





UNDP Research Project (Population Movements first Draft)

RESEARCH STUDY THE RETURN JOURNEY A Mapping of Services Needed, Available, and Accessible for 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 well-being of Afghans, it was a privilege for UNDP and MAGENTA to carry out this research on the journey of returnees from Pakistan—an issue which will continue to be relevant for the region for decades to come. In line with UNDP’s vision of creating sustainable and long-term development in Afghanistan, this study sought to better understand Afghans’ experience returning from Pakistan, and in particular their needs at different points throughout this journey, as well as whether services were available and accessible to fulfil these needs. 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 Saagarika Dadu, the primary author of the report; Mustafa al-Abdali for his work on designing the report; NOMA Consulting, which conducted the data collection for this research; Sarah-Jean Cunningham, Elizabeth Robinson, and other MAGENTA team members for their support during the data collection and report writing process; and UNHRC and IOM for their contribution and support during the project.

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

The migration of Afghan returnees from Pakistan made headlines most recently in 2016, when over 600,000 people returned to Afghanistan, in large part due to an increase in pressure on the part of Pakistani authorities for Afghans to return to their country. This influx of people was met with an increase in services to support them, though gaps still remained. The flow of both families and funding has slowed in recent years, though the challenge of providing useful services to returnees remains. Many people who have come back to Afghanistan from Pakistan find themselves returning to a country they never lived in before, or one that has changed dramatically since they last have. Without knowledge of the area or many local connections, they understandably seek out assistance in establishing their new lives.

That returnees need support and services to help them reintegrate into Afghanistan is widely acknowledged and the default perspective of most service providers, including international organizations. However, returnees are also in a position to contribute to the communities where they settle, specifically through participation in the local economy. This viewpoint—that returnees are

sources of potential rather than simply in need—is less common, though for that reason, perhaps more important.

In early 2020 MAGENTA and UNDP undertook two studies that, together, comprised both perspectives. One study 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. The full findings from that study are presented in an accompanying report, *A Source of Potential*,¹ and are mentioned where relevant in the conclusion of this document. The second study, which is presented here, maps 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. **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 findings from this research 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 main barriers to reintegration. Services available to returnees in transit and at their destination are insufficient in terms of quality, quantity, and reliability. Throughout their journey from Pakistan to their destination in Afghanistan, returnees repeatedly did not have consistent access to services they needed. This included even very basic services, such as shelter, but also longer-term services, such as education for their children. Returnees were often asked for bribes and experienced other forms of corruption when trying to access services. When returnees were able to access services, they reported that the services were often insufficient—especially for large families—that access was contingent on having local connections, the services were not dependable or on time, and that the services varied in terms of quality and utility; undocumented returnees and women—especially female headed households—also faced additional difficulties in accessing services.

Another limitation that emerged from the research was the absence of consistent and or reliable information about services—including that services exist in the first place. Many returnees rely—implicitly or explicitly—on people around them to pass along information about services available, those these individuals may not have complete information themselves. This was the case both for community leaders, and for people such as drivers and guides with whom returnees interacted while in transit.

The high expectations of returnees vis-à-vis service provision, relative to the actual services available and provided, also led to disappointment and frustration on the part of returnees. Indeed, even while in Pakistan many returnees had heard promising anecdotes about the services provided by NGOs and the Government in Afghanistan, which in some cases contributed to their decision to return. In many cases, returnees felt that service providers had promised support and assistance that never materialized, widening the gap between expectations and reality. Service providers were generally aware of these gaps and limitations and acknowledged that demand for services exceeds what they are able to supply.

Limited and absent services—and in particular the lack of employment opportunities and lack of housing—have made it more difficult for returnees to integrate into communities in Afghanistan. In

¹ MAGENTA and UNDP, July 2020

some cases, returnees received assistance and support from local neighbors, but in other cases they've been met with discrimination and resentment linked to, for example, limited job opportunities.

The findings of this study further highlight the relevance of the findings from the complementary research study on the potential of returnees to contribute to their communities. 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. Moreover, enabling returnees to participate in the local economy through paid work is critical to ensure returnees' 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 and protection, 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, the number of Afghans in Pakistan—including registered refugee returnees, Afghan citizen card (ACC) holders, and undocumented returnees—returning or being deported to Afghanistan largely increased. In many cases, these returns were the result of implicit or explicit pressure on the part of the Pakistani government for these Afghans to leave the country.² In 2016, over 614,000 Afghans returned from Pakistan, 40% of whom were undocumented.³ The flow of returnees has decreased since 2016; between January 1st and April 20th 2019, 7,025 Afghans returned from Pakistan.⁴

The UNDP Livelihoods and Resilience Unit in Afghanistan recognizes that while the pace of returns has slowed since 2017, this recent crisis presents an opportunity to better understand the needs of returnees and the degree to which they were able to successfully reintegrate in Afghanistan. In particular, UNDP is interested in understanding how access to and use of services during the journey of return and reintegration may support resilience among returnees. While high-level statistics and metrics

² While returnees are categorized as either "deportees" or "spontaneous returns," it is likely that both are subject to pressure by the Pakistani government to leave the country.

³ "Afghanistan: Returnee Crisis, Situation Report No. 4," OCHA, 29 December 2016. https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/afghanistan_returnee_crisis_situation_report_no_4_29dec2016.pdf

⁴ "Return of Undocumented Afghans," IOM, 20 April 2019. https://afghanistan.iom.int/sites/default/files/Reports/iom_afghanistan-return_of_undocumented_afghans-situation_report_1420_apr_2019.pdf

are available for the crisis, such data fails to capture how returnees are coping with the challenge of reintegration, and how the stages of the migration journey are impacting people on a human level. To fill this information gap, UNDP has partnered with MAGENTA to conduct a Journey Mapping with documented and undocumented returnees in eastern Afghanistan.

This report presents the findings of the Journey Mapping conducted from January – April 2020; an accompanying supplement presents the findings from each location specifically: Kabul, Nangarhar (Torkham), and Laghman.

METHODOLOGY RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Based on the consultations and desk review conducted as part of the preparation for this project, the research questions examined through the Journey Mapping are as follows:

- What is the experience of returnees in accessing services at various touchpoints with service providers?
- What services do returnees believe they would have benefitted from, but did not receive?

APPROACH

Data collection was conducted through 21 focus group discussions (FGD) with returnees, and 30 key informant interviews (KII) with service providers and returnees in four key locations: Torkham, Nangahar, Kabul, and Laghman. In total, 14 KIIs were conducted with service providers (11 NGO workers, three government employees) and three KIIs were completed with community leaders. There were two KIIs and seven FGDs conducted with documented female returnees. Two KIIs and four FGDs were completed with undocumented female returnees. Two KIIs and six FGDs with were conducted with documented male returnees and three KIIs and six FGDs were completed with undocumented male returnees. The FGDs were composed of five to eight returnees (Figure 1).

