UNHCR
The UN Refugee Agency

SAMUEL HALL.

SSAR
Support Platform
GLOBAL COMPACT ON REFUGEES

Supported by UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency

UNHCR AFGHANISTAN

POST RETURN MONITORING SURVEY REPORT

DECEMBER 2025

We would like to thank first and foremost the thousands of returnees who agreed to take the survey and contributed invaluable information.

Across the Asia and the Pacific region, UNHCR has been forced to reprioritize programmes due to constrained humanitarian funding. Many refugees, stateless people, and other forcibly displaced populations face reduced access to critical assistance, with women and children among the most affected.

UNHCR is deeply grateful to the following donors who have stepped forward with earmarked contributions and those providing flexible funding to Afghanistan, enabling life-saving assistance and protection to reach those most in need. These contributions are vital to sustaining operations and supporting the most vulnerable:

Austria | Belgium | Canada | Denmark | European Union | France | Germany | Ireland | Islamic Development Bank | Italy | Japan | Republic of Korea | Luxembourg | Netherlands (Kingdom of the) | Norway | Poland | Sweden | Switzerland | United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland | United States of America | Afghanistan Humanitarian Fund | Country-based Pooled Fund | Central Emergency Response Fund | Special Trust Fund for Afghanistan

With thanks to private donors from Australia for UNHCR | España con ACNUR | Japan for UNHCR | UNO-Flüchtlingshilfe | UK for UNHCR | Australia | China | Denmark | Italy | Republic of Korea | Netherlands (Kingdom of the) | Norway | United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland

SSAR Support Platform
GLOBAL COMPACT ON REFUGEES

Supported by UNHCR,
the UN Refugee Agency

This report is published by UNHCR, in collaboration with the SSAR Support. Platform under the Chairmanship of the Kingdom of the Netherlands.

© UNHCR/Oxygen Media Empire

At the border crossing point in Torkham, UNHCR receives and assists Afghans being returned from Pakistan. Returns are taking places in the context of a devastating earthquake which hit eastern Afghanistan on 31 August and 1 September.

UNHCR
The UN Refugee Agency

UNHCR AFGHANISTAN

POST RETURN MONITORING SURVEY REPORT

DECEMBER 2025

Acronyms

CBE	Community Based Education
DfA	De-facto Authorities
HoH	Head of Household
HSM	Humanitarian Situation Monitoring
IFRP	Illegal Foreigners Repatriation Plan
IOM	International Organization for Migration
IPC	Integrated Food Security Phase Classification
MHPSS	Mental Health and Psychosocial Services
OCHA	United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
PARRs	Priority Areas of Return and Reintegration
PoR	Proof of Registration
UNAMA	United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
USA	United States of America
USD	United States dollar
VolRep	Voluntary Repatriation
VRF	Voluntary Repatriation Form
WASH	Water, Sanitation and Hygiene
WFP	World Food Programme
WoAA	Whole of Afghanistan Assessment

Contents

Acronyms		**4**
Executive summary		**6**
CHAPTER 1	**Background**	**20**
CHAPTER 2	**Return patterns**	**24**
CHAPTER 3	**Plans to leave**	**29**
CHAPTER 4	**Cash assistance**	**31**
CHAPTER 5	**Access to education**	**34**
CHAPTER 6	**Access to healthcare**	**40**
CHAPTER 7	**Water and sanitation**	**44**
CHAPTER 8	**Food security**	**48**
CHAPTER 9	**Access to housing**	**52**
CHAPTER 10	**Skills and education**	**57**
CHAPTER 11	**Livelihoods and financial situation**	**60**
CHAPTER 12	**Physical safety**	**68**
CHAPTER 13	**Civil documentation**	**72**
CHAPTER 14	**Mental health**	**77**
CHAPTER 15	**Access to mobile phones**	**80**
CHAPTER 16	**Access to assistance**	**82**
CHAPTER 17	**Complaints, feedback and response mechanisms**	**85**
CHAPTER 18	**Conclusions and recommendations**	**90**
ANNEX 1	**Methodology**	**99**
ANNEX 2	**Respondent profile**	**100**
ANNEX 3	**Provinces**	**104**

Executive Summary

UNHCR's Post-Return Monitoring (PRM) continues to monitor the protection, well-being and reintegration progress of Afghan returnees. In August 2025, the monitoring expanded to include returnees from Iran for the first time, alongside those from Pakistan. This round draws on interviews with 1,658 returnee households from Pakistan and Iran. Two new datasets were introduced for returnees from Pakistan: one for those who returned before April 2025 and one for those who returned after when cash assistance was reduced due to funding shortfalls. The survey also includes undocumented returnees, allowing analysis of possible differences between returnees with refugee documentation in countries of asylum and those without.

The changes in datasets reflect the need to understand evolving returnee experiences. In 2025, Afghanistan saw massive return movements, with an estimated 2.7 million returns between January and November. These returns reflect changes in the profiles of those coming back. Many returns occurred under duress and adverse conditions, driven by policies in neighbouring countries and deteriorating conditions for Afghans abroad, particularly in Pakistan and Iran. These mass returns often resulted in abrupt departures and difficult journeys back to Afghanistan.

In Pakistan, the Government announced the resumption of the Illegal Foreigners' Repatriation Plan (IFRP) on 7 March 2025, initially targeting Afghan Citizenship Card (ACC) holders, who were instructed to leave voluntarily by 31 March or face deportation from 1 April. On 31 July, the policy was expanded to include Afghan refugees holding Proof of Registration (PoR) cards, with a one-month grace period ending on 31 August. Between April and August 2025, more than 314,500 Afghans returned from Pakistan.[1]

In Iran, returns intensified in mid-2025 due to tighter border enforcement, the conflict with Israel, increased deportations, worsening conditions for Afghans in Iran, and the expiry of temporary stay permits held by hundreds of thousands of Afghans. Daily returns sometimes exceeded 40,000 in July. Combined returns from Iran and Pakistan reached unprecedented levels, stretching already strained border and transit facilities.[2]

1 UNHCR, 'Pakistan-Afghanistan Returns Emergency Response 39', August 2025

2 UNHCR, 'Iran-Afghanistan Returns Emergency Response 24', October 2025

The survey findings show differences between returnee groups. Returnees from Iran generally reported higher levels of education, slightly improved food security, and greater access to durable housing, but were less likely to have income-generating employment, and more often reported barriers to girls' education. Returnees from Pakistan faced deeper economic strain, relied more on daily wage labour, and carried higher debt. Timing also mattered: those returning from Pakistan after April found more casual income opportunities but struggled to afford rent and maintain sufficient food.

Across all groups, returnees continue to settle in areas with fragile conditions marked by deepening poverty and limited access to essential services. Many cannot return to their areas of origin due to lack of shelter, land, or livelihoods. Over half of households surveyed reported missing essential civil documentation, restricting access to education, healthcare, and housing. Education remains sharply constrained for all women and girls in Afghanistan: returnees from Iran most often cited policies and laws as the key barrier, while returnees from Pakistan pointed to economic obstacles. Access to healthcare is limited by cost, distance, and medicine shortages, with women disproportionately affected due to movement restrictions.

These findings highlight the urgency of sustained, multi-sectoral support to protect returnees and assist their reintegration. Interventions must be tailored to the differing profiles and needs of returnees from Iran and Pakistan, taking into account their distinct vulnerabilities and circumstances behind their return. Continued post-return monitoring remains critical to track evolving challenges, adapt programming, and advance long-term stability and protection.

RETURN PATTERNS

Map 1

Top 10 return areas for returnees from Pakistan and Iran

LEGEND

- Top 10 provinces for Afghan returnees from Iran and Pakistan
- Other provinces for Afghan returnees from Iran and Pakistan
- International boundary
- Admin 1 - provincial boundaries

The boundaries and names shown and the designations used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the United Nations. Dotted line represents approximately the Line of Control in Jammu and Kashmir agreed upon by India and Pakistan. The final status of Jammu and Kashmir has not been agreed upon by the parties. Source: 2025 UNHCR Inflow Border Monitoring Interviews.

The inclusion of returnees from Iran in the August 2025 survey round provides a more comprehensive overview of return trends and patterns. Herat emerged as a major return hub, with 30 per cent of returnees from Iran settling in the province. Herat now surpasses Nangarhar as the second-largest returnee-hosting province after Kabul. Together, Kabul, Herat and Nangarhar host the highest proportion of returnees in the country.

67%

SETTLED IN TEN PROVINCES

67 per cent of returnees are concentrated in 10 provinces, but trends between returnees from Iran and Pakistan vary by background. 30 per cent of returnees from Iran settled in Herat, while those from Pakistan primarily settled in Kabul and Nangarhar. Among returnees, those arriving before April were more likely to stay in Nangarhar (30 per cent), whereas post-April arrivals were more dispersed, with only five per cent in Nangarhar and 10 per cent in Balkh.

29%

DID NOT RETURN TO THEIR PROVINCE OF ORIGIN

Just under two thirds of surveyed returnees returned to their areas of origin, with returnees from Iran slightly less likely to go back to their original community (62 per cent compared to 68 per cent for those from Pakistan). The main reasons cited for not resettling in their areas of origin were lack of shelter (72 per cent), limited job opportunities (62 per cent), and a shortage of land (46 per cent).

28%

DID NOT RETURN TO INTENDED PROVINCE

72 per cent of returnees reported living in their intended province of return. Returnees from Iran were the least likely to be in their intended province, with only 53 per cent compared to 73 per cent of those from Pakistan. Among the latter, those arriving before April were 10 percent more likely to be in their intended location than post-April arrivals, suggesting that mobility options have narrowed over time.

INTENTIONS TO LEAVE

Most interviewed returnees said they intend to remain in their current location although this trend has gradually declined since the first survey in July–September 2024.

© **UNHCR/Oxygen Media Empire**

At the border crossing point in Torkham, UNHCR receives and assists Afghans being returned from Pakistan.

92%

INTEND TO STAY PERMANENTLY

92 per cent of returnees reported intending to remain in their current locations – a slight decline from 94 per cent in December 2024 survey. Returnees from Iran were less likely to report plans to stay than those from Pakistan (88 per cent vs. 94 per cent). Among Pakistan returnees, those who arrived after April were more likely to remain in their current location than pre-April arrivals (95 per cent vs. 91 per cent).

2%

INTEND TO MOVE WITHIN AFGHANISTAN

Two per cent of returnees reported planning to move to another province within Afghanistan. For all returnees, Kabul was the most frequently cited destination, followed by Herat for those returning from Iran and Nangarhar for those from Pakistan.

4%

INTEND TO LEAVE AFGHANISTAN

Six per cent of returnees from Iran stated that they intended to leave Afghanistan again, compared to two per cent of returnees from Pakistan. Among those from Iran who intend to leave, 71 per cent reported that they would return to Iran.

11%

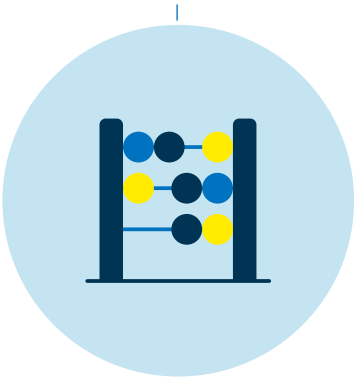
REPORTED RELATIVES OR COMMUNITY MEMBERS RETURNED TO PAKISTAN[3]

11 per cent of returnees from Pakistan reported that some relatives or community members had returned to Pakistan, a six-point decrease since the December 2024 survey. Restrictions on women's education and work were mentioned by close to 40 per cent of returnees as the primary reason for leaving, along with economic challenges, particularly limited employment opportunities. Capturing the full scope of reasons for departure remains challenging, as many people, particularly those potentially in need of international protection, might be scared to openly share their concerns. Among returnees from Iran, six per cent said they intended to leave Afghanistan for Iran. However, this question was not asked of returnees from Iran given that large scale returns/deportations from Iran started in late June. It will be included for returnees from Iran in the next survey round.

3 This question was not asked to returnees from Iran given that the large-scale returns and deportations from Iran started in late June. This question will be asked from Iran returnees during the next survey round.

Cash assistance

Cash assistance continues to provide vital support to returnees but remains insufficient to meet growing needs. Only 41 per cent of returnees reported that the grant was adequate, a 21-point drop compared to the December 2024. Female-headed households were least likely to find the grant sufficient. Returnees from Iran were more likely to consider the support adequate than those arriving from Pakistan. Most households exhausted their funds within weeks, primarily on food (82 per cent), transportation (65 per cent), and healthcare, while spending on shelter has dropped sharply since late 2024.



Education

Access to education for returnee children remains highly constrained, despite modest improvements since the December 2024 survey. 68 per cent of returnee households reported that boys had the same access as host communities, compared to only 55 per cent for girls. Restrictions on female education remain the main barrier, but financial hardship also plays a major role, particularly for boys, a third of whom were kept out of school to work. Returnees from Iran were more likely to cite gender-based restrictions as a key barrier to education (44 per cent vs. 28 per cent for returnees from Pakistan). Among returnees from Pakistan, especially those arriving after April, economic barriers were more frequently reported, with 71 per cent reporting no male children in school, compared to 48 per cent among pre-April arrivals. For girls, non-enrolment was highest among post-April returnees from Pakistan (81 per cent), compared to 67 per cent for returnees from Iran.

Healthcare

11 per cent of returnees reported that there is no medical facility in their community, with returnees from Iran most likely to report having access (91 per cent). More than one third of households (34 per cent) said a member needed medical attention in the past six months but could not obtain it, with financial barriers cited as the most common obstacle. Respondents with disabilities were particularly affected: 51 per cent reported unmet medical needs compared to 28 per cent of those without disabilities. Women were disproportionately represented among those with unmet care needs, reflecting the impact of movement restrictions and *mahram* requirements.

Access to water

27 per cent of returnee households reported not having sufficient water for their daily needs, an eight-point increase compared to the December 2024 survey. Returnees from Pakistan were worse off than those from Iran (69 per cent vs. 82 per cent reporting adequate access), while households with a member with a disability were also more likely to face shortages. Protected wells remained the most common source of water. Eight per cent of households still relied on unsafe, unprotected sources, with the highest levels reported in Maidan Wardak, Kunduz, and Baghlan.

Sanitation and hygiene

Access to sanitation remains strained, with only 67 per cent of returnees reporting adequate access to latrines, handwashing and basic facilities, a 16-point drop compared to the December 2024 survey. Returnees from Pakistan reported more access constraints than those from Iran. Households with a member with a disability faced a 12-point gap in access compared to those without. Most households used private latrines, but 22 per cent relied on shared facilities, with women far more likely to do so (32 per cent vs. 18 per cent of men), raising privacy and protection concerns.

Food security

Food insecurity remains a critical issue, with 63 per cent of returnees still reporting inadequate access to food although this marks an eight-point improvement compared to the December 2024 survey. Returnees from Pakistan were worse off than those from Iran and pre-April arrivals from Pakistan faced the most severe shortages. Skipping meals was widespread (82 per cent), especially among female-headed households (88 per cent). Food stocks remained limited, with 39 per cent of households reporting none at all, and most others holding less than three weeks' worth, leaving many dependent on borrowing to purchase food. Reduced Coping Strategy Index scores[a] highlight continued reliance on extreme coping strategies, with 60 per cent of households in the high category, but with a sharp difference between returnees from Pakistan (62 per cent in the high category) and those from Iran (43 per cent).

a *The Reduced Coping Strategy Index (rCSI) is a food security indicator that measures the frequency and severity of coping behaviours households use when they do not have enough food or money to buy food. It is calculated based on how often households engage in specific strategies over a recall period (7 days), with each strategy weighted by its relative severity.*

Shelter

Three-quarters of returnees live in substandard mud houses, more common among those from Pakistan (78 per cent) than Iran (68 per cent). Only 13 per cent reside in concrete homes, which are more frequent among returnees from Iran. Nearly half (49 per cent) rent housing, rising to 62 per cent among those who returned from Pakistan after April. 74 per cent of renters are unable to afford costs. Female-headed households are less likely to own homes anda more likely to report an inability to pay rent. Overcrowding remains severe, with 80 per cent of households living with up to four people per room, particularly among returnees from Pakistan and female-headed households.

Mental health and psychosocial needs

Mental health concerns remain widespread, with 67 per cent of returnees reporting stress severe enough to disrupt daily life – a figure broadly consistent with the findings from the December 2024 survey. Economic hardship is the leading source, cited by over 90 per cent, alongside uncertainty about the future and food insecurity. Differences between groups were minor, but returnees from Pakistan were slightly more likely to report stress linked to food insecurity, while returnees from Iran more often cited family separation.

Digital inclusion and connectivity

Mobile phone access remains highly unequal: 96 per cent of men reported access compared to just 37 per cent of women. While this marks progress from the December 2024 survey, when only 25 per cent of women had access, the gap continues to restrict women's ability to access information and assistance. Returnees from Iran reported higher access for women (59 per cent) than those from Pakistan (around 30 per cent). This difference may be linked to higher literacy rates among women returnees from Iran and greater acceptance by male family members regarding women's access to communication tools.

Complaints, feedback and response mechanisms

Awareness of complaints, feedback and response mechanisms remains low: only 16 per cent of returnees reported knowing where to raise concerns or seek information on assistance, showing little improvement compared to the December 2024 survey. Men were more aware than women (17 per cent vs. 12 per cent). The UNHCR hotline was the best-known channel (43 per cent), followed by the AWAAZ hotline.[b] Many returnees mentioned a lack of reporting systems, limited knowledge, or mistrust as barriers.

b The Awaaz Afghanistan Hotline is a nationwide toll-free inter-agency call centre that allows people to access information, provide feedback, and report issues related to humanitarian assistance and services.

Economic situation

Just over half of returnees (57 per cent) reported having formal education. 88 per cent possessed at least one marketable skill, continuing an upward trend since 2024. Returnees from Iran were significantly better educated, with only 28 per cent lacking schooling compared to 54 per cent of those from Pakistan, and 21 per cent completing upper-secondary education vs. eight per cent. The gender gap also narrows when including returnees from Iran, with 16 per cent of women reporting no source of income in the December 2024 survey compared to 24 per cent now. Returnee women from Pakistan are the least likely to have advanced education among the groups surveyed.

24%

OF WOMEN HAD A SOURCE OF INCOME

60 per cent of returnees reported earning an income, but stark gender gaps remain. Only 24 per cent of women among returnees reported earning an income, compared to 66 per cent of men. The situation improves when women are the main providers, with 47 per cent of female-headed households reporting a source of income. Returnees from Iran were less likely to earn an income (40 per cent) compared to those from Pakistan (62 per cent).

57%

WORK AS DAILY WAGE LABOURERS

Daily wage labour remains the primary livelihood for returnees, reported by 57 per cent of men and 18 per cent of women. Other sources of income included shopkeeping or small business ownership (16 per cent) and agriculture (nine per cent). Women's livelihoods were largely home-based, with tailoring cited as the main source of income for 58 per cent of returnee women. Patterns were consistent across returnee groups, but women returning from Pakistan faced the greatest constraints in accessing opportunities outside domestic activities.

92%

EARN LESS THAN USD 150 PER MONTH

Only eight per cent earned above USD 147 (AFN 10,000) per month, while 14 per cent earned less than USD 22 (1,500 AFN), a sharp rise from three per cent compared to the December 2024 survey. Female-headed households were more vulnerable, with 53 per cent earning USD 50 (3,000 AFN) or less per month compared to 75 per cent of male-headed households. Returnees from Pakistan who arrived before April 2025 reported slightly higher incomes than those arriving after April. This likely reflects more time to reintegrate into labour markets or less competition before the large wave of returnees from Iran in June and July.

Protection

While physical security incidents remain limited in the absence of large-scale conflict, returnees – particularly women and girls – continue to report serious protection concerns, including discrimination, movement restrictions, and risks related to restrictive laws and community enforcement practices.

52%

OF HOUSEHOLDS HAD AT LEAST ONE MEMBER WITHOUT A TAZKIRA

Fewer than half of surveyed households reported that every household member held a *tazkira*, Afghanistan's national ID, highlighting persistent gaps in civil documentation. Returnees from Iran were better positioned, with 63 per cent of households reporting that all members held a *tazkira,* compared to just 31 per cent among post-April returnees from Pakistan. The absence of documentation continues to restrict access to essential services for 71 per cent of returnees, particularly education (44 per cent), housing (23 per cent), and healthcare (23 per cent).

35%

DID NOT ALWAYS FEEL SAFE ACCESSING HYGIENE FACILITIES

Safety concerns around latrine use remain widespread, with 35 per cent of returnees reporting they do not feel safe. Women were slightly more likely than men to express concerns (36 per cent vs. 33 per cent), while returnees from Pakistan were 15 percentage points more likely than those from Iran to feel unsafe. The main risks cited were overcrowding and a lack of doors or locks, highlighting gaps in privacy and protection.

Table 1

Key indicator matrix over thee rounds of post-return data

Indicators	July-September 2024	December 2024	August 2025
Proportion of returnees living outside province of origin	32%	37%	29%
Proportion of returnees intending to stay in current location	96%	94%	92%
Proportion of returnees reporting they intend to leave the country	<1%	1%	4%
Proportion of returnees in debt	75%	89%	88%
Proportion of returnees reporting girls have same access to education as hosts	36%	37%	55%
Proportion of returnees with access to a medical facility	86%	88%	89%
Proportion of returnees with sufficient access to water	75%	81%	63%
Proportion of returnees with access to latrines, handwashing facilities and basic sanitation	78%	85%	67%

Indicators	July-September 2024	December 2024	August 2025
Proportion of returnees with adequate access to food	80%	43%	35%
Proportion of returnees in rental accommodation	62%	62%	49%
Proportion of returnees earning an income	58%	60%	60%
Proportion of returnees earning less than AFN 10,000 (USD 147) per month	93%	86%	92%
Proportion of returnees who have at least one household member without a Tazkira	75%	76%	52%
Proportion of returnees suffering stress which affects their daily life	49%	70%	67%
Proportion of female returnees with phone access	16%	26%	37%
Proportion of returnees aware of how to lodge complaints	31%	15%	16%

CHAPTER 1

Background

Between January and November 2025, over 2.7 million Afghans returned to Afghanistan, driven by return orders and deportation policies in countries of asylum, particularly Pakistan and Iran. The Government of Pakistan launched Phase II of the Illegal Foreigners Repatriation Plan (IFRP) in April 2025, urging Afghans holding an Afghan Citizen Card (ACC) to depart or face deportation. Similarly, in early 2025, the Government of Iran started scaling up deportations of Afghans, with authorities declaring in March that 'Headcount Slips', held by two million Afghans in refugee-like situations in Iran, were no longer valid for continued stay. This led to an increase in returns and deportation from Iran, peaking in late June and early July, sometimes exceeding 40,000 arrivals per day.[4]

In July 2025, Pakistan announced Phase III of IFRP, primarily urging registered refugees holding Proof of Registration (PoR) cards to depart or face deportation. Since August 2025, UNHCR has recorded large-scale returns of PoR card holders from Pakistan. These returns are occurring under adverse conditions, as PoR holders face increasing protection risks, including harassment, detention, and threats of deportation, prompting many to return involuntarily. The situation is unfolding against a backdrop of widespread human rights violations and severely limited access to essential services in Afghanistan, which significantly jeopardizes prospects for sustainable reintegration. This has created an especially difficult reality for women and girls, who constitute 51 per cent of all returnees, many of whom are deprived of basic rights, freedom of movement, and social participation, leaving them highly vulnerable in the current context.

During 2025, UNHCR assisted over 475,000 Afghans returning from Iran and Pakistan despite significant operational and funding challenges that prevented more people from being reached.

