

**UNHCR AFGHANISTAN**

# POST RETURN MONITORING SURVEY REPORT

**April 2025**





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

We would also like to acknowledge the partnership and appreciate the generous contributions from the following donors that made this report possible:

Austria | Belgium | Bulgaria | Canada | China | Czech Republic | Denmark | European Union | Finland | France | Germany | Ireland | Islamic Development Bank | Italy | Japan | Republic of Korea | Luxemburg | Netherlands | Norway | Saudi Arabia | Sweden | Switzerland | Afghanistan Humanitarian Fund | Afghanistan Humanitarian Trust Fund | Central Emergency Response Fund | Special Trust Fund for Afghanistan | Qatar

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# Acronyms

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

# Executive Summary

The shift in displacement trends in the Afghanistan situation in recent years is a phenomenon of major national and regional significance. The scale of returns, particularly since the adoption of the *Illegal Foreigners' Repatriation Plan (IFRP)* by the Government of Pakistan in late 2023, has had an impact on the landscape in Afghanistan. With the resumption of large-scale returns and deportations from Pakistan in April 2025, it becomes all the more important to monitor the situation of returnees, track their experiences and adapt programming to their needs. This report aims to support these efforts.

UNHCR's Post-Return Monitoring (PRM) is conducted on a regular basis to assess the well-being and reintegration of Afghan refugees who return from Pakistan. This post return monitoring report presents a snapshot of data from 2,868 Afghan households who returned to Afghanistan between January and June 2024. The topline results reveal changes from the previous rounds of post-return monitoring conducted in September 2024.

First, a growing share of returnees are unable to return to their province or district of origin, highlighting persistent barriers to their reintegration including the lack of shelter, land, and livelihoods. Other obstacles include about a quarter (24 per cent) of respondents reporting disabilities within their household – heightening their risk of exclusion from services, livelihoods, and community engagement.

Second, while more returnees report having a source of income, wage labour remains precarious, and families are facing rising levels of debt. At the same time, returnees in this round of monitoring were more likely to showcase marketable skills than the previous cohort. This may indicate a shift in returnee profiles, and the need to further look into their skills profile, across gender and age groups, so as to improve their socioeconomic integration but also understand the impact of their arrival on local economies.

Third, while slight improvements are noted on food security, the levels remain insufficient as half of returnees have no food stocks, and female-headed households are disproportionately affected.

Fourth, while large-scale conflict and internal displacement have abated, returnees continue to face serious protection concerns. Over three quarters of returnees report at least one member of their household not having a national ID card, which is a key obstacle in exercising their basic human and access to essential services.

Women and girls continue to be disproportionately affected by a lack of access to education, healthcare, freedom of movement, inheritance and more.

These findings highlight the importance of monitoring the situation of returnees to understand their conditions upon return but also as they attempt to settle back in Afghanistan and reintegrate. UNHCR hopes that the findings herein presented can inform and improve programming in Afghanistan, and that the UN and other actors can leverage the results to deliver assistance tailored to the needs of returnees and their communities, ultimately to support sustainable reintegration.

## RETURN PATTERNS

Return areas remained largely unchanged compared with the July to September 2024 survey, with a **consistent trend in return movements**. Most returnees follow established and planned patterns, with over one third not returning to their areas of origin and the vast majority returning to their intended provinces. The ten highest return provinces remain identical across both post-return monitoring rounds, with Kabul, Nangarhar and Kunduz featuring in the top three.

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# 86%

OF RETURNEES  
SETTLED IN TEN  
PROVINCES

Of the 2,868 returnees interviewed for this report, 86 per cent had returned to the following ten provinces: Kabul, Nangarhar, Kunduz, Kandahar, Balkh, Laghman, Baghlan, Logar, Helmand, and Jawzjan. These provinces align with the top ten intended destinations recorded upon arrival in Afghanistan, suggesting that most returnees successfully reach their planned locations. This pattern is consistent with findings from the July to September 2024 survey.

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# 37%

DID NOT RETURN TO  
THEIR PROVINCE OF  
ORIGIN

More than one third of surveyed returnees did not return to their province of origin, and 59 per cent did not return to their district of origin. The primary reasons cited were lack of housing, livelihoods, and land. This marks a slight increase from the July to September 2024 survey, where 32 per cent reported not returning to their province of origin. This suggests that barriers to returning home have persisted and, in some cases, worsened over time.

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# 14%

DID NOT RETURN TO  
INTENDED PROVINCE

14 per cent of returnees did not return to their intended province, a slight increase from 12 per cent in the July to September 2024 survey. At the district level, the gap was wider still, with 41 per cent settling elsewhere, up from 29 per cent in the previous survey. This trend suggests that worsening conditions in intended destinations—driven by economic collapse, lack of livelihoods, and restricted access to services—are making it increasingly difficult for returnees to resettle as planned.

## INTENTIONS TO LEAVE CURRENT LOCATION

The majority of returnees expressed an intention to remain in their current locations. There were no significant differences in intentions to stay or leave based on gender.

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# 94%

INTEND TO STAY  
PERMANENTLY

94 per cent of returnees reported intending to stay in their current locations, reflecting a slight decline from 96 per cent in the July to September 2024 survey, suggesting that while most remain settled, a small but growing number may be reconsidering their options.

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# 3%

INTEND TO RETURN TO  
THEIR AREA OF ORIGIN

Only 3 per cent of returnees who had not returned to their areas of origin reported that they wanted to do so but had been unable to. This marks a slight increase from the July to September 2024 survey, where only 1.4 per cent expressed the same intention.

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# 1%

INTEND TO MOVE  
WITHIN AFGHANISTAN

Only 1 per cent reported that they intend to move to another province. This represents a marginal increase from 0.3 per cent reported in the July to September 2024 survey.

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1%

INTEND TO LEAVE  
AFGHANISTAN

Only 1 per cent reported that they intend to leave Afghanistan. Intended countries cited by respondents include Pakistan, Turkey, Iran, Germany, France or the U.S. This was a slight increase from the July to September 2024 survey (0.4 per cent).

17%

WERE AWARE OF  
RETURNS TO PAKISTAN

17 per cent of returnees indicated that some of their relatives and community members, who had returned under the IFRP, had gone back to Pakistan for the second or third time. This marks a significant increase from the July to September 2024 survey (4 per cent), highlighting the persistence of cyclical movements.

## Cash assistance

All returnees reported receiving cash assistance from UNHCR upon arrival, which was mostly used to cover immediate needs such as food, shelter, transportation, healthcare, communication, and debt repayment. However, 38 per cent said the grant lasted two to three months, 34 per cent used it within one month, 22 per cent stretched it to three to six months, and just 5 per cent were able to sustain themselves beyond six months. These spending patterns closely mirrored those from the July to September 2024 survey, underscoring the persistent inadequacy of the amount of assistance in ensuring longer-term stability for returnees. No significant differences by gender were observed. However, VRF holders reported greater satisfaction with the cash grant and were able to stretch it for longer periods than non-VRF holders, likely because they received larger amounts of assistance.<sup>1</sup>

## Education

One third of respondent returnees reported that their children could not access the same schools and educational facilities as the host community, with 37 per cent of girls and 24 per cent of boys facing barriers to enrolment. For girls, the primary obstacle was the ban on female education, cited by 25 per cent of returnees. For boys, the biggest barrier was the need to support their families economically, reported by 16 per cent. The main educational institutions<sup>2</sup> that remained open included primary schools, lower and upper secondary schools, and madrassas.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Details on the cash assistance provided to all population groups is described in Chapter 6 Use of Cash Grant

<sup>2</sup> Under the Afghan education system, upper secondary school covers grades 10 to 12, even though they are referred to as high schools. Lower secondary schools systematically cover all classes from grades seven-nine while primary schools cover grades one to six.

<sup>3</sup> Madrassa is an educational institution offering instruction in Islamic subjects.



## Healthcare

The majority of returnees (88 per cent) reported having access to a medical facility in their community, including public clinics, public and private hospitals, and private pharmacies. However, despite this availability, 34 per cent stated that, in the past six months, one or more members of their household needed medical care but were unable to access it. The main barriers included lack of financial means, long distances to health facilities, lack of transportation, and a shortage of qualified medical personnel. Gender disparities were also observed: 16 per cent of female returnees reported that no medical facility was available to them in their community, compared to 11 per cent of men. Additionally, 38 per cent of female-headed households had at least one member unable to access medical care, slightly higher than 33 per cent among male-headed households.

## Drinking water

The majority of returnees (81 per cent) had access to water for all their household needs, with protected wells being the primary source for 46 per cent. Other sources included public taps or standpipes (11 per cent), water truck deliveries (9 per cent), and piped water (9 per cent). However, 11 per cent of returnees relied on unprotected water sources, increasing their risk of waterborne diseases and related health issues. These findings are consistent with the July to September 2024 survey, underscoring persistent challenges in ensuring safe and reliable water access for returnees. Gender disparities were evident, as 26 per cent of female returnees reported not having access to sufficient water for their household needs, compared to 17 per cent of male returnees. This suggests that women may face greater barriers in securing adequate water.

## Sanitation and hygiene

Access to sanitation was reported by 85 per cent of returnees, with no significant gender differences and a slight increase from 78 per cent in the July to September 2024 survey. The majority relied on household or shared facilities, with 63 per cent having a private latrine, 34 per cent using a shared household latrine, and 2 per cent depending on communal public latrines. Reliance on shared and communal facilities may pose hygiene and privacy challenges, particularly for women, children, and other vulnerable groups.

## Food security

More than half of returnees (57 per cent) reported lacking adequate food for their households, a notable improvement from 80 per cent the previous year but still of critical concern. Additionally, 47 per cent had no food stocks at all, while 29 per cent had supplies lasting less than a week, underscoring persistent food insecurity and the precarious conditions many returnees continue to face. Gender disaggregation of the data revealed

disparities, with 64 per cent of female-headed households reporting insufficient food access, compared to 56 per cent of male-headed households. This suggests that female-headed households may face greater economic hardships or barriers in securing stable food sources.

## Shelter

Substandard mud dwellings remained the most common type of housing, sheltering 71 per cent of returnees. The survey revealed that 62 per cent were living in rented accommodation, 17 per cent were staying with family or friends, and 15 per cent either owned or had inherited their homes. Financial strain was evident among renters, as 61 per cent reported being unable to afford rent, and 60 per cent stated that they borrowed money to cover housing costs. Notably, female-headed households (63 per cent) were slightly more likely than male-headed households (58 per cent) to rely on borrowing for rent, highlighting the heightened financial vulnerability of women-led households.

## Economic situation

Among the 2,868 interviewed returnees, 81 per cent reported possessing one or more marketable skills, marking a significant increase from 49 per cent in the July–September 2024 survey. For men, the most commonly reported skills included shopkeeping, transportation or driving, and agriculture, while women most frequently cited skills in tailoring, cooking, and embroidery.

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# 60%

HAD A SOURCE OF  
INCOME

60 per cent of returnees reported having a source of income, with a significant gender disparity, 72 per cent of male returnees had income, compared to only 16 per cent of female returnees. However, the proportion of female returnees with a source of revenue doubled compared to the July to September 2024 survey, suggesting an increase in economic participation among women, despite persistent barriers to employment.

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# 61%

WORK AS DAILY WAGE  
LABOURERS

Daily wage labour remained the most common source of income for 61 per cent of both male and female returnees, followed by small business ownership (13 per cent). Other livelihood sources included agriculture (4 per cent), employment in private companies (2 per cent), and civil service jobs (2 per cent). Though a slight decrease from the July–September 2024 survey (67 per cent), these findings highlight the continued reliance on unstable, low-income jobs for majority of returnees.

# 73%

EARN LESS THAN AFN  
10,000 PER MONTH

The majority (73 per cent) of returnees reported an average monthly household income ranging between 1,500 AFN and 10,000 AFN (USD 21–140), while 14 per cent earned more than 10,000 AFN (USD 140) per month. Notably, only 3 per cent of returnees had an income below 1,500 AFN (USD 21), a significant decrease from 15 per cent in the previous survey, suggesting a decline in the proportion of returnees in the lowest income bracket. Female returnees faced greater economic vulnerability, with 53 per cent earning 5,000 AFN (USD 70) or less, whereas more than half (57 per cent) of male returnees reported earning 5,001 AFN or more.

## Protection

Few returnees reported experiencing conflict in their communities—96 per cent stated there had been none in the past six months. This number should be interpreted with caution, as security concerns, fear of repercussions, and shifting perceptions of violence may lead to underreporting. While large-scale conflict may not be widespread, returnees continue to face serious protection concerns.

# 76%

OF HOUSEHOLDS  
HAD AT LEAST ONE  
MEMBER WITHOUT A  
TAZKIRA

Lack of civil documentation remained a major challenge, with 76 per cent of households having at least one family member without a Tazkira (Afghanistan's national identity card). Women were disproportionately affected, with 25 per cent of female heads of households lacking a Tazkira, compared to just four per cent of male heads of households. The lack of civil documentation had direct consequences for returnees, with half the sample reporting that it restricted their access to essential services. The most impacted areas were education (42 per cent), law enforcement (21 per cent), social security benefits (10 per cent), and healthcare (8 per cent).

# 32%

DID NOT ALWAYS  
FEEL SAFE  
ACCESSING  
LATRINES

While most returnees reported feeling safe in their communities, concerns remained in certain aspects of daily life. Thirty-two per cent of returnees stated they did not always feel safe when accessing latrines, with women (38 per cent) reporting slightly higher rates of discomfort than men (31 per cent).

## Access to markets

One in ten returnees reported that their ability to visit markets was sometimes limited by physical or security threats. Women may face additional restrictions due to movement limitations, and social norms discouraging their presence in public spaces. Overall, four per cent reported sometimes or never feeling safe, citing extortion by armed groups, unwelcoming attitudes, or discrimination due to their returnee status as key factors.

## Mental health and psychosocial needs

The phone survey findings reveal that mental health and psychosocial concerns were prevalent among returnees, with 70 per cent reporting that they or someone in their household experienced stress that impacted daily life, including sleep disturbances and physical symptoms. This marks a significant increase from 49 per cent in the July–September 2024 survey, highlighting worsening psychosocial conditions. The primary sources of stress among the respondent returnees included lack of employment, severe economic hardship, uncertainty about the future, and food insecurity. No significant differences were observed by gender, indicating that these pressures are widespread.

## Digital inclusion and connectivity

Access to mobile phones remained highly unequal between men and women. While 95 per cent of male family members had access to a phone, only 26 per cent of female returnees reported the same. However, this represents an improvement from the previous survey, when only 16 per cent of female household members had access to a mobile device. While rising, the gender gap in digital access continues to limit women's ability to communicate, seek assistance, and access information.

## Complaints and response mechanisms

15 per cent of respondent returnees were aware of where to lodge complaints or obtain information regarding humanitarian assistance. Female returnees (66 per cent) were more likely than male returnees (53 per cent) to report a lack of knowledge on available complaint mechanisms. The main challenges in reaching humanitarian organizations included lack of awareness about how to access these mechanisms and their absence in some locations. Among those aware of complaint and feedback systems, 41 per cent identified the UNHCR hotline as an available channel.

## CHAPTER 1

# Background

Between September 2023 and December 2024, close to 806,000<sup>4</sup> Afghans returned to Afghanistan, triggered by the Government of Pakistan's Illegal Foreigners Repatriation Plan (IFRP). This figure includes both refugees, individuals in refugee-like situations and undocumented returnees. Between 1 September 2023 and 31 December 2024, UNHCR assisted close to 120,000 returnees, with approximately 49 per cent of those assisted individuals being women and girls, at least 25 per cent were female heads of households while 2.5 per cent were people with disabilities.<sup>5</sup>

This report is based on responses from 2,868 Afghan returnee households (79 per cent male and 21 per cent female returnees) who had returned from Pakistan to Afghanistan between January to June 2024 and who were interviewed over the phone in December 2024. It provides an overview of protection needs, coping mechanisms, access to basic services, and livelihoods. All returnees reported receiving cash assistance at one of UNHCR's encashment centres upon arrival.