Research Objective	Understanding returnees’ experience accessing services during the return journey	Understanding the services provided to returnees to assist with return
Research Method	FGDs and KIIs with returnees	KIIs with service providers
Target Population	Men and women Registered refugees Unregistered returnees Community Leaders	Government agencies International agencies Community organizations

Figure 1. Journey Mapping Methodology

The KIIs and FGDs sought to distinguish between services during transit in Torkham and those in destination where returnees were planning to reintegrate.

The period of pre-departure (T-1) was frequently highlighted during the KIIs conducted during the inception phase as a defining time in the experience of returnees. Given the difficulties of conducting research in Pakistan as part of this project, accounts of pre-departure experiences were collected through FGDs with participants at T0, T1 and T2 and focused more on level of preparedness rather than access to services.

The period of arrival at the Border, T0, represents the first point of contact of returnees with service provision, and is therefore a defining time in the experience of return. Accounts of returnees' experiences at T0, were collected through FGDs with participants at T0, but also retrospectively at T1 and T2. All participants interviewed entered through Torkham, and so this study presents a mapping of services available at Torkham.

The period T1, representing 6-9 months after return to Afghanistan, was elected as the subsequent time period. Most initial services provided are planned to aid returnees particularly in the opening months of return (cash grants, winterization kits). However, to capture the level of detail necessary for transit and services at destination this category was absorbed within services that were available when returnees first arrived at Torkham and when they first arrived at their destination locations.

Finally, T2, 2.5-3.5 years after return, was used to provide insight into the long-term reintegration of returnees. After the initial 6 months or so, services provided to returnees blend into services provided to other poor Afghans or IDPs. Their physical journey is over, and no returnee-specific aid is provided. Accounts of returnee experience after their initial 6 months of return were collected through FGDs at T2.

The choice of Torkham as the first location, derives Torkham being one of only two entry points to Afghanistan from Pakistan, and is the location by which most returnees enter Afghanistan and receive initial support.

Nangahar, Laghman, and Kabul, were chosen as these locations are close to the Torkham border crossing and host a high density of returnees according to IOM's Displacement tracking matrix. They are also relatively easy and safe to operate in, as opposed to areas such as Logar.

In the KIIs, returnees were asked whether three key things:

1. Whether they had needed a particular service – i.e. had actively identified a requirement for it
2. Whether the service was available – i.e. whether the returnees knew whether that particular service was available or not, and
3. Whether the service was accessible – i.e. whether the returnees had been able to access the service

SAMPLING STRATEGY

FGDs

The initial FGD participants were selected with the help of community leaders. Then, snowball sampling—where initial interviewees will refer and introduce the team to new potential respondents—will be used to identify additional participants. The identification of initial communities to target in the four provinces will be done in consultation with UNDP, IOM’s Displacement Tracking Matrix, and MAGENTA’s data collection team to determine accessibility; however, a prime consideration will be the presence of returnees in a given area. Returnees from both camps and host communities will be recruited, as per the breakdown above. Community leaders targeted through KIIs will also assist in identifying potential FGD participants within their communities.

KIIs

Purposive sampling was used to identify KII respondents. Potential service providers which may prove valuable KII respondents include IOM, UNHCR, UNMAS, NSP, WHO, NRC, DRC and GoIRA. The following criteria will be used to determine the participants for each of the KIIs target groups:

- Service providers: Local CBOs, International NGO or Governmental service providers actively delivering services to Afghan returnees from Pakistan in communities
- Community Leaders: local representatives of the host communities
- Returnees: Afghan returnees from Pakistan currently residing in the visited communities. (Adhering to a 50:50 gender and documented/undocumented representation.)

ANALYSIS

The translated transcripts from the KIIs and FGDs were analyzed using the qualitative analysis software Nvivo, based on a coding structure developed in line with the FGDs and KII tools. The coding was conducted by MAGENTA staff.

CHALLENGES AND LIMITATIONS

There were several challenges and limitations encountered during the data collection, summarized here: The data collection took place during the first quarter of 2020, when COVID-19 began spreading in Afghanistan. While all necessary safety measures were taken to mitigate the risk that both the data collection team and respondents would be exposed to the virus, and all government lockdown regulations were followed,⁵ the Afghan government closed the Torkham border crossing in spring 2020 in an effort to stop the spread of COVID-19. As a result, there were no returnees at the border itself at the time of data collection, and therefore data collection was conducted with recent returnees near the border in Nangarhar province, instead of with returnees who had just crossed at Torkham, as originally planned. Identifying recent returnees proved to be challenging. Ultimately, the data collection team was able to identify returnees with the help of UNDP, UNCHR, IOM, and other entities that provided

⁵ A government lockdown was imposed in Kabul in spring 2020, but the data collection in Kabul took place in January and February 2020, before the first confirmed COVID-19 cases in Afghanistan, and therefore the lockdown did not impede the study.

introductions to field teams, service providers, and community leaders. In some cases, respondents found the survey tools repetitive—as they were asked detailed questions about a wide variety of services, some of which they did not access or were not aware about. The data collection was delayed by several months due to difficulties obtaining authorization letters for the research. Some of the KIIs and FGDs could be conducted without the authorization letters, but the approvals were needed for KIIs with service providers, for example.

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FINDINGS

GEOGRAPHIC JOURNEY

On average, returnee journeys from their home in Pakistan to their current location took 2.2 days, and Torkham was the second stop for most returnees who were interviewed. Most returnees, both documented and undocumented who were going to Nangarhar only stopped in Torkham, while those who were going to Laghman tended to stop in either Samar Kheil or Sheikh Mesri before arriving in their destination in Laghman. Those whose destination was Kabul often stopped in Pule-Charkhi. A few returnees who reported making a stop before Torkham tended to stop in Chamkhani in Pakistan; they were either coming from Attock or Peshawar.

RETURNEES' EXPECTATIONS BEFORE THE JOURNEY

Reasons for Returning to Afghanistan

Almost all returnees cited significant police discrimination and abuse in Pakistan as their main motivation for returning to Afghanistan. One documented female returnee living in Nangahar explained: “Out there in Pakistan our men were stopped from working, the police used to go to the back doors of refugees and they used to trouble them, we were not allowed to work and go out of homes, they used to beat up our men, even they used to beat us ladies also some times, and they used to threaten us with lives. They cut off our electricity and water supplies lines, so we had no other option but to return to Afghanistan.” Many other returnees recounted similar experiences that made their lives in Pakistan sufficiently untenable that they chose to return to Afghanistan.

