaners (2), professional drivers (2), weavers (1) or agriculture (1). One refused the question. Respondents without any formal education were less likely to be unemployed. Against an average of 30% unemployment among respondents with any type of education, just 19% (114 out of 608) respondents without formal education were unemployed.

As shown in Figure 7, very few (3%) respondents were unemployed before leaving Pakistan but at the time of the survey, nearly a quarter (23%) said that they were not working in Afghanistan. This trend towards unemployment was driven nearly entirely by men respondents. Most women (78%) retained their occupation, which they usually reported to be housewife.

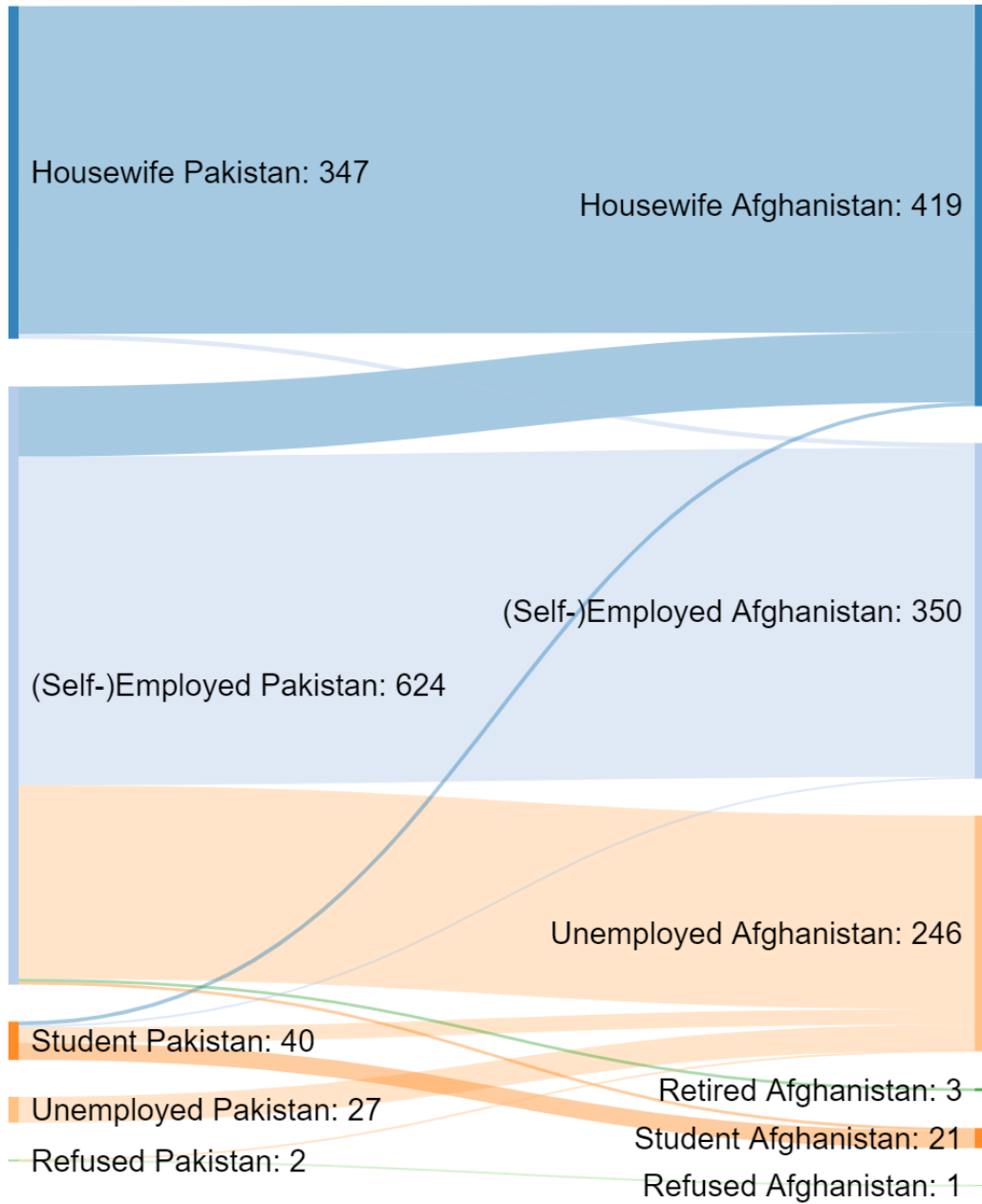
Figure 7 shows how respondents' occupations changed between Pakistan and Afghanistan. For example, 27 of the respondents that were unemployed in Pakistan remained unemployed since return and that 415 of the 992 respondents who were employed in Pakistan now reported to be housewives in Afghanistan. In Pakistan, these women had been working at home and selling hand-made products in markets, including embroidery and tailoring; some women were also working in medium-size factories to produce similar products. These women expressed an interest in resuming work, if they had an opportunity to do so.

It was harder to identify clear trends among specific occupations – and low subgroup sizes mean the results should be treated with caution. However, it is interesting to note that respondents who had owned a kiosk or shop in Pakistan were largely successful in finding work in Afghanistan (30 of the 42, or 71%). This contrasts with tailors, over half of whom were no longer working, either because they had become housewives (45 of the 98, 46%) or were now unemployed (12 of the 98). However, those tailors who had found employment in Afghanistan were mostly working as tailors.

Figure 7 shows respondents' occupation in Pakistan (left side) and their corresponding occupation in Afghanistan (right side). For example, it shows that of 347 respondents who were housewives in Pakistan, nearly all remained housewives in Afghanistan. They were joined by 73 women who were employed or self-employed in Pakistan and became housewives in Afghanistan. Meanwhile, five of them went the other way: from housewife in Pakistan to employed or self-employed in Afghanistan.