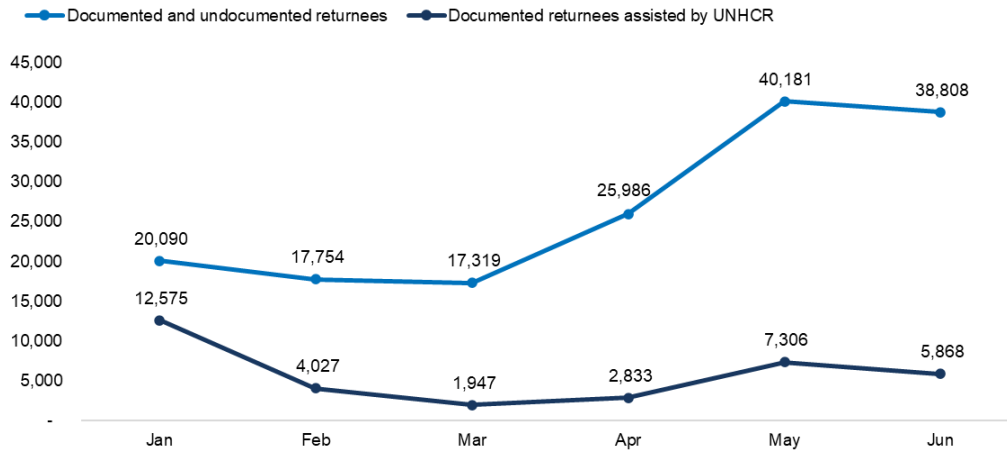
This report is part of UNHCR's return monitoring series, following up on its July–September 2024 returnee monitoring exercise, which surveyed a random sample of 4,220 households who had returned from Pakistan between September and December 2023. The monitoring series focuses on the return of Afghans from Pakistan (January – June 2024) and the growing demand for support in areas of return. Returnees consistently express the need for livelihood opportunities, access to education and healthcare, and secure housing as key factors to rebuild their lives. This report takes stock of how returnees are faring across these critical areas, identifying both progress and ongoing challenges in their reintegration process. By assessing their current situation, this monitoring exercise provides insight into where gaps remain and how returnees are navigating life in Afghanistan following their return.

<sup>4</sup> UNHCR, "Afghanistan Operational Update," 2024

<sup>5</sup> UNHCR, "Pakistan-Afghanistan - Returns Emergency Response #25," 2024

CHART # 1 <sup>6</sup>

Returns from Pakistan 1 January - 30 June 2024



## CHAPTER 2

# Methodology

UNHCR Afghanistan undertakes returnee monitoring at three main touchpoints:

- 1. Encashment Centre Monitoring:** Upon arrival, returnees are interviewed at encashment centres to evaluate return patterns, motivations, and challenges encountered both in countries of asylum and during the return journey.
- 2. Phone Surveys in Return Areas:** As part of ongoing protection monitoring, UNHCR conducts mobile phone surveys with newly returned individuals in their areas of return. These surveys provide real-time insights into returnees' protection needs, coping strategies, and socio-economic conditions, including access to essential services and livelihoods. This is the focus of this report.
- 3. Community-Based Protection Monitoring (CBPM):** In areas of return, this phase involves focus group discussions, interviews with key informants, and household-level surveys. Adopting an area-based approach, CBPM targets returnees (regardless of their return year or status), internally displaced persons (IDPs), asylum-seekers and refugees and host communities to gain a comprehensive understanding of protection concerns and community dynamics. The data is also shared with the Afghanistan Protection Cluster (APC).

<sup>6</sup> Data source: UNHCR




**CHAPTER 3**

# Respondent Profile

The survey sampled 2,868 returnee households, with 79 per cent male and 21 per cent female.<sup>8</sup>

- 80 per cent of returnees were **heads of households**, of whom 74 per cent were male heads of households, and 6 per cent were female heads of households. The remaining 20 per cent are composed of 14 per cent male and 6 per cent female who were not the head of house but responded on their behalf.
- **Youth** (below 25 years) accounted for 11 per cent of the sample.
- **Older persons** (above 60 years) made up 6 per cent of returnees.

These demographic factors indicate that certain groups, particularly women, younger individuals, and older persons, may be underrepresented in the sample. As a result, these limitations should be considered when interpreting the findings, as they may not fully capture the experiences of all returnees within the broader community.

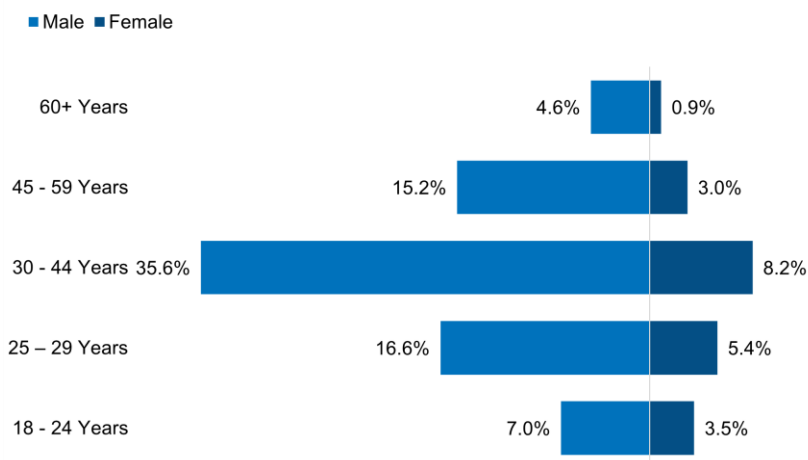


Female returnees:	602
Male returnees:	2,266

## Age

The largest portion of returnees (both male and female) were within the 30-44 years' age bracket.

**CHART #2**



<sup>8</sup> This gender disparity can be attributed to several sociocultural and logistical factors influencing participation. In some cases, families either permitted or restricted female members from participating, reflecting customary norms in certain regions. Additionally, despite the use of female enumerators, some phones registered to female returnees were managed by male family members, further limiting the direct involvement of women and girls in the survey process.

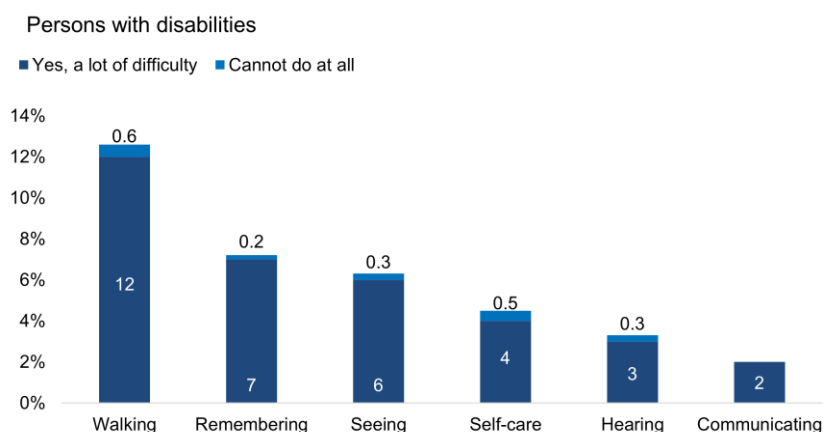


## Persons with disabilities

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.<sup>9</sup>

**The findings revealed marked increase of disabilities prevalence, with 24 per cent of returnees reporting that they or a household member had difficulty or could not function at all in at least one of these domains compared to 15 per cent in the July to September 2024 survey** (see Chart #3). This highlights the significant challenges faced by returnees with disabilities, who are at heightened risk of exclusion from services, livelihoods, and community engagement.

**CHART #3**



## 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's assistance. The VRF facilitates safe travel and ensures access to support services and assistance upon arrival in Afghanistan. In the survey sample, VRF holders were slightly fewer than non-VRF holders, with 1,375 interviews (48 per cent) conducted with VRF holders and 1,493 interviews (52 per cent) with non-VRF holders. This distribution reflects the diverse return pathways among Afghans, with some returning voluntarily under UNHCR facilitated return programme, while others have been unable to access the voluntary repatriation process in Pakistan most likely due to increased levels of harassment and arrest imposed since the implementation of IFRP.

<sup>9</sup> 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, which is most widely tested and generally recommended for usage in the humanitarian response context.

## Geographical locations

The survey covered a broad geographical area, spanning 30 provinces and 197 districts, ensuring a comprehensive perspective on returnee experiences across Afghanistan. However, sample sizes varied significantly between provinces, reflecting differences in population distribution and returnee concentrations.

Provinces such as Kabul, Nangarhar, Kunduz, Kandahar, Balkh, Laghman, and Baghlan were more heavily represented in the sample, likely due to their larger returnee populations and greater phone accessibility. As a result, the findings may be more reflective of experiences in high-return areas, while potentially underrepresenting remote regions or provinces with smaller returnee populations, where access to services, employment, and reintegration support may differ significantly.

### CHAPTER 4

# Return Patterns

The majority of returnees (86 per cent) settled in ten provinces, and 15 districts, as listed below, with Kabul district having the highest proportion of returnees.

**TABLE 1: TOTAL RETURNEES BY GENDER AND PROVINCE**

Province	Female	Male	Total	Proportion
Kabul	166	588	754	26.3
Nangarhar	147	469	616	21.5
Kunduz	47	237	284	9.9
Kandahar	55	177	232	8.1
Balkh	36	99	135	4.7
Laghman	21	94	115	4.0
Baghlan	22	83	105	3.7
Logar	26	65	91	3.2
Helmand	5	60	65	2.3
Jawzjan	5	60	65	2.3
Khost	8	50	58	2.0
Sar-e-Pul	10	38	48	1.7
Zabul	6	39	45	1.6
Takhar	6	35	41	1.4
Herat	3	34	37	1.3
Kunar	3	32	35	1.2
Ghazni	6	25	31	1.1
Samangan	6	17	23	0.8

Parwan	6	15	21	0.7
Paktika	4	9	13	0.5
Paktya	3	6	9	0.3
Maidan Wardak	3	6	9	0.3
Nimroz	0	8	8	0.3
Kapisa	4	4	8	0.3
Uruzgan	2	5	7	0.2
Faryab	1	3	4	0.1
Farah	0	3	3	0.1
Badghis	0	3	3	0.1
Bamyan	1	1	2	0.1
Badakhshan	0	1	1	0.03

**TABLE 2: TOP 15 DISTRICTS**

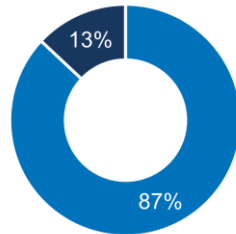
District	Female	Male	Total	Proportion
Kabul	113	382	495	17.3
Bagrami	15	111	126	4.4
Jalalabad	31	88	119	4.1
Behsud	31	77	108	3.8
Kunduz	14	94	108	3.8
Surkh Rod	30	75	105	3.7
Kandahar	27	71	98	3.4
Dasht-e-Archi	11	61	72	2.5
Mazar-e-Sharif	15	52	67	2.3
Qarghayee	14	37	51	1.8
Deh Sabz	10	37	47	1.6
Pul-e-Khumri	7	39	46	1.6
Chaparhar	8	38	46	1.6
Pul-e-Alam	13	32	45	1.6
Kama	6	35	41	1.4

While most returnees (87 per cent) reported living in their intended province of return (see Chart #4), a lower proportion (59 per cent) were residing in their intended district (see Chart #5). This suggests that while many returnees reached their planned provinces, factors such as housing shortages, lack of economic opportunities and other factors including possible security concerns may have influenced their ability to settle in their originally intended districts. No significant differences were observed based on gender.

## Currently living in the area of intended return

**CHART #4**

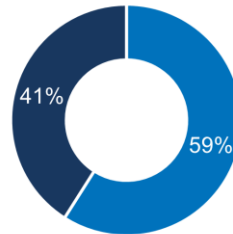
Province



■ Yes  
■ No

**CHART #5**

District



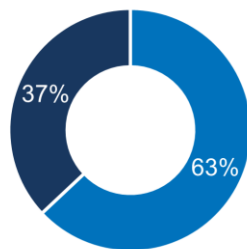
■ Yes  
■ No

While the majority of returnees reported residing in their province of origin (see Chart #6), the proportion was lower compared to previous findings, and less than half reported living in their district of origin (see Chart #7). These results are largely consistent with the July–September 2024 survey, with the main exception being the intended district of return, where a lower percentage of returnees in this survey reported settling in their originally planned district. This suggests that while provincial-level return trends remain stable, challenges related to housing availability, lack of land and possible security concerns, and economic opportunities may be influencing settlement patterns at the district level.

## Currently living in area of origin

**CHART #6**

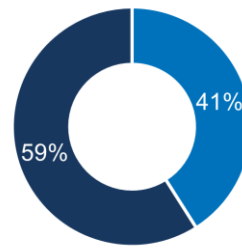
Province



■ Yes  
■ No

**CHART #7**

District



■ Yes  
■ No

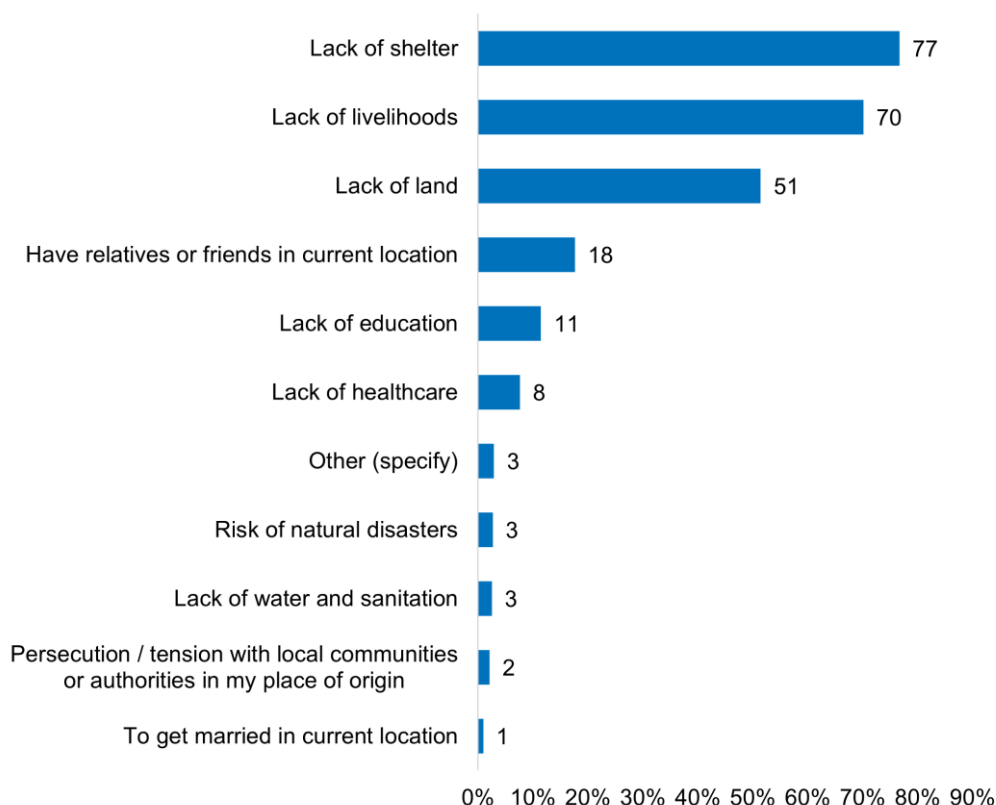
The primary reasons cited by returnees for not returning to their areas of origin were lack of shelter (77 per cent), unavailability of livelihoods (70 per cent), and lack of land (51 per cent). These findings are consistent with the July–September 2024 survey, though in the previous round, lack of livelihoods was the most commonly reported reason, followed by lack of shelter and lack of land.

A smaller portion (18 per cent) of returnees stated that social connections in their current location influenced their decision to remain. Other cited reasons included lack of education (9 per cent), lack of healthcare (8 per cent), access to education in the current location (3 per cent), natural disasters (3 per cent), and lack of water and sanitation (3 per cent) (see Chart #8).

Returnees who did not return to their areas of origin due to lack of livelihoods were most likely to resettle in Kandahar, Balkh, Nangarhar, and Kabul, suggesting that these provinces may offer better livelihood opportunities. Additionally, male returnees (72 per cent) were slightly more likely than female returnees (62 per cent) to cite lack of livelihoods as a barrier to returning to their areas of origin.

