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# AFGHANISTAN

Protection Monitoring Analysis Report:  
Access to Basic Services/Vulnerabilities

2023 | SUMMARY

## CORE ASSESSMENT DATA

Protection monitoring is crucial to understand better the protection needs and priorities of displaced, IDP and refugee returnee and host communities, as well as to inform evidence-based programming, strategic decision making and advocacy.

From 1 January to 31 December 2023, UNHCR and its partners ARAA, WADAN, WAW and WSTA conducted 77,825 household-level assessments, 3,961 key informant interviews and 3,145 focus group discussions in 342 (out of 401) districts in all 34 provinces to identify families in need of assistance.



UNHCR relies on its two main household assessment tools to gather a comprehensive dataset: the Rapid Household Assessment Form (RHAF) – designed to assess the eligibility of the most vulnerable households for assistance purposes - as well as UNHCR's Community-Based Protection Monitoring (CBPM) tools. CBPM provides more in-depth protection information and data on key thematic areas and directly feeds into the Afghanistan Protection Cluster's protection analysis, and information products available on Afghanistan Global Protection Cluster. Detailed analysis based on the findings extracted from these household-level multi-sectoral assessments is summarized in each section of this report and complemented by the feedback obtained through CBPM key informant interviews and focus group discussions (FGD). UNHCR used a generative AI tool (Quid) to facilitate the processing and analysis of qualitative FGD data.

## DISCLAIMER

Findings presented in this report are indicative as assessments were conducted based on sampling or random selection (in the case of border monitoring interviews). At the same time, assessments covering 582,960 individuals/ 77,825 households across Afghanistan, present valuable information regarding the protection and humanitarian situation in the country and the needs of the displaced, returnees and host communities whom UNHCR serves.

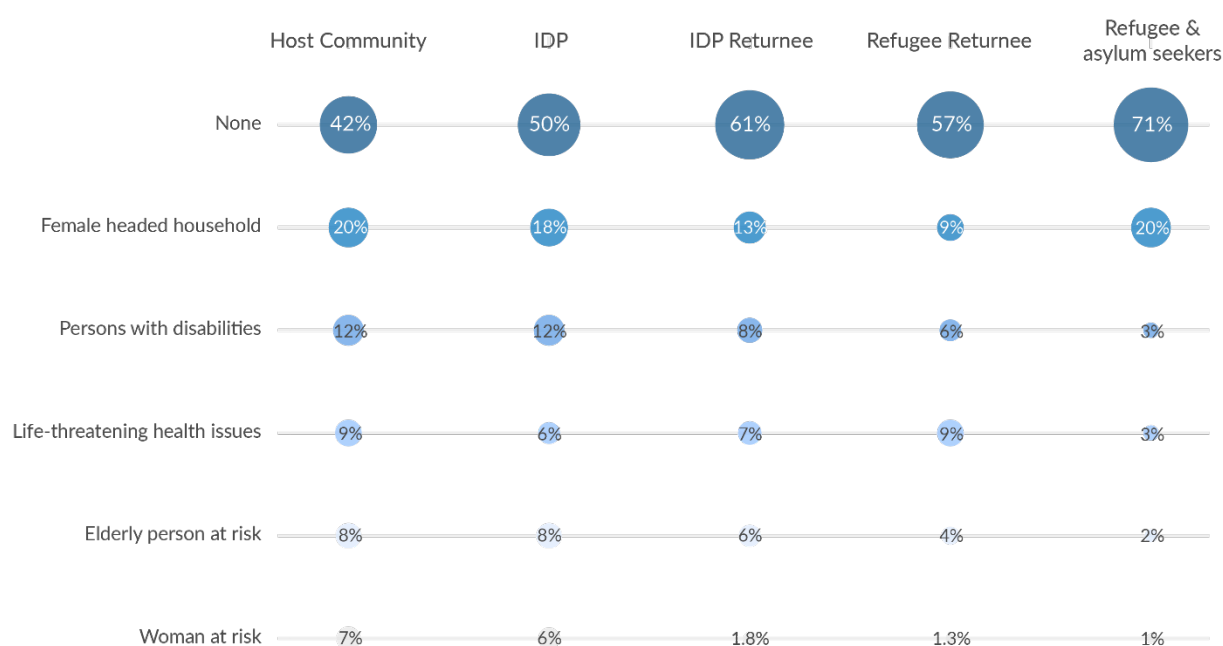
Limitations exist when conducting in-depth protection assessments in the context of the extremely diminished protection environment of Afghanistan. Due to wide-spread fears and uncertainty among the communities as well as the close observation of protection-related activities by the de-facto authorities, some of the topics explored (including freedom of movement, safety and security, dispute resolution or interference in assistance provision) are perceived as highly sensitive. While the data obtained can provide indications on the prevalence of certain issues within a community, it may not allow for a conclusive appraisal of the scope of the protection risk.