¹³ Note that the survey did not probe explicitly whether unemployed women were able or not able to work

Figure 7. Change in employment between Pakistan and Afghanistan



Aspirations to Change Occupation

Just under half (48%) of respondents said they wanted to change their occupation. This included unemployed respondents. Male respondents were significantly more likely to want to change their current occupation (61%) but a notable 182 (35%) women wanted to change their occupation too. Of the women who wanted to change their occupation, 147 of them were housewives (35% of all housewives).

Respondents not in their preferred occupation want to be tailors (22%) or shop owners (11%). More than half (57%) of women who wanted to change their occupation said they would become tailors and another 10% (representing 19 women) would raise or breed animals. A small handful of women talked about becoming religious teachers (10), making or selling handicrafts (7), or becoming midwives (4) and doctors (3).

Most (62%) of those who wanted to change their occupation thought it was realistic that they could achieve this change in the next 24 months. Respondents in this category were more likely to think their goals were attainable if they:

- Were male (67%) rather than female (53%).
- Were not housewives – only half of the housewives interviewed were confident (49%).
- Were better educated: respondents with a high school education were more confident (77%) than those without any formal education (54%).
- Respondents who had attended a Madrasa were as confident as those who attended high school (77%), though note that these categories are not mutually exclusive.¹⁴

The biggest single reason for not being confident about achieving their desired occupation (given by 44% or 87 of the 197 respondents who did not think their preferred occupation was attainable) was that it was not possible to do so in the local economy, for example because they perceived jobs to not be available or self-employment not viable. This was the biggest single reason among both men and women though more widely cited by male respondents (49% compared to 38% of women).

The second most prevalent reason was the sense among respondents that they did not have the time or resources to pursue a change in occupation (18%, 35 of 197). This was the second most important reason for men and women alike.

In addition, though less widely cited than the reasons above, women were significantly more likely than men to say that they were limited by their health (13%) or not allowed by family (8%, or 7 of 86).

Opportunities and Barriers to an Improved Economic Situation

Nearly half (43%) of respondents did not agree with the statement "individuals like you have the ability to change the economic situation of you and your household". More than half (56%) agreed with the statement.¹⁵ Self-efficacy was higher among respondents who: Were male (69%, 372 out of 537) rather than female (43%, 226 out of 525). Had the same occupation as when they were in Pakistan (66%, 333 out of 503) Were living in Laghman (65%, 197 out of 304) rather than in Kabul (47%, 209 out of 444) or Nangarhar (46%, 143 out of 314). Wanted to change their present occupation (64%, 327 of 507). Felt very positive or positive about their return (59%, 392 of 665). Had no formal education (54%, 327 out of 608).

¹⁴ Someone who attended a madrasa may have also attended secondary school.

¹⁵ Four respondents did not know, one refused to answer

Figure 8. Reasons mentioned by respondents for not being able to improve their economic situation

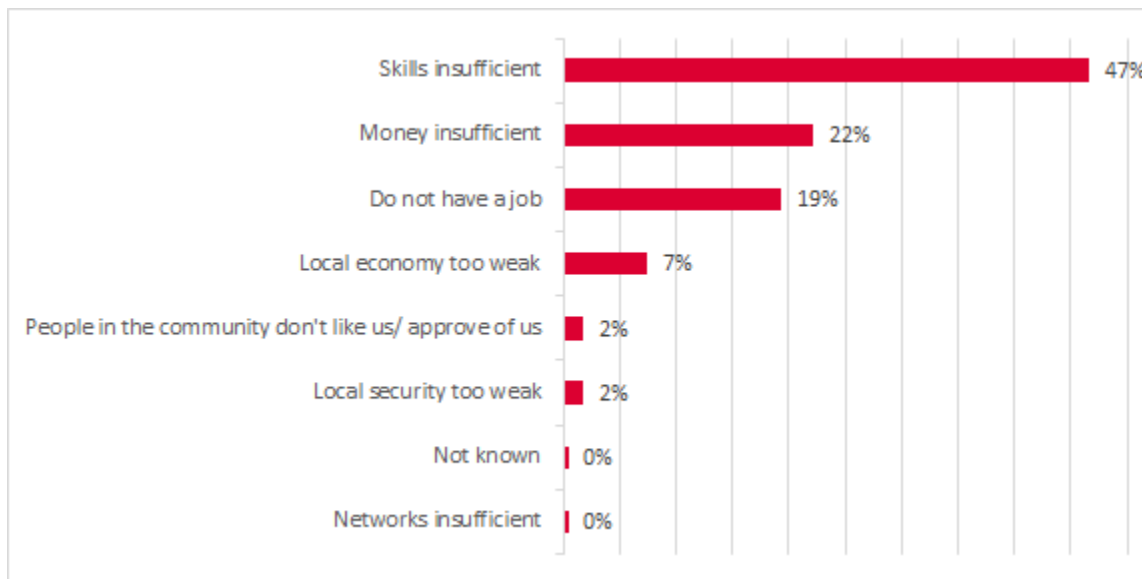


Figure 8 shows that almost half of respondents deemed insufficient skills as the main reason why they could not change their own economic situation, followed at some distance by insufficient money or not having a job in the first place.

Respondents found stigma to be a less important factor in their reintegration. A high proportion of respondents (77%) did not believe the opinion of other members of their community affected their ability to earn money. In fact, almost all participants (94%) believed that non-returnees were mostly happy to have returnees in their communities. While the data does not allow us to profile host communities, this shows that at least from the perspective of respondents living in Kabul, Nangarhar and Laghman, active exclusion by host communities was less of an issue.

Respondents who believed they could change their household economic situation overwhelmingly agreed that the Government of Afghanistan and international or local agencies were best placed to help them (Figure 9). Just one in ten (10%) mentioned that they themselves could be responsible. Note that the question was unprompted, and respondents were able to choose multiple sources of support.