**CHART #8**

Reasons for not returning to areas of origin



## CHAPTER 5

# Plans to leave

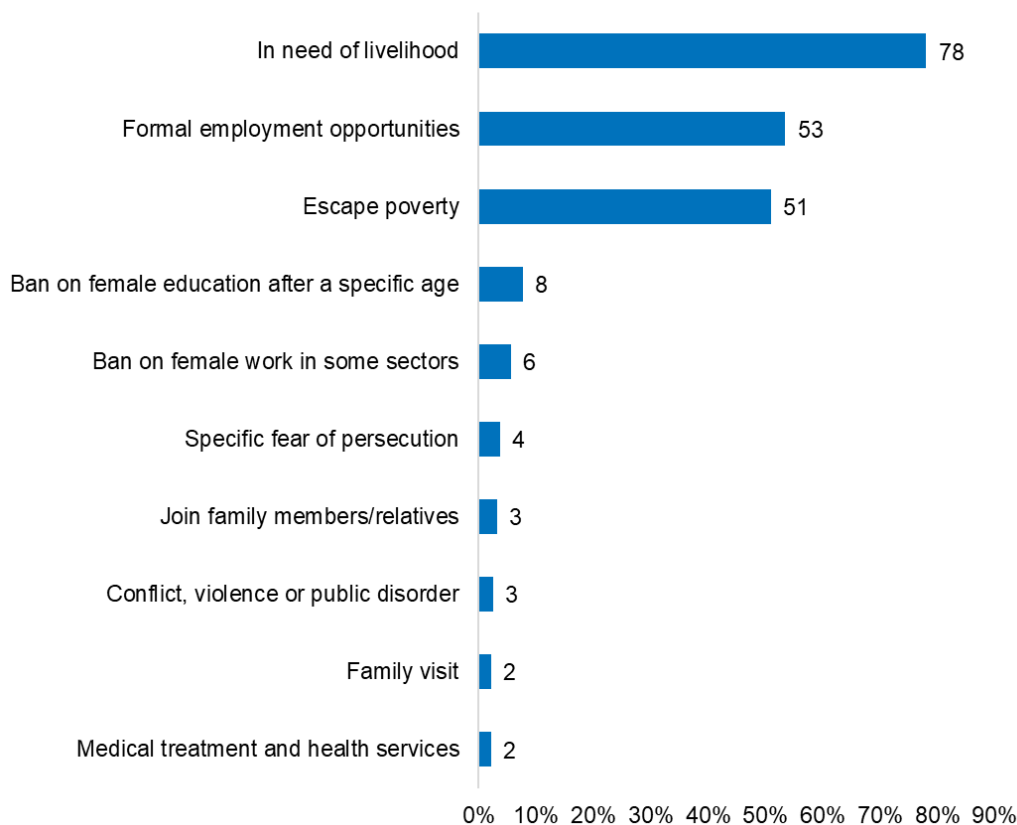
The majority of interviewed returnees (94 per cent) plan to remain in the location, province, or district where they have resettled. These findings are similar to the July–September 2024 survey. A small number (3 per cent) plan to return to their area of origin, while one per cent want to move to another province in Afghanistan, primarily Kabul, followed by Nangarhar, Logar, Herat, Kunduz, and Kandahar. Another one per cent intend to leave Afghanistan, mainly to Pakistan, with few other returnees mentioning Turkey, Germany, the USA, and Iran. However, most of those intending to leave do not yet have a clear timeframe for their departure.

Over (17 per cent) of interviewed returnees, particularly in Nangarhar, Kunduz, Baghlan, and Kandahar provinces, reported that some of their relatives and community members who had returned following the implementation of the IFRP had gone back to Pakistan for the second or third time. This marks a major increase from the July–September 2024 survey, when only 4 per cent reported the same. Returnees were asked to identify as many reasons as for their relatives or community members returning to Pakistan. The main reasons cited for returning to Pakistan were searching for livelihoods (78 per cent), employment opportunities (53 per cent), and escaping poverty in Afghanistan (51 per cent). Other mentioned reasons included the bans on female education and employment, reuniting with family members, conflict, visiting relatives, and seeking medical treatment (28 per cent, see Chart #9 for detailed breakdown). The significant rise in returnees moving back to Pakistan, primarily due to economic hardship and restrictions on rights, highlights the limitations of the current reintegration system. However, the unprecedented humanitarian crisis affecting Afghanistan must not be allowed to overshadow the situation of widespread human rights violations in the country. Afghans fleeing the country may refer in the first instance to their immediate needs for survival as the reason for their flight. This should not preclude a thorough assessment of the international protection needs of Afghan applicants for asylum.

With reference to the shared burden of proof, UNHCR calls on decision-makers to ensure that asylum applicants are given an opportunity to provide a full and complete account of the reasons that forced them to flee, including possible fears of persecution upon return.

**CHART #9**

Top 10 reasons for moving back to Pakistan

**CHAPTER 6**

## Use of cash grant

UNHCR provided protection assistance to Afghan refugees returning under its Voluntary Repatriation (VolRep) program, including a cash grant of USD 375 per person upon arrival from Iran, Pakistan, Tajikistan, and other countries. This grant, distributed through encashment centres in Nangarhar, Kandahar, Kabul, and Herat provinces, was intended to cover transportation costs and support returnees in restarting their lives in Afghanistan. In addition to the VolRep program, in November 2023, UNHCR expanded its assistance to include Afghan refugees and individuals in refugee-like situations returning outside of official UNHCR-facilitated voluntary repatriation programs. This assistance, aligned with the inter-agency assistance package agreed within the border consortium, provides returnees with USD 20 per person for transportation and USD 140 per household to help cover immediate needs upon arrival in Afghanistan.

**BOX 1: CASH GRANT AMOUNTS**

**VRF Holders** receive USD 375 (AFN 26,500) per person



Proof of Registration (**PoR**) **card holders** receive USD 375 (AFN 26,500) per person



**Slip/Asylum certificate holders** receive USD 140 (AFN 9,900) per household and USD 20 (AFN 1,400) per person for transportation



**Undocumented family members** of VRF or PoR card holders receive USD 20 (AFN 1,400)



**Protection referrals** (individuals with protection profiles) receive USD 140 (AFN 9,900) per household and USD 20 (AFN 1,400) per person for transportation and USD 60 for communication



**CARE grant recipients** receive USD 350 (AFN 26,500) for one individual or USD 700 (AFN 49,500) for family cases of two or more individuals. This cash package is paid three to four months after returnees settle in return areas.

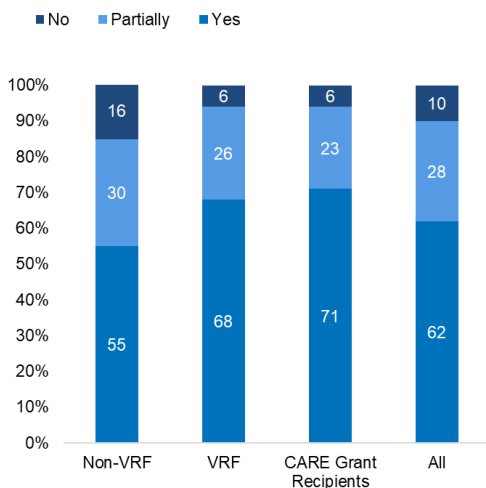
All returnees reported receiving cash assistance from UNHCR upon arrival. VRF holders (52 per cent) received USD 375 per person, while non-VRF holders (48 per cent) received USD 140 per person. Additionally, 5 per cent of returnees—both VRF and non-VRF holders—were CARE grant recipients, receiving USD 350 per person. The majority of returnees (62 per cent) stated that the cash grant was sufficient to meet their immediate needs, while 28 per cent found it partially adequate, and 10 per cent reported that it was insufficient. Notably, the proportion of returnees who found the grant insufficient rose significantly compared to the July–September 2024 survey, where only 3 per cent reported the same. By type of recipient, the non-VRF holders who receive lower cash assistance, as highlighted above, were more likely to report that the grant was insufficient (16 per cent) compared to 6 per cent for VRF holders.

34 per cent of returnees said that the cash assistance lasted one month, 38 per cent managed for two to three months, 22 per cent stretched it to three to six months, and only 5 per cent were able to make it last more than six months. Smaller household sizes (one to four individuals) were largely unable to stretch the cash grant, with only 18 per cent making it last beyond three months. In contrast, 32 per cent of medium-sized households (five to nine members) and 30 per cent of larger households (ten or more members) reported being able to sustain the grant for more than three months.



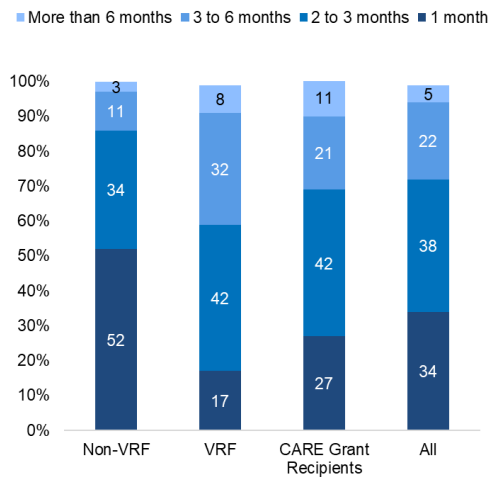
**CHART #10**

Cash grant addressing immediate needs (by type of recipient)



**CHART #11**

How long the cash grant lasted (by type of recipient)

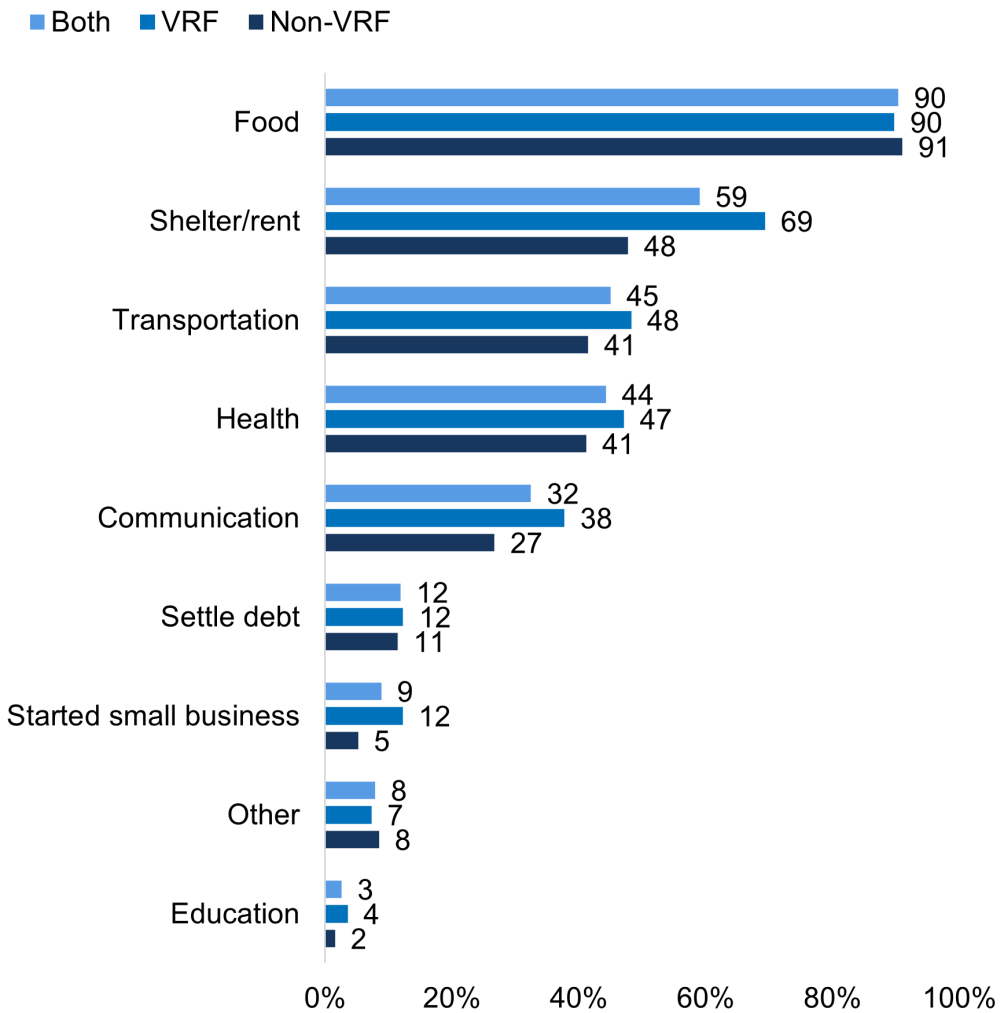


VRF holders expressed higher satisfaction with the cash grant and were more likely to stretch it for a longer period than non-VRF holders, likely due to receiving larger amounts. CARE grant recipients reported similar satisfaction levels to VRF holders but had a slightly lower ability to make the grant last over extended periods (see Charts #10 and #11).

**Food was the most frequently cited use of the cash grant**, with 90 per cent of returnees reporting spending it on food. Other short-term immediate needs were also common, including shelter or rent (59 per cent), transportation (45 per cent), healthcare (44 per cent), communication (33 per cent), and settling debts (12 per cent). There were no major differences by gender in most spending categories; however, male returnees (36 per cent) were more likely than female returnees (22 per cent) to use the grant for communication, which is likely linked to lower mobile phone access among women. Spending patterns between VRF and non-VRF holders were generally similar, though VRF holders were more likely to report using the grant for rent (see Chart #12).

**CHART #12**

Use of cash grant



**CHAPTER 7**

# Access to education

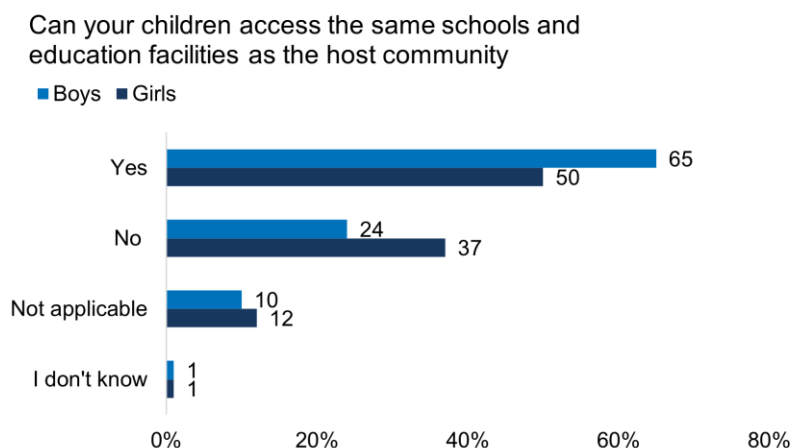
*“We faced many difficulties to enrol our children in school, we went to concern education office in Laghman province multiple times to submit our documents, and it took about two months before we were finally able to enrol our children in school.”*

The educational situation in Afghanistan has significantly deteriorated since August 2021, with bans on female education preventing at least one million girls from attending secondary school and beyond, increasing the total number of out-of-school girls to nearly

2.5 million (80 per cent of school-aged girls).<sup>10</sup> This marks a major setback, reversing nearly two decades of progress in education and putting the future of generations at risk. The impact extends to primary education, where enrolment has dropped from 6.8 million in 2019 to 5.7 million in 2022, partly due to the ban on female teachers instructing boys, exacerbating teacher shortages and socio-economic pressures such as child labour.<sup>11</sup> Higher education has also suffered, with university enrolment halving since 2021.

Following the implementation of the IFRP, nearly two-thirds (65 per cent) of children returning to Afghanistan have not enrolled in school, according to a Save the Children survey.<sup>12</sup> The majority (85 per cent) cited lack of necessary documents as the key barrier to registration. This stands in contrast to their time in Pakistan, where more than two-thirds had been attending school. Findings from this survey align with the July–September 2024 report, with one-third of returnees stating that their children cannot access the same schools and education facilities as the host community. Access was lower for girls (37 per cent) compared to boys (24 per cent) (see Chart #13). By location, returnees in Baghlan (39 per cent), Kunduz (36 per cent), and Kandahar (30 per cent) were most likely to report that their sons could not access education on par with the host community. The trend was similar for girls, with returnees in Baghlan (40 per cent), Kunduz (40 per cent), and Kabul (37 per cent) reporting the same challenges for their daughters. These findings highlight critical gaps in education access for returnee children.

### CHART #13



Educational institutions available in returnee locations included primary schools (70 per cent), upper secondary schools (69 per cent), lower secondary schools (64 per cent), madrassas (52 per cent), Islamic education facilities (16 per cent), and universities (12 per cent) (see Chart #14). However, availability alone does not guarantee access, as structural barriers—such as documentation requirements, socio-economic constraints, and gender-based restrictions—continue to limit enrolment for many returnee children.