## KEY FINDINGS

### HOUSEHOLD VULNERABILITIES

- According to the surveyed household, 68% of heads of households in the host community indicated having one or more vulnerabilities. Notably, female-headed households, with additional vulnerabilities, comprised 20.3% of the host community and 20.4% of refugees and asylum-seekers. Male heads of households reported higher incidences of disabilities (11.3%) compared to female heads of households, who reported a 6.6% incidence of disabilities.

#### Household vulnerabilities

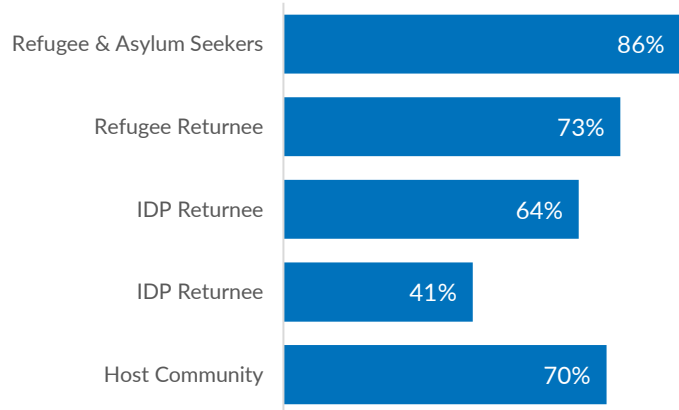


- A total of 46% of the heads of households responded that they or their family members have experienced feelings of stress that affect their day-to-day life (such as sleep or physical symptoms). These are even more pronounced among refugee returnees (61%). Lack of employment is the most prevalent case of stress, especially among IDPs, affecting 84.4% of the group. Other stressors include food insecurity, physical health problems and the unavailability of or lack of access to services. This aligns with other findings of the report, highlighting the impact of the dire economic situation and scarcity of services on the mental health of communities.
- Overall, 27% of all heads of households surveyed indicated that they have noticed such negative changes in the behaviour of other household members in the last three months. This was even more pronounced among refugees and asylum-seekers (44%) and refugee returnees (40%).
- Drug dependence is extremely high among refugees and asylum-seekers at 64.1%, indicating a critical area for intervention. This concern is notably low across other groups.
- High rates of school dropouts are noted, particularly among IDPs and refugee and asylum seekers, affecting over 35% in both groups, highlighting a significant educational gap.
- Life-threatening health issues are most concerning for refugee returnees at 35.8%, in stark contrast to only 2.9% among refugee and asylum-seekers, showing gaps in health services accessibility.
- Vulnerability among household members indicates disabilities (8.5% for female- and 6.7% for male-headed households) and women at risk (13.8% and 10.8%, respectively), and persons with specific legal protection needs (3.4% for females and 1.4% for male-headed households).
- Children at risk are more frequently reported in households with females (21.1%) than males (14.6%).

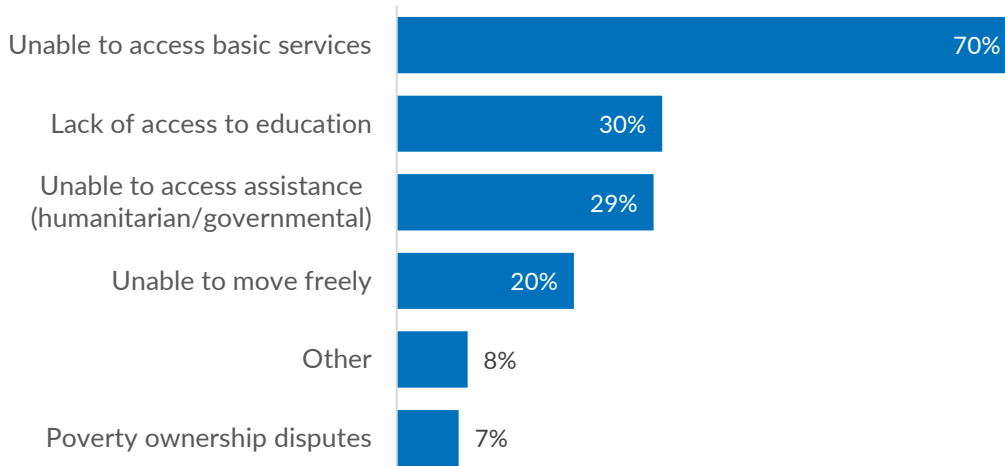
## CIVIL DOCUMENTATION

- According to interviews conducted through Community-Based Protection Monitoring (CBPM), 86% of households reported a lack of civil documents among their families.
- There is a significant increase in households lacking civil documentation, with 58% reporting at least one member without legal documentation. This marks a notable rise from the 37% recorded in 2022, which can be mainly attributed to systemic challenges in acquiring legal documentation following the de facto authorities takeover in 2021 and the subsequent deterioration of the economic situation in Afghanistan.
- The gap is most pronounced among women and girls, who continue to face considerable obstacles in obtaining essential documents. These barriers include the cost of related administrative fees, the absence of mahrams to accompany them, traveling long distances to reach civil registration centers and cultural norms that discourage women from seeking legal documentation. Refugees and asylum-seekers are among the most affected groups lacking civil documentation.