Figure 9. Possible supporters mentioned by respondents as being the most suitable to help them improve their economic situation

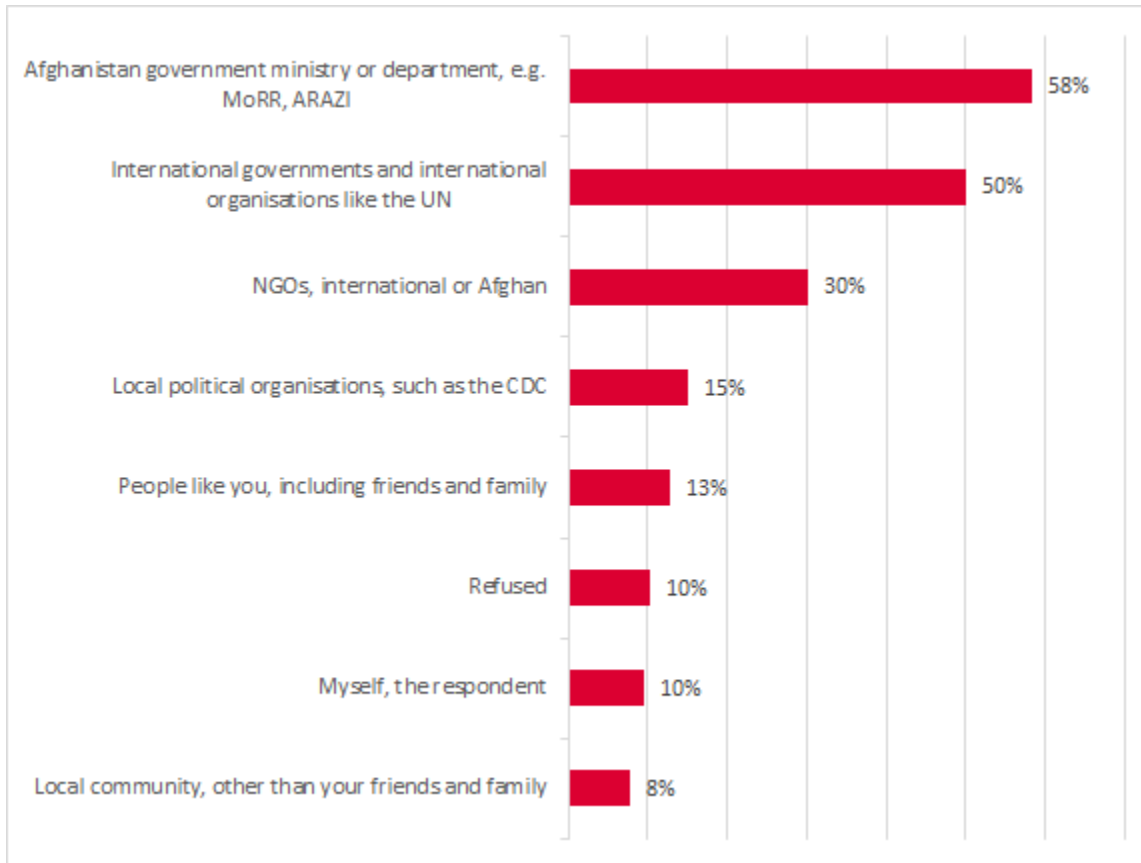
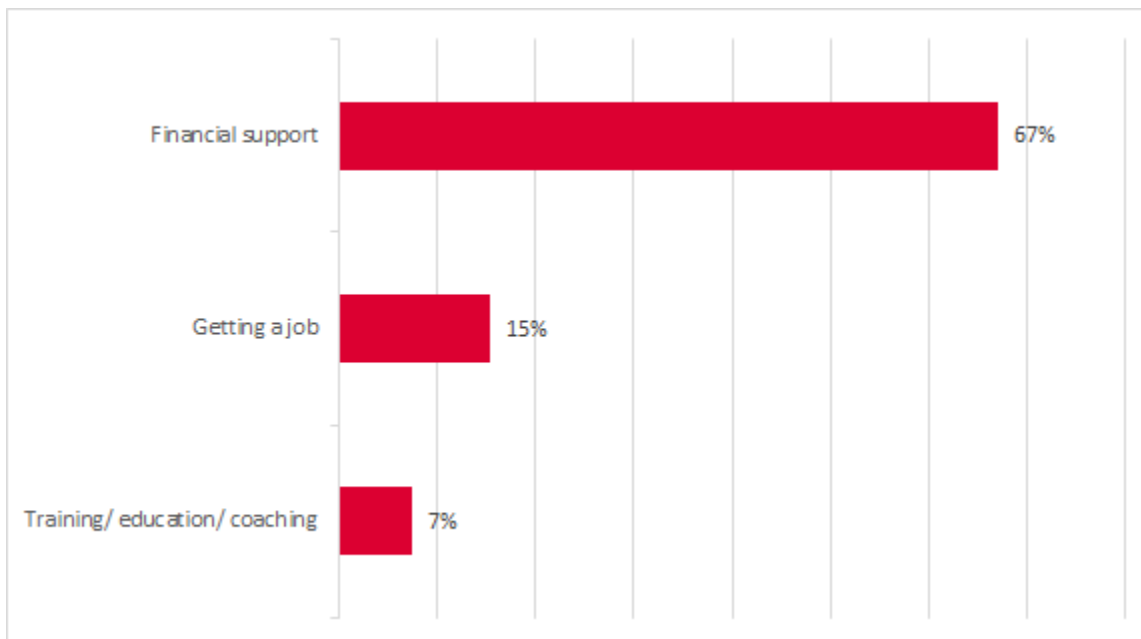


Figure 10. Support needed by respondents in order to improve their economic situation



The majority of respondents (67%, 401 of 598) believed financial support would help them the most in making that change, followed distantly by getting a job (15%, 92) and training, education or coaching (7%, 44). Respondents may see financial support as a means to acquiring the blend of skills and equipment to get started in preferred occupations.