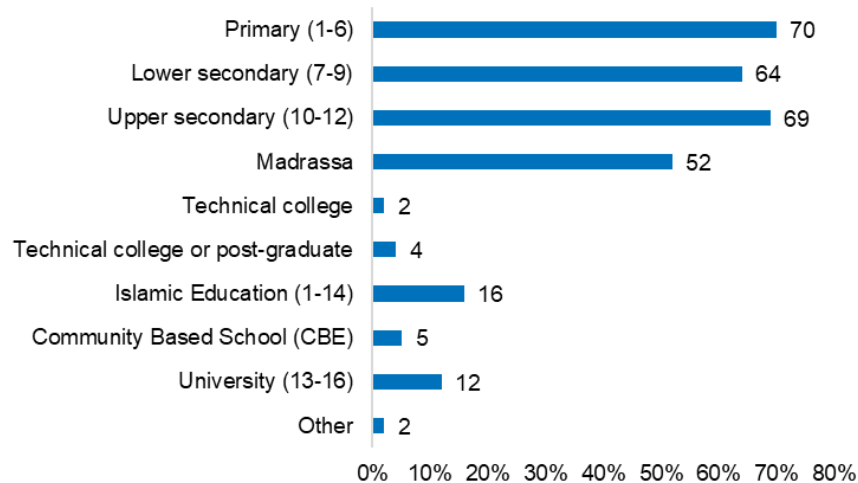
<sup>10</sup> UNESCO, 'Afghanistan: 1.4 million girls still banned from school by de facto authorities', 2024

<sup>11</sup> UNESCO, 'Afghanistan: 1.4 million girls still banned from school by de facto authorities', 2024

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

## CHART #14

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



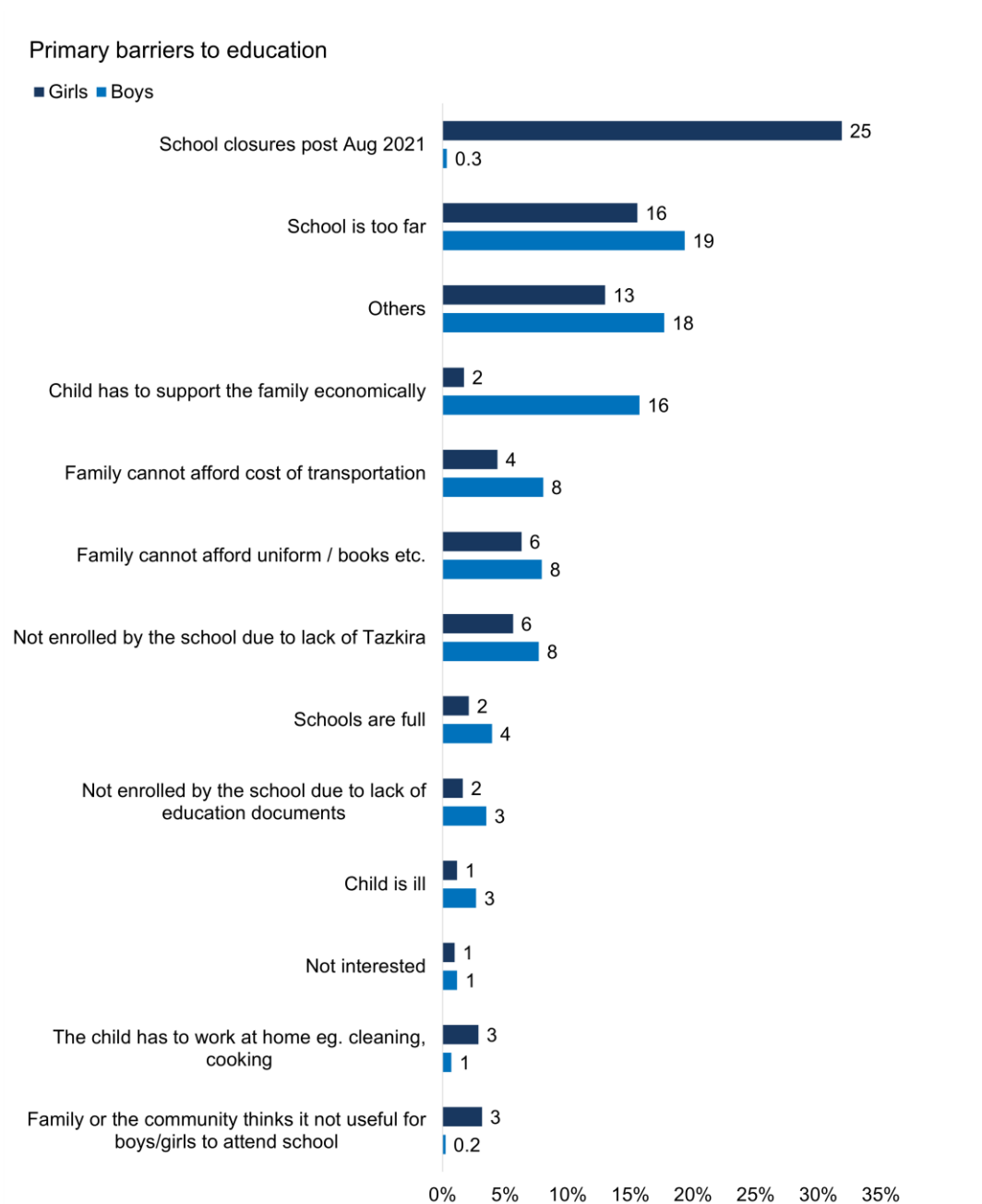
The primary barriers to education for boys and girls differed slightly, reflecting gendered restrictions and broader social attitudes about their roles and access to schooling. For girls, the most frequently cited barrier—reported by 25 per cent of returnees whose daughters were not in school—was the ban on female education. Returnees also cited the closure of schools after August 2021, and family or community beliefs that deem education unnecessary for girls (see Chart #15). These structural and social barriers, combined with additional challenges such as lack of documentation, increase the likelihood that returnee girls will be excluded from education. For boys, the primary barrier was economic pressure to support their families, cited by 16 per cent of returnees. Findings from the Afghanistan Education Cluster align with this trend, noting that while returnee boys generally have better access to public schools than girls<sup>13</sup>, community-Based Education (CBE) programs have become a key alternative for girls, allowing them to overcome gender-specific barriers to schooling.

For both boys and girls, distance to school was a significant barrier (17 per cent), followed by the unaffordability of transportation (6 per cent), the cost of school-related expenses such as uniforms and books (7 per cent), and the lack of a Tazkira or education documents (7 per cent). Financial constraints emerged as a significant barrier to education as parents prioritizing basic needs such as food and shelter over education (see Chart #36). Many returnee families also mentioned that they were unable to travel to their province of origin to obtain identification documents, making it impossible to enrol their children in school. A small portion of returnees reported safety fears for movement outside the home as a challenge to attend school (3 per cent for returnees with daughters and 1 per cent of returnees with sons)

<sup>13</sup> Afghanistan Education Cluster, "An Analysis: Education in Emergencies (EiE) need assessment to better understand the situation of returnees' school-aged children in areas of return in the country," July 2024

Finally, many returnees who selected ‘other’ as a reason for non-enrolment explained that they arrived at their destinations when it was too late in the school term, but they intended to enrol their child in the next term or academic year (see Chart #16). Others identified the lack of documentation as a key barrier, reinforcing findings that only 21 per cent of returnees reported all their children had a Tazkira (see Chart #44).

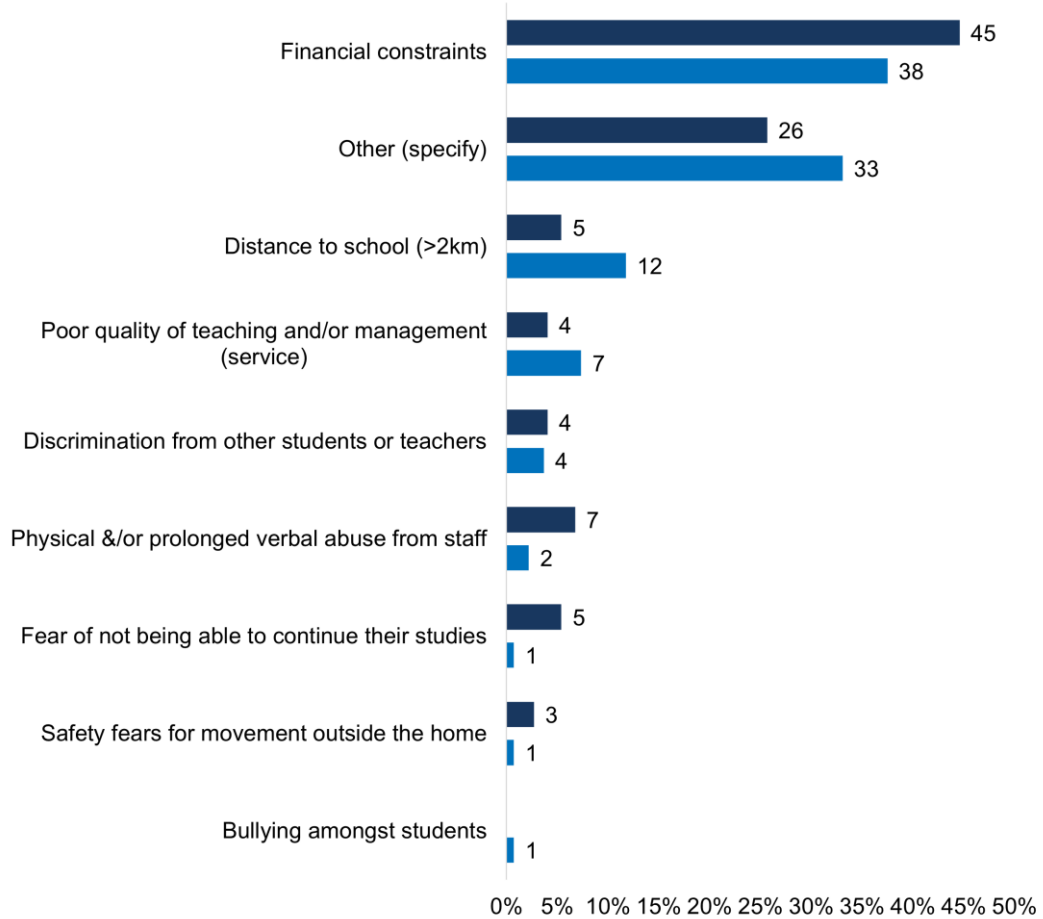
**CHART #15**



**CHART #16<sup>14</sup>**

Primary challenge to attend school

■ Girls ■ Boys



<sup>14</sup> These refer to challenges experienced by children attending school

## CHAPTER 8

# Access to healthcare

*"I gave birth, but we had no money or vehicle, eventually, I was taken to a government clinic, but they refused to accept me and referred me to a private hospital, where we borrowed money for my delivery."*

Afghanistan's health system remains deeply strained by years of conflict, weak infrastructure, and economic instability. Malnutrition, high maternal and child mortality rates, and infectious diseases such as tuberculosis and polio are persistent public health concerns, also contributing to high levels of disability.

For two decades, Afghanistan's healthcare system heavily relied on international donor support, with donors contributing six times more than the Afghan government itself.<sup>15</sup> Following August 2021, the abrupt withdrawal of development funding and the departure of healthcare professionals triggered a healthcare crisis. While humanitarian aid provided temporary relief, its gradual reduction has left critical gaps, forcing organizations to focus solely on emergency assistance. The economic decline and restrictive DfA policies have created a difficult situation, particularly for vulnerable groups such as people with disabilities. Additionally, DfA regulations requiring female healthcare workers to be accompanied by a male guardian have significantly impeded healthcare delivery and limited assessments of health needs. The influx of returnees is expected to compound these vulnerabilities, with women and girls disproportionately affected.

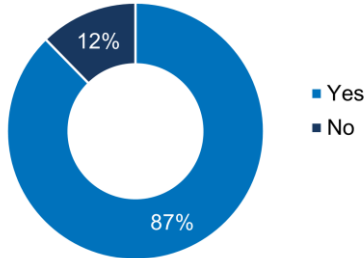
About one in ten returnees (12 per cent) reported that there is no medical facility in their community, a finding consistent with the July–September 2024 survey (13 per cent). These results align with REACH HSM Round 9<sup>16</sup>, which found that 10 per cent of assessed settlements lacked healthcare services, indicating that both returnees and host communities face similar challenges. Female returnees were slightly more likely (16 per cent) than male returnees (11 per cent) to report the absence of a medical facility available to them in their community. The lack of healthcare access was most pronounced in Baghlan (22 per cent), Logar (20 per cent), and Helmand (23 per cent).

<sup>15</sup> HRW, "Afghanistan's Healthcare Crisis," 2024

<sup>16</sup> REACH, "Humanitarian Situation Monitoring (HSM) Round Nine" November 2024

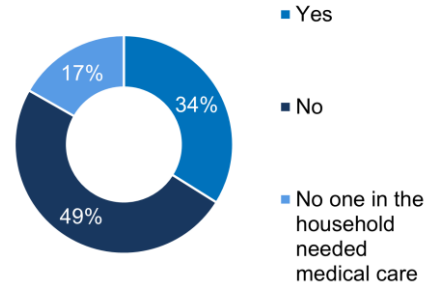
**CHART #17**

Is there a medical facility in your community?



**CHART #18**

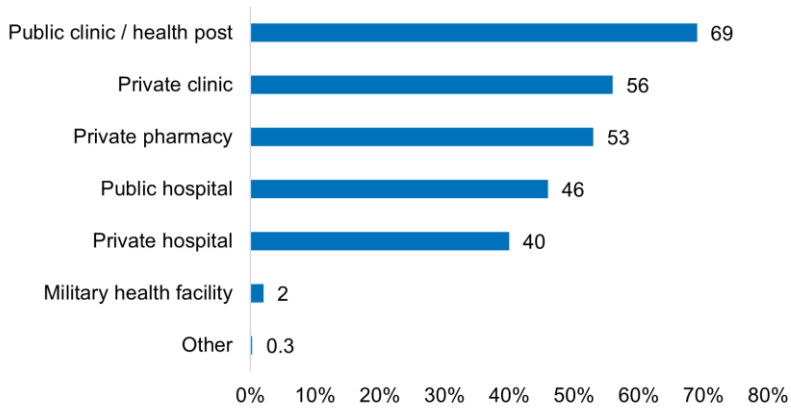
Did anyone in your household need medical care and was unable to access it?



Returnees reported various types of health facilities available in their communities including public clinics (69 per cent), private clinics (56 per cent), private pharmacies (53 per cent), public hospitals (46 per cent) and private hospitals (40 per cent).

**CHART #19**

Type of available health facility

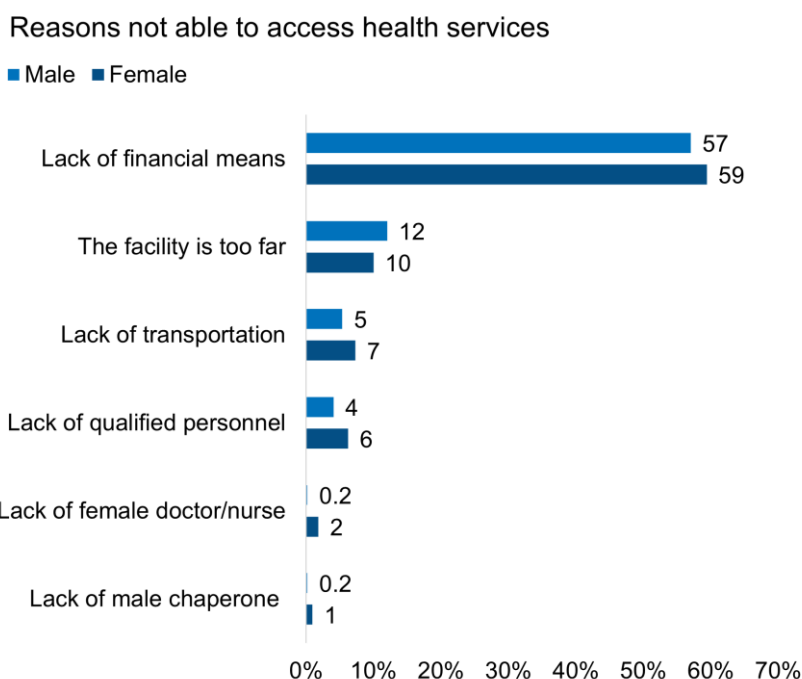


A third of returnees (34 per cent) reported that in the past six months, one or more household members needed medical care but were unable to access it—a figure similar to the July–September 2024 survey (30 per cent). Female-headed households (38 per cent) were slightly more likely to report difficulties in accessing medical care compared to male-headed households (33 per cent). While the majority (82 per cent) of returnees said they take less than an hour to reach the closest medical facility, 16 per cent reported travel times of one to three hours, and 2 per cent reported taking more than three hours. Female returnees (26 per cent) were more likely than male returnees (16 per cent) to report travel times exceeding one hour, indicating greater barriers to timely medical care.



The main barriers preventing returnee households from accessing medical care included financial constraints, distance to healthcare facilities, lack of transportation, and a shortage of qualified medical personnel. Among those who selected ‘other,’ the most frequently cited issue was the lack of medicines in health centers, highlighting the strain on available healthcare services. There were no significant differences by gender in this regard. However, these findings should be interpreted with caution, as access challenges may be underreported due to survey limitations or returnees’ reluctance to disclose security concerns.