4 *UNHCR, Afghanistan Situation: Afghan Returns from Iran and Pakistan Emergency Update #4, August 2025*

Chart # 1

Returns from Iran since 1 January to 30 November[5]

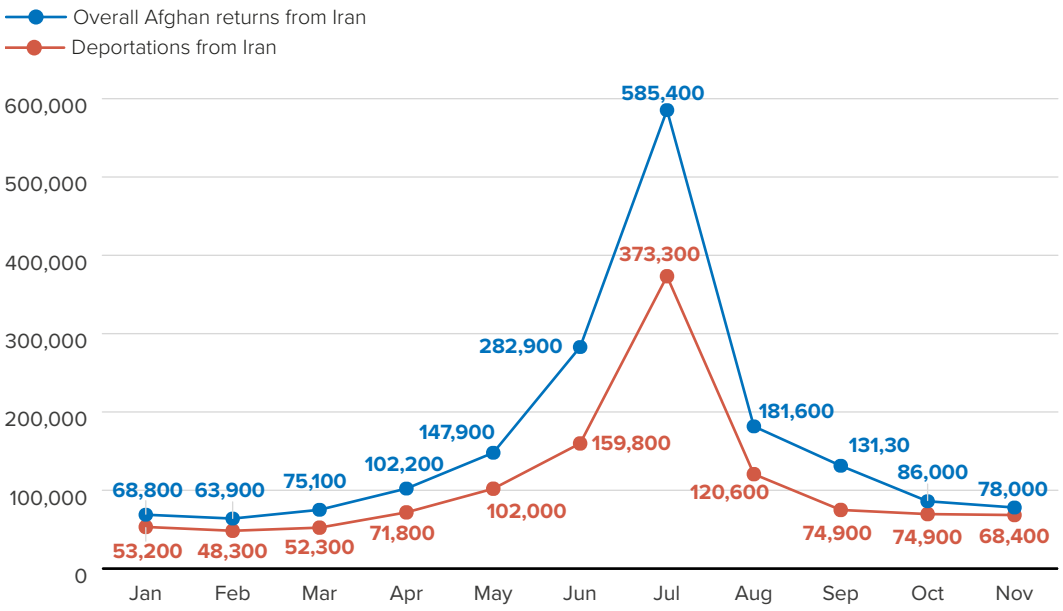
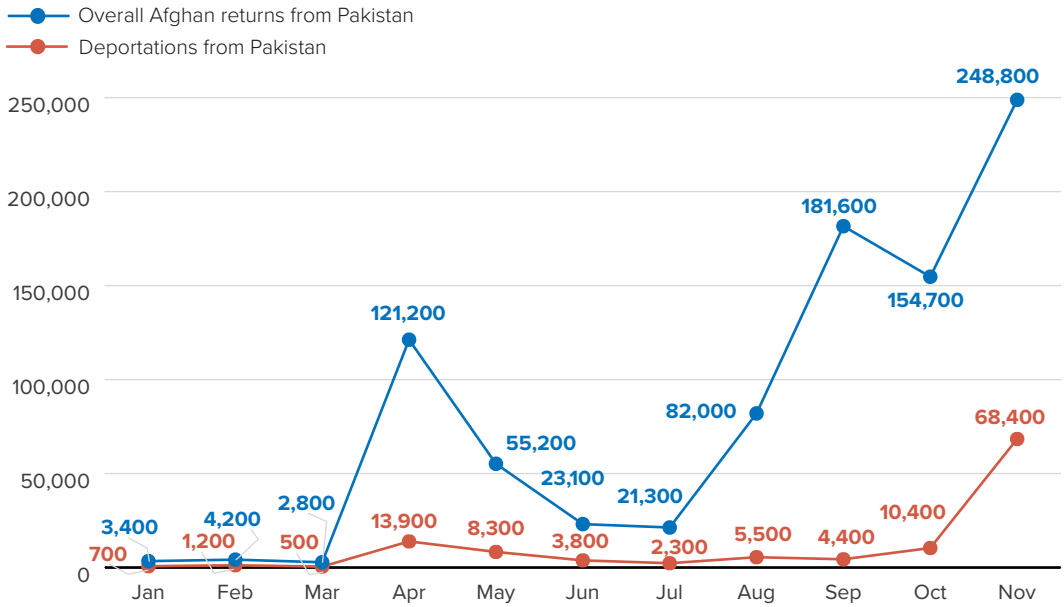


Chart # 2

Returns from Pakistan since 1 January to 30 November



5 *Source: UNHCR & IOM data*

These returns are part of a complex protection crisis, driven by deteriorating conditions for Afghans in countries of asylum. Many returnees reported that they felt compelled to leave, as they saw other Afghans being deported and faced increased restrictions, harassment and discrimination themselves. The unprecedented scale of returns in 2025 raises grave concerns about the well-being of returnees, their ability to reintegrate, Afghanistan's absorption capacity, and the sustainability of these returns.

This report is based on responses from 1,658 Afghan returnee households collected through phone-based surveys (74 per cent male respondents and 26 per cent female). On 10 April 2025, cash assistance was reduced due to funding constraints. Accordingly, separate representative samples were drawn for returnees from Pakistan who were assisted before and after 10 April, allowing for comparison across different assistance levels and returnee category:

- Documented returnees from Pakistan arriving between January and June 2025
- Documented returnees from Iran arriving between September 2023 and June 2025
- Undocumented returns from both Pakistan and Iran who arrived between September 2023 and June 2025.[6]

This report forms part of UNHCR's ongoing return monitoring series, which builds on two earlier rounds:

- First Round**:** Conducted between 15 July and 1 September 2024, targeting 4,220 returned refugee households that arrived from Pakistan between 15 September and 31 December 2023 (IFRP I). The report was released in October 2024.
- Second Round: Carried out in December 2024, targeting 2,868 Afghan returnee households who arrived from Pakistan between January and June 2024. The Report was released in April 2025.

The series explores the situation, challenges and needs of Afghan returnees, including obstacles to reintegration in Afghanistan. This report examines how returnees are progressing across key areas such as access to documentation, housing, and basic services, noting both improvements and ongoing challenges in reintegration, and highlighting critical gaps to inform interventions and guide programming in Afghanistan.

6 *'undocumented returnees' refer to people who did not have documents in the host country recognizing their asylum claims and were not registered.*

Methodology

The third round of the Post-Return Monitoring phone survey targeted four groups of Afghan returnees:

- UNHCR-assisted returnees from Pakistan before the April 2025 reduction in cash assistance changes
- Returnees from Pakistan after April 2025 under reduced assistance
- UNHCR-assisted returnees from Iran between 2023 and June 2025
- Undocumented returnees from both Iran and Pakistan during the same period

Using UNHCR's returnee rosters as sampling frames, a simple random sampling (SRS) approach was applied to ensure equal selection probability within each group. Sample sizes were calculated at a 95 per cent confidence level and five per cent margin of error, adjusted for expected non-response. Analytical weights were applied to correct for differences in group representation. In total, 1,658 returnee households were successfully interviewed across all groups (see Annex 1 for a more detailed discussion of methodology).

Respondent Profile

Among the 1,658 surveyed households, 74 per cent of respondents were male and 26 per cent were female, with women more frequently represented among returnees from Iran (43 per cent) than from Pakistan (22 per cent). Most respondents (79 per cent) were household heads, and five per cent were aged 60 years or above. Approximately one in four households reported at least one member with a functional difficulty, primarily related to mobility. Only 41 per cent of returnees held a UNHCR Voluntary Repatriation Form (VRF), with lower rates among women and Iranian returnees. The survey spanned 33 provinces and 255 districts, with higher representation from major return areas such as Kabul, Herat, Nangarhar, and Kunduz (see Annex 2 for a more detailed discussion of methodology).

CHAPTER 2

Return Patterns

Around two thirds of returnees (67 per cent) are concentrated in 10 provinces, with 50 per cent distributed across 25 districts. Consistent with findings from the July – September 2024 survey, Kabul district hosts the highest proportion of returnees. Herat records the highest share of female returnees across all provinces, reflecting the larger proportion of women among returnees from Iran. Female returnees are also more geographically concentrated than men, with 54 per cent residing in just 15 districts, compared to 37 per cent of male returnees, suggesting more limited mobility for women.

Settlement patterns also vary significantly by country and timing of return. Among returnees from Pakistan, those arriving between January and April 2025 were most likely to settle in Nangarhar (30 per cent), compared with only five per cent of those arriving after April). For post-April arrivals, Balkh became the top province of settlement for returnees (10 per cent). Among returnees from Iran, 30 per cent settled in Herat province, while 18 per cent of returnees from Pakistan settled in Kabul or Nangarhar provinces.

At the district level, Kabul recorded the highest overall proportion of returnees at 10 per cent, followed by Mazar-e-Sharif and Herat at four per cent each, while Balkh and Guzara had the lowest at one per cent each. Across all districts, females accounted for 54 per cent and males for 37 per cent of returnees, with an overall total of 40 per cent of the people surveyed.

© UNHCR/Oxygen Empire Media Production

Saifullah, a returnee from Pakistan, stands with joy on his face as a newly arrived Afghan, preparing to head toward Nooristan with his family, hopeful for a new beginning in his homeland after years away.

Table 1:
Top 10 Total returnees by gender and province

Province	Female	Male	Total
Kabul	14.1%	13.1%	13.3%
Herat	15.2%	6.0%	8.0%
Balkh	10.2%	6.4%	7.2%
Kandahar	4.3%	7.4%	6.7%
Kunduz	2.7%	7.2%	6.3%
Helmand	7.9%	5.2%	5.8%
Baghlan	11.0%	4.3%	5.8%
Nangarhar	2.0%	6.6%	5.6%
Ghazni	4.0%	4.4%	4.3%
Takhar	1.8%	4.2%	3.7%

Most returnees reported living in their intended province of return (72 per cent), representing a decrease of 16 percent compared to the first survey round (July – September 2024). Just over half of returnees (53 per cent) were reportedly living in their intended districts. Returnees from Iran were less likely to be in their intended province, with only 53 per cent reporting this, compared to 73 per cent of returnees from Pakistan. Among returnees from Pakistan, those who arrived before April were 10 percentage points more likely to report being in their intended location than post-April arrivals, suggesting that mobility options may have narrowed over time.

Gender also influenced settlement patterns. Male-headed households were seven percentage points more likely to live in their preferred province, indicating that they may have greater flexibility and choice in decisions about their area of residence.[7]

7 Gender of the head of household was not asked in every instance where the respondent was not themself the head of household – as such the overall sample for this figure is 1,314 instead of the overall sample of 1,658.

Table 2
Living in intended area of return by respondent status

	Pakistan (Jan – 10th April)	Pakistan (April 11th – June)	Iran	Undocumented
No	16%	28%	47%	30%
Yes	84%	72%	53%	70%

Currently living in the area of intended return

CHART #4
Province

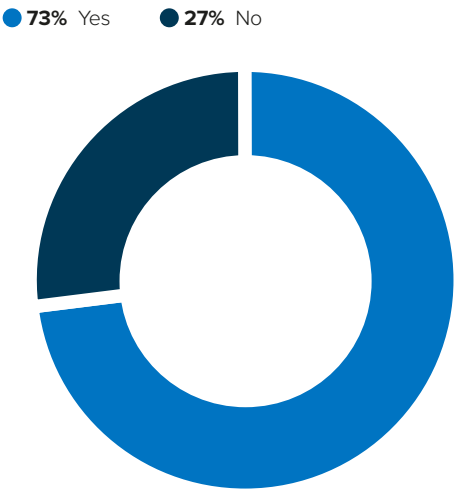
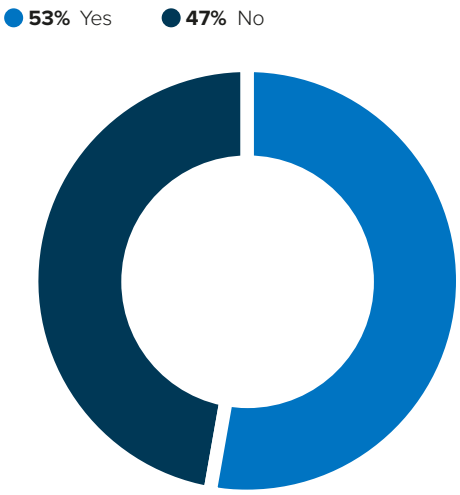


CHART #5
District



Compared to the December 2024 survey, a higher proportion of returnees reported living in their home province in August 2025 (71 per cent vs. 64 per cent). Gender and population group did not significantly influence whether households were settled in their original communities. By contrast, undocumented returnees were slightly more likely than average to report living in their home province.

Currently living in area of origin

CHART #6
Province

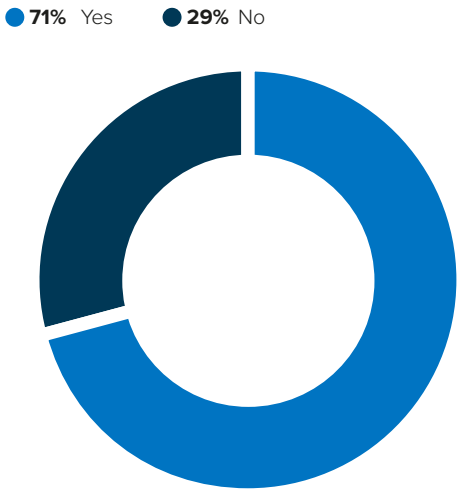
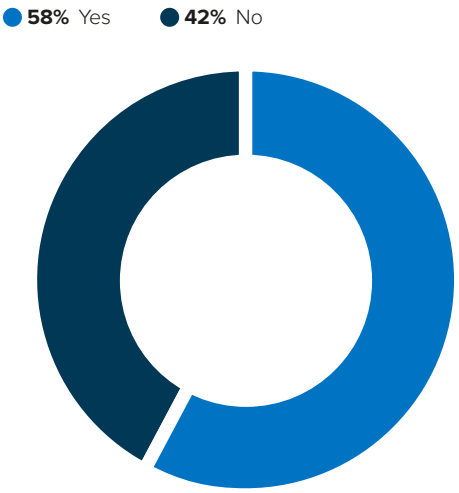


CHART #7
District



The primary reasons returnees were not settled in their areas of origin were lack of shelter (72 per cent), limited livelihoods (62 per cent), and insufficient land (46 per cent). These findings reflect the same key challenges reported in the December 2024 survey.

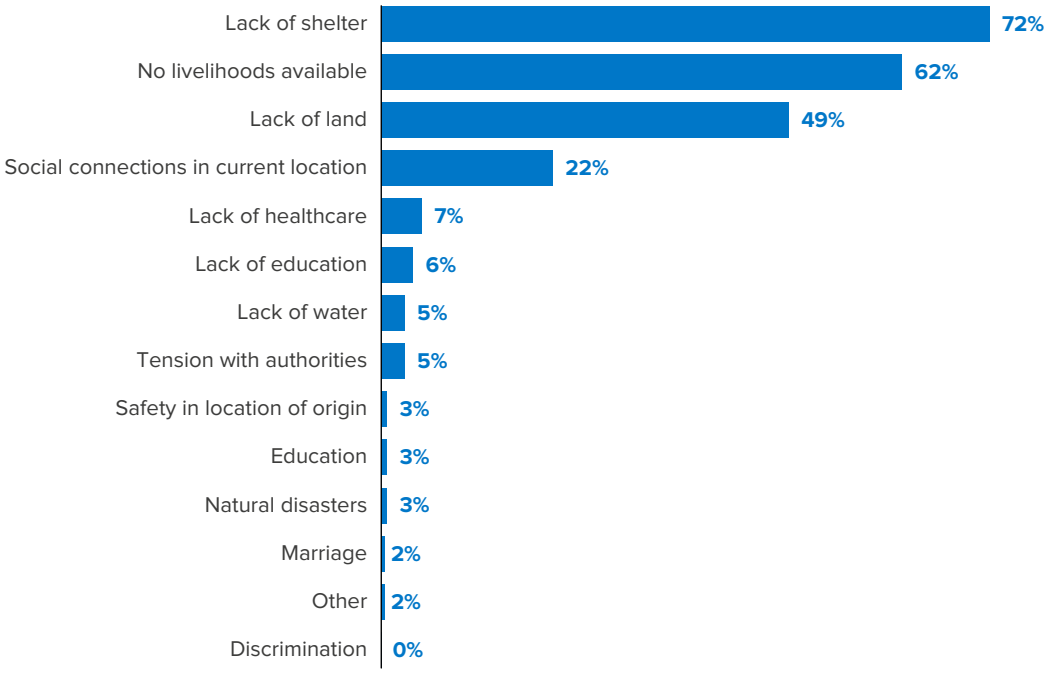
Although less frequently cited, social factors and access to services also played a role. About 22 per cent of returnees reported that social connections in their current locations influenced their settlement decisions, while eight per cent mentioned access to basic services, particularly healthcare, as a factor.

Gender differences were pronounced. Women were 34 percentage points less likely than men to cite lack of livelihoods and 26 percentage points less likely to report lack of land as reasons for living outside their community of origin. Instead, 59 per cent of female respondents identified inadequate shelter as the primary reason for not returning to their original settlements.

Differences were also observed by country of return. Returnees from Iran were less likely to cite lack of access to land as a barrier, with only 36 per cent reporting this, compared to 57 per cent of households returning from Pakistan. This difference may reflect the relatively higher educational attainment of returnees from Iran, which could make them less dependent on agriculture for their livelihoods (see Chapter 12).

Chart #8

Reason for not returning to area of origin



CHAPTER 3

Plans to leave

While the vast majority of returnees (92 per cent) reported intending to remain in their current location, this represents a two percentage point decline compared to the December 2024 survey. This decrease is driven by returnees from Iran, who were six per centage points less likely than those from Pakistan to report plans to stay (88 per cent vs. 94 per cent). They were also four percentage points more likely to express intentions to move out of Afghanistan (six per cent vs. two per cent).

By contrast, returnees from Pakistan who arrived after April were more likely to report willingness to remain than those who arrived between January and April. This may be linked to the fact that they were slightly more likely to be living in their home (68 per cent compared to 65 per cent). Among returnees from Iran who intended to leave Afghanistan, 75 per cent said they would return to Iran, making it the most common intended destination.

Historical trends suggest that re-entry to Iran is likely to remain common. Returnees from Iran have reportedly been among the least likely to remain in Afghanistan: a 2021 study found that 36 per cent of returnees from Iran intended to re-enter the same country.[8] Although recent qualitative evidence is limited, past patterns indicate frequent cyclical movements between Iran and Afghanistan, driven by longstanding cross-border economic and social linkages, limited livelihood opportunities, and ongoing protection concerns within Afghanistan.[9] Given these dynamics, intentions to return to Iran may be underreported in post-return monitoring data, potentially due to fears that acknowledging such intentions could affect access to assistance.

Only two per cent of the total sample reported planning to move to another province within Afghanistan. For both Iran and Pakistan returnees, Kabul was the most frequently cited relocation destination. The second most common destination was Herat for Iran returnees and Nangarhar for Pakistan returnees.

8 *MMC, 'A spotlight on economic reintegration for Afghan returnees', MMC Asia 4Mi Snapshot, June 2021*

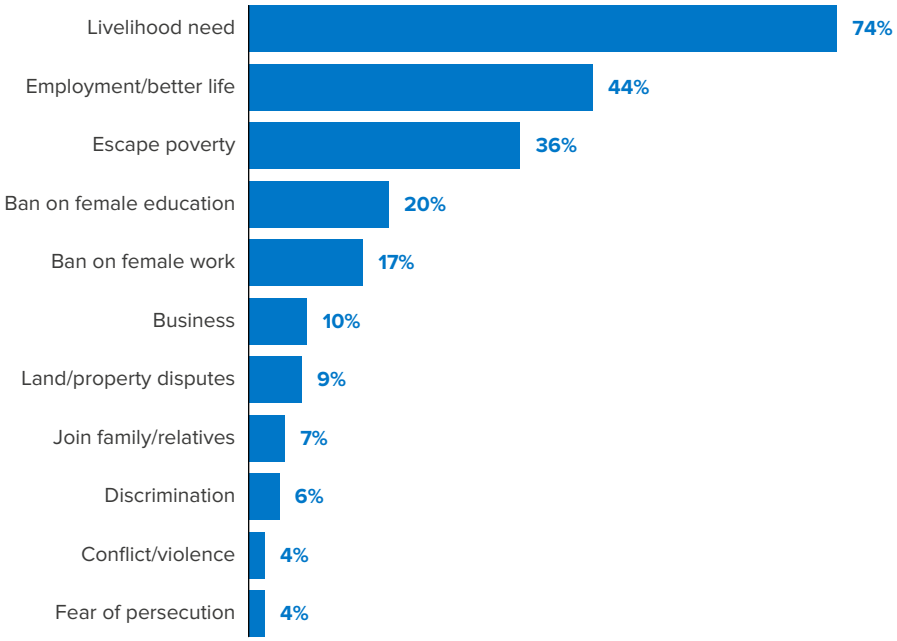
9 *Majidi, Nassim, 'From forced migration to forced returns in Afghanistan: Policy and program implications', Migration Policy Institute, 2017*

Only 11 per cent of returnees from Pakistan reported that some of their relatives or community members had gone back to Pakistan after arriving in Afghanistan. This represents a six percentage point decrease since the December 2024 survey, but remains seven percentage points higher than the July–September 2024 survey. The most cited reasons for return to Pakistan were economic, including livelihood opportunities (74 per cent), formal employment (44 per cent), and escaping poverty (36 per cent). Restrictions on female education and employment also featured prominently, cited by 20 per cent and 17 per cent of respondents respectively. This question was not asked of the Iran cohort, as the largest wave of arrivals occurred in June and July, one month before data collection. It will be included in subsequent survey rounds.

It is important to note that while many Afghans cite livelihood opportunities as their reason for leaving, protection needs must not be overlooked. Decisions to flee are often complex and many forcibly displaced people might feel too scared or uncomfortable to disclose their situation unless a safe environment is provided. UNHCR urges decision-makers to provide Afghans seeking international protection fair access and efficient asylum procedures, allowing applicants to fully explain their reasons for leaving, including any fears of persecution if compelled to return. UNHCR emphasises that returns should never occur where conditions remain unsafe and where people risk serious harm, in accordance with the principle of non-refoulement.

Chart #9

Reasons for returning to Pakistan



CHAPTER 4

Cash assistance

As part of its regional commitments under the Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees (SSAR), UNHCR provides cash assistance to Afghan refugees and those in refugee-like situations when they return to Afghanistan from Iran, Pakistan, Tajikistan, and other countries. This includes those returning under UNHCR's Voluntary Repatriation (VolRep) programme, spontaneous returns, and forced or coerced returns. Cash assistance is distributed through dedicated UNHCR Encashment Centres in Jalalabad, Kandahar, Kabul, Nimroz, Herat, and Kunduz, and is intended to cover transportation costs and support returnees in restarting their lives in Afghanistan.

Until April 2025, those returning under the VolRep programme received USD 375 per person, while those returning through other means received an amount aligned with the inter-agency assistance package: USD 35 per person for transportation and USD 156 per household to help cover immediate needs upon arrival. From 10 April 2025, UNHCR aligned both programmes, providing the USD 156 and USD 35 package to all returnees falling under UNHCR's mandate. This includes Afghans with refugee documentation in countries of asylum (PoR cards, *Amayesh* cards, *Gorizah* cards, UNHCR refugee cards, slip and asylum certificates), those assessed to face heightened protection needs upon return and the undocumented family members of these returnees.

Documented returnees generally reported receiving cash assistance upon arrival from UNHCR, while just under half of undocumented returnees (49 per cent) reported the same.

Fewer than half of returnees (41 per cent) reported that the cash grant was sufficient to meet their current needs. This represents a 21 percentage point drop since the December 2024 survey, but remains 38 percentage points higher than the July – September 2024 survey. In total, 41 per cent found the amount partially sufficient and 18 per cent considered it insufficient.

Female-headed households were 17 percentage points less likely to report that cash grants were sufficient compared to male-headed households (40 per cent to 23 per cent respectively), suggesting that women may face greater difficulties providing for their families. Returnees from Pakistan who arrived after 11 April were less likely to report that the grant met their needs, reflecting the impact of the reduced cash assistance amounts. This likely

also explains the higher levels of grant satisfaction reported by returnees from Iran: fewer of them were documented refugees and thus received the aligned assistance package rather than the reduced VolRep amount.

Table 5

Cash grant addressed immediate needs by respondent status

	Pakistan (Jan – 10th April)	Pakistan (April 11th – June)	Iran	Undocumented
No	9%	16%	10%	24%
Partially	42%	43%	34%	39%
Yes	49%	41%	56%	37%

Returnees reported that cash grants lasted for varying lengths of time. Close to one quarter of the sample (30 per cent) said the grant lasted less than one week, while 18 per cent reported that it lasted two to three months. Only three per cent indicated that the grant lasted more than three months. Female respondents were four percentage points more likely to report that cash grants lasted less than a week (34 per cent vs. 30 per cent).

CHART #10

Cash grant addressing immediate needs

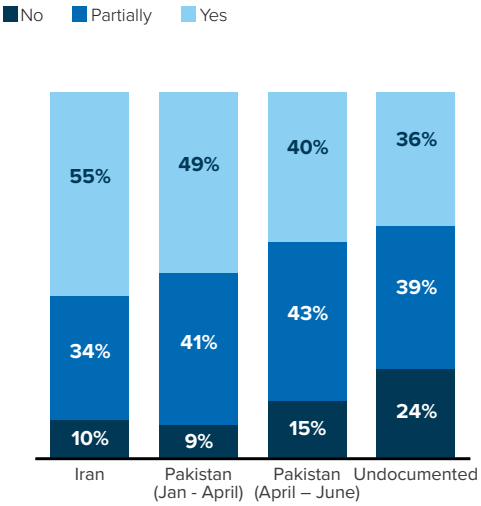
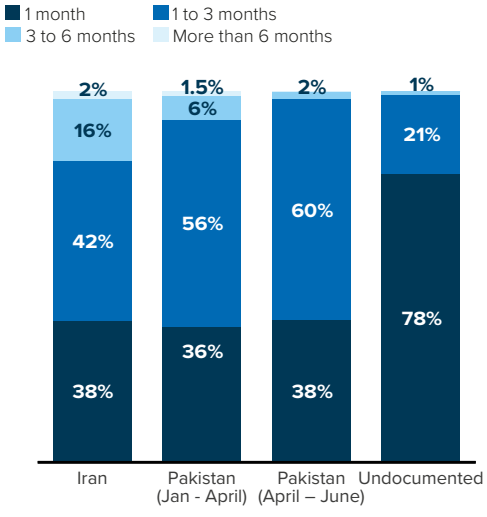


CHART #11

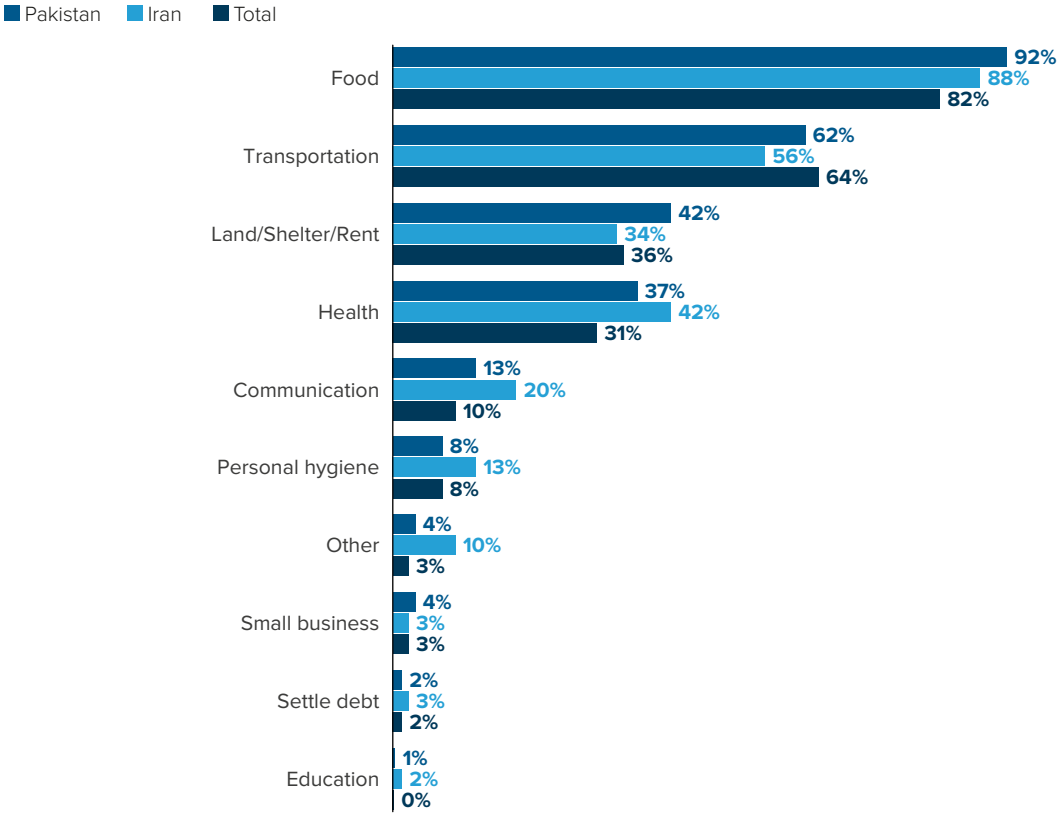
How long cash grant lasted



Consistent with the December 2024 survey, food remained the primary use of cash grants in August 2025, with 82 per cent of returnees reporting that they spent the grant on food. Spending on transportation rose to 65 per cent, a 20 percentage point increase since December 2024, while spending on shelter fell from 59 per cent to 35 per cent in August 2025.