### Lack of documentation



### Lack of documentation impact

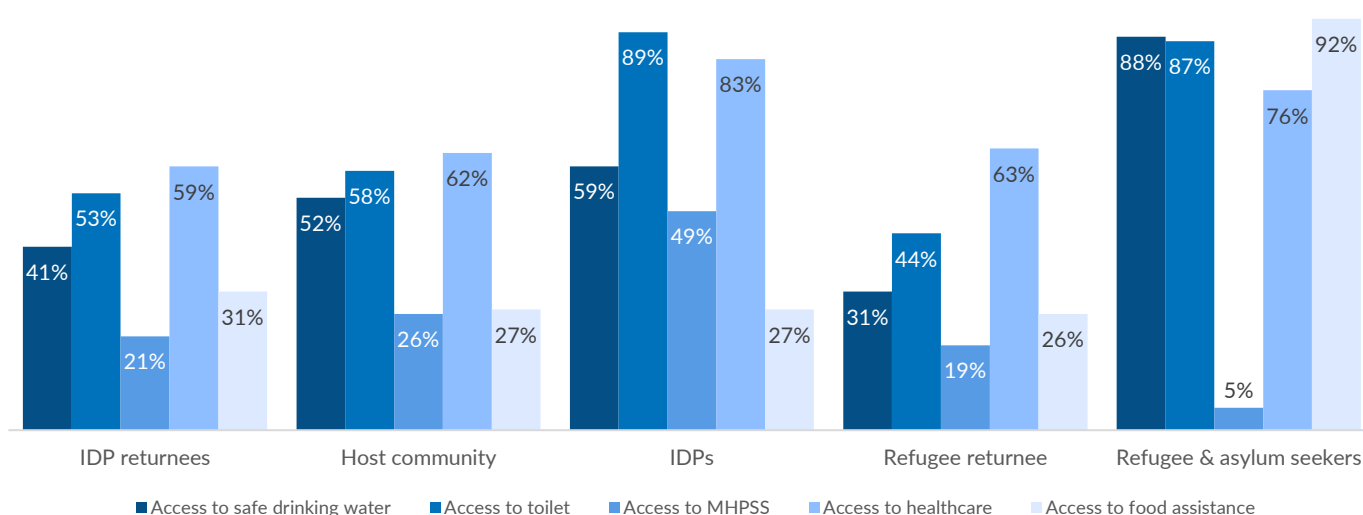


- Most respondents indicated that the primary consequence of lacking documentation was the inability to access basic services. Challenges in accessing education and assistance and in enjoying a freedom of movement were also highlighted.

## ACCESS TO ASSISTANCE

- Some 88% of households surveyed have not receiving any assistance.
- Food was highlighted as a priority need, alongside clothing and non-food items (NFIs). Accordingly, costs for food, health and clothing also remain the largest expenditure. Some needs vary across population groups, reflecting the specific circumstances. For instance, rental costs do not feature as key need or expenditure for other population groups with the exception of IDPs.
- Women and girls are consistently identified as the household members facing the biggest challenges in accessing several types of services. This underlines the dramatic impact of the systemic discrimination of women and girls in all areas and the need to analyze and respond to gender-specific access barriers.