**CHART #20**



**CHAPTER 9**

# Water, Sanitation and Hygiene

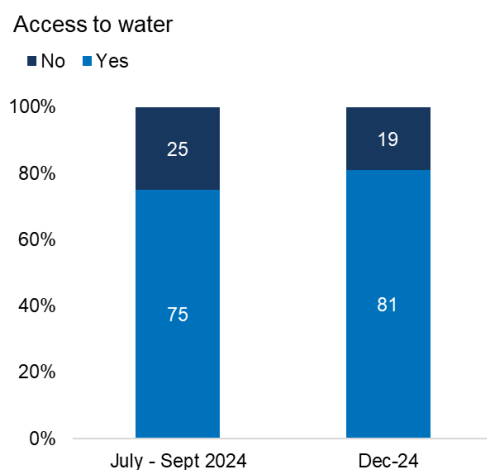
Afghanistan continues to face a severe humanitarian crisis characterized by widespread water scarcity and inadequate access to WASH services. Climate change-related events, such as droughts, floods and earthquakes have intensified these challenges, impacting an estimated 19.4 million people residing in high-risk zones<sup>17</sup>. In January 2024, dry conditions

in the Western, Northern, and Northeastern regions of the country, continued throughout February and March.<sup>18</sup> According to the 2024 Whole of Afghanistan Assessment, drought conditions in 2024 led to increased displacement and heightened risks of gender-based violence, particularly due to limited water access.<sup>19</sup> Acute watery diarrhoea is a significant public health threat, primarily affecting children under five. Poor water quality and inadequate sanitation are the main drivers of this outbreak, with 171,600 reported cases and 87 deaths by December 2024.<sup>20</sup>

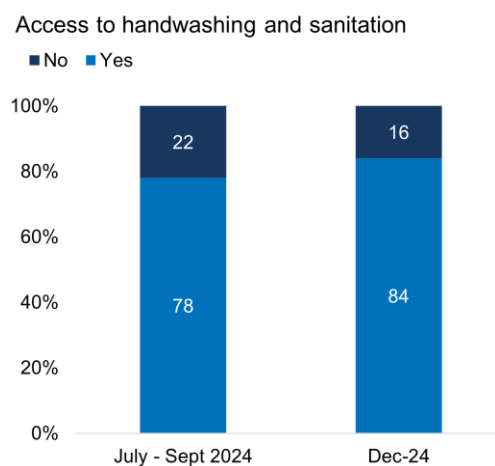
The majority of returnees (81 per cent) in this survey reported that they have access to water for all their household needs, that is, drinking, hygiene, cooking and house cleaning. (It is worth noting that this is significantly higher than the REACH HSM Round Nine Monitoring where 65 per cent of returnees were able to access sufficient quantities of water for drinking, cooking, other domestic use and hygiene.) About one quarter (26 per cent) of the female returnees reported that they did not have access to water for all their household needs while only 17 per cent of male returnees did.

Additionally, 85 per cent also reported having access to latrines, handwashing and sanitation facilities, with no differences by gender. These findings are a slight improvement from the July to September 2024 survey. While this depicts relatively high levels of access to water, the data does not account for water quality as illustrated by the REACH HSM Round nine Monitoring which found that in 16 per cent of the assessed settlements, only a small portion of households (1 - 25 per cent) had access to safe drinking water within 500 meters of their homes.<sup>21</sup>

**CHART #21**



**CHART #22**



<sup>19</sup> UNICEF, "Afghanistan WASH Cluster Newsletter," December 2024

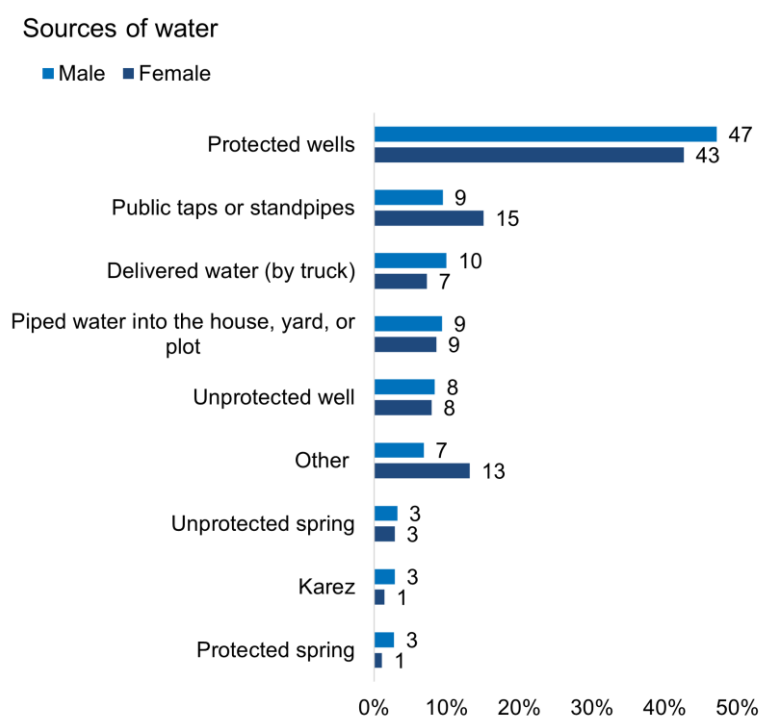
<sup>20,18, 19</sup> OCHA, "Afghanistan Dry Spell Monitoring," April 2024

<sup>21</sup> REACH, "Humanitarian Situation Monitoring (HSM) Round Nine" November 2024

The main source of water for the largest portion of returnees was protected wells, reported by 46 per cent of households. Other common sources included public taps or standpipes (11 per cent), water truck deliveries (9 per cent), and piped water (9 per cent), with no significant differences by gender. Among those who selected ‘other’ sources of water, mosques and neighbors were frequently mentioned.

However, 11 per cent of returnees reported relying on unprotected water sources (such as unprotected wells or springs), increasing their risk of waterborne diseases. This was particularly common in Kunduz (27 per cent), Baghlan (19 per cent), and Laghman (17 per cent), highlighting regional disparities in access to safe drinking water.

**CHART #23**

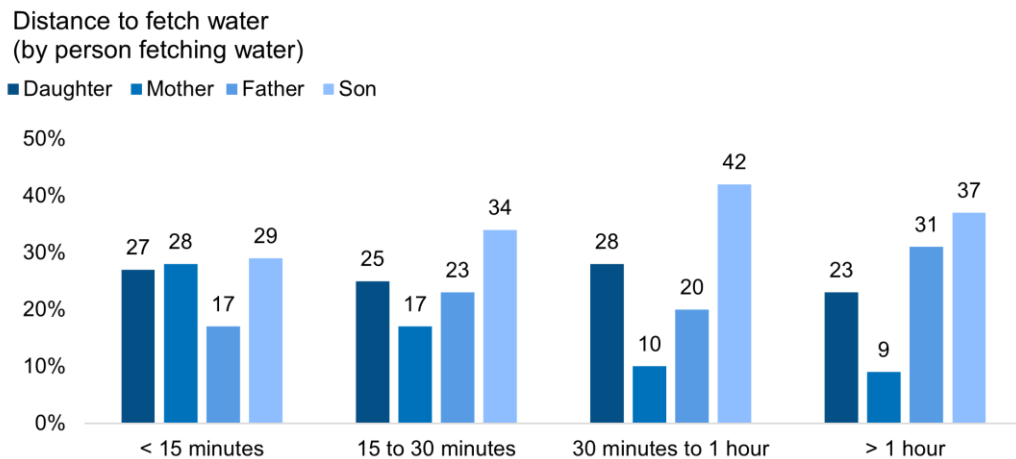


For the majority of returnees (85 per cent), distances to water points were relatively short, with water collection (including round trip and waiting time) taking less than 15 minutes. An additional 11 per cent reported that fetching water took between 15 and 30 minutes, while 2 per cent reported taking 30 minutes to one hour, and only 1 per cent had to travel more than an hour to fetch water.

Female-headed households reported longer distances to access water, with 24 per cent taking more than 15 minutes, compared to 13 per cent of male-headed households. While sons were the most likely household members to fetch water (see Chart #24), the distance to the water source played a role in determining who was responsible. As distance

increased, male household members (sons or fathers) were more likely to fetch water. This shift is likely due to restrictions on women's movement and security risks associated with traveling long distances alone.

**CHART #24**



**CHAPTER 10**

# Food security

*“Today I worked from morning to night without eating, and even during work, I feel weak from hunger.”*

The food insecurity situation in Afghanistan remains dire, with approximately 17.2 million people — about 40 per cent of the population — experiencing high levels of acute food insecurity as of April 2023.<sup>22</sup> This includes nearly 3.4 million individuals facing emergency levels of food insecurity. Contributing factors include economic instability, climate shocks, and disrupted agricultural productivity, which have left the nation struggling to meet basic needs.<sup>23</sup> The WFP reports that 14.8 million people are currently facing acute food insecurity, with 3.5 million children suffering from malnutrition.<sup>24</sup> Additionally, the Global Hunger Index indicates that 30.4 per cent of the population is undernourished, and 44.6 per cent of children under five are stunted<sup>25</sup>.

<sup>22</sup> Afghanistan: Acute Food Insecurity Situation for April 2023 and Projection for May - October 2023

<sup>23</sup> World Bank - Afghanistan is facing a severe food security crisis

<sup>24</sup> WFP: “Hunger threatens one in three Afghans. Without immediate funding, millions of people will go without the food they need.” 2025

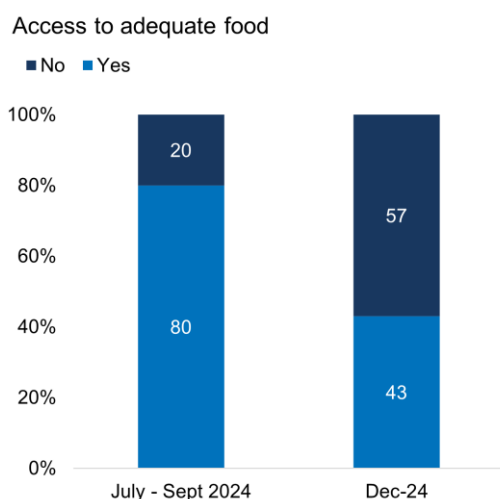
<sup>25</sup> Global Hunger Index, Afghanistan

Findings from the phone survey reflect these trends, with 57 per cent of returnees reporting inadequate access to food for their households. The situation was most severe in Baghlan (70 per cent), Kandahar (64 per cent), and Laghman (62 per cent). Female-headed households were more likely to experience food insecurity (64 per cent) compared to male-headed households (56 per cent), reinforcing the gendered impact of food shortages.

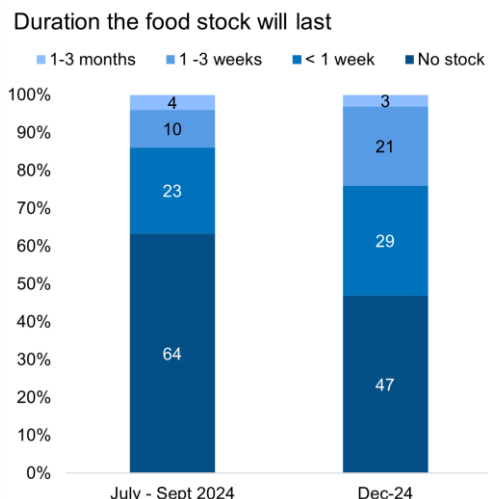
Three quarters of returnees reported that they or a household member had skipped a meal or reduced food intake because there was not enough food available. By gender, women (82 per cent) were more likely than men (72 per cent) to report meal skipping or food reduction, highlighting higher levels of vulnerability among women and female-headed households.

When asked about food stocks, nearly half (50 per cent) of returnees reported having no food reserves, while 29 per cent had stocks lasting less than a week, 21 per cent had stocks for one to three weeks, and only 3 per cent had food that could sustain them for one to three months. There were no significant differences between female-headed and male-headed households. While these findings suggest a slight improvement in the ability of returnees to stretch food stocks compared to the July–September 2024 survey (see Chart #26), the food security situation remains dire. The need to meet household food requirements remains the primary reason for returnees taking on debt (see Chapter 13).

**CHART #25**



**CHART #26**



While the majority of returnees (85 per cent) reported having access to a market to meet their household needs, male returnees (89 per cent) reported higher access compared to female returnees (77 per cent). This disparity can be attributed to restrictions on women's mobility and economic participation imposed after August 2021, reinforcing their heightened socio-economic vulnerability.

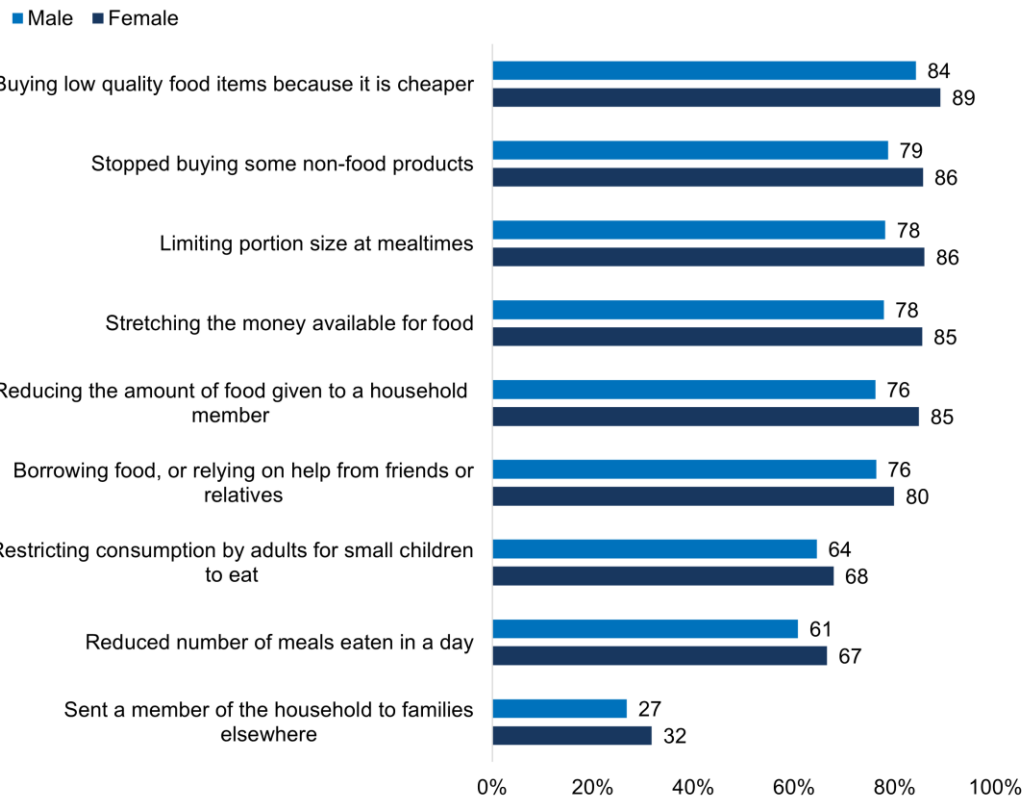
Findings from the REACH HSM Round Nine report indicate a rise in movement restrictions for women, with an increasing number of settlements requiring women to be accompanied by a male relative when accessing markets.<sup>26</sup> In some areas, market access was entirely restricted for women<sup>27</sup>. Additionally, they have raised transaction costs, especially for transportation. One in ten returnees faced physical or security threats when accessing markets (7 per cent of female and 11 per cent of male returnees). Lack of transportation was a more common issue, affecting 25 per cent.

Returnees reported using various coping strategies to meet their food needs, with the most common being buying cheaper and lower-quality food (85 per cent). Other frequently cited strategies included eliminating some non-food purchases (80 per cent), limiting portion sizes (80 per cent), stretching available money for food (79 per cent), and borrowing (77 per cent). Female returnees were slightly more likely than male returnees to employ these strategies (see Chart #27).

**CHART #27**

<sup>26, 27</sup> REACH, "Humanitarian Situation Monitoring (HSM) Round Nine" November 2024

During the past 7 Days, has anyone in your household done any of these things?



**CHAPTER 11**

# Access to housing

*“Currently, I live at my uncle’s house, and the UNHCR is building a home for us, in two months, this house will be rebuilt, and we will move there.”*

Afghanistan faces severe shelter shortages due to an influx of returnees, natural disasters, and economic hardship. Earthquakes in October 2023 damaged or destroyed 48,000 homes, while floods in 2024 affected 18,460 homes<sup>28</sup>, exacerbating decades of conflict-driven displacement. Rising poverty and unemployment further limit households' ability to secure adequate housing. The 2024 UN humanitarian response plan estimates that 6.6 million people need shelter assistance, with many internally displaced or living in temporary, inadequate conditions.