Spending patterns were broadly similar between returnees from Pakistan and Iran. Returnees from Pakistan were eight percentage points more likely to spend on land, shelter and rent, reflecting the higher proportion of returnees living in rented accommodations (see Chapter 11). In contrast, returnees from Iran were more likely to spend grants on healthcare and communications (see Chart 12). By gender, patterns were broadly similar except for transportation: men were 19 percentage points more likely than women to report spending on transportation, likely reflecting the impact of movement restrictions by the de facto authorities on women.

Chart #12:
Use of cash assistance



CHAPTER 5

Access to education

As of 2025, an estimated 2.2 million girls remain excluded from education due to policies imposed by the de facto authorities since August 2021. The bans on women and girls attending post-primary and higher education have reversed nearly two decades of progress in educational attainment.[10] According to UN Women, as of August 2025, 78 per cent of young women in Afghanistan are not engaged in education, employment, or professional training – nearly four times higher than the rate among young men.[11]

Returnee families face particular barriers in accessing education. A 2024 report from Save the Children found that nearly two-thirds of children in families returned from Pakistan were out of school, with lack of documentation cited as the main obstacle to enrolment.[12] Publicly available data from Iran on enrolment rates remain limited, but UNHCR returnee interviews indicate that missing or mixed documentation hindered access to education for recent returnees.[13]

Findings from the August 2025 survey suggest modest improvements in enrolment since the December 2024 survey. Respondents were three percentage points more likely to report that boys had the same access to education as host communities (68 per cent vs. 65 per cent) and five percentage points more likely for girls (55 per cent vs. 50 per cent). As expected, given current restrictions on girls' education, returnees were nine percentage points more likely to report that girls did not have the same access as host children compared to boys (32 per cent vs. 20 per cent).

10 UNESCO, 'Afghanistan: Four years on, 2.2 million girls still banned from school', 2025

11 UNWOMEN, 'FAQs: What it's like to be a woman in Afghanistan in 2025', 2025

12 Save the Children, 'Afghanistan: 250,000 children in need of food, homes and education after returning from Pakistan,' 2024

13 UNHCR, Afghanistan Situation: Afghan Returns from Iran and Pakistan Emergency Update #3, 2025

While there were no notable differences between returnees from Iran and Pakistan overall, differences emerged among returnees from Pakistan before and after April 2025. Among post-April arrivals, 28 per cent reported boys had less access than host community peers, compared to 17 per cent among pre-April arrivals. A similar 12 percentage point gap was observed for girls'. This likely reflects different settlement patterns: post-April returnees were less likely to settle in Nangarhar, a province where disparities in educational access are less pronounced (six per cent for boys and 20 per cent for girls).

Table 6

Proportion of returnees reporting that children do not have same access to education as host commuity by respondent status

	Pakistan (Jan – 10th April)	Pakistan (April 11th – June)	Iran	Undocumented
Boys	17%	28%	20%	14%
Girls	24%	36%	28%	28%

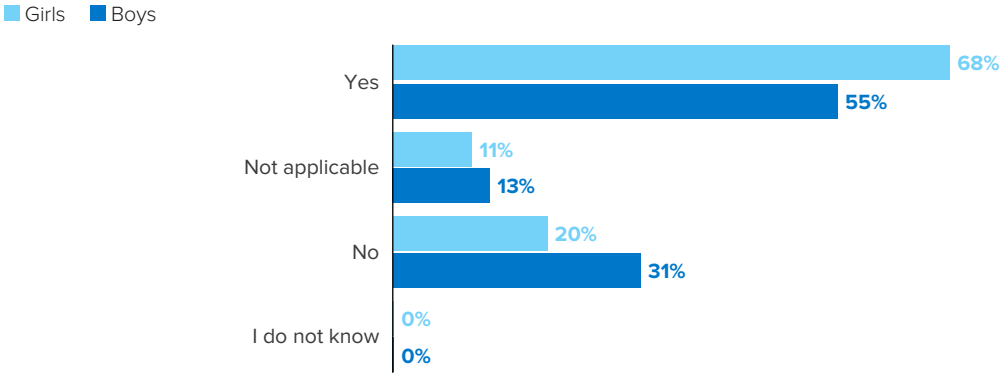
At the provincial level, disparities in access to education were more pronounced. Returnees in Helmand (45 per cent), Farah (37 per cent), and Kandahar (32 per cent) were most likely to report that their sons could not access education on par with the host community, with Farah replacing Kunduz, which had been in the top three in 2024. For girls, the largest gaps were in Helmand (54 per cent), Laghman (48 per cent), and Kandahar (47 per cent), reflecting provinces typically associated with more conservative attitudes towards women and girls.

© UNHCR/Oxygen Media Empire

At the border crossing point in Torkham, UNHCR receives and assists Afghans being returned from Pakistan.

Chart #13

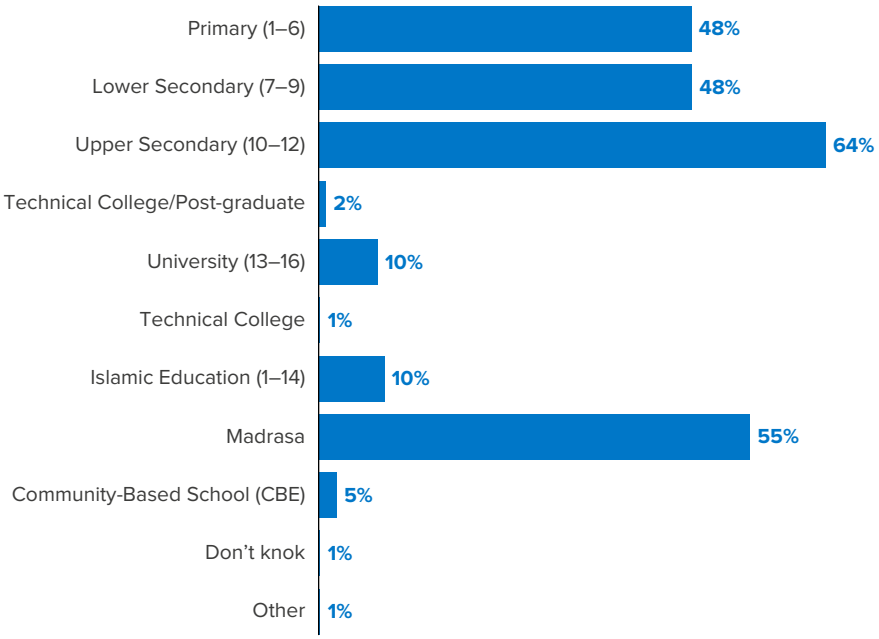
Can your children access the same schools and education facilities as the host community?



A variety of educational institutions are reported to be available in returnee locations (see Chart #14). However, many returnee children remain excluded due to persistent structural barriers such as lack of documentation, financial hardship, and gender-based restrictions.

Chart #14

What type of school is open in your area/ community/ village?



Among returnee households with children, 71 per cent reported that no girls in the family were attending school, compared to 51 per cent for boys. Returnees from Pakistan were more likely to report non-attendance for both boys and girls: 68 per cent of returnee households from Pakistan reported no boys attending school, compared to 51 per cent for those from Iran. For girls, the gap was similar, with 79 per cent of returnees from Pakistan, reporting no girls in school compared to 67 per cent among those from Iran.

A notable difference also emerged among returnees from Pakistan based on timing: 71 per cent of pre-April returnees reported no boys attending school, compared to 48 per cent of post-April returnees. This gap may reflect the timing of return, as many arrivals coincided with an ongoing school term, limiting children's ability to enrol.

Table 7

Proportion of returnees reporting no children enrolled in education by gender of child and respondent status

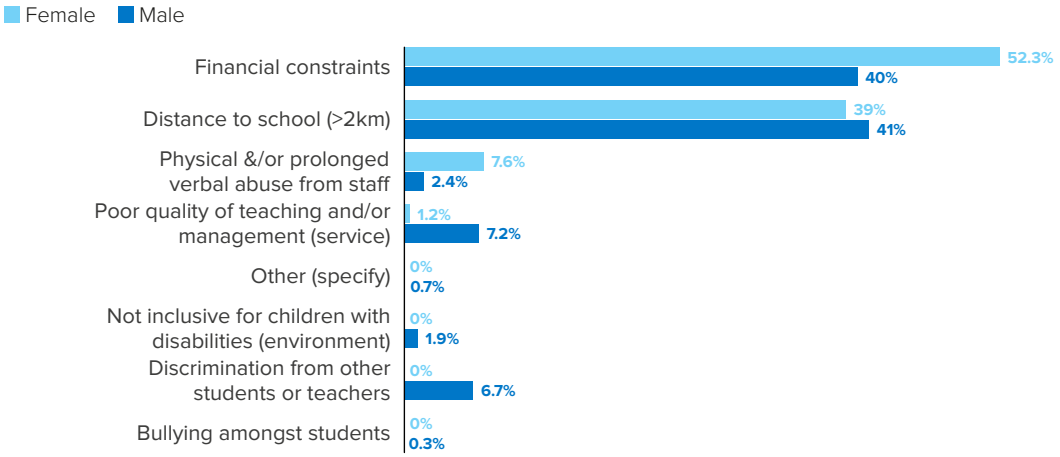
	Pakistan (Jan – 10th April)	Pakistan (April 11th – June)	Iran	Undocumented
Boys	48%	71%	51%	33%
Girls	66%	81%	67%	62%

Among returnees enrolled in education, the majority reported no challenges in attendance, with 16 per cent indicating difficulties for both boys and girls. Returnees from Iran were more likely to report such challenges, with access issues for both boys and girls around 10 percentage points higher than for other returnees.

The primary challenge to educational access for both boys and girls was financial constraints, cited by 40 per cent of households reporting difficulties for boys and 53 per cent of those reporting challenges for girls. For families with enrolled girls, distance to school emerged as the second most significant barrier, reported by 39 per cent of households (see Chart #15).

Chart #15

Primary barriers once enrolled[14]



For households that did not have all their children enrolled in school, gender was a significant factor in the barriers faced (see Chart #16). For girls, the ban on education was cited by 37 per cent of returnees whose daughters were not in school, an increase of 12 percentage points from the December 2024 survey. The second most common barrier was financial, with 16 per cent of households with unenrolled girls reporting they could not cover the cost of transportation and school supplies.

For boys, the primary barrier was also economic: 34 per cent of households could not cover basic school costs, while another 16 per cent reported that their son had to work to support the family. These results are consistent with previous post-return surveys. Other barriers included the lack of *Tazkira* or identification documents although this factor has declined by four percentage points compared to the December 2024 survey, falling from seven to three per cent for boys and from seven to two per cent for girls.

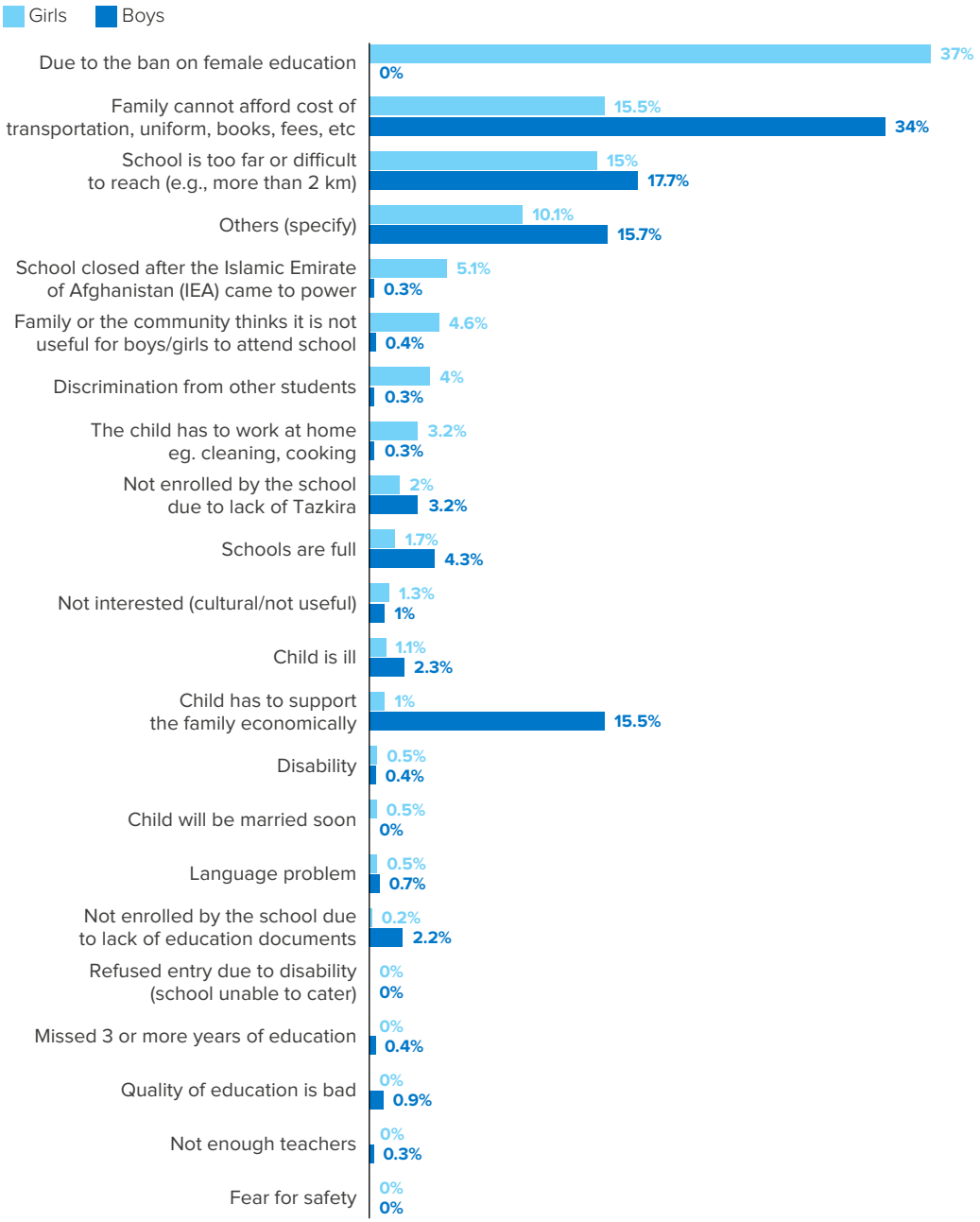
Comparing returnees from Pakistan and Iran, barriers to boys' education were broadly similar, but girls faced different challenges. Returnees from Pakistan were 16 percentage points less likely than those from Iran to cite the ban on education as a barrier (28 per cent vs. 44 per cent). Instead, they were more likely to report transportation and school-related costs as obstacles (20 per cent vs. 11 per cent). This was particularly true for returnees from Pakistan arriving after April 2025, who were the most likely to highlight economic constraints affecting both boys' and girls' enrolment.

14 These refer to challenges experienced by children attending school

Other reasons for non-enrolment included arriving in the return location mid-term, which required waiting until the next school year, and concerns about the safety of children traveling to school, including the risk of accidents along the long journey.

Chart #16

Top 10 barriers to enrolment



CHAPTER 6

Access to healthcare

2025 reports from the World Health Organization (WHO) show that Afghanistan continues to face major public health challenges, driven by a fragile health system and poor service coverage in rural and remote areas. High rates of communicable disease outbreaks, maternal and child health complications, and malnutrition all contribute significantly to morbidity and mortality.[15] These challenges have been exacerbated by mass returns, aid cuts (which have worsened the accessibility and functionality of health facilities in the country)[16] and restrictions on women's work (which have reduced the pool of available and qualified health professionals).[17] Economic hardships also forces many households to delay seeking care until conditions become critical, worsening health outcomes and increasing reliance on emergency care services.[18]

In August 2025, 11 per cent of returnees reported that no medical facility was available in their community, a slight decline from previous periods (12-13 per cent). Returnees from Iran were most likely to report access, with 91 per cent indicating a facility was available, while returnees from Pakistan who arrived after April were the least likely to report access. Respondents with disabilities faced additional barriers: 16 per cent reported no access to a health facility, compared to 10 per cent of respondents without disabilities.

Table 8

Access to a medical centre by respondent status

	Pakistan (Jan – 10th April)	Pakistan (April 11th – June)	Iran	Undocumented
I don't know	0%	0%	1%	0%
No	7%	14%	8%	10%
Yes	93%	86%	91%	90%

15 *WHO, 'Public Health Situation Analysis – Afghanistan', 2025*

16 *The Washington Post, 'Hospitals struggle, hunger surges in Afghanistan amid US aid cuts', 2025.*

17 *Reuters, 'WHO asks Taliban to lift female aid worker restrictions following earthquakes', 2025.*

18 *MSF, 'Pressure grows on hospitals in Afghanistan, as paediatric patient numbers rise', 2025.*

Geographic disparities were pronounced: over 30 per cent of returnees in Badghis, Faryab, Maidan Wardak and Uruzgan provinces reported no access, compared to no returnees in Daikundi, Ghor, Kapisa and Panjsher provinces.

CHART #17

Is there are a medical facility in your community?

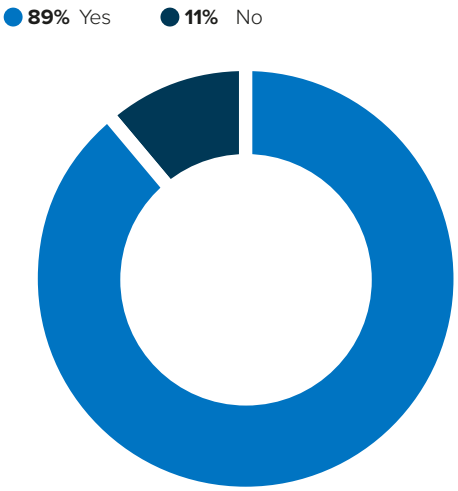
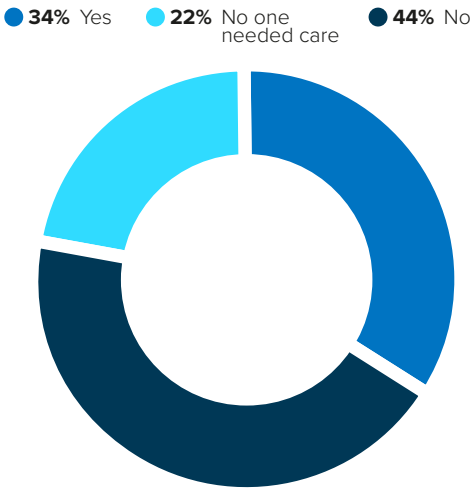


CHART #18

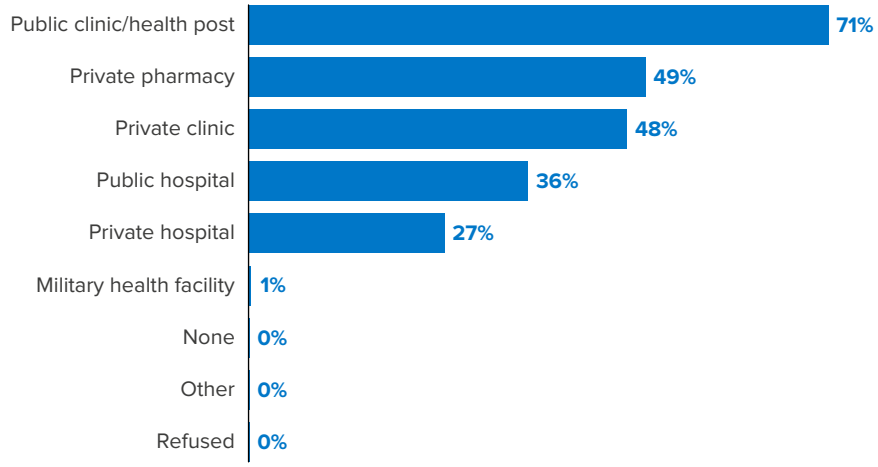
Did anyone in your household need care but could not access it?



In the past six months, 34 per cent of households reported that one or more members needed medical attention but were unable to access it. This is an increase of four percentage points compared to the July–September 2024 survey. Female returnees were slightly more likely than male returnees to report difficulties in accessing healthcare (38 per cent vs. 36 per cent). Among reported cases where a household member could not access a medical facility, 58 per cent involved women, likely reflecting the impact of *mahram* requirements and movement restrictions on women's and girls' access to healthcare across Afghanistan. Respondents with disabilities also faced significantly greater challenges: 51 per cent reported that a household member was unable to receive medical care when needed, compared to 28 per cent of those without disabilities.

Chart #19

Type of available health facility



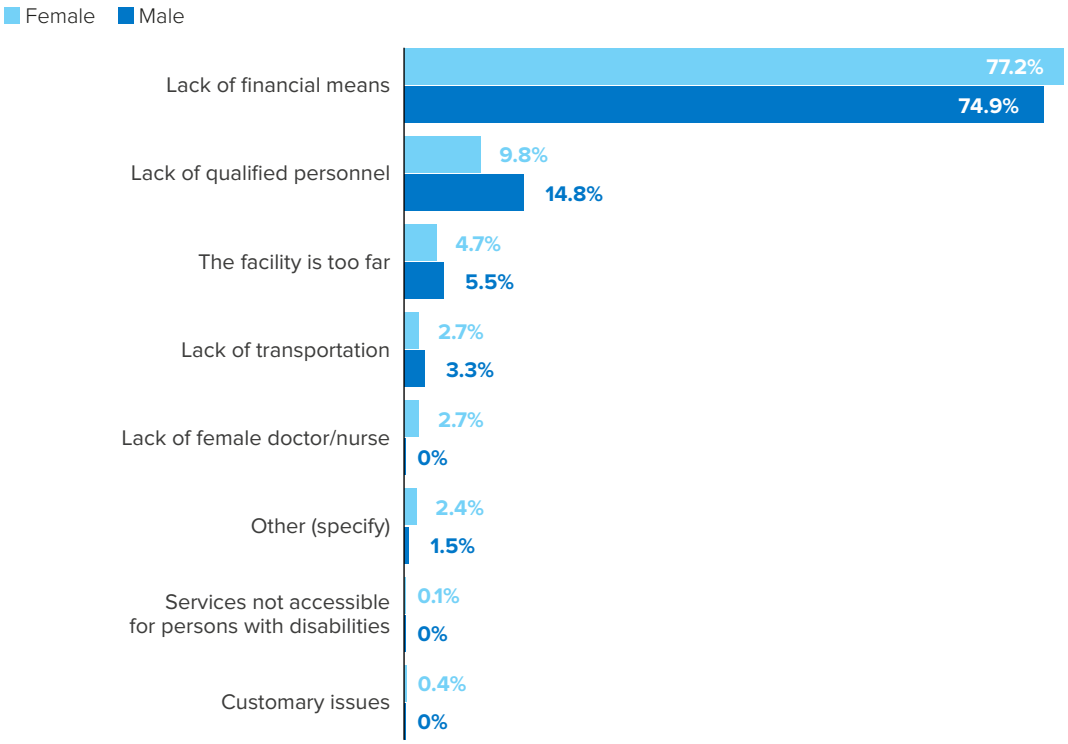
Most households (80 per cent) reported that it took less than one hour to reach the nearest medical facility. Travel times of one to three hours were reported by 16 per cent, while 3 per cent needed more than three hours – an increase of one percentage point from the December 2024 survey. Returnees from Iran generally had shorter travel times, with 86 per cent able to reach a facility within one hour compared to 80 per cent of returnees from Pakistan. Among the latter, those arriving after April were less likely to report short travel times (80 per cent) than earlier arrivals (88 per cent), suggesting that more recent returnee are settling in more remote locations. Distance posed a particular challenge in Daikundi, a remote province, where 23 per cent of returnees reported travel times to exceeding three hours. No significant differences were observed between female and male returnees in reported travel times.