Access to Services per Population Status



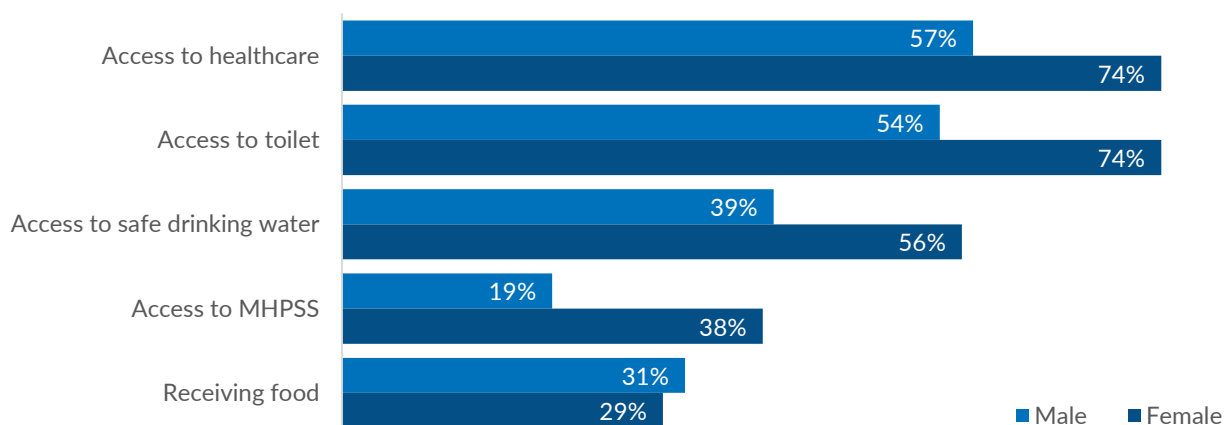
## COPING MECHANISMS

- Most families are either unemployed or lack formal education and rely on daily labour. Income generated is usually spent on basic needs and debt repayment. The lack of economic opportunities, entrenched poverty alongside repeated and protracted displacement and the shrinking protection space have detrimentally impacted the resilience of affected communities.
- Many families resort to harmful coping mechanisms, with severe implications that especially impact women and children: most families had to borrow money (88%), sell assets, skip or reduce meal sizes, delay seeking medical attention or send their children to work. The data reaffirms the high socio-economic vulnerability of all communities in Afghanistan and their limited capacity to prevent and respond to threats.
- Alarmingly, community members resort to a variety of harmful coping mechanisms that imply serious child protection risks, such as sending children to work instead of school, including in neighbouring countries, engaging them in begging or hazardous work and early or forced marriage.

**ACCESS TO SHELTER, NFIs, WASH, ENERGY & HEALTH ASSISTANCE**

- Survey findings among households across all population groups indicate that more than half face issues with insulation or heating, especially refugees and asylum-seekers (59.5%). Women are slightly more affected (54%) than men (51.9%). Access to water for drinking, cooking, and bathing is lowest in the host community at 74.9%, with moderate access for IDPs and IDP returnees (85.9% to 86.2%).
- High numbers of refugees and asylum seekers report lacking electricity, (81.1%), compared with just 47.6% of IDPs. Refugees and asylum seekers face the highest financial barriers in accessing medicines at 88.2%, while the cost of care or treatment is most burdensome for IDP returnees at 74.2%.

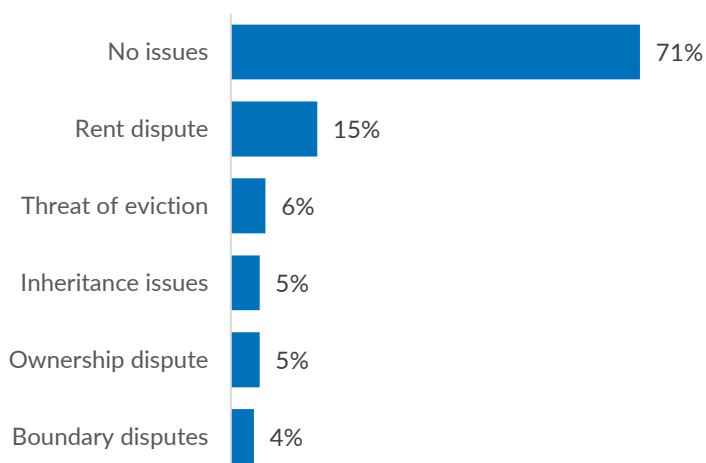
**Access to Services**



**HOUSING, LAND & PROPERTY**

- Around 30% of the community members face housing, land and property (HLP) issues, the most prevalent concerns identified being rental disputes, threats of eviction, inheritance issues, and ownership or boundary disputes. IDPs experience significantly greater problems related to their rental accommodation, facing threats of eviction, pointing to their precarious living situation and heightened vulnerability.
- Female respondents were generally more concerned about rental disputes than male respondents, highlighting the increased economic vulnerability of women as well as the difficulties they face in asserting their rights. Returnees from Pakistan reported housing and accommodation as their most urgent priority.

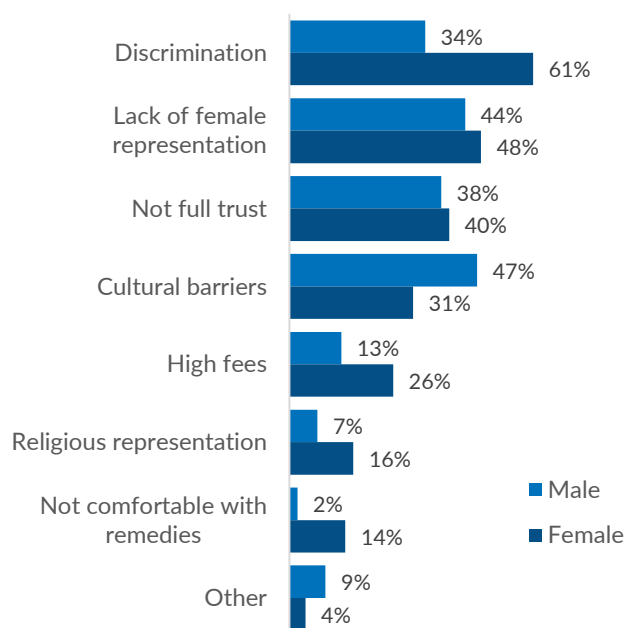
**Top reported problems related to housing, land or property**