Overall, fewer respondents considered the community economic situation to be negative (57%) than considered their own situation to be negative (76%, described earlier). Earlier returnees were more pessimistic than more recent returnees about the economic situation of the local community. Those who returned in 2017 were more likely to consider the economic situation in their community as mostly negative (63%) than those who returned in 2019 (50%) and those who returned in 2020 (47%). The year of arrival had no bearing on perceptions of the household economic situation except that 2020 arrivals overwhelmingly saw the situation as bad (86%).

Just over half of respondents agreed they could improve their local community economic situation (52%), a slightly lower proportion than thought could improve their own situation (54%). Respondents were more likely to mostly agree with the statement that they could improve their local economic situation if they:

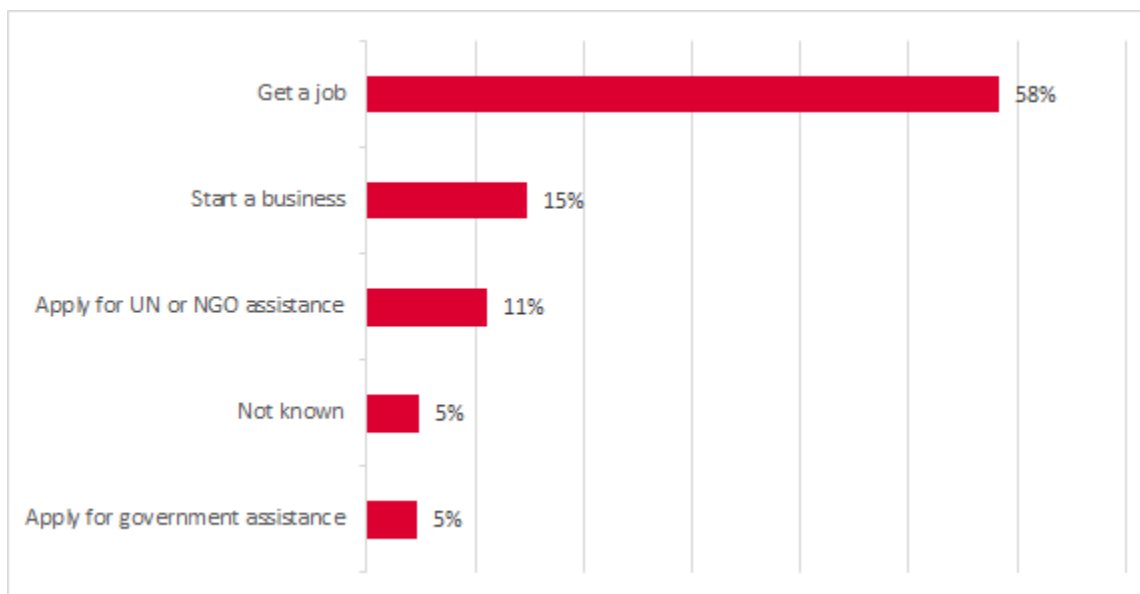
- Were younger (61% of 25-29s and 56% of 18-24s), compared to 39% of over 60s, though note that 59% (55 of 93 45-49s) also agreed.
- Were male, 63% (339 of 537) of whom agreed, compared to 41% (214 of 525) women.
- Returned earlier: 58% who returned in 2017 agreed compared to under half in 2018 (47%), 51% in 2019, and 49% in 2020.
- Thought the economic situation in their local community was mostly positive (44%).
- Were in any occupation except housewives, 54% of whom (225 of 419 housewives) disagreed they could do anything to change the economic situation of the community. In contrast, 70% (32 of 46) of tailors and 58% of the unemployed agreed they could.
- Returned to Afghanistan because they were no longer safe in Pakistan (77%, 130 out of 168). This group was divided on whether the economic situation was good (42%) or bad (55%).

Over half of the respondents (Figure 11) indicated that getting a job would help improve the economic situation of their local community, followed distantly by starting a business and applying for UN or NGO assistance. Specific types of UN or NGO assistance included cash assistance/grants to start a business, and professional skills training (such as carpentry). Women in particular expressed an interest in being trained on tailoring, and receiving support to connect with potential markets, such as schools or organizations that may need uniforms. Women also expressed an interest in receiving support to produce dairy products and jam. Other than UN or NGO assistance, the government and international community were seen as the primary source of external support for boosting local economies.

Respondents who said they were not able to change the situation of their local community were asked why. Responses were divided between insufficient money (33%), insufficient skills (29%) and not having a job (22%). As described earlier, respondents who did not have confidence in addressing their own households' economic situation mostly talked about skills. This might suggest that respondents frequently saw skills as a route to a job that would improve their own personal situation but thought more broadly about how they might improve the local economy.

Independent of barriers to economic opportunities, respondents were asked what existing skills they might contribute to the local economy. Respondents most often pointed to their agricultural, teaching and construction skills (Error! Reference source not found.). As might be expected given the greater availability of agricultural land, respondents in Nangarhar (56%) and Laghman (53%) were more likely than respondents in Kabul (34%) to mention agricultural skills.

Figure 11. Action that would help respondents improve their local community economic situation



Female respondents most frequently emphasised agricultural skills, followed by teaching skills. Women were significantly more likely than men to mention their childcare skills (21%) and skills in the ‘other’ category (22%), where tailoring, handicrafts and business were frequently mentioned. Housewives of the sample population could offer agricultural skills (46%) followed by teaching skills (25%) and childcare skills (18%).

Skill offerings sometimes crossed between occupations (Figure 13). Street vendors of the sample population could offer their construction skills (35%, 14 of 40) and agricultural skills (43, 17 of 40). Tailors could offer childcare skills (41%, 13 of 32). Unemployed respondents said they could offer agricultural skills (48%, 68 of 142) followed by teaching skills (37%, 52 of 142).