The primary barrier to accessing healthcare for both male and female returnees is financial constraints, cited by more than three-quarters of households. Returnees from Pakistan arriving after April were the least likely to report financial challenges and were 13 percentage points more likely than pre-April arrivals to cite a lack of qualified personnel as a barrier to men's health access (26 per cent vs.13 per cent). This pattern was less evident for women, suggesting that more recent returnees from Pakistan are settling in areas with better access to women's health services.

Other challenges include long distances to facilities, a shortage of qualified medical personnel or insufficient medicines in health centres. Female-specific barriers, such as the lack of female medical staff, were reported by only three per cent of households; however, these may be underreported due to women's reluctance to disclose such issues in the Afghan context.

Chart #20:

Reasons for inability to access health services



CHAPTER 7

Water and sanitation

In 2025, UNICEF reported that nearly one third of Afghanistan's population (31 per cent) lacks access to safe drinking water.[19] In Kabul, groundwater depletion is particularly severe, with aquifer levels dropping by almost 30 metres over the past decade, raising concerns that these sources could be exhausted by 2030.[20] Hygiene conditions remain critical, as 42 per cent of Afghans lack access to basic hygiene services, highlighting persistent water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) challenges.[21]

Returnees are particularly vulnerable, especially upon arrival, when they often face overcrowded reception centres with inadequate facilities. In these conditions, limited access to clean water and sanitation increases the risk of waterborne diseases.[22] In 2025, 27 per cent of returnees reported insufficient water to meet daily needs for drinking, hygiene, cooking, and cleaning, representing an increase of eight percentage points since the December 2024 survey. Differences across groups were evident: returnees from Pakistan were worse off, with only 69 per cent reporting adequate water access compared to 82 per cent of returnees from Iran, likely reflecting differences in settlement locations.

No significant gender-based disparities were observed. However, returnees with a disability were nine percentage points more likely to report insufficient water, likely due to mobility challenges, as they were more dependent on public water distribution or open sources and seven percentage points less likely to have piped water in their homes.

19 UNICEF, 'Safe Water on their Doorstep', May 2025.
20 Mercy Corps, 'Kabul's Water Crisis: An Inflection Point for Action', April 2025.
21 UNICEF, 'Safe Water on their Doorstep', May 2025.
22 WHO, Afghanistan Returnees Response: Health Situation Report', July 2025.

Table 9:
Access to sufficient water by respondent status

	Pakistan (Jan – 10th April)	Pakistan (April 11th – June)	Iran	Undocumented
No	32%	31%	18%	26%
Yes	68%	69%	82%	74%

Access to sanitation was similarly constrained. Just 67 per cent of returnees reported having access to latrines, handwashing, and sanitation facilities, representing a 16 percentage point decline since the December 2024 survey. Returnees from Pakistan again reported lower access (69 per cent) compared to those from Iran (82 per cent).

Table 10:
Access to latrines, handwashing and sanitation by respondent status

	Pakistan (Jan – 10th April)	Pakistan (April 11th – June)	Iran	Undocumented
No	35%	38%	19%	31%
Yes	65%	62%	81%	69%

Gender differences in access to sanitation were minimal, but people with disabilities had significantly less access, with a 12 percentage point gap compared to those without disabilities (58 per cent vs. 70 per cent). 80 per cent of returnees reported access to a single private latrine. 22 per cent of households reported using a shared latrine. Female returnees were considerably more likely to report using a shared latrine (32 per cent) than male returnees (18 per cent), creating potential protection concerns.

Over half of assessed returnees reported protected wells as their primary source of water, making it the most commonly used source, mirroring findings from 2024. Other frequently cited sources included public taps or standpipes (11 per cent) and piped water (11 per cent). Returnees from Iran were more likely to report access to private piped water than returnees from Pakistan (15 per cent vs. nine per cent respectively), while female returnees were nine percentage points more likely to rely on public taps as their primary water source than male returnees (20 per cent vs. nine per cent).

CHART #21:
Access to water

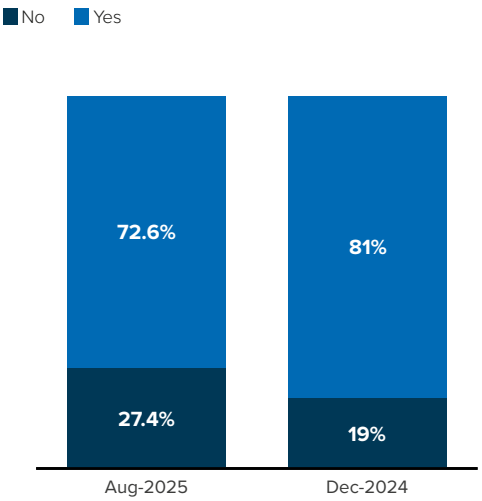
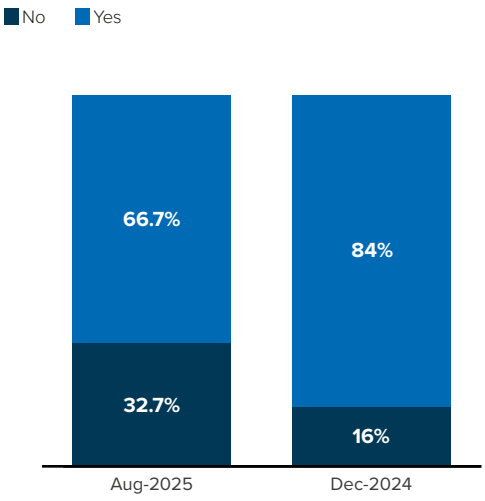
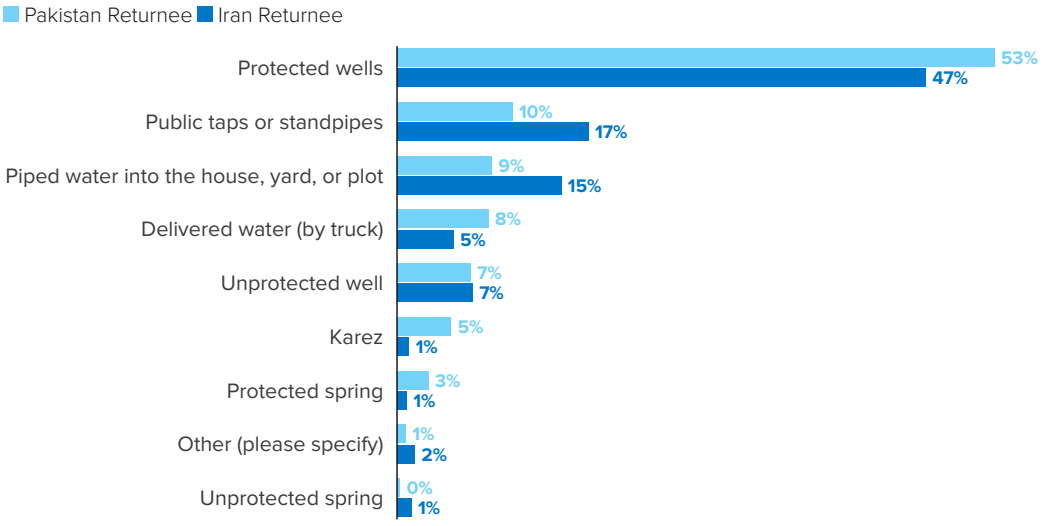


CHART #22:
Access to handwashing and sanitation



Across the sample, nine per cent of returnees reported relying on unprotected water sources, consistent with 2024. Reliance on unsafe water sources was highest in Maidan Wardak (24 per cent), Kunduz (17 per cent) and Baghlan (16 per cent), underscoring regional disparities in access to safe drinking water.

Chart #23:
Sources of water



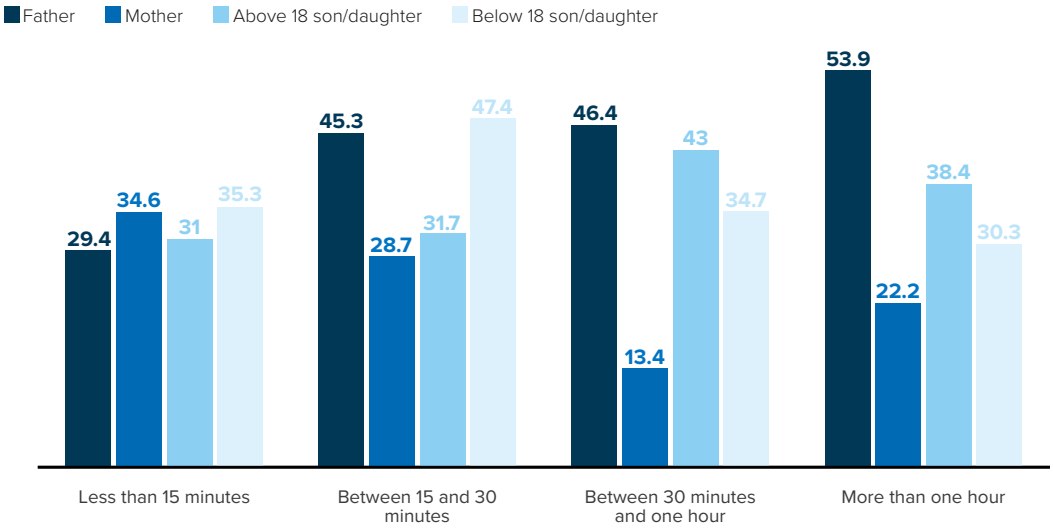
For most returnees (83 per cent), collecting water is not a lengthy activity, taking less than 15 minutes, including travel and waiting time. One per cent of returnees reported that collecting water took over one hour. For returnees with a disability, water collection was more arduous: only 76 per cent reported it took under 15 minutes, compared to 85 per cent of those without a disability. Moreover, three per cent of respondents with a disability spent over an hour collecting water, compared to just one per cent of those without disabilities.

Responsibility for collecting water is shared evenly within households, with fathers, mothers, and children under 18 all commonly reporting that they handle the task. However, as distance to the water source increases, fathers become more likely to collect water, reflecting both security risks and restrictions on women's movement. Returnees from Pakistan who arrived before April were the most likely to report safety and security concerns when accessing water (37 per cent). This compares to 18 per cent of those returning after April, and just seven per cent of returnees from Iran.

The most common concerns were fear of walking at night (39 per cent) and threats from wild animals or stray dogs (34 per cent). Fears of walking at night were particularly pronounced among returnees from Pakistan, who cited this in over half of instances compared to one quarter of returnees from Iran. Among those citing "other" concerns, the most frequent issue was hazardous road conditions on the way to the water point.

Chart #24:

Distance to water and person fetching water



figures are percentages

CHAPTER 8

Food security

As of April 2025, the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) estimated that 12.6 million people in Afghanistan were facing at least crisis levels of food insecurity (IPC Phase 3 or above), representing roughly 27 per cent of the total population. A slight improvement is expected by October, with about 21 per cent projected to remain in these conditions.[23] Malnutrition is also a major concern, with 3.5 million children projected to experience acute malnutrition between June 2024 and May 2025[24] Food security challenges are driven by climate shocks, ongoing economic instability, and funding shortfalls.[25]

Findings from the survey also reflect persistent food insecurity, with 63 per cent of returnees reporting inadequate access to food – a six-percentage point decrease compared to the December 2024 survey. Returnees from Pakistan reported particularly poor access, with only 35 per cent indicating adequate food access, compared to 44 per cent among returnees from Iran. Among returnees from Pakistan, earlier returns (pre-April) were seven percentage points more likely to report inadequate food access than post-April returns.

Table 11:
Sufficient access to food by respondent status

	Pakistan (Jan – 10th April)	Pakistan (April 11th – June)	Iran	Undocumented
No	70%	63%	55%	64%
Yes	29%	36%	44%	34%
Other	1%	1%	1%	2%

23 IPC, 'Afghanistan: Acute Food Insecurity Situation for March - April 2025 and Projection for May - October 2025', 2025

24 Save the Children, 'Afghanistan: One in Five Children Facing Crisis Levels of Hunger as Funding Cuts Reduce Food Aid', 2025

25 World Bank, 'Afghanistan Development Update', 2025

Disparities were especially pronounced for respondents with a disability. While 58 per cent of those without a disability reported inadequate food access, this rose to 69 per cent among those with a disability, illustrating the persistent deficits faced by this group, as already observed in previous sections. Provincially, food insecurity was most severe in Badghis (94 per cent), Ghor (94 per cent), and Daikundi (90 per cent).

> *"We are afraid... since they have banned women, and they don't allow women to go to the markets."*

Over three-quarters (82 per cent) of returnees reported that they or a household member had skipped a meal due to food shortages, a seven percentage point increase since the December 2024 survey. This was more likely among returnees from Pakistan than those from Iran, and most pronounced among returnees from Pakistan arriving before April (88 per cent reported skipped meals). Returnees in female-headed households were slightly more likely to report skipping meals than those in male-headed households (88 per cent vs. 81 per cent), highlighting potentially higher vulnerability among these families. Nearly all households cited joblessness or a lack of means to buy food as the primary reason for missing meals.

CHART #25:
Access to food

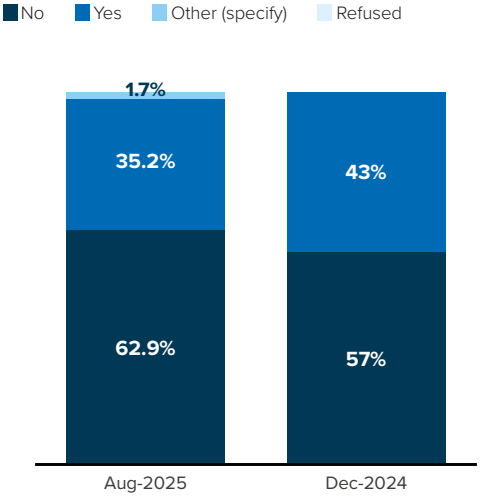
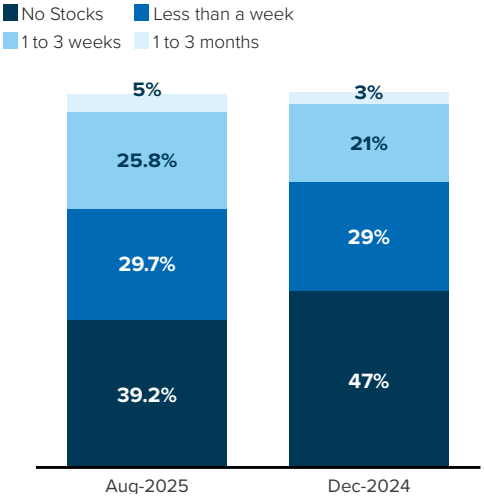


CHART #26:
Duration of food stocks



The Reduced Coping Strategy Index results are concerning. 60 per cent of returnee households fall into the "high" usage category, indicating frequent reliance on severe food-coping strategies, such as adults reducing their own intake during shortages. Only two per cent of households scored "low". Clear differences emerge between returnees from Iran and Pakistan: 43 per cent of those returning from Iran fall into the high category, compared to 62 per cent from Pakistan. Among the latter, earlier arrivals (pre-April) report the most severe conditions, with 73 per cent scoring in the high category, compared to 61 per cent among those who arrived after April. Further highlighting disparities in food access, returnees from Iran eat more meals on average than returnees from Pakistan, at 2.7 meals a day compared to just over 2 meals per day, respectively.

Table 12

RCSI category by respondent status

	Pakistan (Jan – 10th April)	Pakistan (April 11th – June)	Iran	Undocumented
High	73%	61%	43%	52%
Medium	25%	37%	53%	45%
Low	2%	1%	5%	3%

Looking at food stocks, 39 per cent or returnees reported having no food reserves, a nine percentage point decrease from the December 2024 survey. Female-headed households were significantly more likely to report this, at 76 per cent compared to 36 per cent of male-headed households, highlighting a concerning food security outlook for women.

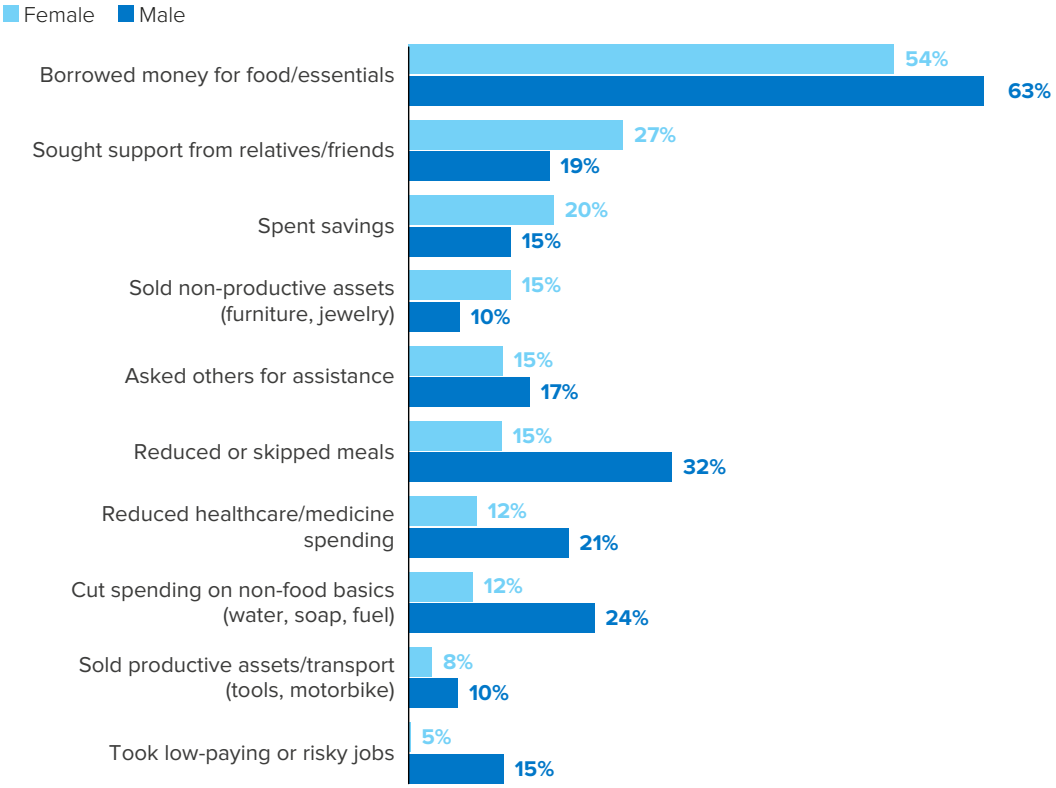
For households with some food reserves, 30 per cent reported that they would last less than a week, while 26 per cent reported that they would last up to three weeks. Only five per cent of returnee households had food stock which would last up to three months. The overall food security situation remains critical although returnees show a slight improvement in their ability to stretch food stocks compared to the December 2024 survey (see Chart #26). As in the December 2024 survey, purchasing food remains the primary reason for returnees taking on debt.

Most returnees (85 per cent) reported having access to a market that met their household needs. While there were no major differences between returnee groups, significant dispar-

ities were observed between men and women: male-headed households were more likely to report access (87 per cent) than female-headed households (71 per cent), again highlighting women's heightened socioeconomic vulnerability. While only two per cent of female returnees reported that movement restrictions limited their market access, it is believed that such issues might be underreported out of fear.

Chart #27:

Common coping strategies (last seven days)



CHAPTER 9

Access to housing

In 2025, mass returns, combined with existing structural challenges and recurrent natural disasters, placed heavy pressure on housing and shelter across Afghanistan. Shelter conditions have worsened due to funding cuts across the aid sector. The powerful earthquake that struck eastern Afghanistan in August 2025, claiming more than 2,200 lives and destroying an estimated 6,700 homes, is the latest example of the devastating destruction faced by the people of Afghanistan.[26]

Three-quarters of returnees live in substandard mud houses although this was 10 percentage points more prevalent among returnees from Pakistan than Iran (68 per cent and 78 per cent respectively), making this the most common type of shelter and marking a four percentage point increase since the December 2024 survey. About 13 per cent live in concrete housing, which is more common among returnees from Iran (26 per cent) than Pakistan (11 per cent). Less common shelter types include tents, makeshift shelters (five per cent) and unfinished houses (four per cent). Recent returns from Pakistan (post-April) are the most likely to be sheltered in tents (six per cent) compared to four percent of pre-April returns and only one per cent of returns from Iran.

26 UNICEF, 'UNICEF Afghanistan Earthquake Response: The First Seven Days', September 2025

© UNHCR/Oxygen Empire Media Production

Ezatullah recently returned to Afghanistan after spending over four decades in Pakistan. He arrived at the Encashment Centre with his children, having left everything behind. Here, with UNHCR's support, he is receiving urgent help — cash assistance, health consultations, mine risk education, and information on how to start over.

Table 13

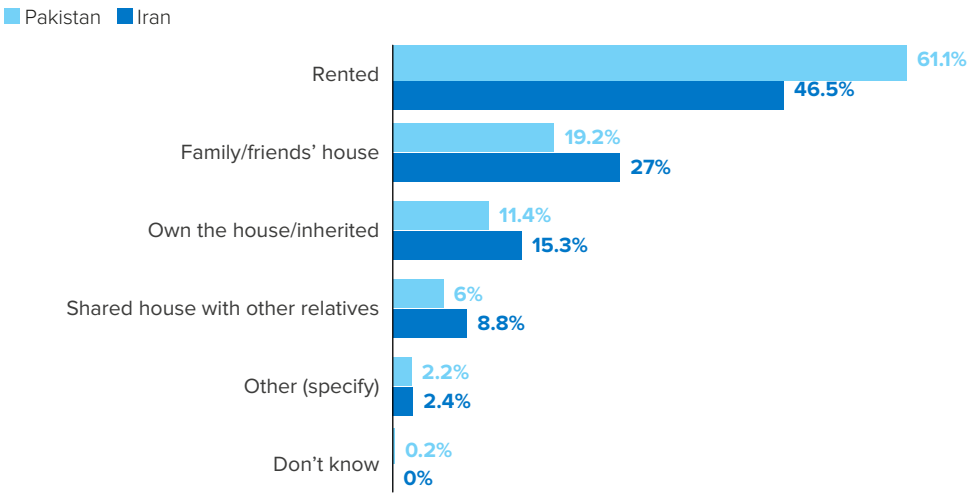
Type of housing by respondent status

Type of housing	Pakistan (Jan – 10th April)	Pakistan (April 11th – June)	Iran	Undocumented
Family/friends' house	23%	19%	27%	15%
Own the house/ inherited	19%	11%	15%	41%
Rented	51%	62%	46%	39%
Shared house with other relatives	6%	6%	9%	4%
Other	1%	2%	2%	0%

Nearly half of returnees (49 per cent) reside in rented housing, a pattern more prevalent among returnees from Pakistan (61 per cent) than those from Iran (46 per cent). In contrast, returnees from Iran are more likely to own or inherit their home (15 per cent) or stay with friends or family (27 per cent), compared with 11 per cent and 19 per cent, respectively, among returnees from Pakistan. These figures suggest that returnees from Iran may have relatively better access to secure and durable shelter. Recent arrivals from Pakistan (post-April) are the most likely cohort to be renting (62 per cent). Female-headed households are significantly less likely to own or inherent a home than male-headed households (five percent compared to 27 per cent respectively) and far more likely to rent, suggesting higher tenure insecurity for these households.

Chart #28

Living arrangement by return location

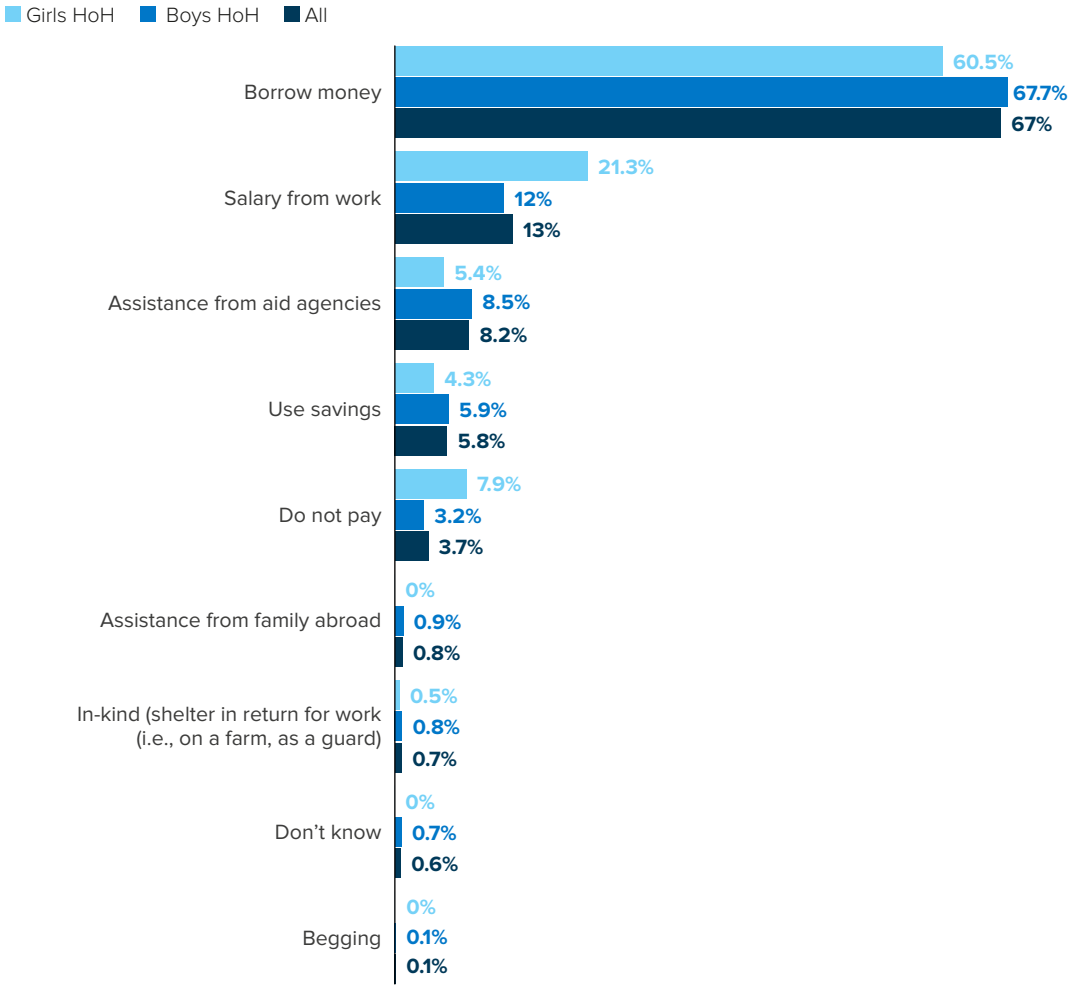


> *"I can't afford rent, but I'm forced to pay, [there is] no other option."*

For returnees living in rented housing, 74 per cent reported that they were unable to afford rent – marking a 13 percentage point increase from the December 2024 survey. Returnees in female-headed households were slightly more likely to report this than male-headed households (by seven percentage points), while returnees from Pakistan were eight percentage points more likely to report challenges paying compared to returnees from Iran. Male-headed households were more likely than female-headed households to report borrowing money for rent (68 per cent compared to 61 per cent), while female-headed households were more likely to be unable to pay at all (eight per cent to three per cent). Differences between returnee groups were insignificant.