## DISPUTE RESOLUTION

- Community members report turning to various informal mechanisms for dispute resolution, relying primarily on the support of elders, shuras or jirgas, mullahs and other religious leaders as well as family members and relatives. While preferences vary across genders and population groups, significant barriers faced by women in accessing law enforcement and justice mechanisms leave them with informal dispute resolution mechanisms as the sole avenue to address grievances and legal complaints. The lack of female representation in informal dispute resolution mechanisms was identified as one of the key shortcomings of the system. Community members also pointed to cultural barriers, discrimination, and lack of trust as other reasons for their dissatisfaction.

### Reasons for dissatisfaction with Dispute Resolution Mechanisms



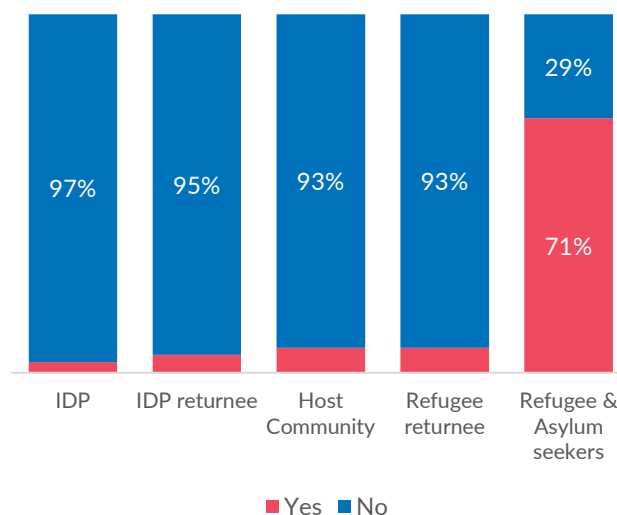
## SAFETY

- Community members stressed that a considerable number of women, girls, boys and men do not feel safe within their communities due to debt-related harassment (which may involve different abusive, coercive or intimidating tactics to pressure for repayment of debts) and community tensions. At a lower level, community members also reported on other forms of harassment or intimidation and criminality (including theft and extortion).

## FREEDOM OF MOVEMENT

- Women and girls face significant restrictions to their freedom of movement. 40% of households confirmed that there are places in the community where women and girls cannot go. The main reasons are mahram requirements, discrimination, and lack of civil documentation, with the latter underlining the severe impact of women and girls' limited access to civil documentation on their daily lives.
- Asylum-seekers and refugees have reported significantly higher movement restrictions than other population groups the main reasons being the lack of documentation, safety concerns as well as mahram requirements for women. Refugee returnees more often identified fears for their personal safety and security among the key reasons restricting the movement of men, women, boys and girls.

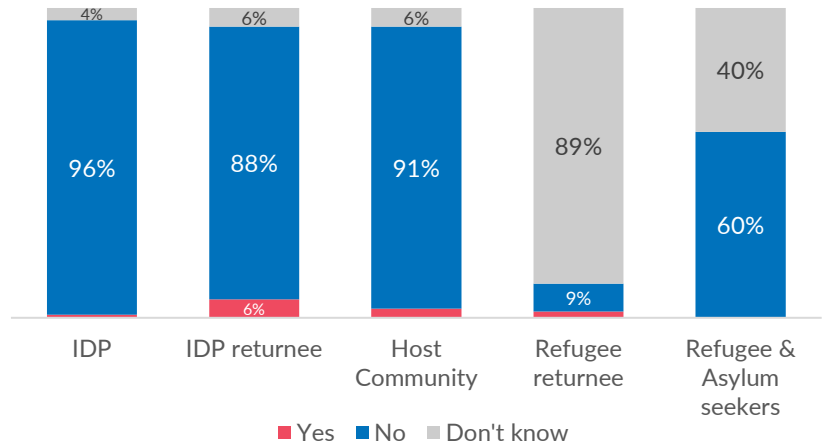
### Can you move freely in your area



**MINES & OTHER EXPLOSIVE ORDINANCES**

- Only 4% of community members were aware of mines and other explosives in and around their area. In 74% of cases, the areas were not marked. IDPs had significantly better knowledge about reporting mechanisms than other population groups. Mines and other explosives prevent affected communities from grazing their animals, playing safely, working on agricultural land, collecting water, as well as from accessing services and schools.