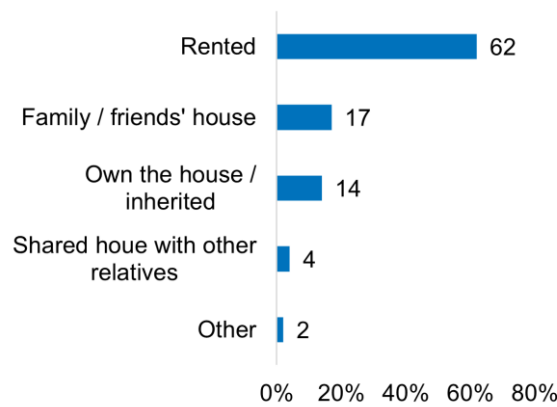
Substandard mud houses were the most common type of shelter among returnees (71 per cent), offering poor protection against natural disasters and increasing susceptibility to

<sup>28</sup> UNHCR, “Afghanistan Shelter Factsheet,” August 2024

disease due to inadequate sanitation and insulation. This proportion is slightly lower than in the July–September 2024 survey (78 per cent), with a notable increase in returnees living in concrete houses (from 11 per cent to 21 per cent). Other, less common shelter types included unfinished houses (5 per cent) and tents or makeshift shelters (2 per cent). The majority of returnees (62 per cent) lived in rented housing, while 17 per cent stayed with family or friends, and 15 per cent lived in homes they owned or had inherited. Shelter conditions did not differ significantly by gender of the head of household.

**CHART #28**

Shelter / housing arrangement

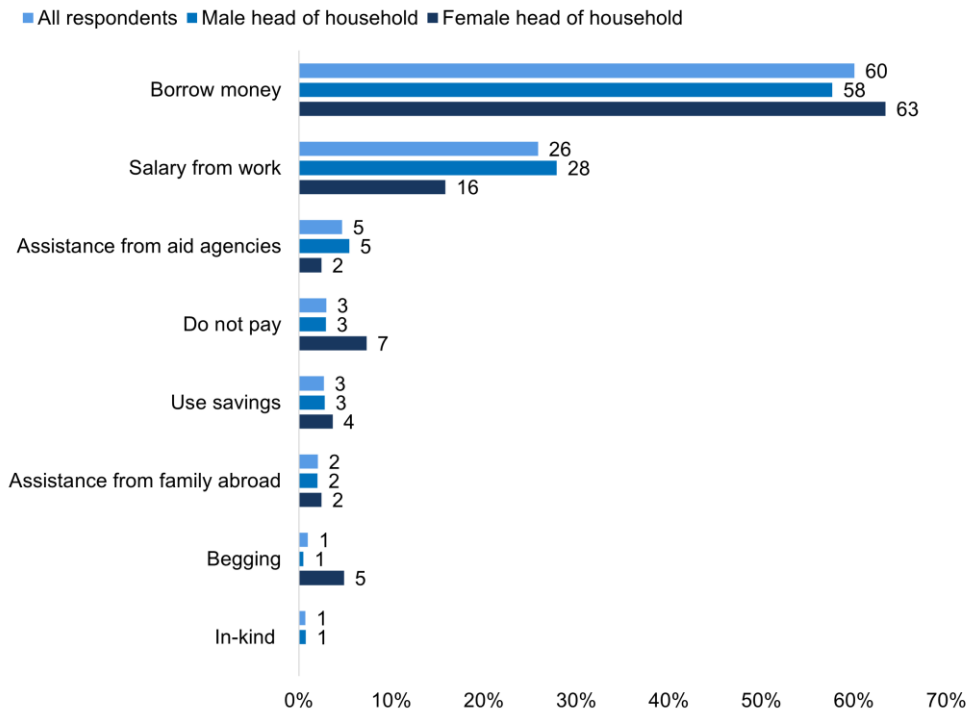


Among returnees living in rented housing, 61 per cent reported being unable to afford rent. To cope, 60 per cent of renters relied on borrowing money to pay rent, while 26 per cent managed using their salaries. Female-headed households (63 per cent) were slightly more likely than male-headed households (58 per cent) to rely on borrowing for rent payments. Overall, 31 per cent of returnees faced a threat of eviction, with female-headed households (36 per cent) more likely to report this risk than male-headed households (31 per cent). The top three reasons for eviction threats were verbal eviction threats (23 per cent), conflicts with the host community or landlord (21 per cent), and landlords planning to use the property for business (19 per cent).

**CHART #29**



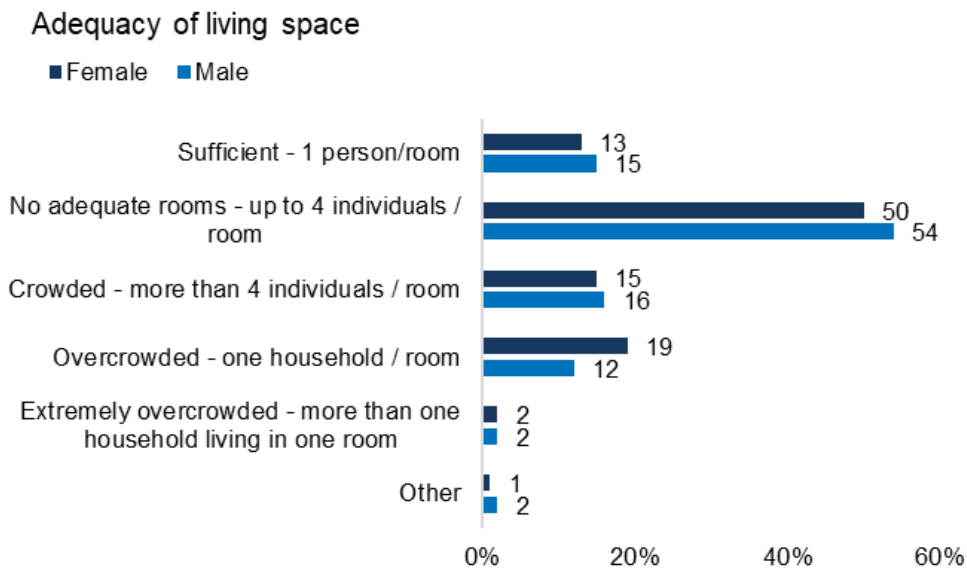
How do you pay the rent?



Inadequate living space was a major issue, with 53 per cent of returnees reporting crowded living conditions, accommodating up to four individuals per room. Additionally, 15 per cent lived in houses shared by multiple households, and 14 per cent reported that one household occupied a single room. Only 15 per cent of returnees stated that their living space was adequate. By gender, female returnees (21 per cent) were slightly more likely than male returnees (14 per cent) to report overcrowded or extremely overcrowded conditions with only half of the required funding received.<sup>29</sup>

**CHART #30**

<sup>29</sup> UNHCR Afghanistan Shelter Factsheet - August 2024



## CHAPTER 12

# Skills and education

Since August 2021, the educational landscape for women and girls in Afghanistan has deteriorated significantly. By December 2022, the DfA had banned female students from universities, effectively ending their access to higher education. This action followed the earlier shutdown of girls' secondary schools. Consequently, a vast number of Afghan girls and young women are now excluded from formal learning. The international community, including aid organizations, donor nations, and Afghan voices like religious leaders and community elders, have voiced alarm over these developments. UNESCO has urgently called for the immediate and unconditional restoration of education for all girls and young women, noting that an estimated 80 per cent of school-aged Afghan females are currently out of school.<sup>30</sup> Similarly, UNICEF data shows that only a small fraction (16 per cent) of Afghanistan's schools are exclusively for girls, and many suffer from inadequate sanitation, further hindering their ability to attend.<sup>31</sup>

The survey findings indicate that half of the returnees reported having received some form of formal education, and 81 per cent possessed one or more skills. Gender disparities in education were pronounced.

<sup>30</sup> UNESCO, "Afghanistan: 1.4 million girls still banned from school by de facto authorities," 2025

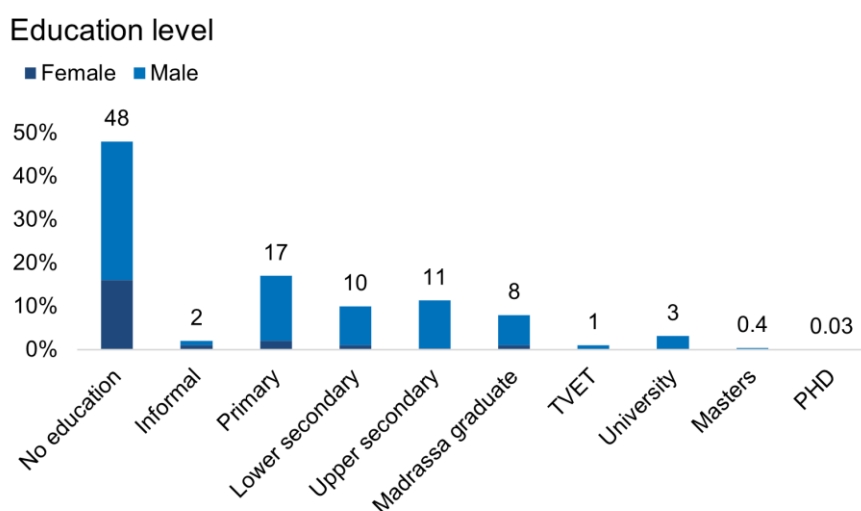
<sup>31</sup> UNICEF Data: Afghanistan

Approximately 73 per cent of adult female returnees reported being illiterate, meaning they had never received an education, compared to 40 per cent of male returnees.<sup>32</sup> Among those who had received formal education:

- Primary education: 12 per cent female, 19 per cent male
- Lower secondary education: 4 per cent female, 11 per cent male
- Upper secondary education: 3 per cent female, 14 per cent male
- Madrassa graduates: 5 per cent female, 9 per cent male
- University degree (Bachelor’s, Master’s, PhD): 1 per cent female, 4 per cent male

Illiteracy rates were higher in Baghlan (59 per cent) compared to Kabul (36 per cent), highlighting regional disparities in education access. Older returnees (60+) were significantly less likely to have received formal or informal education, with at least half reporting illiteracy.

**CHART #31**



However, despite these disparities, overall education levels among returnees have improved compared to the July to September 2024 survey, where only one-third had reported receiving formal education. The earlier returns likely consisted of less-educated, more vulnerable individuals who lacked the resources to delay return, while more educated returnees may have been able to stay in Pakistan longer. As large-scale returns and deportations from Pakistan and Iran are likely to continue in 2025, the demographic profile of returnees may be shifting.

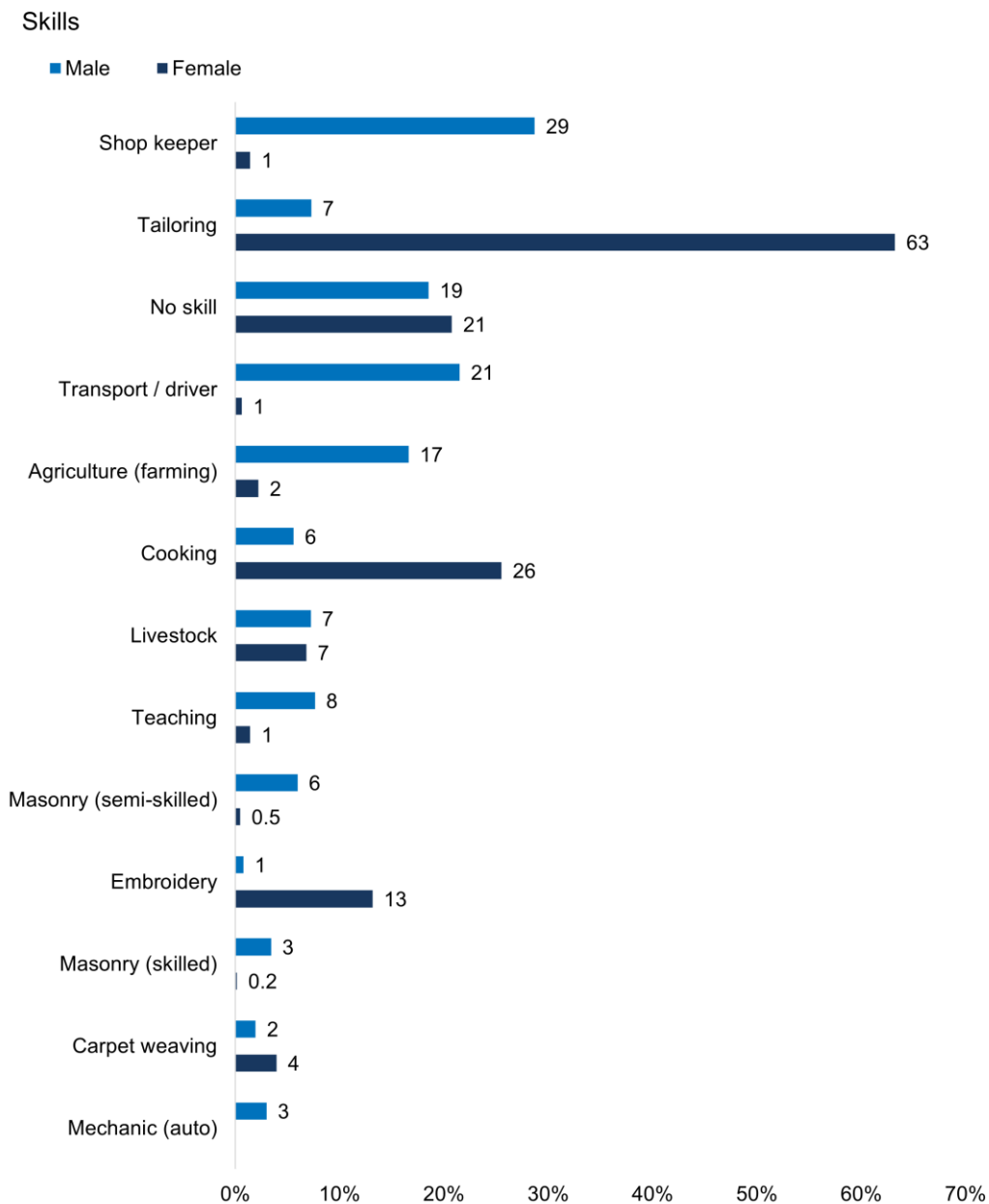
The distribution of **skills** among returnees reflects traditional gender roles in Afghan society. Male returnees were most likely to possess skills in physically demanding and public-facing jobs, such as shopkeeping, transportation/driving, livestock management, and agriculture—fields traditionally associated with outdoor and market-based work. In contrast, female returnees reported skills in domestic and community-based activities,

<sup>32</sup> UN Women - Ground Truth Solutions - Salma Consulting, "Engaging women in the humanitarian response in Afghanistan," 2024

such as tailoring, cooking, and embroidery, reinforcing the expectation that women engage in indoor work. Reflecting trends in levels of education of returnees over time, more returnees reported having at least one skill compared to the July to September 2024 survey, where 51 per cent reported having no skills. However, disparities remain:

- Older returnees (60+) were the most likely to lack skills, with 26 per cent reporting no skills.
- Returnees in Laghman had the highest proportion of unskilled individuals (42 per cent), suggesting regional variations in access to skill-building opportunities.

**CHART #32**



**CHAPTER 13**

# Livelihoods, Income and Debt

*“All our expenses are on credit; we have been borrowing since we got married.”*

Afghanistan’s economic activity remains weak, with high unemployment rates and diminishing household incomes due to limited job opportunities, reduced economic activity, and declining remittances. These pressures are reflected in high levels of household debt and a growing reliance on unsustainable income sources. The Afghanistan Returnees Rapid Needs Assessment (May 2024) found that many returnees—particularly undocumented Afghans from Pakistan—struggled to reintegrate due to limited job availability and the predominance of low-skill manual labour.<sup>33</sup> This challenge was further exacerbated by the fact that 77 per cent of returnees were engaged in low-skill urban labour before returning, making their transition to rural livelihoods even more difficult.

The lack of formal education and vocational training, competition in the labour market (more human resources less demand) and a deteriorating economic conditions further hindered their ability to secure stable employment, compounding their economic vulnerability and impacting their overall livelihoods.<sup>34</sup> As a result, returnees and long-term displaced populations are increasingly relying on unsustainable income sources, with 50 per cent of recent returnees and 43 per cent of the longer-term displaced depending on unstable earnings, compared to the national average of 33 per cent, according to WoAA 2024.