In addition to discrimination from police and security services, returnees reported having faced discrimination from Pakistani citizens. Returnees explained that their Pakistani landlords would raise their rents and cut their water and electricity to force them to leave. Others said that they were fired from their jobs because of their nationality. Without housing, jobs, or basic necessities, many returnees had few other choices than to return to Afghanistan.

Returnees received information about services available in Afghanistan—such as land, food, housing, and employment—from radio and other media outlets in Pakistan. The struggles of living in Pakistan combined with promises of government and NGO support for returnees motivated many Afghans in Pakistan to leave. One undocumented female returnee living in Laghman recounted: “We used to see

and hear in media that returnees are given assistance and our leaders also used to give many promises in the media that if the migrants return to the country, we would help them and will offer them variety of services. That was the main reason came back to the country.”

The other significant reason returnees travelled back to Afghanistan was the anticipated closing of the Torkham border, which would have caused them to lose contact with family living in Afghanistan.

Expectations Prior to the Journey

Many returnees reported that while in Pakistan they had heard stories from friends and family about the services provided by NGOs and the government in Afghanistan. Media announcements about the Afghan government’s services were shared in Pakistan, urging citizens to return to Afghanistan. These advertisements led returnees to develop high expectations of the quality and quantity of services that would be provided to them both on their journey and in their final destination.

During their journey returnees expressed that they had expected to receive cash assistance from NGOs to cover the cost of their transportation, protection to ensure their safety, shelter during the journey, and quality medical care. Overall, returnees had anticipated they would receive significant support from NGOs throughout the journey. One documented male returnee living in Kabul explained: “We expected the NGOs and government will help us, as they promised us a lot of things but they didn’t fulfil any of them.”

In their final destination, returnees had hoped they would be granted services to improve their quality of life such as housing, employment, land, education through high school for their children, quality medical care, and counselling/psychosocial support. Housing and employment were two of the expectations mentioned most frequently by returnees. One documented female returnee living in Kabul spoke about her initial expectations of the housing services she would be able to access: “Having a good and comfortable life was my expectation here I was expecting of owning a house, but here I am, living in a rented house.” Another female returnee living in Nangarhar expressed a similar sentiment: “We expected to have a better life here but we do not.”

Planning and Preparation

Most returnees reported planning minimally for their journey. This was in part because most returnees left hurriedly as they were forced out of their homes and jobs. Most reported not knowing where to find services or what would be available. One undocumented male returnee living in Laghman recounted: “We did not know...the Afghan Border Police of directed us, and showed us the offices of organizations.” Other returnees prepared by speaking with family and friends who had already travelled from Pakistan to Afghanistan to learn what to expect.

SERVICES DURING TRANSIT

The following section (and the section after, on services at the destination), use charts with colored figures to depict whether respondents needed services, and whether services were available and accessible. Green figures indicate that services were needed, available, and accessible; red figures indicate that services were not needed, not available, and not accessible. The ratio of green to red figures represents the approximate ratio of respondents who had each experience.

Services Offered

Service providers reported that they offered the following services to returnees in transit: health and medical services, food assistance, psychosocial support, non-food items, information and awareness, cash assistance, and legal assistance. At this stage in returnees' journeys, their most immediate needs as outlined by them were basic necessities such as food and medical care.

Returnees reported accessing services at two main points on their journey, first at the Torkham border crossing, then at Puli Charkhi, for those whose destination was Kabul. Returnee Access to Services in Transit Almost all returnees reported that they needed shelter while in transit, but neither service providers nor returnees were aware of shelter being provided. Returnees recounted having to sleep outdoors on their belongings as there were no tents or houses for them (Figure 2).



Figure 2. Shelter Services in Transit

Service providers and returnees both reported that health services are provided to returnees on their journey. The majority of documented and undocumented returnees said that they were able to have their children vaccinated and treated in cases of malnutrition. 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." However, many clinics in Torkham were so crowded that returnees reported not being able to access medical services themselves. Those who did receive health care were disappointed in the quality of the care and the professionalism of the doctors (Figure 3).



Figure 3. Health Services in Transit

Many returnees were provided access to information sessions on mines and explosives in the region, information on vaccinations for children and some female returnees reported receiving information about domestic violence and maternal health. Women reported these trainings were useful and a positive experience. One undocumented female returnee received the training while in Torkham and explained, “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.” Both men and women were provided access to these trainings, but women reported not being able to participate in trainings unless there was a female instructor present, which limited what they were able to access (Figure 4).

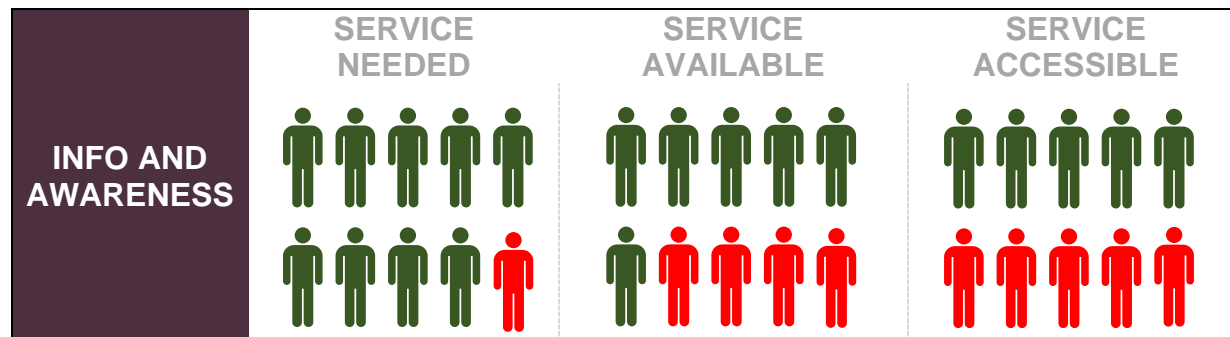


Figure 4. Info and Awareness Services in Transit

Many returnees reported needing assistance accessing a Tazkera (Afghan identity cards), but only a few returnees were able to access the services offered. The majority of returnees interviewed were not aware that legal services and assistance could be accessed during the journey (Figure 5).



Figure 5. Legal Assistance Services in Transit

The only protection services returnees reported having access to during their journey were routine border searches by security services. While this was a positive experience for some returnees, others experienced abuse by security services during the journey, both while in Pakistan and Afghanistan. Several returnees said they were forced to pay bribes at the Torkham border crossing. “When we crossed the border through Torkham, the Afghan Border Police demanded money from us, they said we will not let you cross until you give us money. We tried to call the UNHCR office but their number was switched off. There were around 350 returning households and they took money from all of them, the households who were carrying livestock they took 7000 Rupees from them,” explained one male documented returnee living in Laghman. That said, several returnees reported that they felt safe and welcomed back to their homeland (Figure 6).