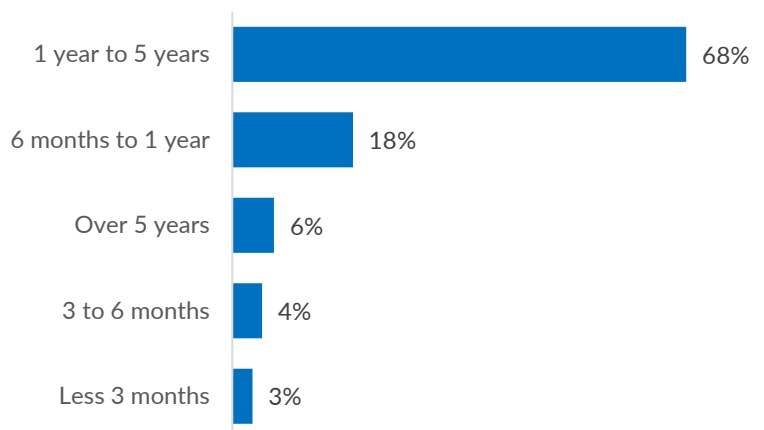
Are there mines or other explosives in and around your area



**DISPLACEMENT & DURABLE SOLUTIONS**

- While limited, new displacements continue to be observed. While armed conflict has been identified as the key driver of displacement for all IDPs interviewed, those who have been displaced within the last 4-12 months cite natural disasters as the main cause of displacement. Community members also emphasized the increasing impact of climate change, identifying drought and related economic consequences as crucial contributing factors to displacement, which also drive the onward movement of community members to neighbouring countries.

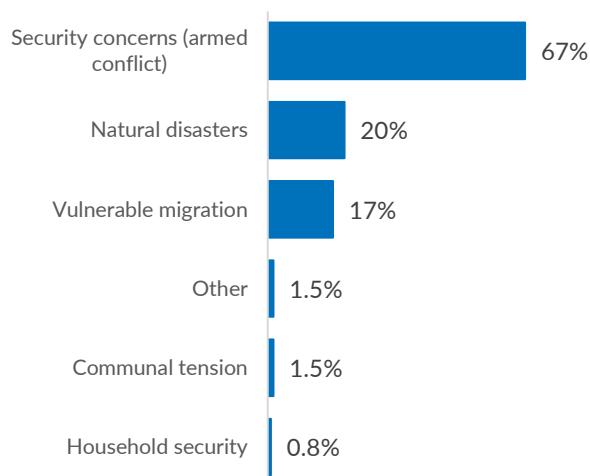
Length of latest displacement



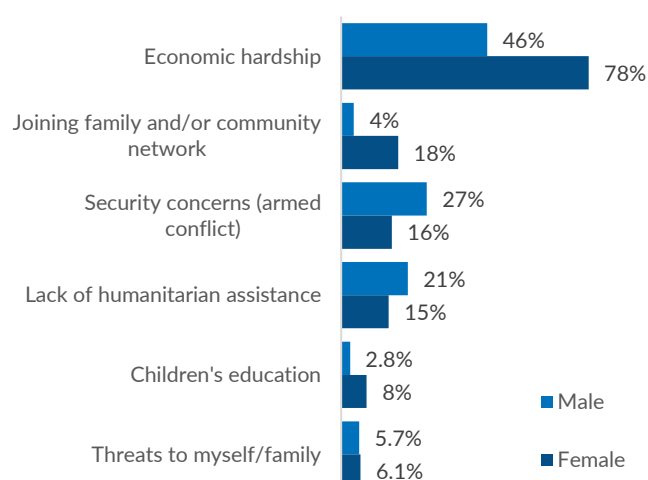
- 71% of IDPs expressed their intention to remain and integrate into their current locations. Only 13% of respondents indicated the wish to move onwards or return to their places of origin. This preference was more pronounced among female respondents.
- Poverty and economic hardship, security concerns and lack of humanitarian assistance are the key drivers for onward movement and return. At the same time, improved access to livelihood opportunities and safety are among the main reasons facilitating IDP integration, alongside social factors such as the presence of family and relatives. Gendered analysis of the data highlights female respondents putting even more weight on their economic situation as well as family and community networks and access to services as key drivers for their onward movement and return and reintegration.