Chart #29

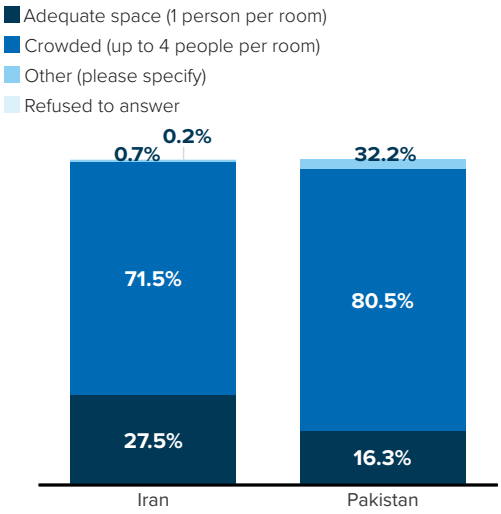
How do you pay the rent?



Inadequate living space remains a significant issue, with 80 per cent of returnees reporting crowded living conditions, accommodating up to four people per room – an increase of 27 percentage points since the December 2024 survey. Living conditions tended to be more crowded for female-headed households and returnees from Pakistan. Returnees living in concrete housing, who are more often from Iran, were more likely to report adequate space (one person per room), with 26 per cent of returnees in concrete housing reporting this compared to 18 per cent of returnees living in substandard mud dwellings.

Chart #30

Adequacy of living space by return location



© UNHCR/Oxygen Empire Media Production

Hadigul is carrying her younger sisters, Sabria and Freshta, as they travel together after recently returning to Afghanistan. Despite the hardships they've faced, the close-knit family shows resilience and strength as they move forward.

CHAPTER 10

Skills and education

Since August 2021, the educational landscape for women and girls in Afghanistan has progressively deteriorated, with most women effectively excluded from formal learning. Women are banned from universities and girls' secondary schools have been closed. UNICEF estimates that 3.7 million children are out of school, with 60 per cent of these being girls.[27] UN Women also estimate that nearly 78 per cent of young Afghan women are not in education, employment, or training – four times the rate for young men.[28]

Returned Afghans face additional challenges upon return, including disrupted educational journeys while in displacement in Pakistan and Iran. Among assessed returnees, just over half (57 per cent) reported having some form of formal education, while 88 per cent possessed at least one marketable skill, an increase of seven percentage points since the December 2024 survey. The increase is partly due to the inclusion of returnees from Iran, who show higher education levels than those from Pakistan, reflecting disparities in access to education for Afghan refugees.[29]

Only 28 per cent of returnees from Iran reported having no formal education, compared with 54 per cent of returnees from Pakistan. 21 per cent of returnees from Iran had completed upper-secondary education, compared with just eight per cent of those returning from Pakistan. The gap is even more striking for women, with 25 per cent of female returnees from Iran reporting an upper-secondary education compared with only four per cent of those from Pakistan.

Examining the formal education levels of returnees, the following patterns emerge for men and women:

- Primary education: 21 per cent female, 16 per cent male
- Lower secondary: nine per cent female, 14 per cent male

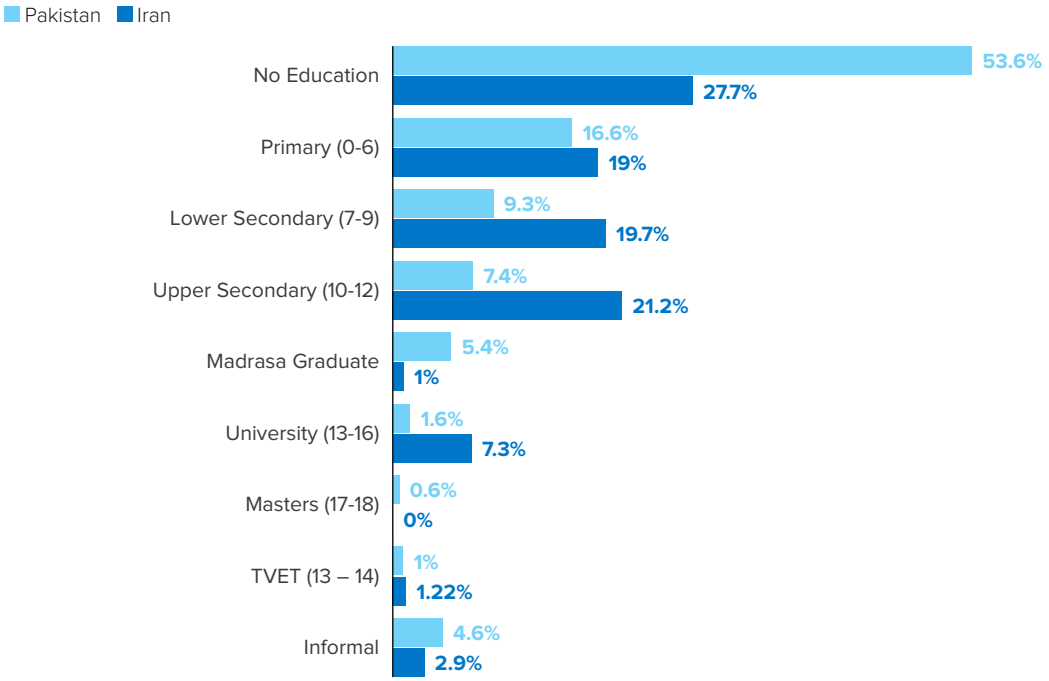
27 UNICEF, 'Education', 2025

28 UNWOMEN, 'FAQs: What it's like to be a woman in Afghanistan in 2025', 2025

29 Due to recent Iranian policy, Afghan refugees are no longer entitled to access education in Iran.

- Upper secondary: 14 per cent female, 14 per cent male
- Madrassa graduate: five per cent female, six per cent male
- University degree: four per cent female, two per cent male.

Chart #31:
Education level by returnee group

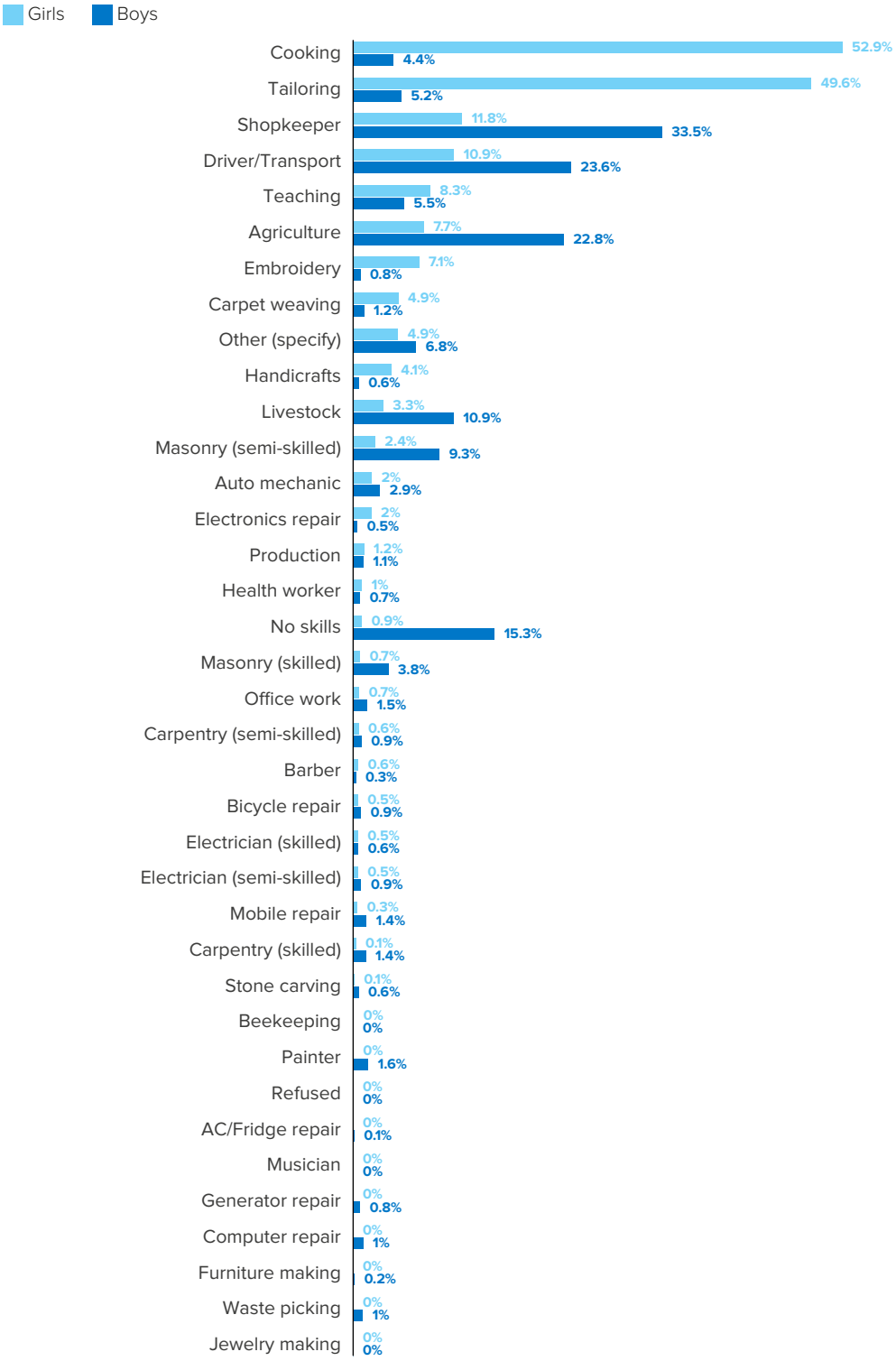


The distribution of skills among returnees reflects traditional gender roles in Afghan society. As in the December 2024 survey, male returnees were most likely to possess skills in physically demanding or public-facing jobs, such as shopkeeping, transportation/driving, livestock management, and agriculture. Female returnees reported skills in more indoor-based activities, including tailoring, cooking, and embroidery.

The number of returnees reporting marketable skills is increasing, with only 49 per cent in the July – September 2024 survey having at least one skill, 81 per cent in the December 2024 survey, and now 88 per cent in the August 2025 survey. However, disparities remain: older returnees (60+) were the most likely to lack skills (22 per cent) compared to 11 per cent of returnees among those aged between 18 and 30. Kabul had the highest proportion of unskilled people (18 per cent). While skill distributions were generally similar between returnee groups, female returnees from Pakistan were more likely to possess “home-based” skills.

Chart #32:

Skills by returnee group



CHAPTER 11

Livelihoods and financial situation

Despite the recent stabilisation of the Afghan economy and modest growth in 2024, poverty remains widespread, with nearly half of the population living below the poverty line and almost 40 per cent facing severe food insecurity.[30] Employment opportunities are limited and highly unequal, creating particular challenges for women and young people. By 2023, nearly a quarter of Afghan youth aged 15-29 were unemployed. Unemployment among young women has increased sevenfold since 2020, with women now representing over half of all unemployed youth.[31]

Displaced communities face compounded vulnerabilities as many arrive with weakened support networks and limited resources, making it harder to secure stable livelihoods in an already strained labour market. Among youth, the pressure is even greater: Afghanistan's labour force must absorb an estimated additional 1.7 million young workers by 2030.[32]

For women, restrictions on secondary education and formal employment have forced many into low-paid, home-based work, widening the gender earnings gap and reinforcing cycles of economic insecurity. Livelihoods in Afghanistan are shaped not only by macroeconomic factors but also by structural inequalities based on age, gender, and experience of displacement.

Livelihoods and jobs

Returnees from Iran were less likely to report earning an income, with only 40 per cent reporting compared to 62 per cent of returnees from Pakistan. This difference may reflect greater support from family and social networks among those returning from Iran.

30 World Bank, 'Afghanistan Welfare Monitoring Survey (AWMS) – Round 3,' 2023

31 · World Bank, 'Afghanistan Employment Policy Note: A Focus on Youth, Women, and Employment Support Programs,' 2025

32 World Bank update World Bank, Afghanistan Development Update – April 2025 – Unlocking Youth Potential For Resilience and Economic Recovery

Timing of return also matters: returnees from Pakistan who arrived between January and April were far more likely to report earning an income (70 per cent) compared to those arriving after April (55 per cent). This likely reflects differences in reintegration time and access to local labour markets, as early returnees had more time to establish livelihoods or find temporary work.

Table 14:

Do you have an income?

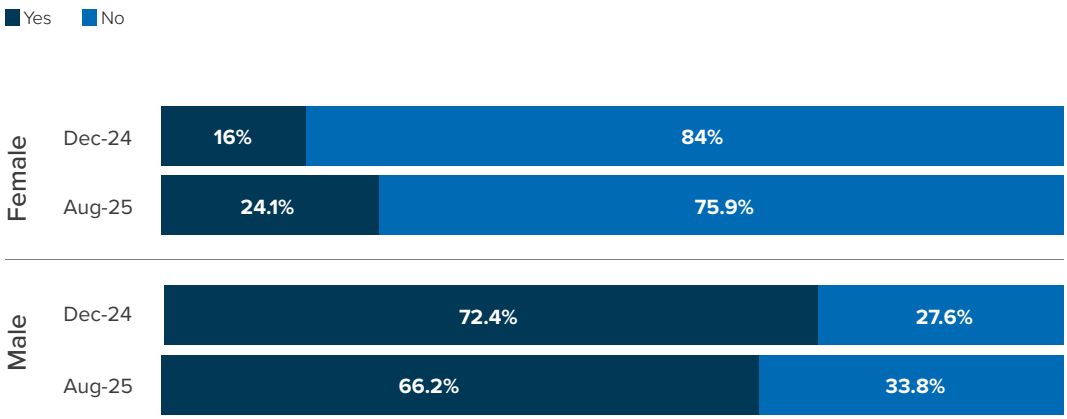
	Pakistan (Jan – 10th April)	Pakistan (April 11th – June)	Iran	Undocumented
No	30%	45%	60%	34%
Yes	70%	55%	40%	66%

Gender differences in income are stark. Overall, 60 per cent of returnees reported earning an income, but this masks significant disparities between men and women. 66 per cent of men reported generating income, a slight decline from 72 per cent in the December 2024 survey. By contrast, only 24 per cent of women reported having an income – a modest increase from 16 per cent in the December 2024 survey.

Income among female-headed households was higher: 47 per cent reported earning an income, highlighting that these households are more likely to participated in income generating activities compared with women living in male-headed households.

Chart #33:

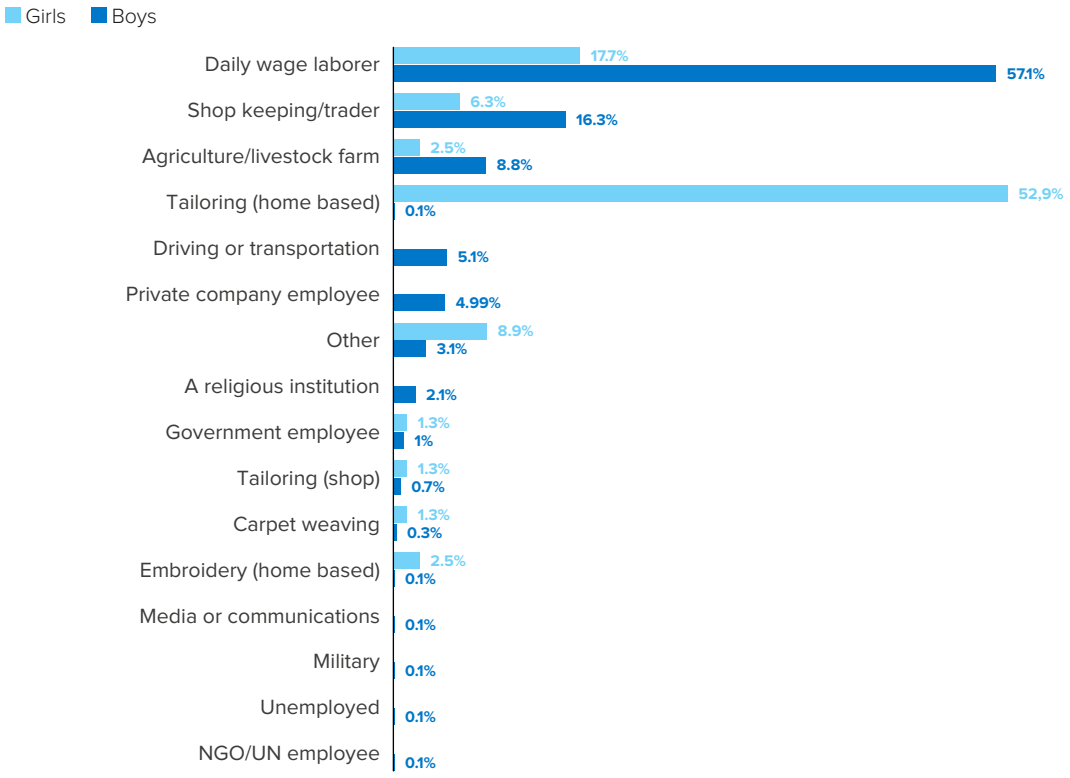
Do you have an income?



Among male returnees, 57 per cent relied on daily wage labour, illustrating a heavy dependence on informal and unstable work. Smaller proportions were employed in shopkeeping or small business ownership (16 per cent), agriculture (nine per cent), or driving (five per cent).

Most women returnees were engaged in home-based activities, reflecting the influence of customary norms. The majority (58 per cent) earned income through tailoring at home, while a smaller share (18 per cent) participated in daily wage labour.

Chart #34:
Labour sector per returnee gender



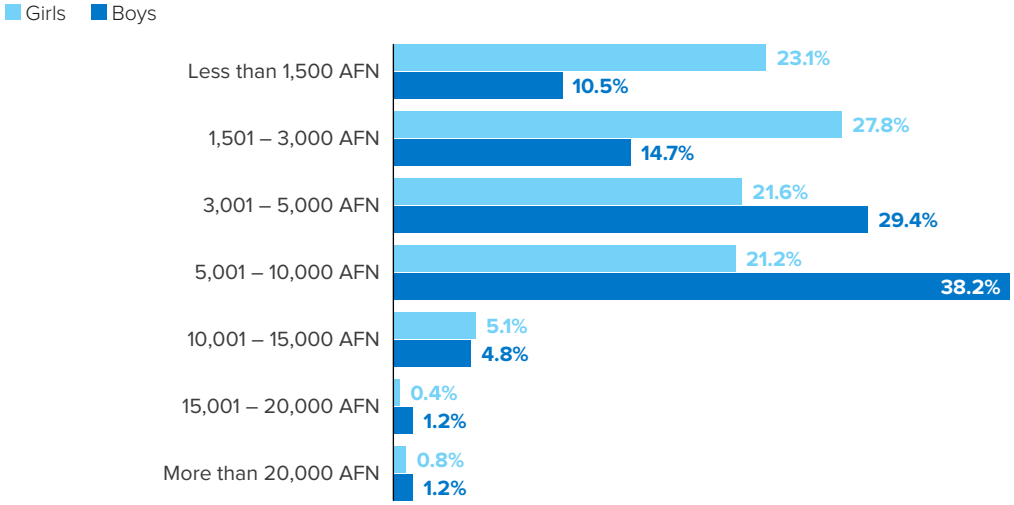
Income

Income levels remain low for returnees, with the largest share (33 per cent) reporting a monthly household income of AFN 5,001–10,000 (USD 73–147). Worryingly, 14 per cent earned less than AFN 1,500 (USD 22) per month, up from three per cent in the December 2024 survey. Only eight per cent reported household incomes above 10,000 AFN (USD 147), down from 14 per cent in 2024, highlighting deteriorating economic conditions among returnees.

Gender disparities were also evident: over half of female-headed households (53 per cent) reported earnings of 3,000 AFN (USD 44) or less, whereas 75 per cent of male-headed households earned above this threshold.

Earlier returnees from Pakistan (pre-April) were somewhat better off, with only nine per cent earning less than AFN 1,500 AFN compared to 16 per cent among later arrivals. This likely reflects longer reintegration periods, greater labour market access, and higher grant amounts available before April (USD 350 per household compared to USD 175). There were no observable differences between returnees from Pakistan and Iran.

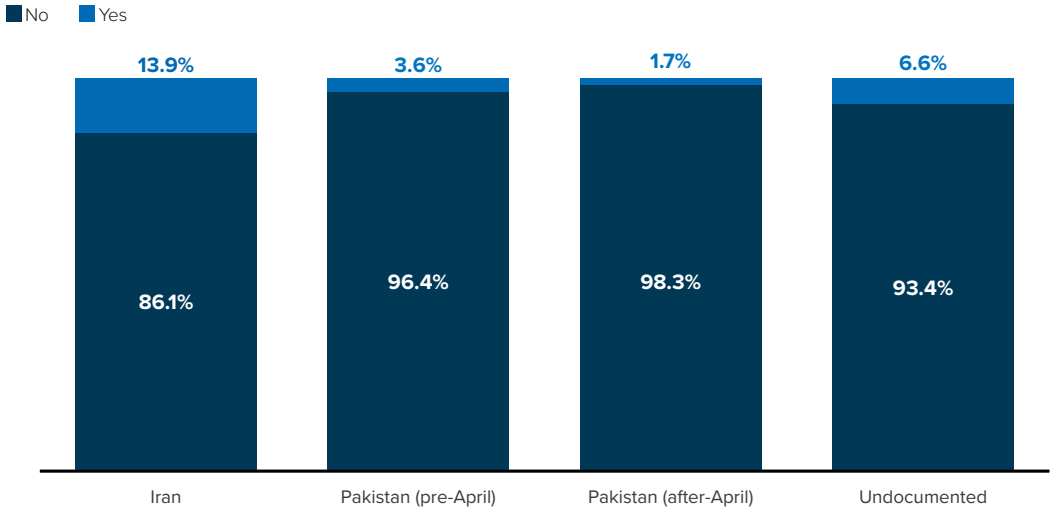
Chart #35:
Average monthly family income



For a small portion of returnees (five per cent), remittances are a vital source of income, ranging from AFN 1,500 and 295,000 (USD 22 – USD 4,246) per month. Returnees from Iran were considerably more likely to receive remittances (14 per cent) and typically reported higher amounts, averaging AFN 32,092 (USD 481) per month. In contrast, only three per cent of returnees from Pakistan received remittances, with an average of AFN 13,596 (USD 204) per month.

For many returning families, these funds provide a financial cushion, helping them afford necessities and pay off debts. In a context where incomes are often inconsistent and formal social safety nets are limited, remittances serve as a crucial and reliable lifeline for many households.

CHART 36:
Use of donations or remittances from abroad

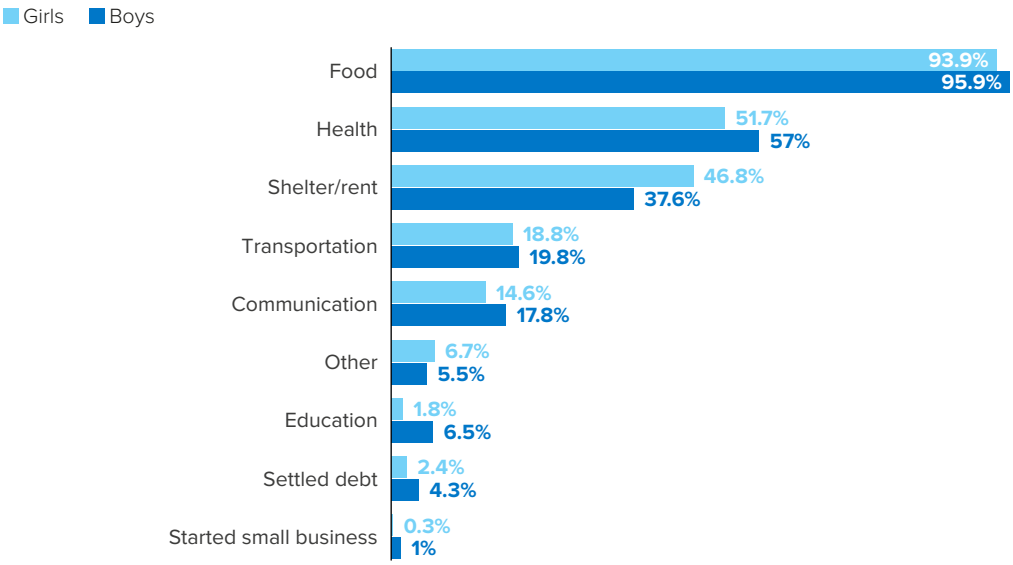


Nearly all returnees reported spending their household income on food, followed by healthcare (56 per cent), shelter/rent (38 per cent), transportation (20 per cent) and communications (17 per cent). Spending patterns were broadly consistent across genders and returnee groups and aligned with findings from 2024.