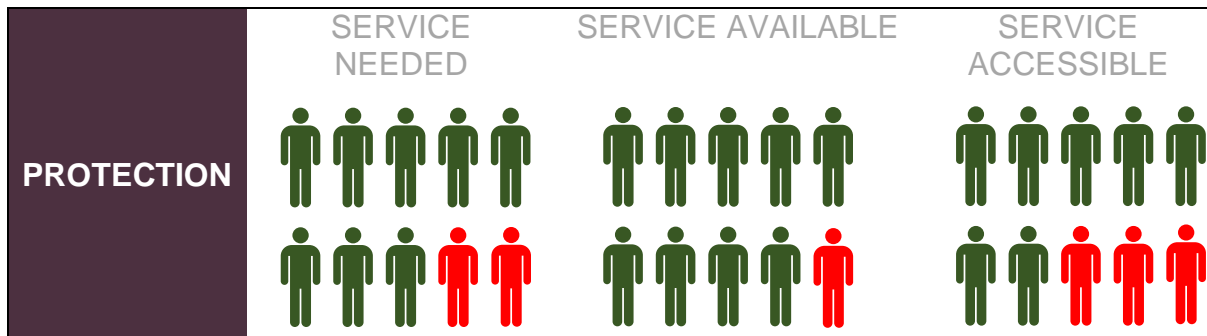


Figure 6. Protection Services in Transit

Food assistance was one of the most important services returnees received during their journey. According to one undocumented female returnee who accessed food assistance in Torkham: “Out of them [the services] the food assistance was very good and most relevant to our needs.”

There were two types of food assistance provided to both documented and undocumented returnees, direct food assistance and cards to access food and non-food assistance at later points in their journey or at their final destination. Returnees who received direct food assistance were provided sacks of flour, cartons of cooking oil, kilograms of dal, and breads, and were happy with this service. Those who were granted food cards were not satisfied as often they were never able to successfully trade the cards in for food goods (Figure 7).



Figure 7. Food Assistance Services in Transit

Service providers reported that in Torkham and Puli Charkhi returnees are evaluated for mental health issues and provided cards to access treatment at their destination. While returnees reported that security services and service providers encouraged them and gave them confidence that they could succeed in their journey, no returnees reported having accessed any formal psychosocial services like what service providers described (Figure 8).



Figure 8. PSS Support Services in Transit

Cash assistance is offered to returnees in both Torkham and Puli Charkhi to cover transportation and the costs of basic necessities such as food, medicine, and non-food items. Documented and undocumented returnees reported having access to this service. The quantity of cash provided to returnees varied based on distance returnees had left to travel and the size of their family. Though undocumented returnees who received cash assistance reported receiving about the same amount of money as documented returnees reported receiving,⁶ they reported feeling that they had been discriminated against by service providers and granted less cash assistance than their documented counterparts. One undocumented male returnee now living in Laghman explained, “the money was very less, they gave 300 USD to other but to us they gave us only 2000 AFN per head. We feel like they discriminated against us” (Figure 9).

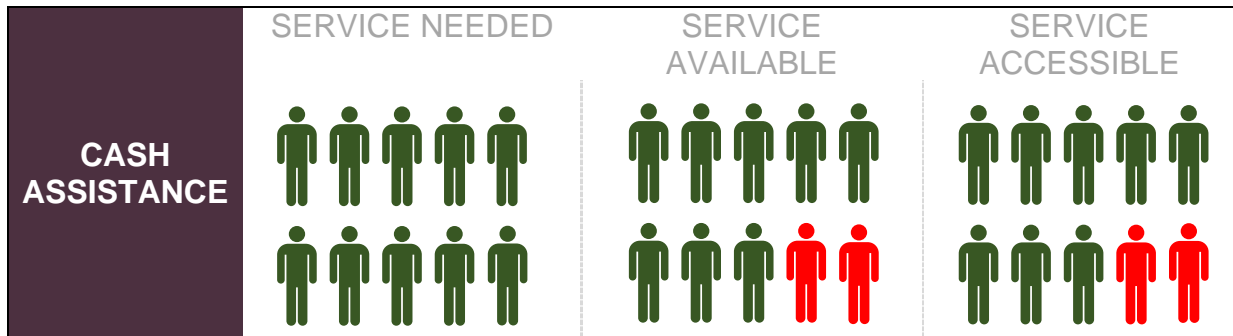


Figure 9. Cash Assistance Services in Transit

Returnees, particularly those who travelled during the colder winter months, stressed the importance of non-food item services on their journey, but were disappointed by the quantity of the assistance. Those who accessed this service received items such as home appliances, blankets, and warm clothing for children, but rarely in sufficient quantities. Several female returnees reported they were given only one or two sweaters for several children, and families of ten or more members were given only two or three small blankets. More female returnees reported accessing this service more than men (Figure 10).

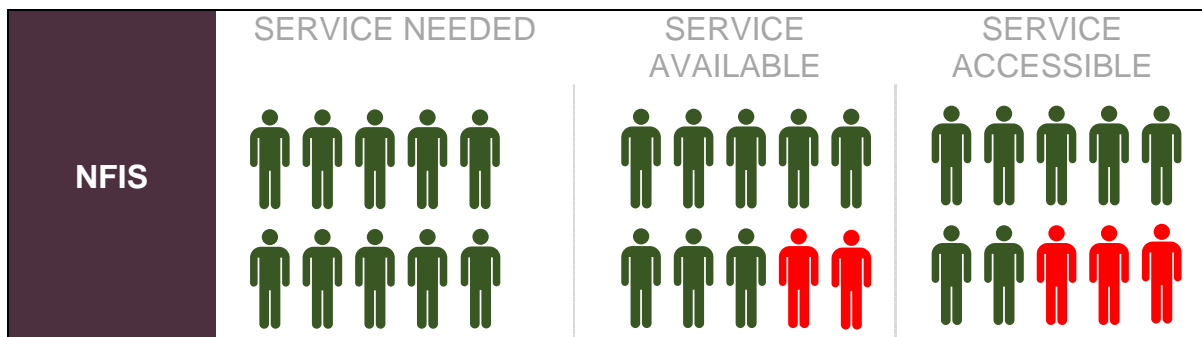


Figure 10. NFI Services in Transit

Limitations/Gaps in Service Provision

⁶ As mentioned, this is what the respondents in the study reported, as per their perception and memory; the actual amount of assistance provided by agencies may differ.