Figure 12. Skills that respondents have and can offer to improve their local community economic situation

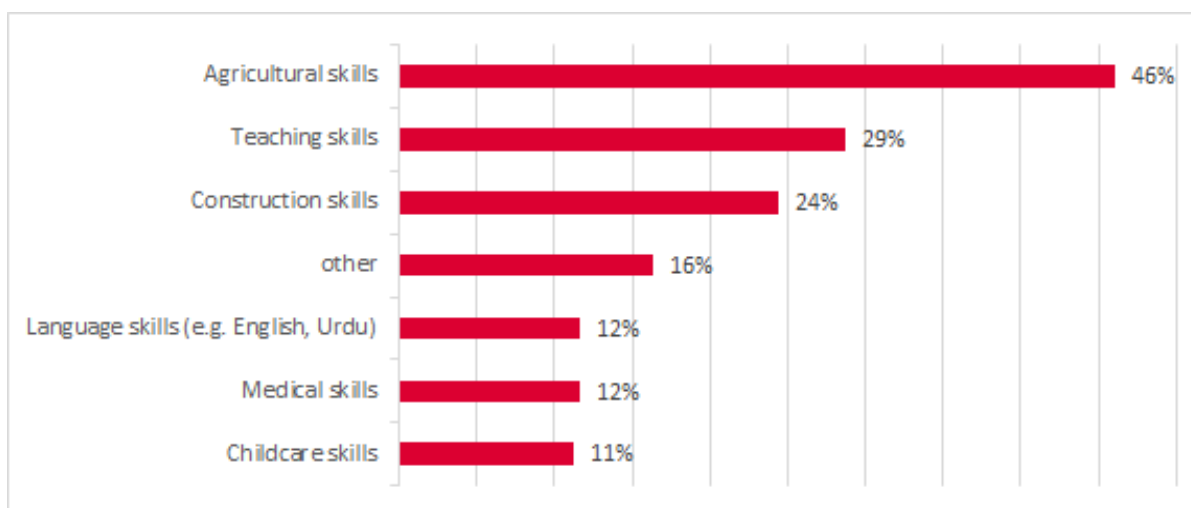
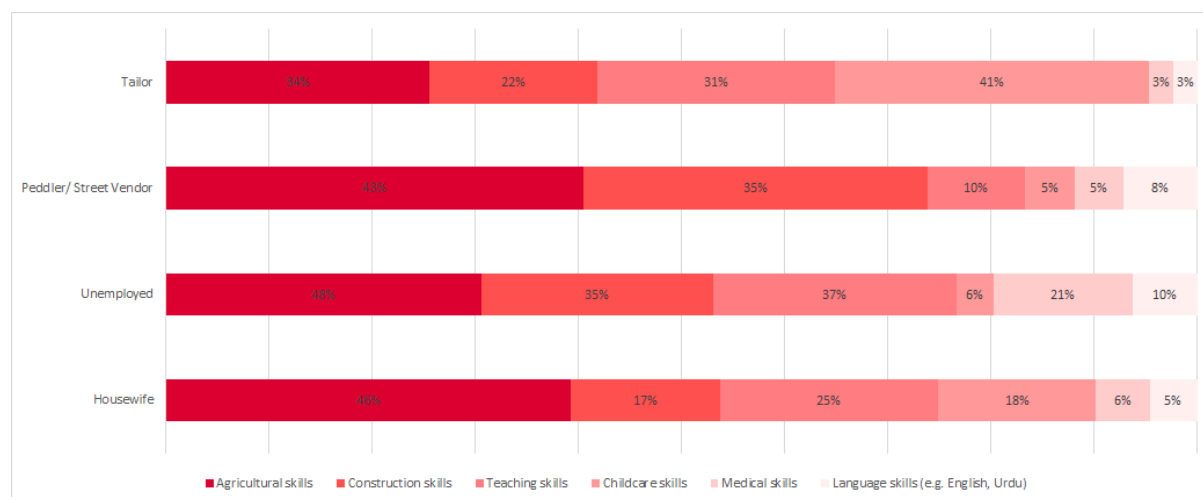


Figure 13. Most common skills that respondents have to offer by occupation in Afghanistan



Social Participation AND Contribution

Summary of section:

- Social participation was low overall and lower among women.
- Just under half of respondents who participated in community activities also took on leadership roles.
- Poor awareness and lack of time are the main barriers to social participation.
- Younger, male respondents more often said social participation was important.

Relatively few respondents (21%) said they had taken part in any social activities (Community Development Council (CDC) meetings, religious, sports, social and political activities (Figure 14). Respondents were more likely to have participated in at least one kind of social, political or religious community activity since returning to Afghanistan if they:

- Were male (33%), compared to 9% of women. Women who did participate in community life did so almost exclusively through CDC or other community meetings (combined 27 women). Were living in Laghman (29%). Participation was lowest in Kabul (14%).
- Were educated, 32% with upper secondary education compared to 16% with no formal education.
- Arrived in 2017 (25%) compared to just 16% who arrived in 2019.