### Reasons for displacement



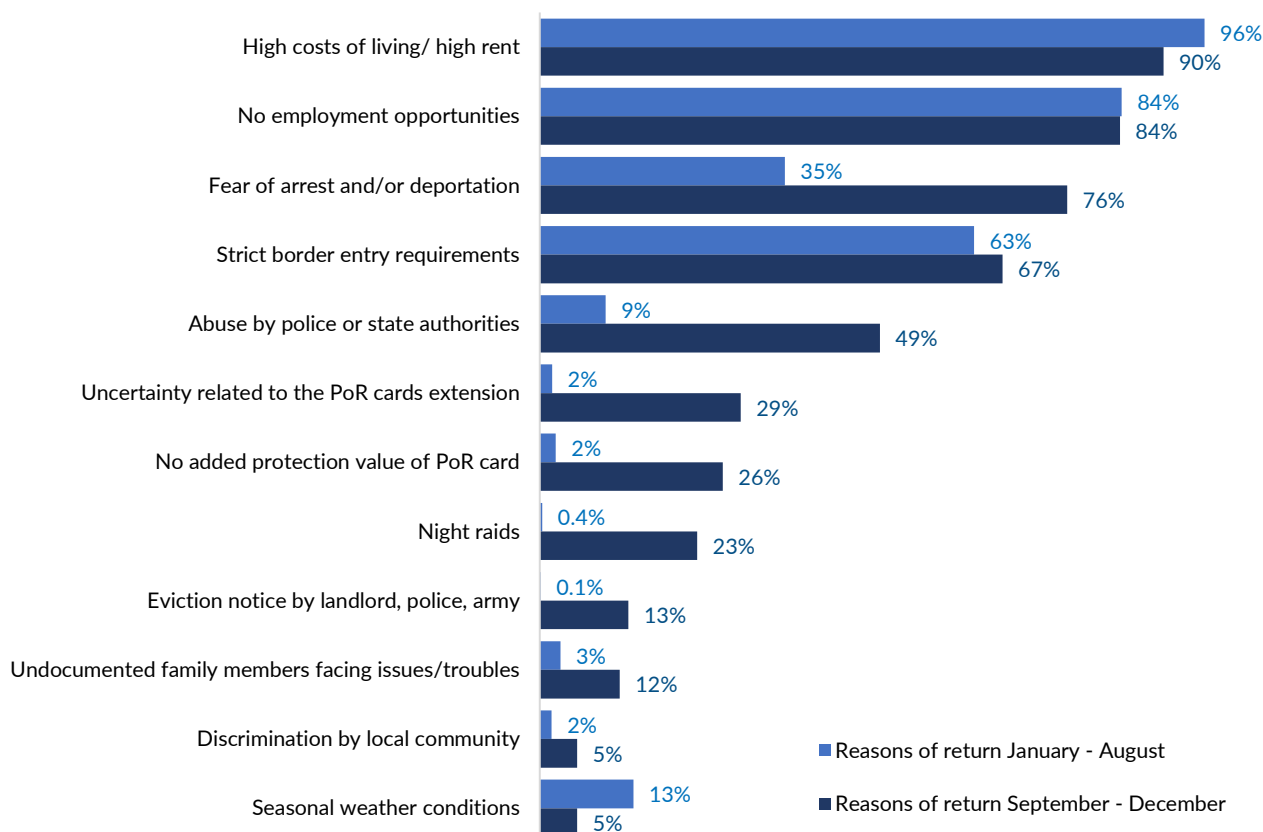
### Reasons for intending to return or move onward



## PAKISTAN RETURNS EMERGENCY

- Between 1 January 2023 and 31 December 2023, a total of 75,948 Afghan refugees and persons in refugee-like situations returned to Afghanistan. The vast majority (75,324) returned from Pakistan, of which 79% or 59,836 individuals returned between during November and December 2023 following the implementation of the Government of Pakistan’s “Illegal Foreigners Repatriation Plan” (IFRP).
- Between 1 January – 31 December 2023, there were 3,286 returnee monitoring interviews (2,047 males and 1,239 females) conducted with randomly selected newly arrived returnees at Kabul, Kandahar, Jalalabad, and Herat Encashment Centres (ECs). These interviews included 3,025 returnees from Pakistan, 223 from Iran, and 38 with from other countries, of these some 1,746 interviews were conducted in the last four months of 2023, of which 1,675 interviews were conducted with returnees from Pakistan.
- The reasons influencing returns identified by refugee returnees from Pakistan have significantly changed in the lead-up to the announcement and implementation of the GOP’s IFRP. In the beginning of 2023 until early September, socio-economic challenges (high cost of living, inflation, limited job opportunities), as well as protection concerns in Pakistan influenced refugees’ decision to return to Afghanistan. Since September 2023, returnees increasingly pointed to fears of arrest and deportation as well as abuse by police and state authorities as important drivers for return alongside discrimination by local host communities, night raids, and the limited protection value of their Proof of Registration (PoR) cards.
- Returnees also reported numerous challenges prior to crossing the border to Afghanistan as well as at the border points, including harassment, waiting long hours and overcrowding at the border, lengthy customs procedures and search of luggage as well as detention.
- Returnees expressed their concerns about the lack of shelter, livelihoods, access to land, documentation, water and sanitation, education, child protection, support for women and girls, and health care services including MHPSS in return areas as well as difficulties in meeting their basic needs such as food and access to transportation. Considering the lack of adequate infrastructure and resources and already deteriorated services, returnees face serious challenges to address their basic needs. In addition, reports of human rights violations were recorded.