Many returnees expressed that service providers' continual promises of assistance that never materialize have caused them to lose confidence in these actors. Service providers granted returnees vouchers during their journey for future food, medical, cash, and land assistance, however, most returnees have never received those services. One documented male returnee living in Kabul no longer trusts service providers to assist members of his community: "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."

Other returnees reported that without the assistance of relatives and advice from other returnees, they struggled to locate and access services. Drivers and other guides who were assisting returnees on their journey did not stop at locations where services were provided despite the returnees needing medical and other assistance. One undocumented female returnee living in Laghman recounted that she did not receive documentation or medical care because they did not know what services were available to her along the journey route: "We had a lot of health issues, my husband's kidney was afflicted with pain, and I was suffocating and had diarrhoea too. But unfortunately, the driver told us the services in Torkham are offered to disabled and widowed ladies only" She blamed the driver for not assisting her better, but also emphasized that had she known what services were available, she would have asked for support.

Unjust distribution of assistance by service providers was another issue of concern to returnees. Several returnees believed that aid was not provided to those who had the greatest need, but, rather, to people with connections. "There were also some rich people who used to apply and took the aids instead of poor people," one undocumented male returnee living in Nangahar reported."

SERVICES AT DESTINATION

Services Offered

Service providers reported that they offer the following services in Nangahar (Torkham included), Kabul, and Laghman: employment assistance, cash assistance, housing and shelter, food assistance, potable water access, information and awareness, legal assistance, psychosocial support, and education. The only service that no NGO or government workers were sure was available were social protection services. While all these services are technically available to returnees, service providers stress that, for most of these services offered, they are unable to meet the needs of the returnee communities and many returnees go unserved. The most important services that have failed to meet the community needs according to service providers, are employment assistance, housing and shelter, and education.

Returnee Access to Services at Destination

INGO service providers reported that the housing and shelter situation for returnees has been significantly improved. There are several organizations which have already worked to assist returnees in finding and building housing. However, "The demand is too much" expressed one INGO worker in Nangahar in reference to demand for permanent housing by returnees.

Current housing and shelter services available are described as insufficient by nearly all returnees interviewed. Undocumented returnees have significantly more difficulty accessing housing services than documented returnees, because they do not qualify for land grants or housing provisions without proof

of returnee status.⁷ Several undocumented returnees reported facing additional stigmatization over their housing status. One undocumented male returnee living in Laghman 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.”

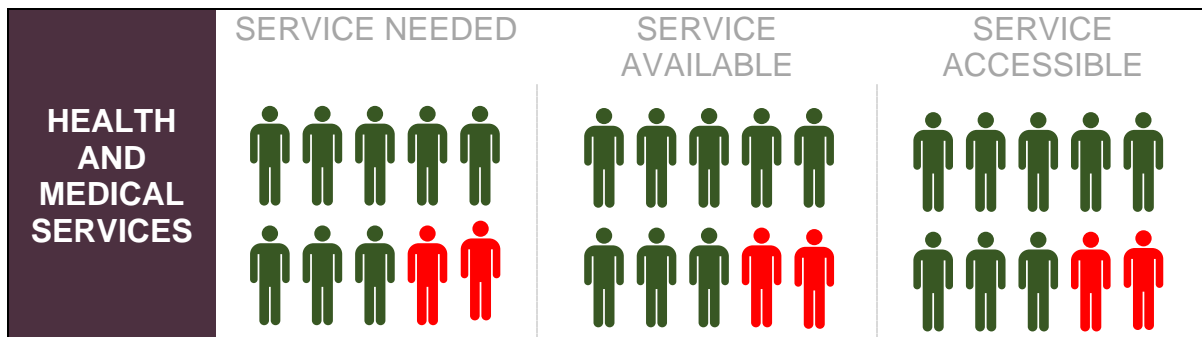
Though theoretically documented returnees should have better access to housing—they are granted land cards and qualify for housing assistance—they report almost equal lack of access as undocumented returnees. Though many documented returnees were promised housing and land those services have never been delivered and thus they are in the same situation as undocumented returnees: renting housing, living in tents, or in some cases, homeless (Figure 11).



Figure 11. Housing Services at Destination

Service providers report that there are several organizations working to provide medical care to returnees in Nangarhar, Laghman, and Kabul. Returnees are provided with medical services through public hospitals, local clinics, vaccination stations, midwife services, and others.

However, community leaders and returnees have not had as easy access to medical services as service providers describe. For many returnees, clinics and hospitals are located too far away for returnees to easily reach. According to the Head of Gulabad Shura camp in Nangahar: “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” (Figure 12).



⁷ Proof of returnee status’ was the phrase used in the data. We can assume this refers to documentation proving returnee status through UNHCR or government registration at the border

Figure 12. Health and Medical Services at Destination

Service providers report that in all three locations there are informational services available on a variety of subjects ranging from market access to mine and explosive safety to women’s rights and domestic violence prevention. The returnees who reported participating in these programs were predominantly documented and undocumented women. Participants in the mines and explosives and market access trainings were pleased with the quality of the service and reported finding the information shared useful. One documented male returnee living in Nangahar 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.” Returnees frequently requested that these sessions be offered more regularly so that more people can benefit from them (Figure 13).

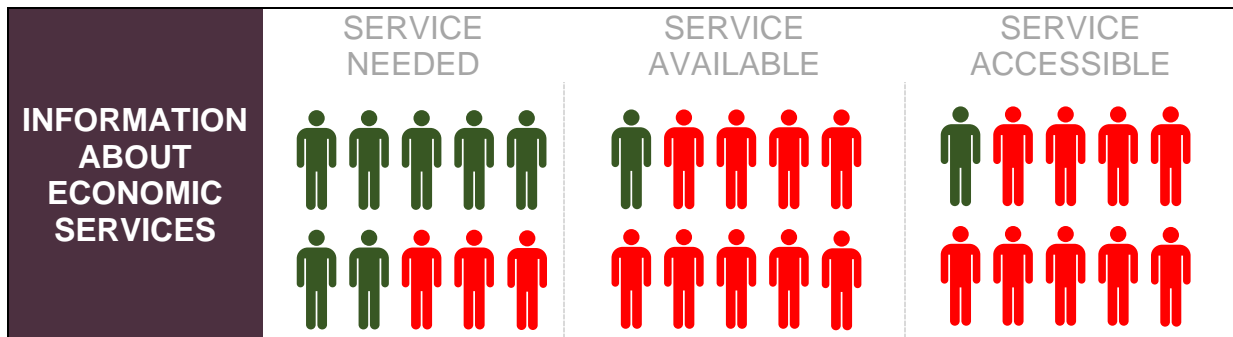


Figure 13. Information About Economic Services at Destination

Though returnees reported that land disputes took place when returnees first arrived in Laghman, Kabul, and Nangahar, they said that those issues have since been resolved, and, at the time of this study, no returnees, documented or undocumented, reported needing legal assistance. Most often, returnees turned to community members such as community elders and Maliks to solve disputes rather than seeking government- or NGO-offered legal assistance (Figure 14).