## Livelihoods situation

Afghanistan’s young and rapidly growing population, combined with economic instability and ongoing insecurity, has led to chronic labour market imbalances. Each year, an estimated 400,000 to 500,000 Afghans enter the labour market, but opportunities remain scarce. The economic downturn following August 2021 has further reduced the market’s ability to absorb new workers.

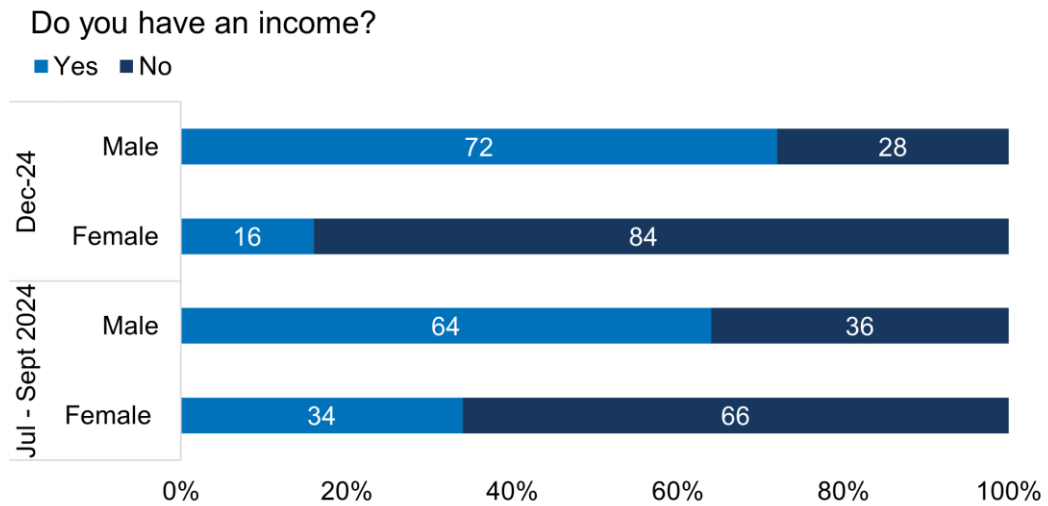
Overall, 60 per cent of returnees reported having an income, but with significant gender disparities. Only 16 per cent of female returnees reported earning an income, compared to 72 per cent of male returnees.

<sup>33, 33</sup> World Bank-UNHCR- IOM, “Afghan Returnees Rapid Needs Assessment”, May 2024

- For men, this represents a slight increase from the July–September 2024 survey (64 per cent previously).
- For women, income levels declined, with only 16 per cent reporting an income compared to 34 per cent in the previous survey.
- Female-headed households had slightly higher income rates than the overall female sample, with 20 per cent reporting an income.

This decline in women’s income participation coincides with new decrees issued by authorities, which have further restricted women’s access to employment and economic opportunities.

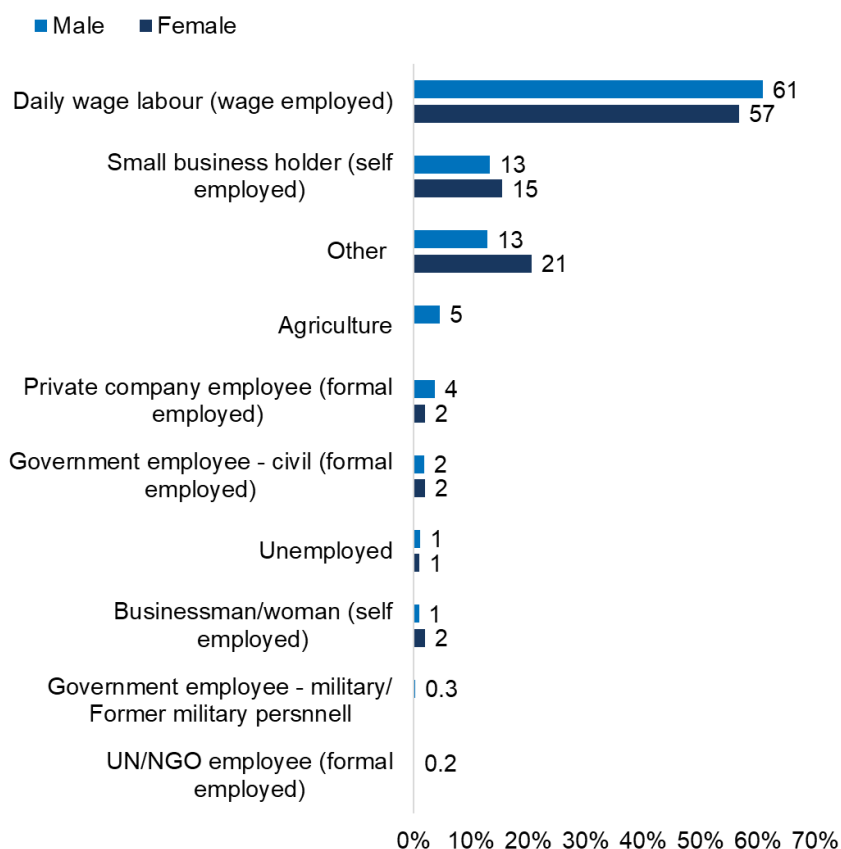
**CHART #33**



The majority of returnees (61 per cent) relied on daily wage labour, followed by small business ownership (13 per cent). Fewer found work in agriculture (4 per cent), private companies (2 per cent), or the civil service (2 per cent), highlighting the prevalence of informal and unstable employment.

**CHART #34**

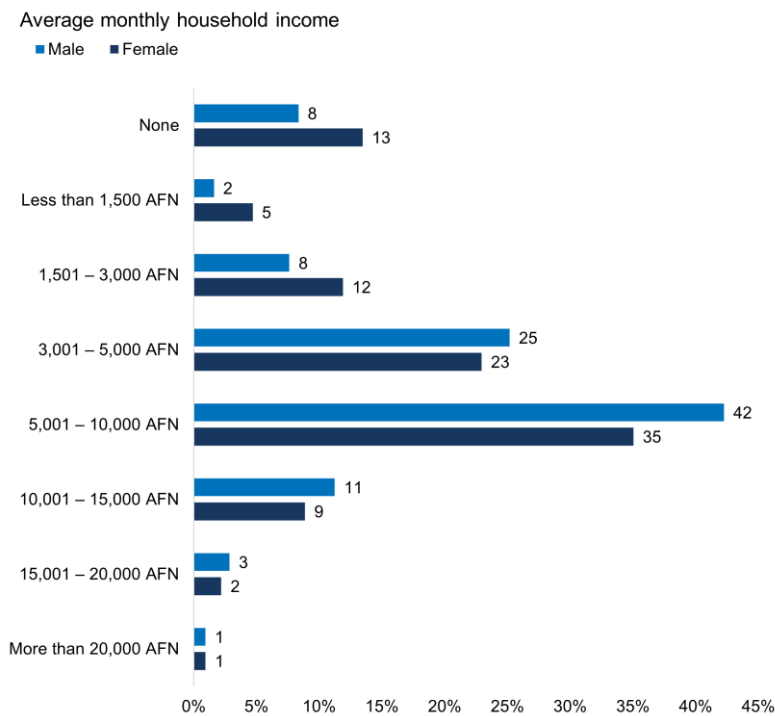
### Employment by sector



## Income

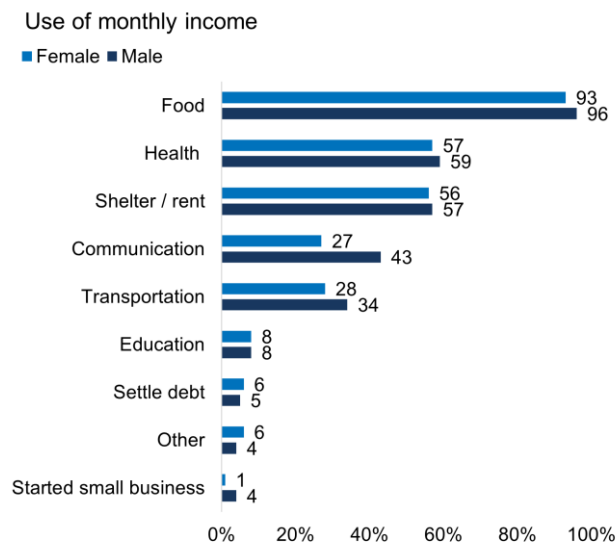
The largest share of returnees (40 per cent) reported a monthly household income of 5,001–10,000 AFN (USD 70–140), while three per cent earned less than 1,500 AFN (USD 21). Overall, 73 per cent had an income between 1,500 and 10,000 AFN (USD 21–140), and 14 per cent earned over 10,000 AFN (USD 140). Notably, 10 per cent had no income. Compared to the July to September 2024 survey, fewer returnees reported earning less than 1,500 AFN (USD 21) (down from 15 per cent), while those in the higher income bracket (over 10,000 AFN / USD 140) increased significantly (from 4 per cent). However, female returnees remain economically vulnerable, with 53 per cent earning 5,000 AFN (USD 70) or less, while 57 per cent of male returnees earned above 5,001 AFN (USD 70).

**CHART #35**



Nearly all returnees reported spending their household income on food, followed by healthcare (59 per cent), shelter/rent (57 per cent), communication (40 per cent), and transportation (32 per cent). There were no significant gender differences, except in communication, where 43 per cent of male returnees spent on this compared to 27 per cent of female returnees. This gap likely reflects lower mobile phone access for women in Afghanistan (see Chapter 17).

**CHART #36**



Debt

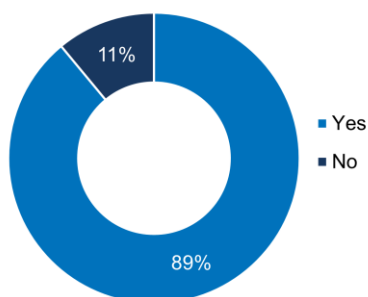


A total of 89 per cent of returnees reported that their households are currently living in debt, marking a significant increase from the July to September 2024 survey. This surge underscores the growing financial instability faced by Afghans, including returnees. On average, indebted households consisted of seven individuals, including four children, indicating that families with young dependents are particularly burdened by debt, further worsening their financial situation. Debt levels were especially high in Laghman (97 per cent), Helmand (94 per cent), and Nangarhar (94 per cent), where an overwhelming majority of returnees reported struggling with financial distress. There were no significant differences between female-headed (90 per cent) and male-headed (89 per cent) households, suggesting that economic pressures from debt affect all returnee families equally.

Nearly all returnees reported that their debt exceeded their monthly income, highlighting the severe financial strain faced by households. VRF holders (89 per cent) were slightly more likely to report having debt than non-VRF holders (83 per cent). An overwhelming 94 per cent stated that their household debt had increased since returning to Afghanistan, with the top three reasons for borrowing being food (35 per cent), healthcare (32 per cent), and rent (8 per cent)—findings consistent with the July to September 2024 survey. These trends align with the REACH HSM Monitoring Report, which also identified food as the most common reason for taking on debt.<sup>35</sup> There were no significant differences by gender of the household head, with widespread economic hardship across returnee households.

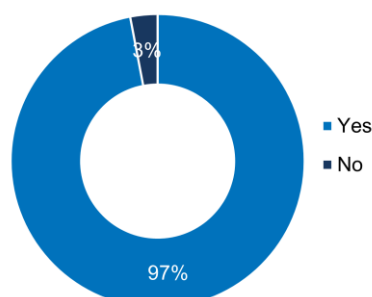
**CHART #37**

Does your household currently hold any debts



**CHART #38**

Are these debts more than your monthly income

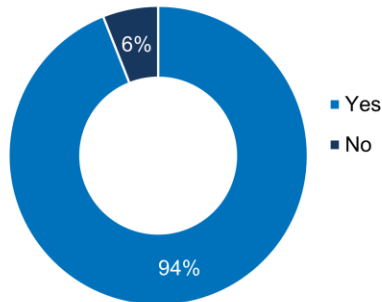


**CHART #39**

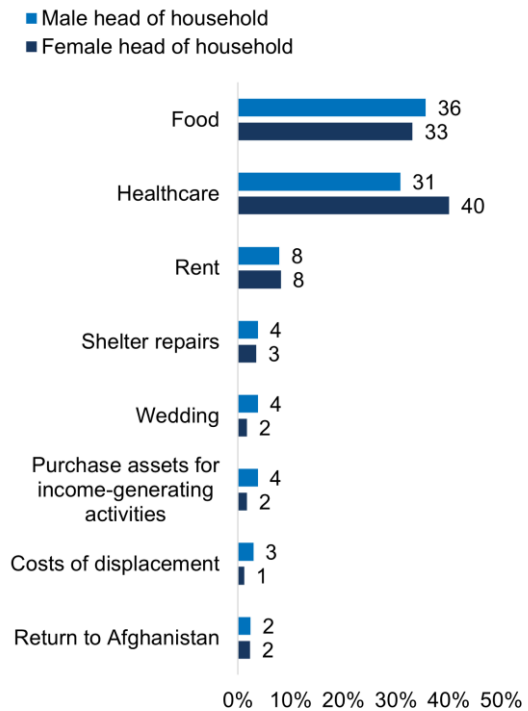
**CHART #40**

<sup>35</sup> REACH, "Humanitarian Situation Monitoring (HSM) Round Nine" November 2024

Has the household's amount of debt increased since return to Afghanistan



Primary reason for taking on debt



**CHAPTER 14**

# Physical safety

The level of conflict in Afghanistan has decreased since the end of large-scale conflict in 2021, with only two per cent of households reporting conflict-related shocks in the 2024 WoAA, a sharp drop from 60 per cent in 2021. However, according to the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan<sup>36</sup> (UNAMA), intermittent cross-border incidents involving military and armed security forces, particularly in Khost, Kunar, Nangarhar resulted in a number of civilian casualties and internal displacement in the period July to September 2024. Targeted improvised explosive device (IED) attacks in populated areas, as well as explosive remnants of war, were the leading causes of civilian harm. In addition, during this period, UNAMA Human Rights documented at least 24 instances of arbitrary arrest and detention, at least ten instances of torture and ill-treatment, verbal threats and at least five killings of former Afghan National Defence and Security Forces (ANDSF) members.

Findings from this survey align with the July to September 2024 survey, with 96 per cent of returnees reporting that they had not experienced physical security issues in their communities over the past six months. However, perceptions of safety should be

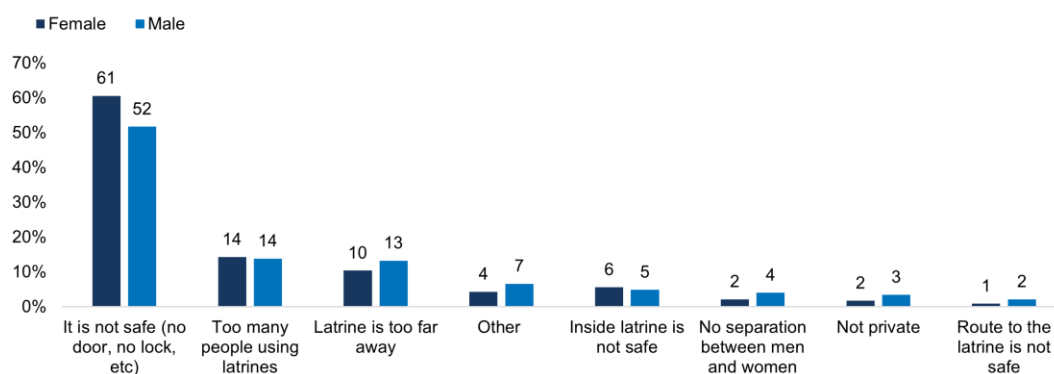
<sup>36</sup> UNAMA, *Update on the human rights situation in Afghanistan, July to September 2024*

interpreted with caution, given the broader security and protection challenges in Afghanistan. While only four per cent of returnees reported feeling unsafe, their concerns were linked to extortion by armed groups, unwelcoming attitudes, and discrimination due to their return status. Additionally, one per cent of returnees reported being victims of physical violence, with rates slightly higher among men (two per cent) compared to women (one per cent). While overall reports of violence remain low, economic disparities appear to disproportionately affect women, with 22 per cent of female victims citing economic status as a factor compared to 16 per cent of male victims. These findings suggest that while large-scale conflict has diminished, localized tensions, economic struggles, and social divisions continue to shape returnees' security experiences, particularly for the most vulnerable groups.