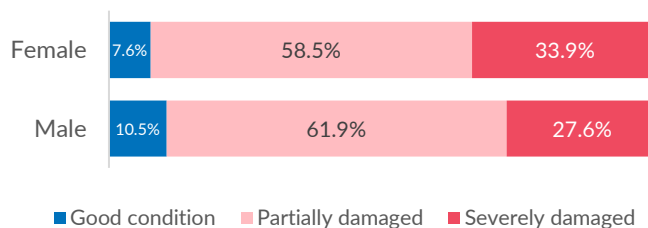
### Reasons of Return from Pakistan - 2023



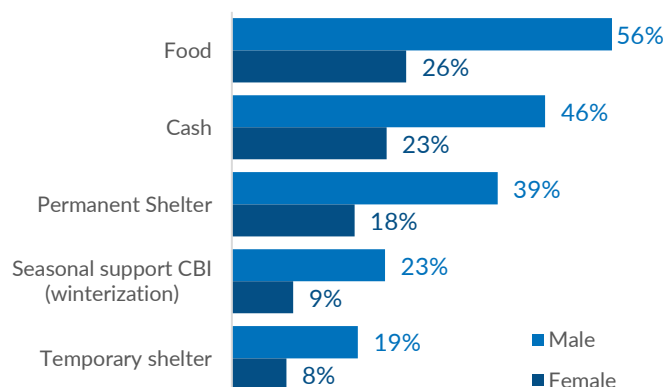
### HERAT EARTHQUAKE EMERGENCY

- The earthquake in Herat directly impacted 3,060 households, with 69% male heads of household and 31% female heads of household. Zindajan district had the highest number of assessments, predominantly with male-headed households.
- A significant portion of the affected population during the earthquake reported damage to their homes. 61.9% of males and 58.5% of females reported their houses were partially damaged, while 27.6% of males and 33.9% of females reported severe damage.
- The earthquake had significant psychological effects. 64.8% of males and 79.7% of females reported experiencing upsetting symptoms like excessive sadness, changes in appetite or sleep patterns, and anxiety.

### House Condition



### Top five priority needs



## RECOMMENDATIONS

### CROSS-CUTTING ISSUES

- Consider the diverse needs, challenges in accessing services and assistance and protection risks of different population groups to ensure programming is relevant to the identified community. The data suggests the need to place increased focus on those newly returned from Pakistan.
- Address movement restrictions for women and girls, considering different modalities of service provision and engagement that facilitate access to assistance and information and participation.
- Ensure close monitoring and oversight of activity implementation as well as continued advocacy with the de-facto authorities to prevent and respond to diversion of assistance from intended recipients.

### PROTECTION

- Provide targeted assistance and services to women and girls and persons with heightened vulnerabilities, including persons with disabilities and legal protection needs, such as persons without legal documentation or persons at risk due to their specific profile. Strengthen relevant protection programs to provide safe spaces, counselling and access to comprehensive services, ensuring that access barriers are addressed.
- Improve awareness about and access to MHPSS services for all population groups, addressing societal stigmas and heightened needs among the communities.
- Support vulnerable families through comprehensive programming interventions, aiming to prevent and reverse the adoption of harmful coping mechanisms through integrated child protection, livelihoods and community engagement interventions.
- Increase awareness amongst communities on the importance of civil documentation and address gender disparities in access to documentation through targeted programming and advocacy. Ensure that legal – including Housing Land and Property (HLP) - interventions integrate the specific needs of all population groups.
- Strengthen access to formal dispute resolution mechanisms and processes for women and girls through coordination and advocacy with relevant stakeholders and legal partners.
- In coordination with relevant protection partners and Clusters, strengthen reporting mechanisms, referrals systems and protection case management programs to support individuals who have experienced any forms of exploitation, abuse and other protection risks.
- Ensure continued focus on mine risk education and awareness about reporting channels across all communities. Consider a broad variety of factors supporting return and reintegration as well as onward movement of displaced communities to ensure sustainable programming. Greater focus should be put on the impact of climate change as well as the specific protection and assistance needs of new returnees from Pakistan.
- Strengthen protection mainstreaming across all sectors, with a particular focus on prioritizing safety and dignity, securing meaningful access as well as ensuring participation and empowerment of the community and accountability. This is key to address access barriers that have been identified across all areas of programming.

## SHELTER, WASH, ENERGY & HEALTH

- Improve insulation and heating for all households, focusing on refugees, asylum-seekers, returnees, IDPs and female-headed households through the distribution of NFIs and the targeted implementation of programmes providing extra winter support.
- Enhance access to potable water in host communities and repair and upgrade existing communal water supply infrastructures, especially natural springs, and adding water pipelines where feasible.
- Improve the electricity supply for refugees and asylum-seekers, IDPs and returnees most impacted by electricity shortages by investing in sustainable energy solutions like solar panels. Upgrade the water supply system with solarized boreholes.
- Promote income generation through social cohesion initiatives that leverage the specific skills of artisans and the workforce.
- Address financial barriers to accessing medicines and healthcare, especially for refugees, asylum-seekers, and returnees.



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