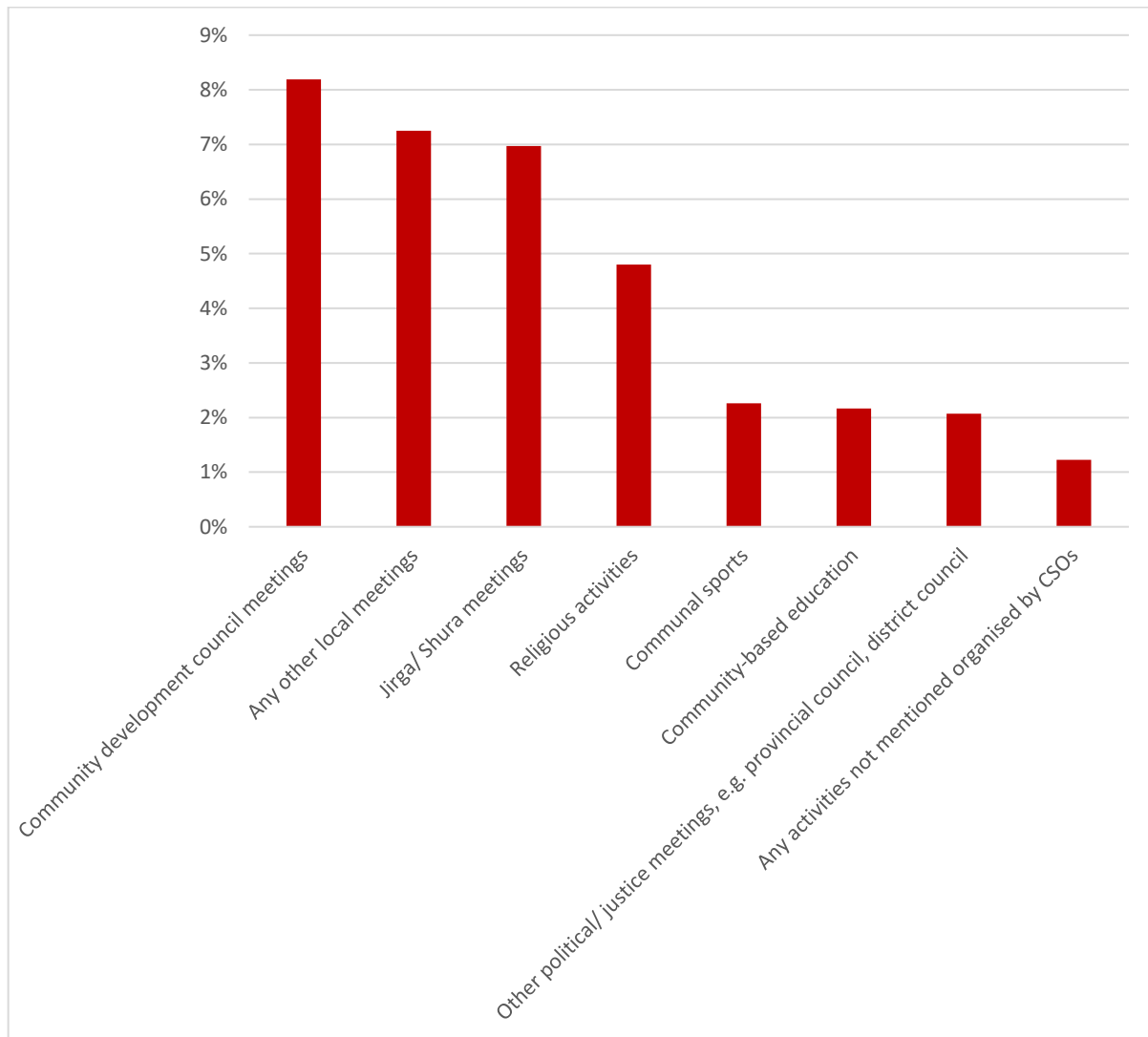
Respondents who said they had influence over what activities happened and when were recorded as having taken leadership roles. Just under half (46%) of the 226 respondents who participated in these activities claimed to have taken on a leadership role, usually in CDC or jirga/ shura meetings. The biggest group of community leaders among respondents were 18-24 year olds, 12 of whom said they took on leadership roles (out of 46 who said they took part in these kind of activities).

Non-participation was usually due to respondents not being aware of community activities (45%). Poor awareness was particularly pronounced among women (51% compared to just 37% of men) and in Laghman (38% of Laghman-based respondents).

Poor awareness was followed by lack of time (22% of the sample). Street vendors (17 of 44) and bricklayers (10 of 30), among others, more often found time to be an important factor. Lack of time might have been a more significant factor, had more of the sample been employed.

The third most common reason overall was lack of interest (16% or 137 out of 836 respondents not participating in social activities). Although behind a lack of awareness, a fifth (21%) of housewives and roughly a third (36%) of over 60s said they had no interest in such activities.

Figure 14. Respondents' participation in local social activities



Discrimination does not appear to be a major concern, except perhaps in Laghman, where 36 (17%) of Laghman-based respondents said their participation was not permitted by the organizers of those activities, and among women, 52 (11%) of whom said the same. Some participants said their participation wasn't allowed because the organizers were prioritizing the involvement of certain groups,

so that if any assistance was provided in the future, it would be given to that prioritized group.¹⁶ In addition, it was reported that organizers didn't like the dialect or accent of those returning from Pakistan, and in turn discriminated against them.

However, half of Laghman-based respondents (49%) also said that social participation was important, suggesting that there is a willing but frustrated set of returnees seeking to progress their integration in this area.

Respondents overall were split on the importance of social participation, 41% finding it important or very important to take part in these kinds of activities compared to 38% who disagreed and 21% neutral respondents.

However, low overall rates of endorsement reflect the fact that only 25% of women found social activities important.

Other groups that were more likely to endorse community interaction were 18-24s (48%, 78 of 163), 2017 returnees (47%, 196 of 420) and better educated respondents (67% or 97 of the 145 respondents who had attended high school).

Political Participation and Government

Summary of section:

- Practical and documentation issues frequently prevented respondents from voting in local and national elections.
- Participation was higher in the presidential elections than local elections.
- Documentation issues were more prevalent among younger respondents and women respondents.

Local elections Most participants (70%) had not voted in any local elections. Election participation was higher among:

- Male respondents (34%) than female (25%)
- Laghman-based respondents (43%) than Nangarhar (27%) and Kabul (22%)
- Farmers and agricultural workers (27 of 54 agricultural workers, or 50%)
- Respondents who returned in 2017 (38%) compared to just 8% that returned in 2020 (6 of 72)

Participation in local elections was lower among:

- Women working as housewives (24% of housewives)
- Unemployed/ respondents without income (26%)

Respondents who did not vote said they could not because of:

- Inconvenient date/ time (31% or 231 of 744 participants who did not vote)

¹⁶ Is it not clear why the organisers expected that those who participated in activities to be prioritised for assistance

- Documentation issues (20%)
- Lack of information on the elections and/or how to vote (18%).