Figure 14. Access to Courts, Legal Aid, Etc. at Destination

Service providers from NGOs report that social protection services are provided by the government. Government employees were unaware of whether or not this service is provided, yet believed it would be offered by NGOs. No returnees interviewed had been able to access any social protection services

(Figure 15).

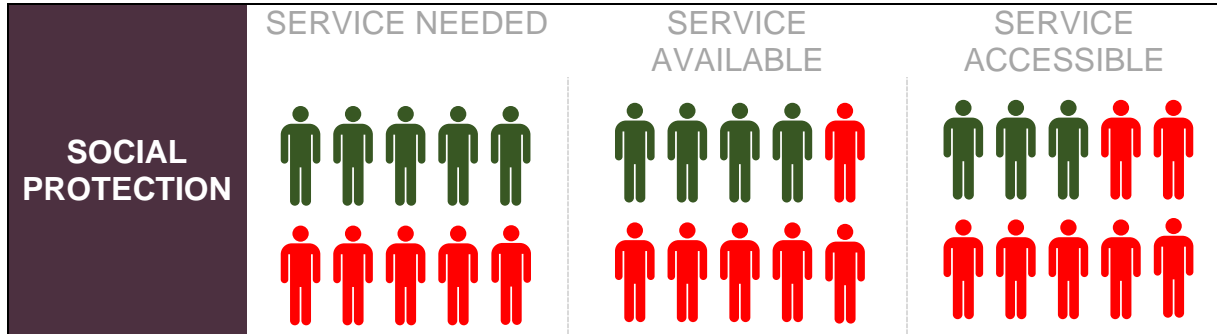


Figure 15. Social Protection Services at Destination

Most returnees reported that they had easy access to markets where they could purchase food and non-food items. However, a documented male returnee living in Kabul 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.” Several other returnees expressed this same sentiment, i.e. the barrier to returnees accessing food is not the availability of food goods, but of funds to purchase these basic goods (Figure 16).



Figure 16. Access to Markets at Destination

Several NGOs reported that they offer food assistance to returnees such as flour, cooking oil, etc. However, returnees described these services as too infrequent, unreliable, and insufficient to meet their needs. Several returnees stated that their families are in a near constant need of food assistance and they have only received support every several months. “Currently, our most desperate need is food items assistance, so that we won’t faint due to hunger and thirst,” described one documented male returnee in Nangahar (Figure 17).



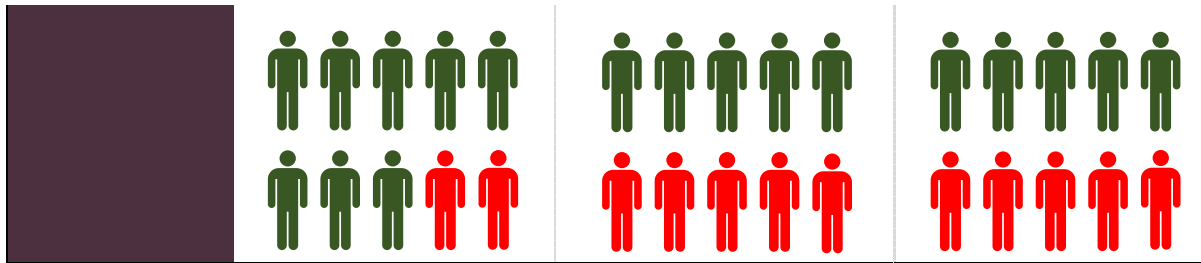


Figure 17. Food and Nutrition Services at Destination

While service providers, returnees, and community leaders stressed the importance of psychosocial services for returnees given the trauma many have experienced, there was only one returnee who had been able to access counselling services for a brief period of time after living for several months in Laghman. The rest of the returnees interviewed were not aware of counselling services being provided. One undocumented male returnee in Nangahar 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.”

Several service providers reported that counselling services are available but solely to specific demographics such as pregnant women, disabled individuals, etc (Figure 18).



Figure 18. PSS Services at Destination

Service providers in all locations spoke of the easy availability of cash assistance in Laghman, Nangahar, and Kabul. However, while many returnees had received cash assistance during their journey, far fewer had been able to access this service in their long-term destination.

For many female returnees, both documented and undocumented, cash assistance was the most useful form of assistance they had received. Women mentioned the importance of cash assistance far more than their male counterparts, but also added that it was too unreliable and challenging to access to provide any real long-term security (Figure 19).



Figure 19. Cash Assistance at Destination

Assistance finding employment is one of the most significant gaps in services faced by returnees, and while several service providers are attempting to fill this gap, they recognize that the demand for employment far exceeds what they are able to provide. One INGO worker in Kabul explained: “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 to reduce unemployment in returnee communities largely focused on providing returnees with employability skills. Returnees who have participated in these training sessions have been disappointed in their quality and usefulness. A camp leader in Nangahar stated that, “people have received professional skills but there is not work opportunity for them, so that these professional people can find work.” The issue with providing professional skills is that the barrier to returnees gaining employment is not their skill level, but the availability of jobs (Figure 20).

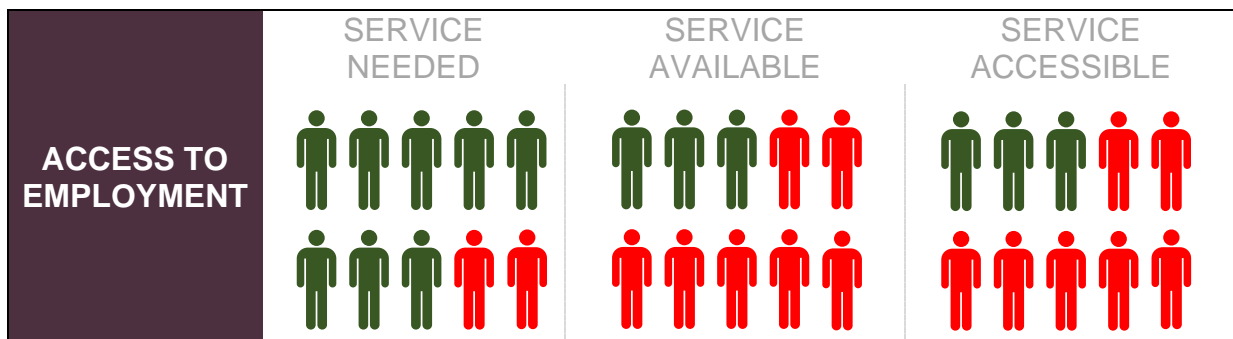


Figure 20. Access to Employment at Destination

Service providers in all three locations report that there are organizations working the area to provide potable water access in the camps⁸ so that returnees can have easy access to potable water. However, returnees report that the wells are often located too far from their homes, so it is very difficult to access them.