However, returnees from Pakistan who arrived between January and April were 12 percentage points more likely than later arrivals to report healthcare expenditures, suggesting higher medical needs or greater access to services among earlier returnees.

Chart #37:

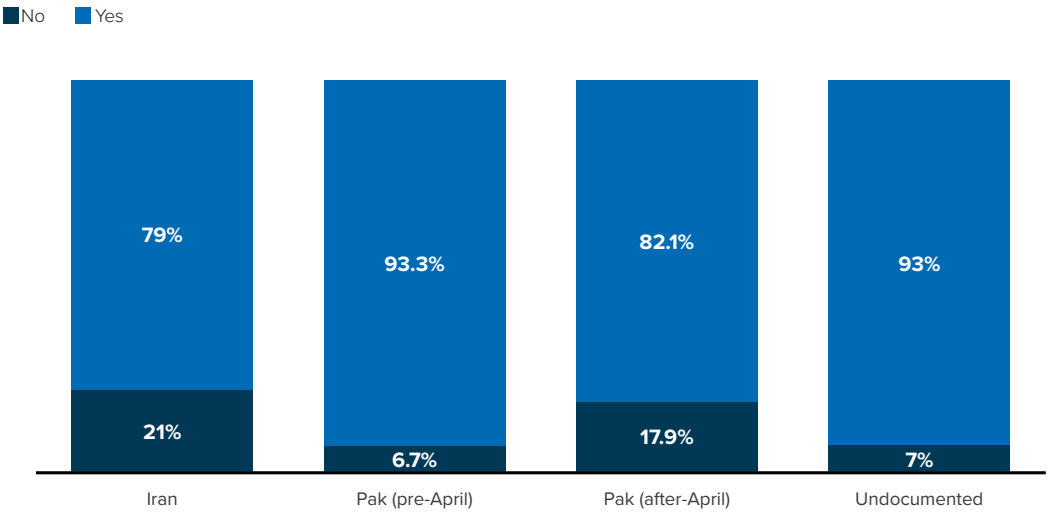
Use of income



Debt

Chart #38

Does your household currently hold any debt?



Most returnees (88 per cent) reported living in debt, representing a slight decline from the December 2024 survey. Indebted households were typically large, averaging six members. Debt was particularly widespread in Nangarhar province, where 96 per cent of returnees reported financial distress.

Returnees from Iran were slightly less likely to hold debt than those from Pakistan, while differences between female-headed (90 per cent) and male-headed (87 per cent) households were minimal.

Almost all indebted households stated that their debt exceeded their monthly income, underscoring widespread, unsustainable debt cycles and the financial pressures that undermine economic reintegration.

CHART #39

Has the household's debt increased since arrival to afghanistan?

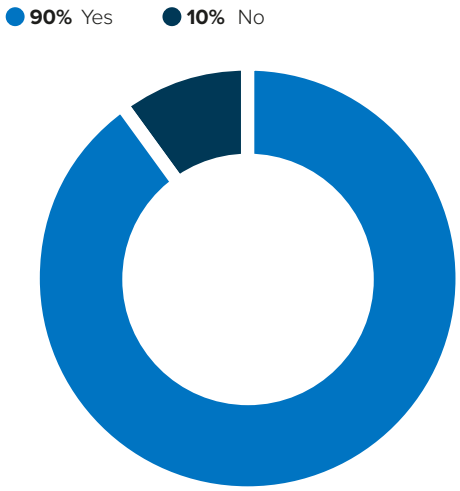
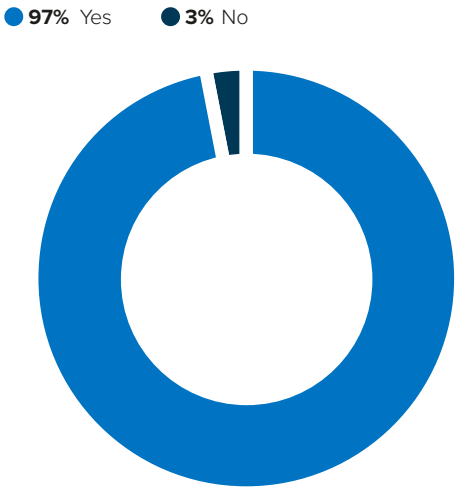


CHART #40

Are debts more than your monthly income?



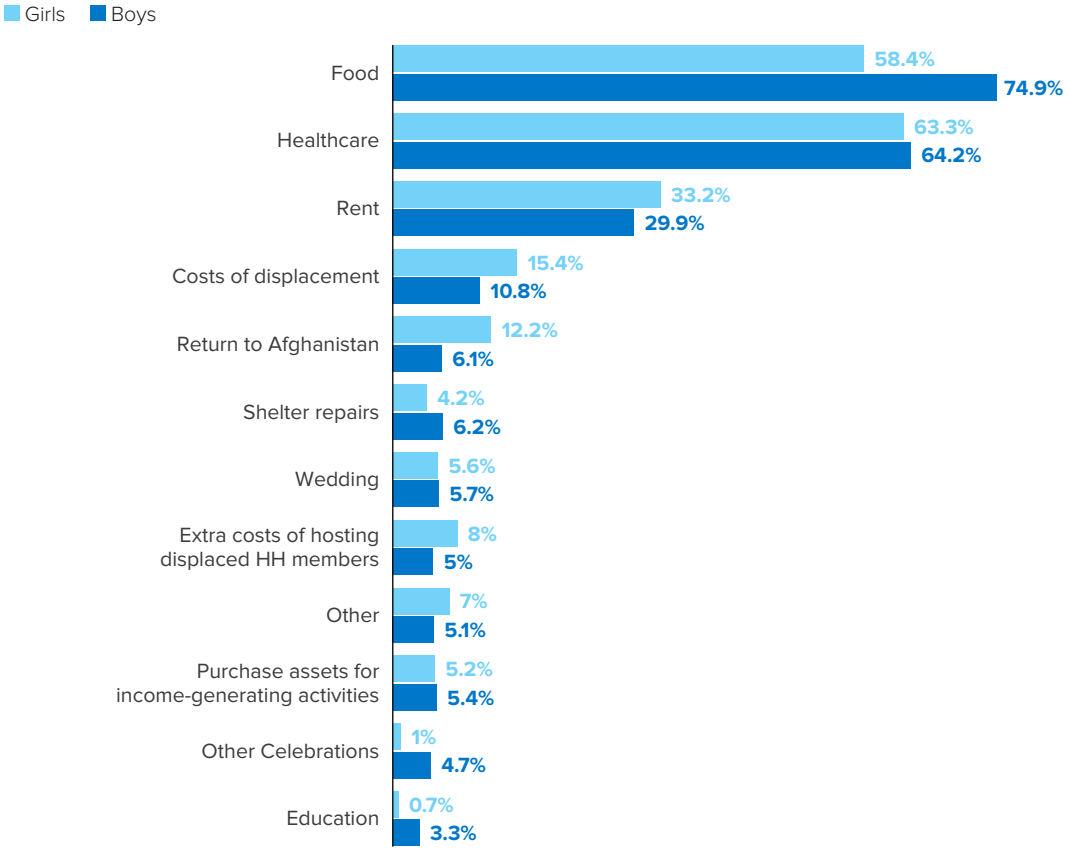
An overwhelming 90 per cent of returnees reported that their household debt had increased since returning to Afghanistan, with no major differences across returnee groups. This is only slightly lower than the 94 per cent recorded in the December 2024 survey.

The main drivers of borrowing were basic needs, including food (72 per cent), healthcare (64 per cent), and rent (31 per cent). While these priorities remain consistent with previous

findings, the proportions have risen significantly across all three categories, underscoring the worsening economic pressures on returnee households and their growing reliance on debt to cover basic needs.

Chart #41

Main reason for taking on debt



CHAPTER 12

Physical safety

Generalised violence in Afghanistan has largely subsided since the takeover by the de facto authorities in 2021. However, certain groups now face heightened risks of human rights violations and other abuses. Those most affected include women and girls, former officials of the previous Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, members of the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces, as well as civil society actors, human rights defenders, and journalists.

Returnees are particularly vulnerable upon return due both to the strict enforcement of restrictive laws and the lasting consequences of conflict. The introduction of the Law on the Propagation of Virtue and Prevention of Vice (PVPV) has expanded surveillance and arbitrary enforcement in both public and private life, with thousands of inspectors authorised to detain people based on appearance, behaviour, or perceived non-compliance[33] Women and girls face heightened risks, including harassment and restrictions on movement. Enforcement is carried out not only by the authorities but also by community members, reshaping social relations and entrenching fear. These challenges are compounded by broader human rights concerns, such as threats of violence, limited access to justice, and weakened protection mechanisms for vulnerable groups.[34] For returnees who often arrive with scarce resources and limited support networks, the combination of legal insecurity, social exclusion, and physical risk creates several obstacles to sustainable reintegration.

The findings of this survey are in line with the December 2024 survey, with 94 per cent of returnees reporting no physical security incidents in their communities over the past six months, and no significant differences observed between returnee groups or by gender.

33 *UNAMA, "Report on the Implementation, Enforcement and Impact of the Law on the Propagation of Virtue and Prevention of Vice in Afghanistan." 2025*

34 *UNAMA,' No safe haven: Human rights risks faced by persons involuntarily returned to Afghanistan,' 2025*

Table 15:

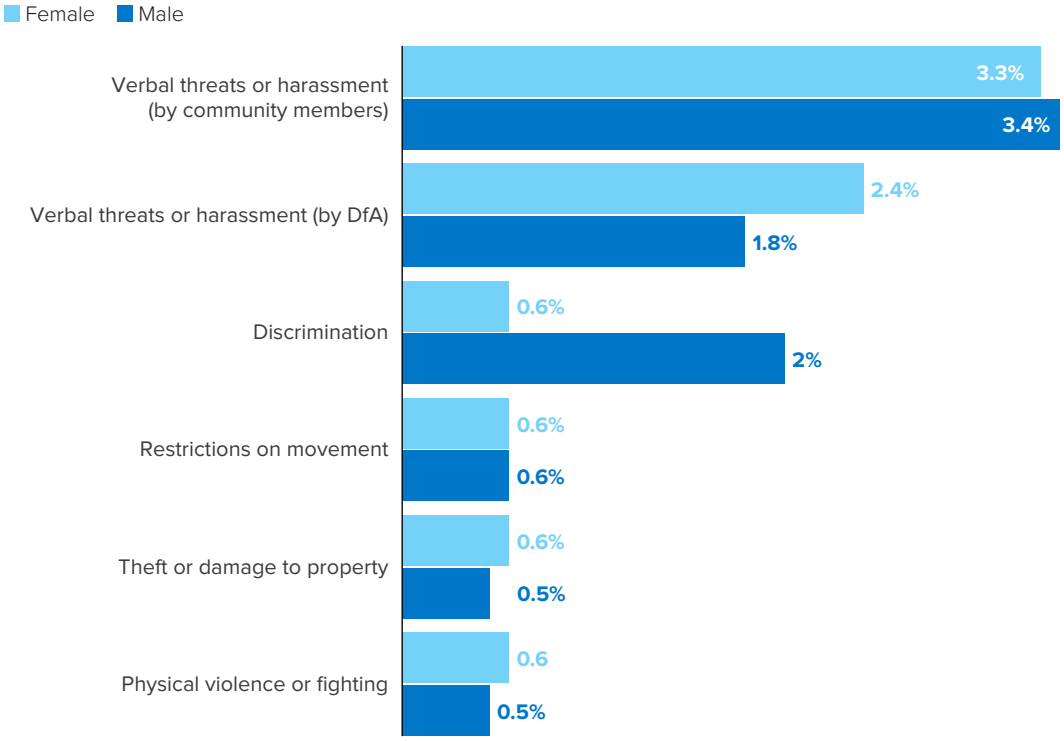
Experienced safety concerns in the past six months by respondent status

	Pakistan (Jan – 10th April)	Pakistan (April 11th – June)	Iran	Undocumented
No	93%	95%	93%	93%
Yes	8%	5%	8%	7%

However, perceptions of safety should be interpreted with caution given the wider security and protection challenges highlighted above. These figures may mask underreporting and broader risks persist even if not directly experienced by returnees. Only six per cent of returnees reported safety concerns, primarily linked to verbal threats from community members or the de facto authorities. Other less frequently cited issues included discrimination, restrictions on movement, theft, and physical violence.

Chart #42

In the past six months, has anyone in your household experienced any of the following in your community?



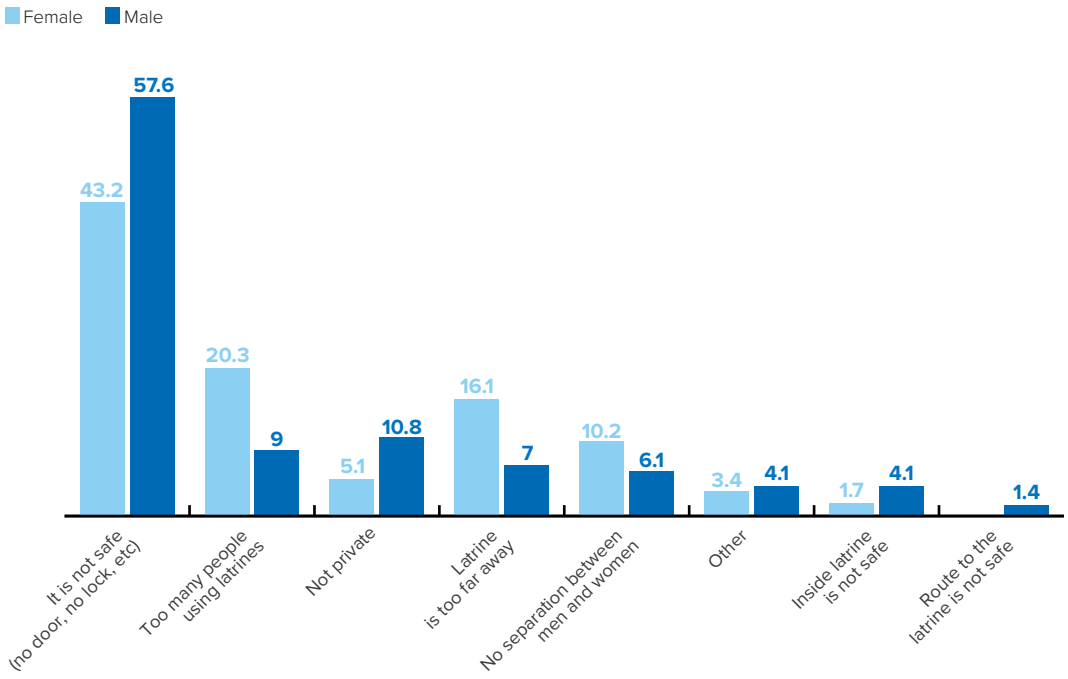
Returnees reported differing levels of concern about physical safety in various aspects of daily life. Market access was only slightly affected by security issues, with just three per cent of returnees indicating restrictions due to checkpoints, limited movement, theft, or harassment. This included nine per cent of women compared to three per cent of men.

Among the four per cent of returnees whose nearest water point was more than 30 minutes away, only around one-fifth expressed safety concerns during the journey. These concerns were mainly related to walking alone at night, encounters with stray or wild animals, and the risk of harassment. Notable differences were observed by returnee groups: only seven per cent of returnees from Iran reported feeling unsafe when fetching water, compared with 28 per cent of returnees from Pakistan.

The highest levels of safety concerns were recorded among returnees from Pakistan who arrived between January and April, with 38 per cent reporting safety issues compared with 18 per cent of those who arrived after April. This pattern may reflect differing conditions at the time of return, with earlier groups potentially facing more volatile security environments, temporary accommodation, and greater challenges in community integration.

Chart #43

Why don't you/your household members feel safe using latrines?



figures are percentages

Access to latrines emerged as a significant safety concern. Over one-third (35 per cent) of returnees stated that they did not always feel safe when using latrines. Returnees from Pakistan were 15 percentage points more likely than those from Iran to report feeling unsafe. By gender, women were slightly more likely than men to feel unsafe (36 per cent vs. 33 per cent). The main reasons identified were the absence of doors or locks on the latrines, as well as overcrowding.

UNACCOMPANIED MINORS

Recent reports highlight significant protection concerns for unaccompanied and separated children among returnee populations. Thousands of such cases have been identified at border crossings in both Pakistan and Iran. These children face acute risks, including trafficking, forced labour, early marriage, and sexual or gender-based violence. Their vulnerability is often compounded by the lack of child-friendly reception facilities and overstretched case management systems. Limited access to mental health and psychosocial support and safe shelter further increases their risk. Strengthening family tracing and reunification, expanding child-friendly spaces, and ensuring specialised case management at entry points are critical measures to protect children and support their safe reintegration.

1 *UNHCR, "Afghanistan Situation: Afghan Returns Emergency Update #5," 2025*
2 *UNICEF, "Thousands of children on Afghan-Iran border need urgent help," 2025*

CHAPTER 13

Civil documentation

Civil documentation, particularly the *Tazkira*, is essential for accessing rights, services, and opportunities in Afghanistan. Yet large gaps in ownership, especially among returnees, displaced and other vulnerable populations persist, especially among returnees and other displaced groups. These groups often face greater barriers than host communities in obtaining a *Tazkira* due to lost documents during flight, bureaucratic obstacles, and the high cost of replacement or issuance.[35]

35 UNHCR, "Protection Analysis Update," 2025

THE TAZKIRA

The *Tazkira* is Afghanistan's primary form of national identification and is essential for accessing a range of rights and services. It provides official confirmation of Afghan nationality and is required to move freely in public, own property, enrol in education, and obtain formal employment. Without a *Tazkira*, people face significant barriers to essential services, legal protection, and economic opportunities, making it a vital document for socioeconomic inclusion and the reintegration of returnees.

Gender disparities compound these challenges, as women are consistently less likely than men to hold a *Tazkira*. This reflects restrictions on mobility, lower awareness of legal procedures, and, in some cases, requirements for male guardianship in administrative processes.[36] The issue is particularly acute for female-headed households, such as those led by widows, who may lack a male relative to vouch for them and must rely on a community leader (*malik*) to access identity documents.[37] Many returned and displaced women thus face double exclusion, leaving them at heightened risk of marginalisation and limiting their access to essential services, legal protection, and livelihood opportunities.

> *"My wife does not have a Tazkira, and her Tazkira can only be prepared based on her father's family, whose families are still immigrants in Pakistan."*

Across all genders and regions, factors such as age and education shape a person's likelihood of obtaining civil documentation. Although official procedures stipulate that support should be provided to applicants who cannot read or write, limited literacy makes it difficult for many to navigate and complete application forms, and fear or unease can often discourage them from approaching relevant offices.[38]

Fewer than half of respondents reported that most or all household members held a *Tazkira*, pointing to substantial gaps in civil documentation. Notably, households headed by women were more likely to report higher levels of *Tazkira* ownership (77 per cent) compared to male-headed households (40 per cent), suggesting potential differences in how male- and female-headed households prioritize civil registration.

36 UNHCR, "Protection Analysis Update," 2025
37 UNOCHA, "Afghanistan Humanitarian Needs and Response Plan," 2025
38 Samuel Hall, "Documentation and Legal Identification in Afghanistan," 2023.

CHART #44

Do you or your household members have a tazkira?

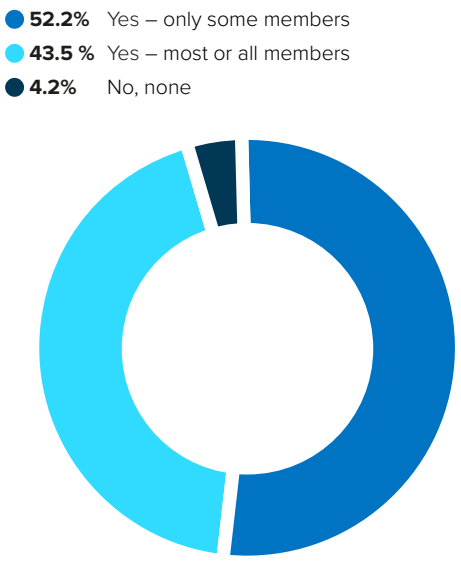
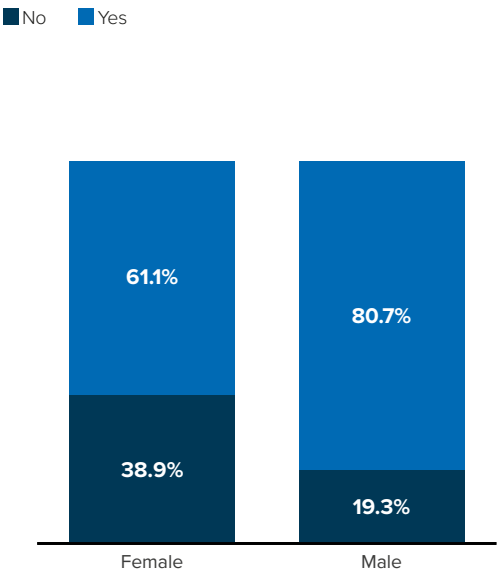


CHART #45

Do you know how to get tazkira/ passport? (Hoh only)



Returnees from Iran reported the highest proportion of households where most or all members possessed a *Tazkira* (63 per cent), followed by undocumented returnees (52 per cent). Ownership was significantly lower among those returning from Pakistan, particularly among those post-April arrivals (31 per cent). The proportion of households reporting no documentation at all was small across all groups although slightly higher among post-April arrivals from Pakistan (eight per cent). The lower rates of full documentation among returnees from Pakistan likely reflect ongoing bureaucratic or financial barriers to obtaining a *Tazkira* for all household members.

Table 16:

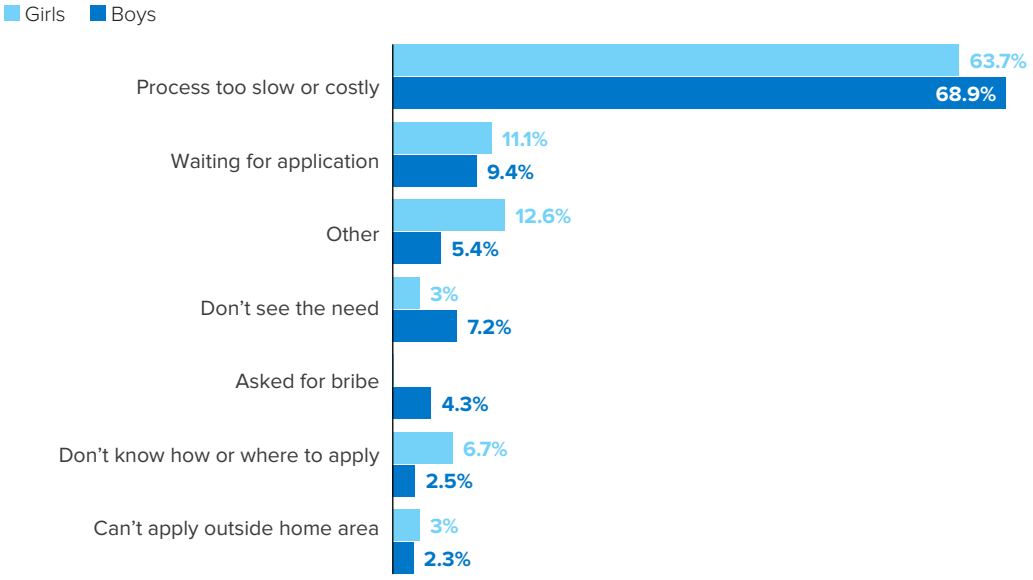
Possession of a tazkira by respondent status

	Pakistan (Jan – 10th April)	Pakistan (April 11th – June)	Iran	Undocumented
Yes, most or all members	47%	31%	63%	52%
Yes, only some members	49%	62%	32%	47%
No, none	4%	8%	5%	1%

The primary barrier to obtaining a *Tazkira* was the lengthy and costly application process, reported by 67 per cent of respondents and consistent with the December 2024 survey. By returnee group, 72 per cent of returnees from Pakistan cited cost or bureaucratic delays as the main barrier, compared to 58 per cent of returnees from Iran. Among returnees from Pakistan, those arriving before April faced the gratest challenges, with 77 per cent reporting difficulties related to cost or processing time. Fewer respondents pointed to other obstacles, such as not perceiving a need for the document (seven per cent), being asked for bribes to secure it (four per cent), or having already applied and still awaiting issuance (10 per cent).