Men who did not vote in local elections were more likely to cite practical barriers (39% of 353 men who could not vote). Women jointly most frequently cited practical barriers and documentation issues (24% of 391 women respondents). They were also more likely than men to say they did not care about the outcome, with 6% of women compared to 2% of men reporting this.

Respondents living in the three provinces shared the three main concerns but Nangarhar-based respondents were more likely to highlight the unsuitability of dates/times of the elections (39% or 88 of 228 Nangarhar residents who did not vote).

Nearly two thirds (64%) of participants that returned to Afghanistan in 2020 selected incompatibility of date/time as their main problem, a figure that declines the earlier participants had arrived.

Presidential elections

Key Finding: Participation was higher in the presidential elections but documentation and practical issues prevented many respondents from voting. Documentation issues were more prevalent among younger respondents and women respondents.

Participation in the presidential elections on 28 September 2019 was higher (47%) than at the local level (30%). Participation was highest among respondents aged 40 to 59 (50%) and men – around half of male respondents participated in the presidential elections (53%), whereas only 41% of women respondents did. Once again, more residents in Laghman voted in the elections (60%) than those living in Nangarhar (46%) and Kabul (40%).

The reasons claimed by the 53% (558) respondents who did not vote largely mirrored the local election concerns around documentation and logistics. Information about how to vote seems to have been less of an issue, with the exception of a small group of women. Respondents' top three reasons were:

- Lack of documentation (32%, 181 of 558 who did not vote)
- Inconvenient date/time (27%)
- Worry about security threats (13%)

Laghman-based respondents were more likely to place emphasis on the security threat as a deterrent to voting (22% of those who did not vote), respondents living in Nangarhar were more likely to blame the inconvenience of the date/time of the elections (34%).

Almost none of the male respondents said they were unaware of the elections or how to vote. In contrast, 12% of the 306 women unable to vote cited this as a reason. Women respondents' reasons for not voting followed that of men respondents: 32% lacked documentation, 25% found voting not practical or inconvenient and 15% were worried about security threats.

Importantly, 40% or 36 of 89 respondents aged 18 to 24 years old who did not vote claimed they had lacked the necessary documentation (compared to 23% of local non-voters citing this reason).

There may be a tentative link between madrasa education and inclination to vote. Of 143 respondents had attended a madrasa, 58 (41%) said they had voted in presidential elections and 41 (29%) in local

elections. However, as with all comparisons in this report, note that there may be other factors (confounding variables) that better explain this association.

COVID-19

The vast majority of respondents (93%) believed the COVID-19 outbreak has made it harder to earn a living. Fittingly, most of the 67 respondents who said that COVID-19 had not made a difference to their ability to earn a living had higher rates of self-efficacy: 54 (81%) believed that they had the ability to change the economic situation of their local community compared to 50% of those who thought COVID-19 had made earning a living more difficult. 52 (78%) believed they had the ability to change their own economic situation compared to 55% of those who thought COVID-19 had made earning a living more difficult.

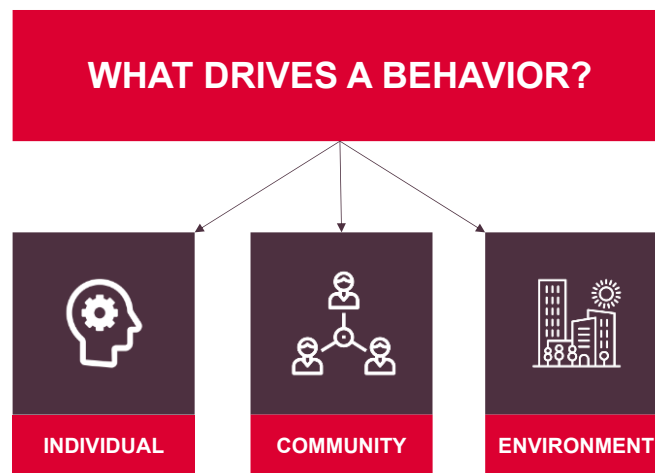
Almost all respondents (97%) indicated they would follow government's advice on COVID-19. The 3% (37) who would not say that they considered it impossible to follow, since their daily activity (e.g. as housewives or street vendors) involved contact with others or did not understand or trust the advice.

CONCLUSION

The results show that there are several areas that might offer promising avenues to support returnees' social, economic and political (re)integration. These are discussed below in line with the framework prescribed by the Behavioral Drivers Model (Figure 15), developed by UNICEF. This framework considers factors at three levels of barrier or drivers to behaviors or decision-making:

- Individual – psychological factors that affect how respondents think, feel and act
- Community – social dynamics that influence respondents' beliefs and actions
- Environmental – structural factors that determine what thoughts, beliefs and actions are possible.

Figure 15. Behavioral Drivers Model



INDIVIDUAL Respondents'

feelings were relevant in how they interpreted their current situation. Respondents motivated to return for economic reasons appear to have found it difficult to realize their objectives. Although we cannot be entirely certain what these objectives were, it seems likely that the change from employment in Pakistan to widespread unemployment (or, for women, a return to being 'just' housewives) after returning to Afghanistan is a key part of the problem.

Given that employment was generally higher among respondents who returned early in the period, time appears to be a relevant factor in economic reintegration. However, the frustration levels were also higher among this group, suggesting that from the perspective of returnees, establishing an income is an important part of the reintegration process but does not necessarily lead returnees to settle psychologically. Conversely, and supporting this picture of reintegration as a part-economic and part-psychological journey, many unemployed recent arrivals held a positive outlook.

These nuances aside, the data clearly showed that respondents returned with a hopeful enthusiasm, but this quickly dissipates as they are confronted with the challenges of reintegration. The presence of this pattern even among returnees who arrived in Afghanistan in 2020 suggests that the initial window of euphoria can be very small.