No returnees interviewed had access to electricity. One documented male returnee living in Laghman complained: “if there isn’t sun we are sitting in dark.”

⁸ “Camps” may include informal settlements and densely populated urban areas colloquially referred to as camps.

Community leaders and service providers report that returnees have easy access to primary schools in all three locations and less reliable, but still existent access to high schools. While many documented returnee families have access to schooling, most undocumented returnees do not. Due to their lack of proper documentation and permanent address, many undocumented children are unable to enrol in school.

For those returnees who do have access to schooling, there are significant concerns about the quality of educational services provided. Several female returnees in all three locations 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,” said one documented female returnee living in Laghman (Figure 21).



Figure 21. Education Services at Destination

Limitations/Gaps in Service Provision

In all three locations, returnees were disappointed in the quality of the services they had received. “Our problems are somewhat addressed, as compared to past, now we have a school, we have clinic, we have house. The only thing we are suffering from is the quality of the services,” explained one documented male returnee living in Laghman. Service providers and services are described undependable, are often delivered late, and vary in quality and utility.

Overall, returnees struggle to identify and access the services provided to them. Service providers report far more services offered than returnees report knowing about or having had access to. At present, the village Malik is the main source of information about services for returnees. An undocumented male returnee in Nangahar explained, “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.” However, often the Malik has village specific information and only and cannot assist returnees with more general services. As one documented female returnee living in Kabul explained: “We don’t know who are providing these services, if we knew then we would have asked them to help us too.” This highlights a significant barrier to returnees accessing services: they do not know the services exist.

Many returnees have lost faith in service providers, who had promised them services and failed to deliver. For example, according to one documented male returnee living in Laghman: “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." Another documented male returnee in Kabul expressed disillusionment with service providers, "we relied on the Government and other NGOs but they gave us nothing other than vague promises."

Furthermore, most returnees feel that aid and services are not being fairly distributed and that service providers are corrupt. Several returnees expressed their belief that it is necessary to have connections within the government or an NGO to benefit from 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" detailed one documented female returnee living in Nangarhar.

Undocumented returnees face additional challenges in accessing services and many reported they feel ignored and dismissed by service providers. One undocumented female returnee living in Laghman described the barriers her documentation status creates: "Accessing all the services were difficult for us as we did not have documents here and that is why no one believed us that we are returnees."

REINTEGRATION

Reintegration Intentions

While many returnees remain hopeful that conditions will improve and that they will receive housing, land, education for children, and employment, others express fading hopes that they will be able to reintegrate. Some stated that if conditions do not improve, they would be forced to return to Pakistan. According to one documented male returnee living in Laghman: "If the conditions go on to be like this, I do not see my future any different or better. I may have to go back to Pakistan because we do not have jobs here. Here we do not have security. We do not have other basic facilities a human must have for life." One of the leaders of a camp for returnees in Nangarhar spoke about the flow of returnees back to Pakistan: "Some of the people who had returned went back to Pakistan about two years ago. Because the government of Pakistan started to give new documents and cards for afghan refugees. Mostly the people who had businesses in Pakistan went back. They are given good job opportunities as they are skilled laborer's, here they couldn't find any jobs in Afghanistan." The challenge of unemployment was repeatedly mentioned to be the most significant barrier to reintegration and subsequently the motivation for returnees to move back to Pakistan.

Local Attitudes to Returnees Experienced by Returnees

Many returnees have had positive experiences and felt accepted by the local population where they have resettled. In Kabul, returnees have reported that they have not been discriminated against by the community and have developed good relations with their neighbors. One undocumented male returnee living in Kabul described his relationship with the local population: "I am disabled and have children. Society people help me and are kind to me."

In Nangarhar and Laghman, returnees describe a less smooth reintegration process. When the returnees first arrived, there were numerous land disputes and job opportunities became increasingly scarce with the influx of unemployed returnees. Ghazigul, the Head of Council in Laghman described the toll of land disputes on the community: "The people living around us quarrelled with us a lot. The government gave

500 Jiribs of land for us to live in, but the people of hosting communities did not like that and they claimed over this land, we quarrelled a lot and then eventually the government convinced them and decided for us to live here.” He added that “Now the situation is good, because the government gave this land to us, the disputes that host community had with us over the land are now resolved. We do not have any problem with each other now.” Returnees in Nangahar expressed the same sentiments. A documented male returnee living in Nangarhar reported, “The feeling of belonging is the main reason that enable us to feel like home, as we are all Afghans and doesn’t matter whatever happens we would be staying in this community.”

Some returnees expressed that they have continued to be discriminated against. One undocumented man living in Laghman reported wanting to move to another location due to discrimination from the local community: “We have very bad relations, we are not feeling comfortable here in this area, because local people do not treat us well, and we don’t have our own houses and we are living in rental houses, and also we are jobless. We have to pay for the rent of the houses, we are trying to shift our houses somewhere else.” This sentiment was shared by returnees who were living in a region that they were not originally from and from returnees who were born in Afghanistan but who had spent most of their lives and formative years in Pakistan. According to a Nangahar camp leader, “Only the people who were born and raised in Pakistan do not feel safe here in this community, and rightly so, as the conditions of this community is very different from that in Pakistan.”

Local Relationships, Support Systems and Networks

Several returnees cited their supportive relationships with the local community and community leaders as the singular aspect of their lives that makes them feel at home in the community. An undocumented male returnee in Kabul explained, “despite all the problems that we are having, we still feel good for living here because this is our homeland and we are not threatened here by the police or anyone else, although we don’t have our own house here but the people of this community have accepted us and they are welcoming us into their communities, the only thing that we feel like home here is that we feel like we are a part of this community.”

According to community leaders in both Nangahar and Laghman, though there were some initial disputes between returnees and the local community, the community members have made efforts to ensure that returnees are supported and welcomed into the community. The head of Gulabad Shura in Nangahar explained, “The initial reaction of the community was positive. They gave them food assistance, they reduced the rents of the houses for them. Some people let the returnees stay in their houses for free.” These leaders also reported the existence of youth groups that complete community service work in the community. According to another camp leader in Nangahar the youth groups work on a variety of issues such as, “We advise those who are drug addicts and we help them quit it. The people of the community are trying to contribute to the betterment of the services as much as they can.”