Chart #46:

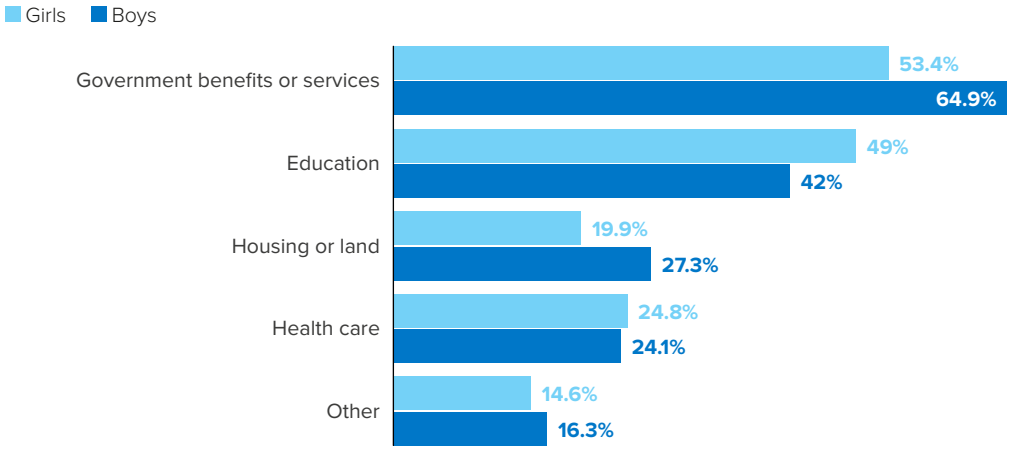
Reasons for not having a Tazkira



71 per cent of returnees reported that the absence of civil documentation restricted their access to essential services, a substantial increase from 50 per cent in the December 2024 survey. No significant differences were observed between returnee groups. By gender, male returnees (73 per cent) were more likely than female returnees (57 per cent) to report barriers linked to missing documentation.

The areas most affected were government benefits (64 per cent), education (44 per cent), housing (23 per cent), and healthcare (23 per cent), with no notable observable differences between returnee groups. Among those who selected 'other,' many mentioned the inability to obtain SIM cards without a *Tazkira*, underscoring how gaps in civil documentation also limit access to telecommunications and, consequently, critical information and connectivity.

Chart #47:
Services affected by lack of Tazkira



CHAPTER 14

Mental health

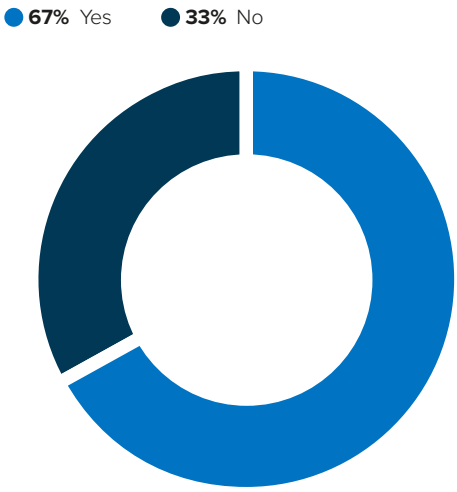
Prolonged conflict and economic instability in Afghanistan have severely impacted mental well-being, with many people grappling with depression, anxiety, and unprocessed traumatic experiences. Displacement intensifies these pressures, disrupting social networks and livelihoods that are crucial for coping. Returnees often face higher levels of mental health and psychosocial challenges compared to the wider population. Most returnees (67 per cent) reported that they or a household member experienced stress affecting daily life, which is consistent with the December 2024 survey, where 70 per cent reported the same.

Common symptoms include anger, irritability, disrupted sleep, loss of appetite, and withdrawal from social life, which can escalate into domestic violence and harmful coping mechanisms such as substance abuse.[39] Women, girls, and other marginalised groups face distinct vulnerabilities due to reduced mobility, economic isolation, and heightened exposure to violence. At the community level, mental health conditions remain heavily stigmatised, leading to social exclusion and isolation, reduced participation in decision-making, and reluctance to seek formal care.

Differences between returnee groups were minimal although those returning from Pakistan between January and April were more likely to report stress.

Chart #48

Have you or your household experienced feelings of stress that affected your day-to-day life such as sleep or physical symptoms?



39 *Samuel Hall, "Unpacking the Realities of Displacement Affected Communities in Afghanistan Since August 2021," 2022*

Table 17:
Household showing feelings of stress by respondent status

	Pakistan (Jan – 10th April)	Pakistan (April 11th – June)	Iran	Undocumented
Yes	72%	66%	67%	67%
No	28%	34%	33%	33%

Consistent with the December 2024 survey, economic hardship remained the primary source of stress, with 92 per cent of respondents citing unemployment and financial strain as their main concern. Other significant stressors included uncertainty about the future (38 per cent) and food insecurity (36 per cent). These findings mirror broader national trends: nearly 75 per cent of Afghans experience food insecurity and limited healthcare access, while over 80 per cent contend with threats of violence or diminished family connections, all factors that are all closely linked to elevated psychosocial distress.[40] This evidence underscores the need for integrated approaches that address both economic survival and psychosocial well-being.

The post-monitoring data illustrate this pattern: only 36 percent of returnees earning more than AFN 20,000 (USD 300) per month reported stress affecting their daily life, compared with 75 per cent of those earning less than AFN 1,500 (USD 23) per year. A similar trend was observed with food access and stress: returnees with adequate food were 16 percentage points less likely to report high levels of stress than those with inadequate access (56 per cent vs. 72 per cent). Returnees in debt were 15 percentage points more likely to report high stress levels than those without.

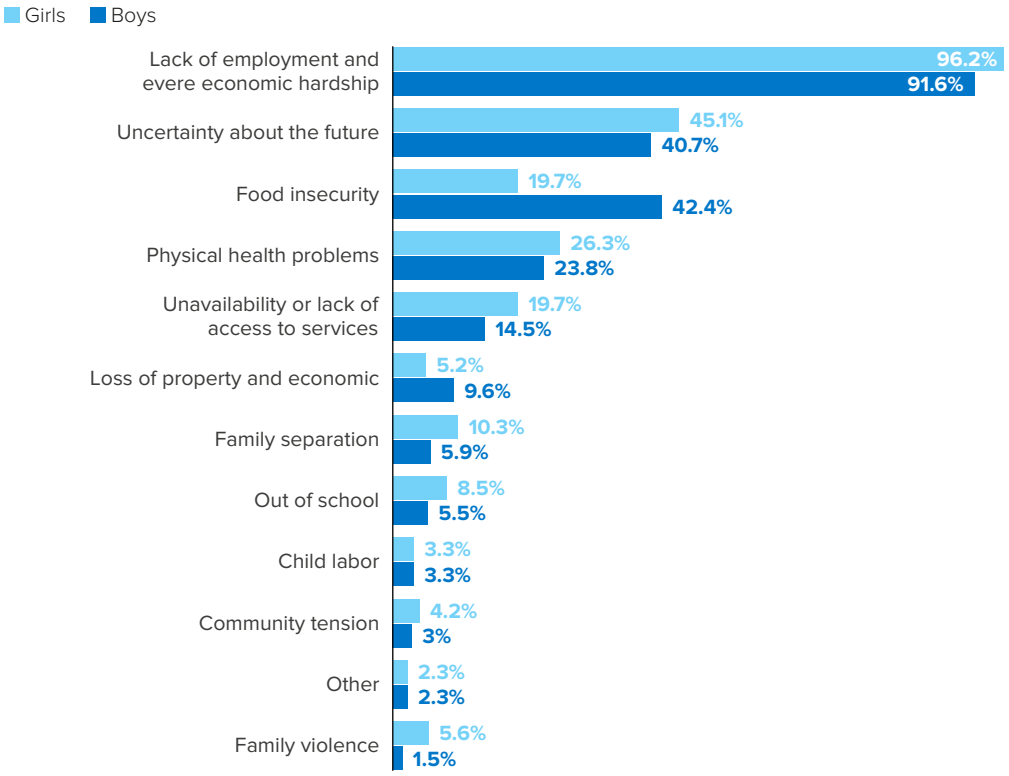
40 Hanson-DeFusco J, et al. 'The association of diminished quality of life of Afghan adults' psychosocial wellbeing, in the era of the Taliban 2.0 government.' 2025

While overall patterns were consistent across groups, some variations emerged. Returnees from Pakistan were 10 percentage points more likely than those from Iran to cite food insecurity as a major stressor, particularly those who arrived between January and April, nearly half of whom (47 per cent) reported it, compared with 37 per cent of post-April arrivals. Conversely, returnees from Iran were more likely to identify family separation as a source of stress (17 per cent) compared with four per cent among returnees from Pakistan.

Since May 2025, deportations from Iran sharply increased and shifted from affecting predominantly single men to including a higher proportion of families with women and children. These deportations are often sudden, forced or coerced, and uncoordinated, sometimes separating families during detention or transit, which contributes to heightened anxiety among returnees.[41]

Chart #49

Causes of stress



41 IOM Afghanistan, "Sharp Rise in Forced Returns from Iran", (2025)

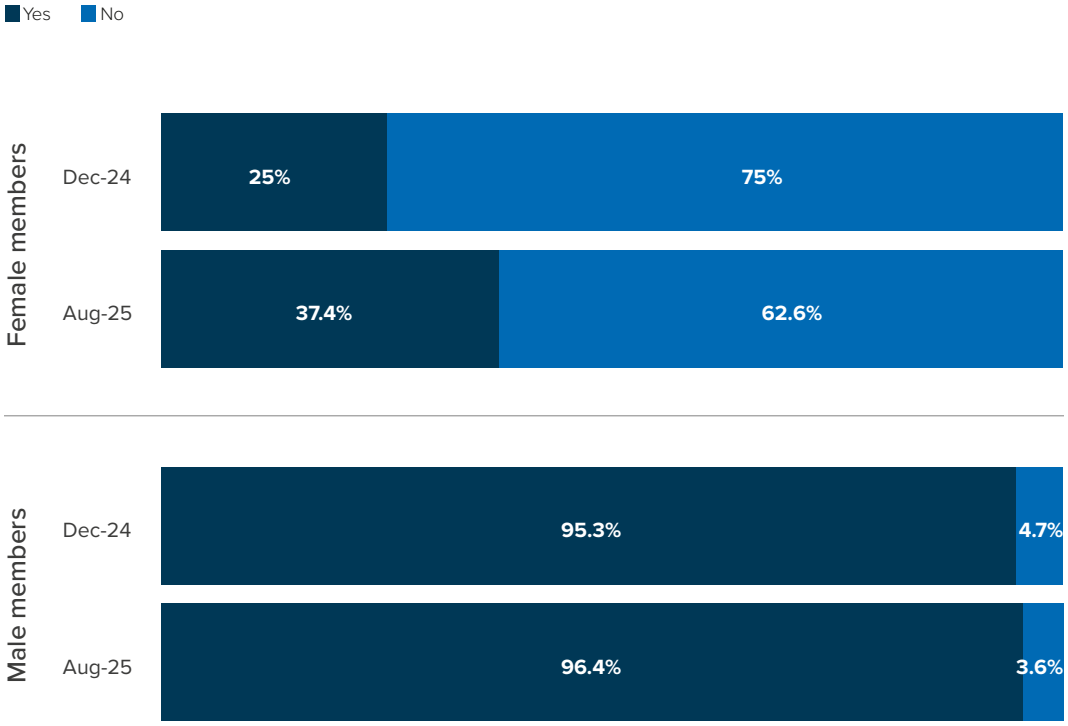
CHAPTER 15

Access to mobile phones

Owing to social and cultural norms, significant gender disparities persist in mobile phone access among respondents: 96 per cent reported that male family members had access to a phone, compared to just 37 per cent of female family members. Limited mobile phone access restricts women's ability to obtain vital information on health, safety, and education, further constraining their decision-making and excluding them from participation in public life. Encouragingly, the situation has improved since the December 2024 survey, when only 25 per cent of respondents reported that female household members had access to a phone.

Chart #50

Do your family members have access to a phone?



Analysis by population group revealed that returnees from Iran were significantly more likely to report that female household members (59 per cent) had access to mobile phones compared to only 32 per cent of returnees from Pakistan. This may be attributed to the relatively higher educational attainment of returnees from Iran (see chapter 12). There were no differences between the different returnee groups from Pakistan.

Table 18:
Access of women to mobile phones by respondent status

	Pakistan (Jan – 10th April)	Pakistan (April 11th – June)	Iran	Undocumented
Yes	33%	30%	59%	41%
No	67%	70%	41%	59%

© UNHCR/Oxygen Empire Media Production

Ahmad, 15, and his younger brother Sahil, 12, are waiting at the Torkham border with their family. After returning from Pakistan, they are filled with a mix of hope and uncertainty as they prepare to begin a new life in Afghanistan.

CHAPTER 16

Access to assistance

In total, 19 per cent of respondents reported having recently received support from organizations other than UNHCR. Returnees from Iran (11 per cent) were far less likely to report receiving such support compared to returnees from Pakistan (26 per cent) highlighting additional constraints they may face in facilitating reintegration. Gender differences were also evident, with 20 per cent of male returnees reporting additional assistance compared to 14 per cent of female returnees.

The de facto authorities[42] were identified as the primary source of support beyond UNHCR, as cited by 13 per cent of respondents. Smaller proportions reported receiving assistance from NGOs or INGOs (three per cent), other UN agencies (two per cent), and IOM (one per cent). Notably, returnees from Iran were far less likely than those from Pakistan to report receiving support from the de facto authorities.

Table 19

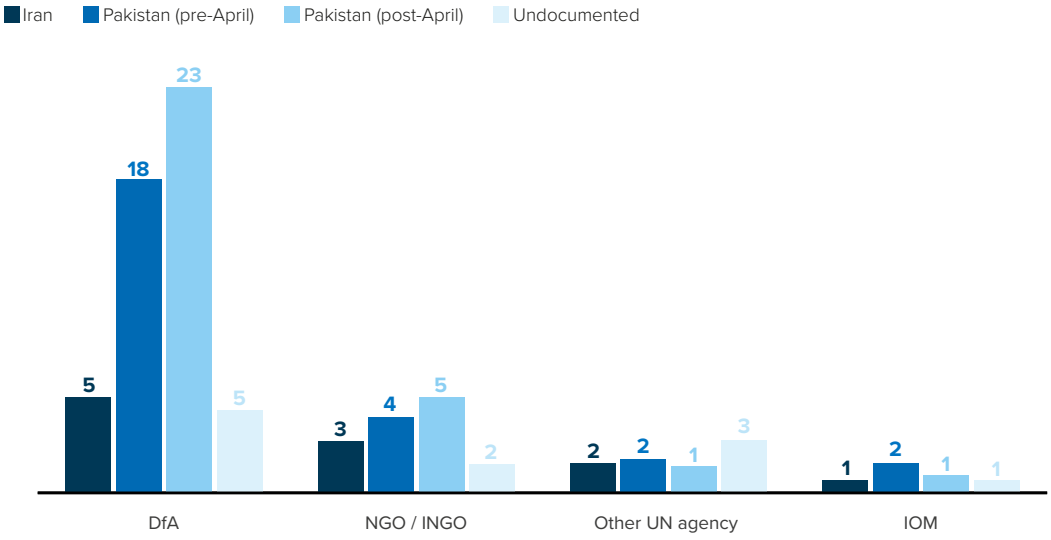
Besides UNHCR, did you or your household receive assistance from any other organization in recent months?

	Pakistan (Jan – 10th April)	Pakistan (April 11th – June)	Iran	Undocumented
No	74%	72%	90%	89%
Yes	26%	31%	11%	10%

42 De facto authorities provide cash assistance to returnees (only families).

Chart #51

If yes, from which organization?



figures are percentages

> *"I need a lot of support for the treatment of my two-year-old child so his health condition will get better, and I will find hope for living."*

Among returnees who received assistance, only 13 per cent reported that their needs were fully met, while the majority (79 per cent) said the support partially met their needs, and eight per cent considered it insufficient. Compared to the December 2024 survey, the share of respondents who felt the assistance fully met their needs declined sharply (from 28 per cent), while those reporting it as completely insufficient also fell (from 19 per cent), suggesting a shift towards partial, albeit still inadequate, coverage.

Returnees from Iran were particularly disadvantaged, with only two per cent reporting that their needs were fully met compared to 13 per cent of returnees from Pakistan. Female-headed households were also disproportionately affected, with 17 per cent reporting that assistance did not meet their household's needs, compared to nine per cent of male-headed households.

CHART #52

Did the assistance meet your household's needs?

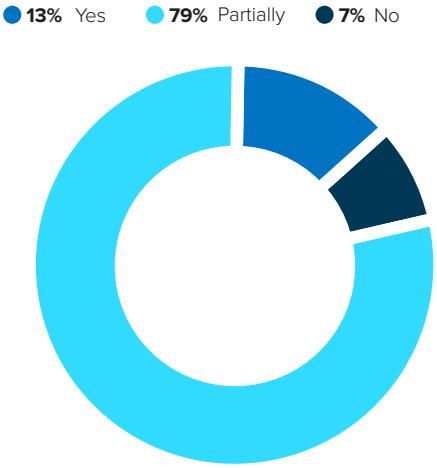
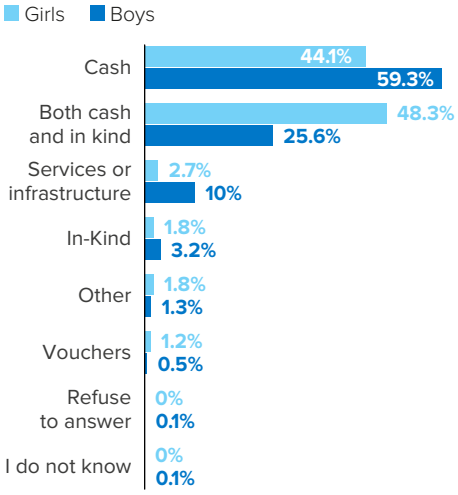


CHART #53

In the future, how would you prefer to receive assistance



More than half of returnees (56 per cent) expressed a preference for cash assistance in the future, down from 69 per cent in the December 2024 survey. At the same time, the share preferring a combination of cash and in-kind support rose to 31 per cent, up from 24 per cent previously, indicating shifting priorities among returnees and the likely impact of reduced cash assistance from UNHCR and other actors. Preferences were broadly similar across all returnee groups.

The priority needs identified by returnees remained largely consistent with the December 2024 survey. Shelter-related needs, including construction materials, rent payments, or housing, were cited most frequently (44 per cent), followed by food (15 per cent) and financial assistance such as cash or loan repayments (15 per cent). These findings indicate that housing insecurity remains a major concern for returnee households, with 74 per cent of renters in August 2025 reporting they were unable to afford rent. Continued demand for food and cash assistance reflects widespread food insecurity, with 63 per cent of respondents reporting inadequate food access, alongside high levels of indebtedness. The persistence of these needs across survey rounds suggests limited capacity among returnees to adapt or recover without targeted support.

CHAPTER 17

Complaints, feedback and response mechanisms

> *"I don't know which office to complain to. If I knew, I would be sitting in front of that office every day."*

Awareness of complaints, feedback and feedback mechanisms among returnees remains low, even though most have received support at UNHCR Encashment Centres. Only 16 per cent said they knew where to submit complaints or inquiries about humanitarian assistance, which is consistent with the December 2024 survey findings (15 per cent). Male returnees were slightly more aware (17 per cent) than female returnees (12 per cent). Awareness was similar between returnees from Iran (16 per cent) and Pakistan overall (19 per cent) although those returning from Pakistan before 10 April demonstrated greater awareness (24 per cent) compared to later arrivals (15 per cent).

© UNHCR/Oxygen Empire Media Production

Nargis, 12, carries her belongings with determination, ready to load them onto the truck as her family begins their journey back to Afghanistan after returning from Pakistan. Despite the challenges, her resilience shines through as she helps with the preparations.

CHART #54

Are you aware of a contact point for inquiring or complaining about humanitarian assistance?

16% Yes **84%** No

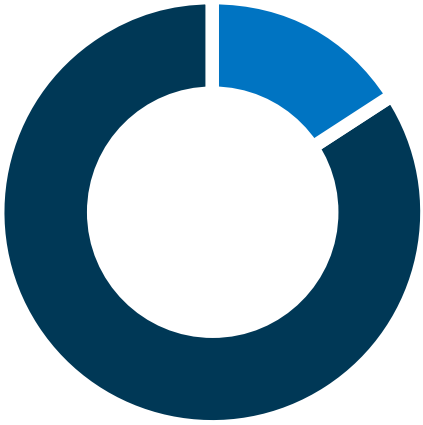


CHART #55

What mechanisms are you aware of?

14% Community outreach volunteers
18% Complaint box
23% AWAAZ (410 free number)
21% Other
43% UNHCR Hotline

The UNHCR hotline was the most widely known complaints, feedback and response mechanism among returnees, with 43 per cent reporting awareness of it, followed by the AWAAZ free number (23 per cent), complaints boxes (18 per cent) and community outreach volunteers (14 per cent). Among the 21 per cent who selected 'other', many cited the de facto authorities' offices, particularly the Department of Refugees and Repatriation.

Returnees from Iran were less aware of the UNHCR hotline, with 46 per cent reporting familiarity compared to 58 per cent of returnees from Pakistan. However, they were slightly more aware of the AWAAZ hotline (23 per cent aware compared to 17 per cent of returnees from Pakistan).

Table 20:

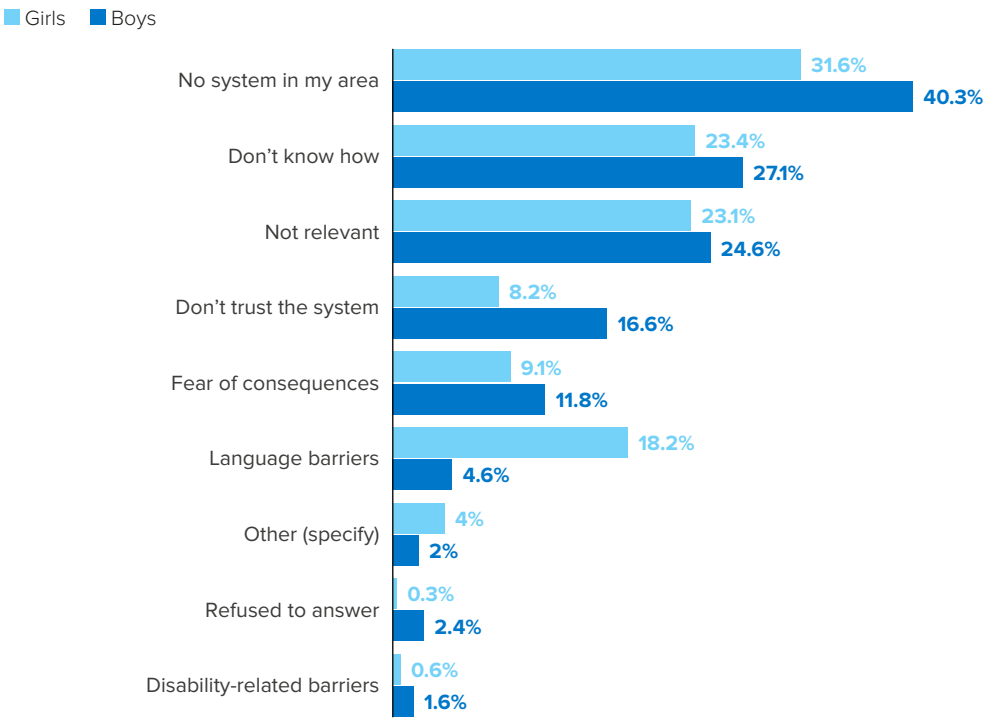
Awareness of contact point for inquiring or complaining about humanitarian assistance

	Pakistan (Jan – 10th April)	Pakistan (April 11th – June)	Iran	Undocumented
No	76%	85%	84%	91%
Yes	24%	15%	16%	9%

The most commonly cited barrier to contacting aid organizations with complaints or questions was the lack of reporting systems in their area. This was reported by 39 per cent of returnees, followed by a lack of knowledge on how to contact organizations (30 per cent). 13 per cent said they did not trust the system and 11 per cent reported being afraid of the consequences of reporting.

Chart #56

What prevents you from contacting aid organizations with complaints or questions?

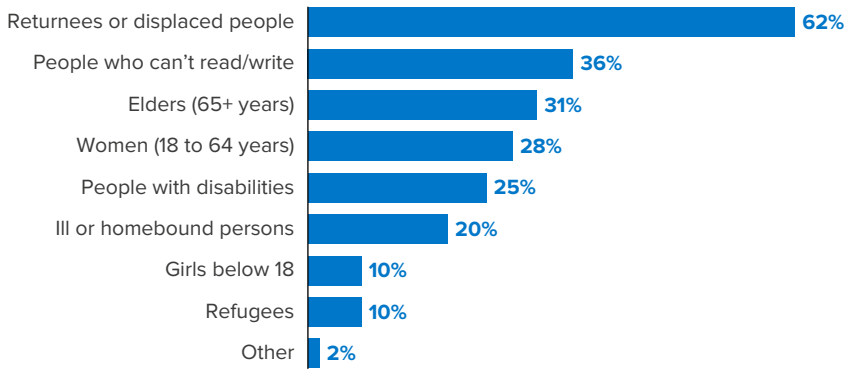


Disaggregation by returnee group reveals differing dynamics: returnees from Pakistan, who arrived before 10 April were more likely to cite mistrust (24 per cent), whereas those arriving later were more likely to report not knowing how to make contact (37 per cent). This suggests that earlier arrivals may have had more experience engaging with assistance providers. Notably, 18 per cent of women reported language as a barrier to engaging aid organizations compared with only five per cent of male returnees. This points to potential challenges in accessing education in countries of asylum or upon return. Returnees in Baghlan (47 per cent) and Kandahar (43 per cent) were the most likely to report that their areas lacked reporting systems.