Many respondents were motivated to change their situation. Around half wanted to find work or change their occupation including a significant proportion of housewives. A majority, albeit slim, were confident that they would be able to do so. This confidence was less evident among returnee women, with considerably fewer respondents believing they could find (fulfilling) work despite the clear desire to do so.

Respondents were overall more positive about the economic situation of the local community than their own. Those who had returned more recently were more positive, while the earliest returnees mostly saw the situation as bad, which suggests again that returnees become jaded over time. This might be expected given the high rates of unemployment in the sample, especially among women who had previously worked in Pakistan.

COMMUNITY

Many respondents believed that they would best be able to support the economy if they themselves found work. They felt that a limited skillset prevented them from pursuing their ambitions but, in slight contradiction, were also able to identify existing agricultural, teaching and tailoring (among women) skills that could be useful. There may be scope for returnees to be coached to focus on making changes in their lives on the basis of skills they possess already, as well as, where possible, pursuing those they would like to acquire. Similarly, there may be scope for livelihoods actors to support the creation of income-earning opportunities in these areas.

Women respondents were similarly excluded from the social sphere. Very few had participated in or led social activities with many either unaware of uninterested in doing so. Those that did engage, participated in CDC and other meetings, which were also the most frequently cited social activity among men.

ENVIRONMENT

Respondents believed that structural factors, namely market conditions, were the primary barrier to them achieving their employment goals. Afghanistan's economic situation is certainly fragile but the ability of some returnees in finding work suggests that this barrier is not insurmountable. The individuals that most often kept their jobs on returning from Pakistan to Afghanistan tended to be in independent trades or self-employed. Returnees with relevant skills may benefit from measures that help them to market.

More highly educated respondents struggled more. The survey data does not tell us why, however, it may be that more highly skilled jobs are harder to obtain, either through scarcity or the need for networks and endorsements that come with time.

Respondents pointed to the need for economic and financial support from government and international organizations to address economic challenge. It is possible that expectations around aid—and natural limitations to a structured survey—overly concentrate results on financial assistance. However, it is also possible that respondents saw financial assistance as a means to acquire the skills needed for economic participation.

In the political sphere, respondents had found it difficult to take part in local and national elections. A lack of information about how to do so and access to the requisite documentation were the two primary barriers, both with clear programmatic remedies. Perhaps surprisingly, security concerns were less prominent, although a greater concern among women.

The findings from this research will be used to promote the sustainable and long-term reintegration of Afghan returnees from Pakistan through a holistic and coordinated approach that mainstreams

migration throughout development plans at the national and local level. UNDP, in collaboration with partners such as UNHCR and IOM, is working to support MoRR and other local ministries to integrate migration, movement and return into long-term planning. As evidenced by this study, UNDP is committed to using research to support investment in development approaches that priorities 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.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of the survey, the following are specific recommendations for a programmatic response that would support the sustainable (re)integration of returnees. They are written with UNDP, the government and the wider international community in mind.

- 1. Help returnees make informed decisions about return through information provision in the pre-return phase.** Some respondents had returned to Afghanistan with potentially unrealistic expectations about their economic prospects. Information campaigns that counter the encouragement and pressure around return in Pakistan may help Afghans make more informed and better planned decisions about their (potential) return. Beyond practical information about accessing emergency shelter and cash allowances, pre-departure jobs and livelihoods counselling could help some plan to return to places with better prospects for reintegration. More sophisticated prereturn programming might seek to signpost and refer to services in provinces of return. For example, campaigns could be delivered in coordination with the Eshteghal ZaieeKarmondana (EZ-Kar) programme, which aims to provide information and passports to Afghans in the pre-return phase and livelihoods support post-return.
- 2. Provide access to information and coaching for returnees who aspire to change their occupation.** Respondents showed varying levels of confidence in their ability to change their situation but a high motivation to do so. The gap between women's motivation and confidence was especially large. Vocation-based training and business incubation projects are already common in Afghanistan but many of them neglect the individual, psychological aspects of return and reintegration.
- 3. Provide information on how and when to vote and support access to documentation.** There is enough evidence to suggest that legal and administrative assistance would increase returnees' political participation. Conversely, further research could investigate why political participation levels in Laghman are relatively high.
- 4. Provide tailored support to women returnees that leverages their existing skills.** For example, "cash for work" programming often focuses on public infrastructure projects but could more effectively target women by providing donor- or government funded payments for childcare, tailoring and teaching. When accompanied by coaching or mentoring, this could be effective in expanding the income-earning proportion of women returnees.
- 5. Provide tailored support to male returnees that leverages their existing skills.** For example, cash grants or loans to start a small business or skill training programs in collaboration with potential employers could support male returnees to obtain their desired occupation.

6. Promote the participation – as employees and beneficiaries – of skilled returnees in mainstream humanitarian and development programming. NGOs providing emergency education services could survey the return population for teaching skills. Returnees with English and Urdu language skills picked up in Pakistan could boost the employability of peers. The displacement-sensitive approaches of many humanitarian actors – where programmes are designed to benefit displaced populations but also enroll host community members as beneficiaries – could mitigate the risk of host community resentment.

7. Undertake proactive measures to boost the participation of returnees in Community Development Councils. The results of the study suggest that CDC and similar mechanisms are one way that low participation groups of returnees can take part in community activities. Active measures to promote inclusion, such as outreach by representatives of marginalized groups (women, older returnees), could boost participation.

8. Support access to documentation to boost political participation. The study showed that a lack of legal documentation was a barrier to participation in the local and national elections and appeared to disproportionately affect women returnees. Respondents were also more likely to find practical or logistical issues with participating in local politics, suggesting that the Citizen’s Charter programme may be able to boost local participation by reviewing its processes.

9. Utilize the Land Reform Act to better target agriculture- and land-based assistance at returnees with agricultural skills.



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Resilient nations.*