All returnees regardless of location reported that in the event of a dispute, Maliks and other elders in the community resolve the issues. One undocumented male returnee in Nangahar explained: “Personally I have good relations with the people of local community but there are other people also who have some disputes amongst themselves which are resolved by the local elders or Malik.” Other returnees reported that in their community there was a Shura of elders who would support returnees if there were disputes or problems. Many returnees have confidence that the community leaders will

assist them when they face these challenges. “Our elders are very good people and we if there is any issue they are resolving it tactically,” explained one documented female returnee living in Nangahar.

However, the efficacy of these mechanisms for community engagement was brought into question by several returnees. Many returnees and returnees who do not originate in the regions where they are currently living report that they are treated poorly by the Malik, and do not receive services that other returnees do. According to one undocumented male returnee living in Nangarhar, “the Malik and elders of the village are not behaving nicely, because they’re not bothered about us either they give us any advices as of what to do and where to do it. We are totally ignored.”

Reintegration Challenges

By far the two most significant barriers to returnee reintegration for returnees were unemployment and housing. One documented male in Kabul explained, “Joblessness and lack of houses or lands are the main reasons that no matter how hard we try we can’t feel like we are living in our own country, we still feel like we are living in refuge.”

Other returnees echoed this sentiment and stressed the importance of housing to successful returnee reintegration. Another female documented returnee in Kabul stated, “If we are provided shelter, then we will feel at home in community. Otherwise, there is no difference of living outside the country in Pakistan or here.”

Community leaders, service providers and returnees stated that if returnees were able to find employment, many of the other challenges they face would be less significant. An undocumented male returnee in Nangahar said, “, if we are able to work and find jobs, 50 percent of our problems will be solved.” Others emphasized that unemployment was one of the central challenges that drives returnees to return to Pakistan. “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,” shared one undocumented female returnee in Laghman.

CONCLUSION

As the analysis and conclusions above demonstrate, significant gaps exist in service provision to address the short-term and long-term needs of Afghans returning from Pakistan. Health and education services are prevalent, and returnees have access to them, but in many cases the quality is a concern. On the other hand, key services—such as shelter and housing, which are urgent needs—are largely absent. Undocumented female returnees were identified in the research as an especially vulnerable group, and access to services in Laghman specifically was more limited than in other areas.

In the rest of this section, we return to and address the original research questions.

The first research question was as follows: What is the experience of returnees in accessing services at various touchpoints with service providers? Overall, returnees’ experience in accessing services was generally poor, and participants reported confusion around how and where to access services; insufficient and low-quality services that were not suitable for large families; and corruption and nepotism in service provision. In addition, returnees reporting feeling disappointed, after having received promises from providers vis-à-vis the services they could access. Often, individuals that

returnees relied on—implicitly or explicitly—to provide information about services, such as community leaders or drivers/guides during their journey, either did not always share the information with all returnees in an equitable manner (in the case of community leaders), or did not have the proper information themselves (in the case of driver/guides).

Returnees generally only spent a few days traveling between when they arrived at the Torkham border and when they arrived at their destination in Afghanistan; therefore service providers at the Torkham border and in nearby communities in Nangarhar may only have a short window of time in which to provide services to returnees, though that opportunity for initial support is quite important to provide returnees with basic supplies and cash assistance; it is also likely one of the first times returnees interact with service providers in Afghanistan. Returnees in Laghman had a particularly negative experience accessing service; it is not immediately clear why this is the case, but this warrants further investigation.

These factors contributed not only to poor experience accessing services, but limited access to services in the first place. In many cases, returnees were simply not aware of services offered, or the services were insufficient to meet the needs of all returnees, or meet their needs fully. Corruption and nepotism were notable barriers to access, as well as lack of documentation, especially when it came to access to housing. Some services—such as health services in Kabul— were too far away for returnees to easily access, while other services, such as access to market, existed, but returnees' access was de facto restricted by lack of money to purchase goods.

The second research question was as follows: What services do returnees believe they would have benefitted from, but did not receive? While in transit, nearly all returnees reported that they needed access to shelter, but this service was not available; returnees resorted to sleeping outside with their belongings. Legal assistance while in transit was often cited as a common need by returnees—in particular accessing a Tazkera—but few reported that this service was available and even fewer could access it. At their destination, returnees again reported that housing was in short supply, and the nominal support that returnees should have access to (such as land cards) did not lead to assistance in reality. Employment opportunities were also identified as a gap by returnees, who needed support on this but found that services were rarely available or accessible.

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 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.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the result from the survey, the following are specific recommendations for a holistic programmatic response that would support the sustainable reintegration of returnees. They are written with service providers, UNDP, the government and the wider international community in mind.

1. Identify what civil documentation is required to access which services. Throughout the research, a consistent finding was that returnees did not have the proper documentation to access services when they needed them. Understanding what documents are required to access which services—and how the documents can be obtained by returnees—would go a long way to increasing returnees’ access to services.

2. Increase coordination among service providers, including a feedback mechanism for returnees. Despite the best efforts among service providers, returnees frequently reported confusion when trying to access services, and lack of information about how and where to access services. Coordination among service providers that facilitates a common location for service provision, for example, could address this situation.

3. Encourage accountability and fairness among service providers. Participants in the research repeatedly mentioned that they felt services were not provided in an equitable manner, and that families with connections were given preferential treatment. Service providers should be encouraged to ensure accountability and transparency around the scope and availability of services, and a complaint mechanism should be established to investigate any concerns.

4. Services should aim to support returnees in contributing to their own communities. Given the fact that demand for services will likely always exceed supply, it is recommended that resources for service provision be focused on building the capacity of returnees to contribute economically to their local community and aim for economic self-sufficiency.

5. Plan an additional study to examine service provision in Laghman. The results from the research showed that service provision in Laghman was particularly poor. A further study should be commissioned to better understand why.

6. Service providers should communicate realistically to returnees about services available. Participants often mentioned that they felt service providers over-promised vis-à-vis service delivery, and that in turn returnees’ expectations for service delivery exceeded reality. Service providers should be encouraged to give returnees realistic expectations of service delivery to reduce disappointment and frustrate.

7. Support to undocumented returnees and female-headed households should be increased. The research showed that these groups regularly experienced more difficulties accessing services, compared to other groups of returnees. More resources should be allocated to support these groups.

8. Increase available and access to shelter/housing in transit and at destination, legal assistance in transit, and employment opportunities at destination. These services were identified by returnees as services they wanted but were not available or that they did not have access to.



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