Across all returnee groups, respondents identified returnees themselves as the group most likely to face difficulties in accessing information, followed by people with low literacy levels and the elderly.

Chart #57

Which group in your community has the most difficulty getting information about humanitarian aid?

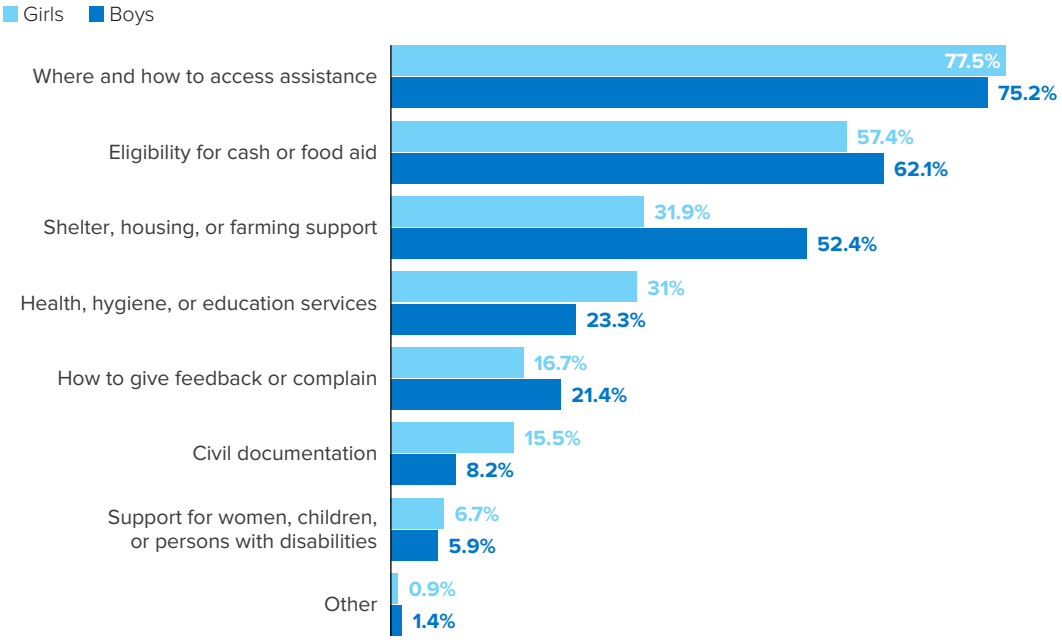


Demand for information remains high: nearly four in five respondents (79 per cent) expressed interest in learning how to access humanitarian assistance, while 60 per cent wanted more information about their eligibility for cash or food aid. Shelter, housing and farming support were also key areas of interest, particularly among male returnees.

Disaggregated findings show that returnees from Pakistan who arrived after April were the least informed about access procedures and were 16 percentage points more likely to seek such information compared with those who arrived earlier. No major differences were observed between returnees from Iran and Pakistan.

Chart #58:

Topics of interest



CHAPTER 18

Conclusions and recommendations

Returnees continue to settle in a fragile environment marked by economic hardship and limited access to essential services. Many households are unable to return to their areas of origin due to a lack of shelter, land, and livelihoods, while others engage in cyclical movements to neighbouring countries and even attempt the dangerous onward journeys beyond the region.

Food insecurity remains critical despite modest improvements, with returnees from Pakistan disproportionately affected. Shelter, water, and education access further highlight disparities. Returnees from Pakistan, particularly recent arrivals, are more likely to rent housing and struggle to afford rent, whereas returnees from Iran more often own or inherit their homes. Access to safe water and sanitation is also more limited for returnees from Pakistan.

In education, returnees from Iran report higher levels of attainment, with particularly stark differences among women: 25 per cent of female returnees from Iran had completed upper-secondary education, compared with just five per cent of those returning from Pakistan. School attendance remains constrained overall, with economic barriers more acute among post-April returnees from Pakistan, while gender-based restrictions are more frequently reported by returnees from Iran.

These findings highlight the urgency of sustained, multi-sectoral support that addresses both immediate and longer-term needs. Assistance must combine short- and medium-term cash support with livelihood opportunities, durable housing solutions, water and health infrastructure, and access to civil documentation, among other key needs and challenges faced by returnees. Targeted interventions are essential for the most vulnerable groups, including female-headed households and people with disabilities. Continued monitoring, disaggregated by country and period of return, is critical to adapting programming based on evidence and ensuring that reintegration translates into lasting improvements in stability and protection.

The following recommendations are intended to guide actors in the humanitarian and basic human needs space in the development and implementation of interventions to support returnees in reaching better safety, well-being, and socioeconomic inclusion outcomes upon their return and reintegration in Afghanistan. The recommendations and conclusions are also intended to raise awareness amongst the international community, including donors and policymakers, about the needs and gaps in returnee response, where support is most urgently required, and the potential impact of inaction.

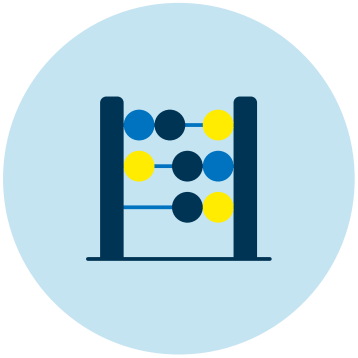
Cash assistance

The most common uses of return cash assistance among returnees were food (82 per cent), transport (65 per cent), and rent or shelter (35 per cent). For many households, however, the grant lasted only one week to two months, and only 41 per cent considered it sufficient to cover their needs. Female-headed households were the least likely to report adequacy. Returnees from Iran were more likely to view the support as sufficient compared with those from Pakistan, particularly post-April arrivals who received the reduced package. While cash remains the preferred form of aid (56 per cent), this has declined since the December 2024 survey, with one-third of households now favouring a mix of cash and in-kind support, underscoring the impact of reduced cash assistance and the need for more flexible and sustained support.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Prioritize support for the most vulnerable, including female-headed households, households with people with disabilities, and large families, and explore phased or mobile disbursements where possible to extend support despite reduced budgets.
- Link cash or in-kind assistance to sustainable livelihood opportunities, such as vocational training, small business support, and remote or home-based work, to reduce long-term dependence on humanitarian assistance.
- Expand hybrid assistance (cash and in-kind), for example food or shelter kits, in areas where cash distribution is no longer feasible or has limited reach.
- Support advocacy with the de facto authorities to restore safe and gender-sensitive cash delivery mechanisms, to ensure female beneficiaries receive equitable in-kind or alternative support.

Education



Access to schooling remains highly constrained for returnee children, particularly girls. In August 2025, nearly one-third of returnee households reported that their girls could not access the same schools as host community families, compared to one-fifth for boys. Barriers differ by country of asylum: returnees from Iran more often cited the gender-based ban, while returnees from Pakistan, especially those arriving after April, highlighted economic constraints. Non-enrolment is particularly high among returnees from Pakistan, with 71 per cent of boys and 81 per cent of girls from post-April arrivals reportedly out of school, compared to 48 per cent of boys and 66 per cent of girls among pre-April arrivals.

These patterns reflect the urgent need to expand education and flexible learning options, tailored to the distinct challenges faced in each context.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Advocate with the de facto authorities to simplify documentation procedures and expand mobile or on-site *Tazkira* issuance, prioritizing school-aged children to overcome enrolment barriers.
- Provide targeted financial support, such as school supply stipends, transport assistance, or conditional cash transfers, to reduce economic pressures that keep children out of school and help families prioritize education.
- Expand safe and inclusive learning spaces and flexible schedules to reach girls and women in areas where formal school attendance remains restricted.

Healthcare

Access to healthcare remains limited and uneven among returnees, even in areas with accessible medical facilities. In the August 2025 survey, 89 per cent of returnee households reported having a health facility in their community, yet 34 per cent said a household member had needed care in the past six months but could not access it. The main barriers were financial constraints, cited by over three-quarters of returnees and the cost or lack of transportation to the nearest facility. Women were disproportionately affected: in over half of the cases where care could not be accessed, the person in need was female, likely reflecting the impact of movement restrictions and *mahram* requirements. Persistent shortages of medicines and rising costs continue to force many households to delay or forgo treatment altogether.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Expand mobile and outreach health services to remote areas to offset the closure of some fixed facilities and ensure women can safely access care.
- Strengthen reproductive, maternal, and child health services in areas where movement restrictions impede access.
- Introduce or scale up transportation subsidies or community transport initiatives to reduce the cost and time burden of reaching medical facilities.

Food security

Food insecurity remains widespread and severe, with 63 per cent of returnee households reporting inadequate access to food. Returnees from Pakistan are particularly affected, with 62 per cent highly likely to resort to negative coping strategies, compared to 43 per cent of those from Iran. On average, returnees from Iran reported 2.7 meals per day compared to just over two among those from Pakistan. Negative coping strategies remain widespread, with 82 per cent of households reducing meal sizes or skipping meals and 39 per cent reporting no food stocks at all, most with reserves lasting less than three weeks. Rising debt continues to force many families to borrow to buy food.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Scale up emergency food assistance in the most food-insecure provinces, prioritizing female-headed households and families with no food stocks.
- Expand livelihood and agricultural initiatives, including access to seeds, fertilisers, and climate-resilient farming methods, while supporting returnees with limited rural experience through training and small-scale production schemes.
- Provide tailored financial assistance and community-based food production support (e.g., kitchen gardens and poultry farming) to help vulnerable households reduce reliance on debt and improve long-term food security.
- Establish mobile or community-based food distribution points to reach households facing movement restrictions or high transportation costs.
- Support advocacy with the de facto authorities to ensure women can safely and independently access markets and food distribution sites.

Housing and shelter

Housing conditions remain highly precarious for returnees, with three-quarters of surveyed households living in substandard mud dwellings, a situation more common among those who returned from Pakistan (78 per cent) than Iran (68 per cent). Only 13 per cent overall reported living in concrete housing although this was far more frequent for returnees from Iran (26 per cent) than Pakistan (11 per cent). Nearly half of households (49 per cent) rent their homes, with renting most widespread among those from Pakistan (61 per cent compared to 46 per cent from Iran), and 74 per cent of renters said they could not afford the rent. Female-headed households were especially disadvantaged, being far less likely to own or inherit a home (five per cent vs. 27 per cent of male-headed households).

Overcrowding is also worsening, with 80 per cent of households reporting living with up to four people per room, a sharp increase since late 2024, leaving many families with both insecure and inadequate living conditions.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Expand shelter programmes that prioritize durable housing solutions for the most vulnerable, including female-headed households, large families, and people with disabilities.
- Increase targeted support for emergency shelter assistance to protect vulnerable households at immediate risk.
- Support community-led construction and low-cost housing initiatives to create more sustainable, locally sourced shelter options in areas of high return.

Livelihoods and socioeconomic inclusion

Economic opportunities remain scarce, with 60 per cent of households reporting a source of income, while women are far less likely to earn than men (24 per cent vs. 66 per cent). Daily wage labour dominates, particularly among returnees from Pakistan. Most households earn very little, with 78 per cent reporting monthly income between AFN 1,500 (USD 22) and AFN 10,000 (USD 147). Female-headed households are the most disadvantaged, with over half earning AFN 3,000 (USD 44) or less. Debt is nearly universal, with 88 per cent of households holding debt, with borrowing most widespread among returnees from Pakistan.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Scale up vocational training and skill-building programmes aligned with local labour markets, with a specific focus on women, people with disabilities, and youth.
- Include certification pathways and advanced training in business management, financial planning, and digital skills to leverage the comparatively higher education levels of recent returnees (particularly from Iran) and increase access to better-paying jobs.
- Facilitate access to microfinance, small business grants, and start-up capital, prioritizing female entrepreneurs to promote economic independence.
- Promote home-based and remote work opportunities for women facing mobility restrictions by supporting digital literacy, e-commerce, and telework models.
- Integrate financial literacy and debt management training into programmes to help households stabilize income and reduce reliance on disadvantageous borrowing mechanisms.

Civil documentation

Civil documentation remains a major barrier, with fewer than half of households reporting that all members hold a *Tazkira*. Female-headed households were more likely than male-headed households to report documentation for all family members (77 per cent vs. 40 per cent). Returnees from Iran had the highest coverage (63 per cent), while those from Pakistan, especially post-April arrivals, had the lowest (31 per cent), and eight per cent reported that no family member held a *Tazkira*. High costs and long processing times were the main obstacles, particularly for returnees from Pakistan. The lack of documentation is has a significant impact: 71 per cent of households said missing papers restricted their access to key services such as education, housing, and healthcare.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Advocate with the de facto authorities for simplified and gender-sensitive documentation processes, including female staffing at registration points, and for a prompt scale-up of *Tazkira* registration campaigns with a strong focus on reaching women and school-aged children. This should include mobile, home-based or community-based registration options to overcome movement restrictions and ensure broader reach.
- Expand legal assistance and awareness-raising efforts to inform returnees of their rights and the procedures required to obtain a *Tazkira*.
- Train and deploy community-based documentation facilitators – particularly trusted returnee or female community leaders – to guide households through paperwork, provide translation support, and liaise with the relevant de facto authorities.

Complaints, feedback and response mechanisms

Awareness of complaints, feedback and response systems remains low among returnees. Only 16 per cent reported knowing a contact point to raise concerns about humanitarian assistance, with men slightly more aware than women. Returnees from Pakistan who arrived before April reported the highest awareness (24 per cent), while post-April arrivals from Pakistan were the least informed. The UNHCR hotline was the best-known channel (43 per cent), followed by the AWAAZ number and complaints boxes. Key barriers included lack of reporting systems (39 per cent), not knowing how to file complaints (30 per cent), mistrust (13 per cent), and fear of potential consequences of reporting (11 per cent). Women cited language as a barrier at a much higher rate (18 per cent compared to five per cent).

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Strengthen and expand outreach and information campaigns to raise awareness about available complaints and feedback mechanisms, using trusted communication channels such as hotlines, radio, community meetings, and mobile teams to reach households in remote areas.
- Ensure complaints and feedback systems are fully accessible to people with disabilities, incorporating sign language services, braille materials, and voice-based or SMS-based options for people with visual or hearing impairments.
- Roll out language translation services to support female returnees in accessing existing channels for complaints and feedback.

ANNEX 1

Methodology

This third round of the Post-Return Monitoring Phone Survey targeted four population groups of Afghan returnees. Details for the sampling universe are as follows:

1. UNHCR-assisted returnees from Pakistan (1 January – 10 April 2025), prior to changes in cash assistance amounts, with 905 recorded households.

2. UNHCR-assisted returnees from Pakistan (11 April – 30 June 2025), following the reduction in cash assistance, with 8,888 recorded households.

3. UNHCR-assisted returnees from Iran (2023 – June 2025), included for the first time in the phone surveys, with 1,377 recorded households.

4. Undocumented Afghan returnees from Pakistan and Iran (2023 – June 2025), identified through UNHCR's border monitoring system, with 10,885 recorded households.

For each population group, UNHCR maintains a comprehensive roster capturing family ID, arrival date, household size and composition, and details of the household head (name, gender, age, and contact number). Background data on undocumented returnees is comparatively less robust, limiting its use as a primary reference for analysis.

Sampling was conducted using a simple random sampling design, ensuring that each returnee household had an equal probability of selection within its group. Sample size determination followed standard formulas (95% confidence level and five per cent margin of error), with adjustments for anticipated non-response, resulting in a target of 400 respondents per group. To account for unequal probabilities of selection, **analytical results were weighted by group prevalence in UNHCR's population lists**. The total sample included the following groups:

- **UNHCR-assisted returns from Pakistan (1 Jan – 10 Apr 2025):** 415 households reached
- **UNHCR-assisted returns from Pakistan (11 Apr – 30 Jun 2025):** 405 reached
- **UNHCR-assisted returns from Iran (2023 – Jun 2025):** 411 reached
- **Undocumented returns (2023 – Jun 2025):** 427 reached

ANNEX 2

Respondent Profile

The survey sampled 1,658 returnee households (exceeding the 1,600 target), with 80 per cent male respondents. However, the overall share of female participants in the sample is higher – 26 per cent compared to 74 per cent – since family members could respond on behalf of the registered beneficiary if they were unavailable.[43] A substantially higher proportion of respondents assessed from Iran were female (43 per cent) compared to only 22 per cent of returnee respondents from Pakistan.

- 79 per cent of sampled returnees were heads of households, of whom 72 per cent were male heads of households, and eight per cent were female heads of households. The remaining 20 per cent comprised of eight per cent male and 12 per cent female who were not the head of household but responded on their behalf.
- Older persons (aged 60 and above) made up five per cent of respondents.

These demographic factors signal that certain groups, particularly women and older persons, may be underrepresented in the sample. These limitations should be considered when interpreting the findings, as they may not fully reflect returnee experiences.

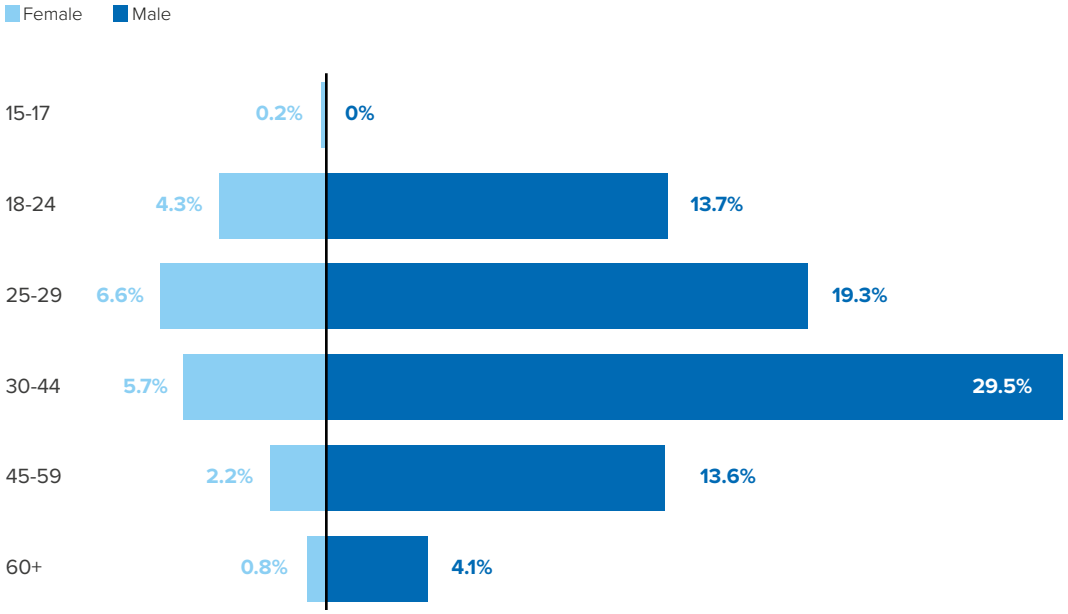
Female returnees 427

Male returnees 1,231

43 *The gender disparity can be attributed to sociocultural and logistical factors influencing participation. In some cases, families prevented female members from participating due to customary norms. Additionally, despite the use of female enumerators, some phones registered to female returnees were managed by male family members, limiting the direct involvement of women.*

Age

Chart #2
Gender distribution



The largest portion of interviewed returnees (both male and female) were aged between 30 – 44 years. Returnees from Iran tended to be younger than those from Pakistan, with 47 per cent of respondents under the age of 30 compared to 37 per cent among returnees from Pakistan.

People with disabilities

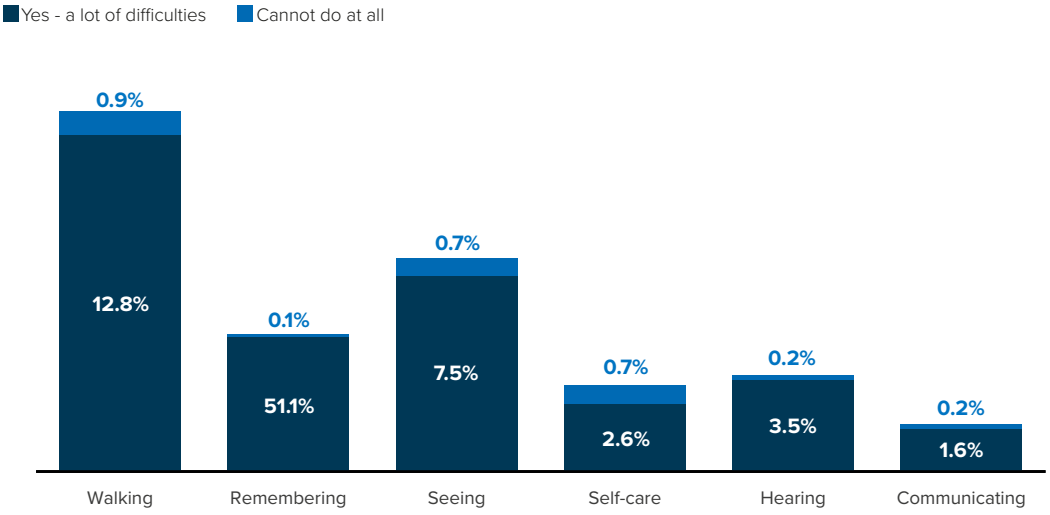
To assess functional limitations among returnee households, UNHCR employed the Washington Group Short Set on Functioning (WG-SS), which evaluates six key disability domains: seeing, hearing, walking, cognition, self-care (washing and dressing), and communication.[44]

44 The WG short set has the limitation of not addressing psychosocial or intellectual disabilities and that it can miss a significant number of children with developmental or psychosocial issues (which is addressed by the WG extended set or the child functioning question set, aiming at identifying a fuller range of childhood disability). As the survey mainly targets adult heads of households, UNHCR has opted to use the short set, as it is most widely tested and generally recommended for usage in the humanitarian response context.

25 per cent of assessed returnee households reported that they or a household member had difficulty or could not function at all in at least one of these domains (see Chart #3). This is comparable to 24 per cent of households in the December 2024 survey and represents a steep rise from 15 per cent in the July – September 2024 survey. The most common functional limitations were related to mobility, with 14 per cent of households reporting that they had members who either could not walk or had great difficulty walking. Disability prevalence was not associated with the location of displacement (Iran or Pakistan) or the timing of return (pre- or post-April for Pakistan returnees).

Chart #3

People with disabilities



Voluntary Repatriation Form (VRF) Holders

The Voluntary Repatriation Form is a document issued by UNHCR to returning Afghans, confirming their intent to return voluntarily to Afghanistan with UNHCR assistance. The VRF facilitates safe travel and ensures access to support services and assistance upon arrival. Across the surveyed sample, only 41 per cent held a VRF. Female beneficiaries were less likely to have this documentation compared to male respondents (29 per cent vs. 44 per cent). Returnees from Iran (35 per cent) are also proportionally less likely than those from Pakistan (45 per cent) to hold a VRF, likely linked to their registration status in Iran.

Geographical locations

The survey covered 33 out of the 34 provinces in Afghanistan and 255 districts, an increase of three provinces and 58 districts compared to the August 2024 round, providing a comprehensive perspective on returnees' experiences across the country. Sample sizes varied significantly between provinces, reflecting differences in population distribution and returnee concentrations.

Provinces such as Kabul, Herat, Nangarhar, Kunduz, Balkh, Kandahar and Baghlan were more heavily represented due to larger returnee populations and greater phone accessibility. However, the distribution of provinces appeared more balanced compared to the December 2024 survey, likely due to the inclusion of returnees from Iran in this data cycle.

ANNEX 3

Provinces

Table #1:
Total returnees by gender and province

Province	Female	Male	Total
Kabul	14.1%	13.1%	13.3%
Herat	15.2%	6.0%	8.0%
Balkh	10.2%	6.4%	7.2%
Kandahar	4.3%	7.4%	6.7%
Kunduz	2.7%	7.2%	6.3%
Helmand	7.9%	5.2%	5.8%
Baghlan	11.0%	4.3%	5.8%
Nangarhar	2.0%	6.6%	5.6%
Ghazni	4.0%	4.4%	4.3%
Takhar	1.8%	4.2%	3.7%
Jawzjan	6.7%	2.5%	3.4%
Farah	3.7%	2.3%	2.6%
Khost	1.4%	2.6%	2.4%
Zabul	0.5%	2.8%	2.3%
Paktika	0.9%	2.4%	2.0%
Faryab	0.7%	2.1%	1.8%
Paktya	0.5%	2.2%	1.8%

Province	Female	Male	Total
Laghman	0.3%	2.0%	1.6%
Parwan	1.8%	1.5%	1.6%
Kunar	0.0%	1.9%	1.5%
Sar-e-Pul	2.3%	1.2%	1.4%
Kapisa	0.7%	1.7%	1.4%
Logar	1.2%	1.5%	1.4%
Samangan	0.6%	1.3%	1.2%
Bamyan	0.9%	1.2%	1.2%
Daikundi	1.3%	1.0%	1.1%
Maidan Wardak	0.3%	1.2%	1.0%
Badakhshan	0.5%	0.9%	0.8%
Badghis	0.7%	0.8%	0.8%
Uruzgan	0.0%	0.9%	0.7%
Nimroz	1.7%	0.3%	0.6%
Panjsher	0.0%	0.5%	0.4%
Ghor	0.0%	0.3%	0.2%
Total	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**

Post Return Monitoring Survey Report

Published in December 2025

UNHCR The UN Refugee Agency

SAMUEL HALL.

SSAR Support Platform GLOBAL COMPACT ON REFUGEES

Supported by UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency

UNHCR Afghanistan
ICON Compound
Supreme Road, District # 9
Jalalabad Road, Kabul, Afghanistan

www.unhcr.org