Returnees reported varying levels of physical safety concerns in different aspects of their daily lives. Accessing latrines was a particular issue, with 32 per cent stating that they did not always feel safe, a concern more frequently reported by women (38 per cent) than men (31 per cent) (see Chart #40). Market access was also affected by security threats, with 10 per cent of returnees reporting limitations due to safety concerns, including 7 per cent of female returnees and 11 per cent of male returnees. Water collection appeared to pose fewer safety risks.<sup>37</sup>

**CHART #41**

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



**CHAPTER 15**

<sup>37</sup> This applied to both men or women and boys or girls

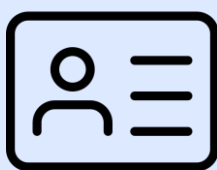
# Civil documentation

*"I can't pay for the ID card, neither I nor my children have it. My children even missed school because they do not have an ID."*

Following decades of conflict, Afghanistan still faces significant challenges with civil documentation due to inefficient administrative procedures. The suspension of the 2004 Afghan Constitution and all internal legislation in 2021 had significant ramifications for governance and legal systems in Afghanistan, particularly affecting civil registration processes. Returnees often struggle to obtain official identification documents like *Tazkiras* within their host communities as the hosts are sometimes hesitant to act as witnesses, which is a crucial step in the application process. In terms of gender, women face more barriers owing to requirements to be accompanied by a male companion in order to apply for identification and civil registration documentation, cultural barriers, and lack of knowledge of the process.<sup>38</sup>

Furthermore, irrespective of gender, ethnicity and location, age and education levels influence a person's ability to acquire these documents. Despite guidelines that mandate assistance for illiterate individuals, many still face barriers. Low literacy rates hinder their ability to understand and complete application forms, and fear and discomfort can prevent them from visiting government offices.<sup>39</sup>

## BOX 2: THE TAZKIRA



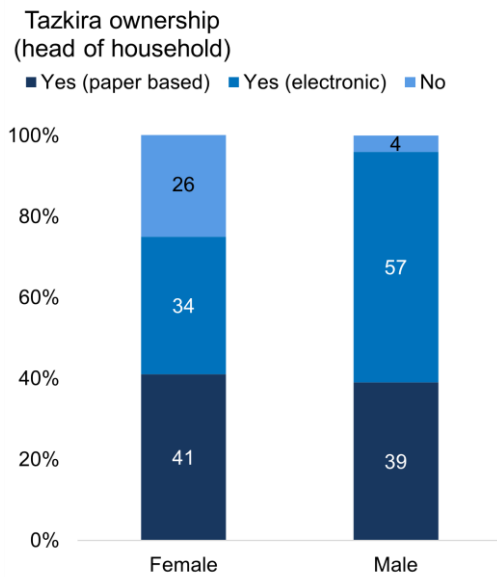
The Tazkira is Afghanistan's primary national identification document, essential for accessing rights and services. It serves as official proof of Afghan nationality and is required for freedom of movement, property ownership, education, and formal employment. Without a Tazkira, individuals face significant barriers in securing basic services, legal protections, and economic opportunities, making it a critical document for social and economic inclusion in Afghanistan.

Overall, 76 per cent of households had at least one family member without a Tazkira, highlighting widespread gaps in civil documentation. Women were disproportionately affected, with 25 per cent of female heads of households lacking a Tazkira, and 46 per cent of male heads of households reporting that their spouse did not have one (see Charts #42 and #43). The absence of civil documentation significantly increases women's vulnerability, restricting their ability to inherit property, access legal protections, or retain custody of their children if they become widowed, divorced, or the sole head of their

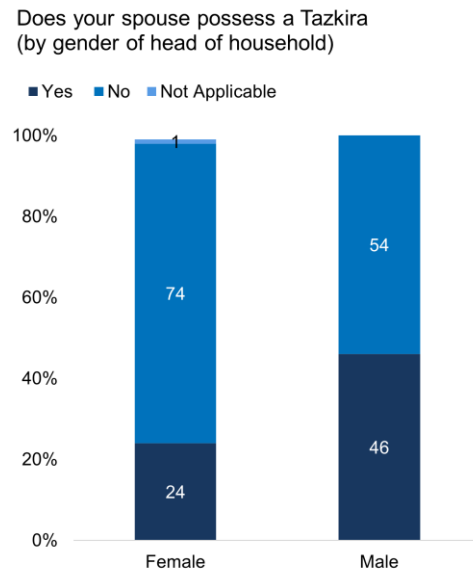
<sup>37, 39</sup> Samuel Hall, "Documentation and Legal Identification in Afghanistan," 2023.

household. Additionally, only 21 per cent of returnees reported that all their children had a Tazkira, further limiting their access to education, healthcare, and future opportunities.

**CHART #42**

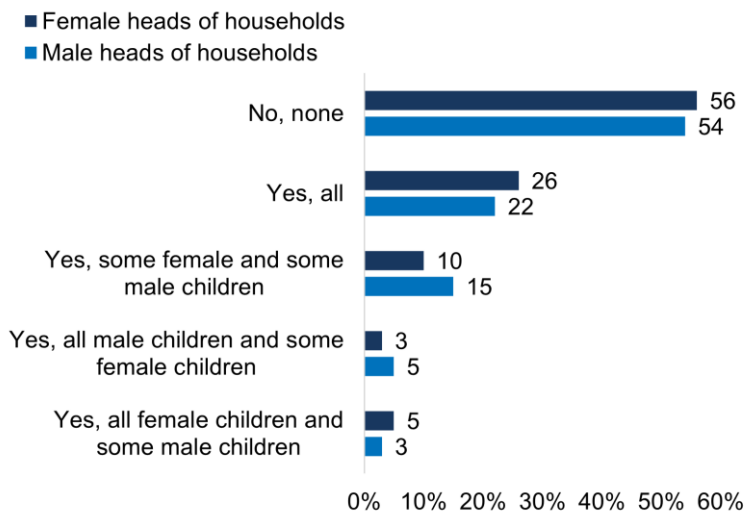


**CHART #43**



**CHART #44**

**Do your children have a Tazkira?**



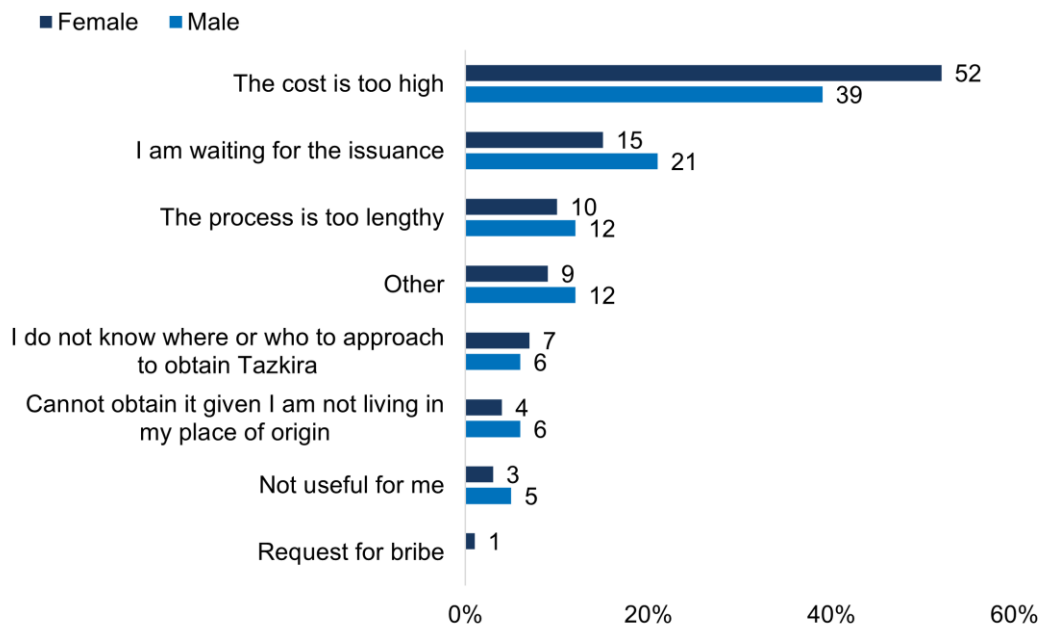
The primary barrier to obtaining a Tazkira was cost (47 per cent), followed by the length of the application process (11 per cent). A smaller portion of returnees cited lack of knowledge about the process (six per cent) or inability to apply due to not living in their place of origin

(five per cent). Notably, 17 per cent had applied and were awaiting issuance, suggesting that bureaucratic delays also contribute to the gap in civil documentation. Women faced greater financial barriers, with 52 per cent of female returnees citing cost as the main obstacle compared to 39 per cent of male returnees, underscoring the gendered impact of economic vulnerability (see Chapter 15).

Half of the returnees reported that lack of civil documentation restricted their access to essential services, with the most affected areas being education (42 per cent), followed by law enforcement (21 per cent), social security benefits (10 per cent), and healthcare (eight per cent). Male returnees (54 per cent) were more likely than female returnees (43 per cent) to report barriers to services due to missing documentation. Children of returnees face particular challenges in accessing education, as parents often need to travel back to their home province to obtain the required identification. Given the financial constraints of many returnees, these trips are often not feasible, increasing the risk of returnee children being left out of school.<sup>40</sup>

**CHART #45**

Why do you not have a Tazkira?



<sup>40</sup> Samuel Hall, "Documentation and Legal Identification in Afghanistan," 2023.

**CHAPTER 16**

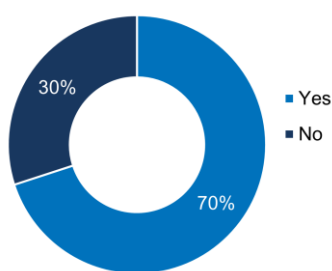
# Mental health

Mental health and psychosocial problems among returnees are complex and multifaceted, driven not only by traumatic experiences, war, displacement, and violence but also by ongoing stressors and uncertainty about the future. Compared to the host population, returnees often face greater economic hardship, further increasing their vulnerability to mental health challenges and limiting their ability to rebuild stable lives.<sup>41</sup>

A majority (70 per cent) of returnees reported that they or someone in their household experienced severe stress affected daily life. This marks a sharp increase from the July to September 2024 survey, where 49 per cent reported similar issues. Economic hardship was the dominant stressor, with 93 per cent citing lack of employment and financial struggles as key contributors. Uncertainty about the future (45 per cent) and food insecurity (43 per cent) were also commonly reported causes.

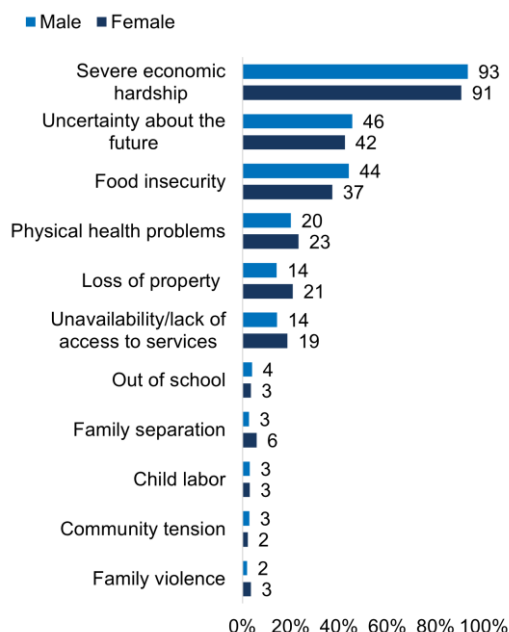
**CHART #46**

Have you or your household experienced feelings of stress that affected your daily life?



**CHART #47**

What are the sources of your stress?



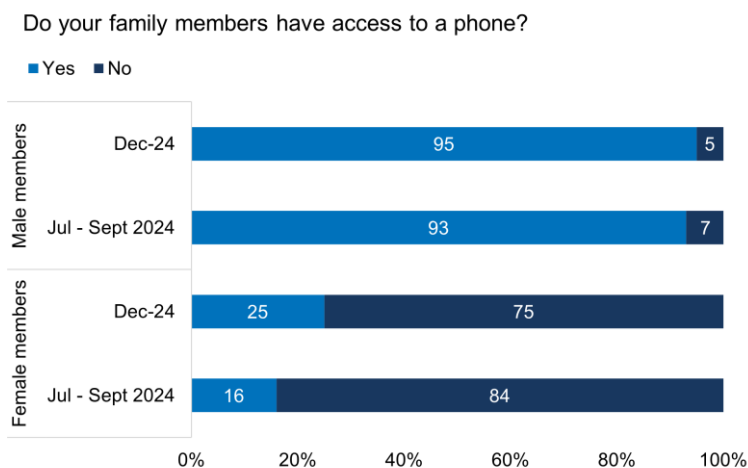
<sup>41</sup> Samuel Hall, "Unpacking the Realities of Displacement Affected Communities in Afghanistan Since August 2021," 2022

## CHAPTER 17

# Access to mobile phones

There was a significant gender gap in mobile phone access, with 95 per cent of returnees reporting that male family members had access to a phone, compared to only 26 per cent for female family members. This disparity limits women's access to critical information on health, safety, and education, further restricting their ability to make informed decisions. However, the findings indicate a notable improvement from the July to September 2024 survey, where only 16 per cent of returnees reported female household members having phone access. This increase could be linked to higher education levels among returnees in this survey.

## CHART #48



## CHAPTER 18

# Access to assistance

*“We have land for a house, but the house is not built, and we do not have water.”*

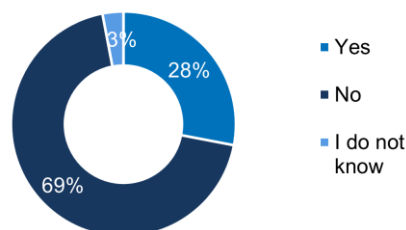
The proportion of returnees receiving cash assistance in their communities increased to 28 per cent, up from 17 per cent in the July to September 2024 survey. However, access remained uneven, with 82 per cent in Kandahar and 76 per cent in Kabul reporting they had not received any aid. Gender disparities were also evident, as only 21 per cent of female returnees reported receiving cash assistance, compared to 30 per cent of male



returnees. The World Food Programme (WFP), UNHCR, and the DfA were identified as the main aid providers.

**CHART #49**

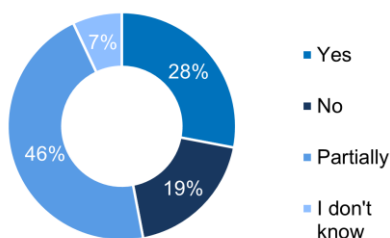
Was there any assistance distribution in your community?



Among those who received assistance, 28 per cent reported that it fully met their needs, while 46 per cent said it only partially met their needs, and 19 per cent stated it was insufficient. In terms of satisfaction, 52 per cent were satisfied, 28 per cent were partially satisfied, and 9 per cent expressed complete dissatisfaction with the quality and quantity of assistance received.

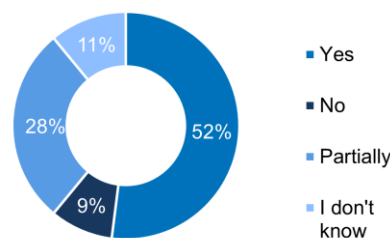
**CHART #50**

Did the assistance meet you/your community's needs?



**CHART #51**

Was the assistance received efficient?



The majority of returnees (69 per cent) preferred cash assistance in the future, though this was lower than the 80 per cent reported in the July to September 2024 survey. In contrast, 24 per cent now preferred a combination of cash and in-kind assistance, up from 13 per cent previously, suggesting shifting priorities among returnees. A small portion (4 per cent) preferred infrastructure services, while 2 per cent requested a mix of cash and vouchers.

The top priority needs identified were shelter (41 per cent), food (22 per cent), rent (12 per cent), small business or income-generating assets (8 per cent), and fuel (8 per cent). These findings align with earlier sections on poor living conditions and high food insecurity. While

there were no significant gender differences in assistance preferences, this may be due to responses being framed at the household level, where aid is typically provided.

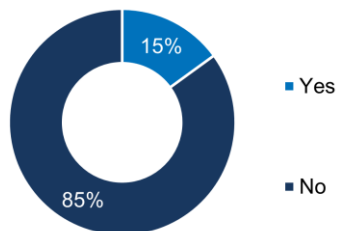
**CHAPTER 19**

# Complaints and feedback mechanisms

Fifteen per cent of returnees reported knowing where to lodge complaints or seek information about humanitarian assistance. Among those aware, the UNHCR hotline (41 per cent) was the most recognized mechanism, followed by AWAAZ (23 per cent) and complaint boxes (six per cent). Many who selected "other" referred to de-facto government offices, particularly the Ministry of Refugee and Repatriation (MoRR). The greatest barrier was lack of knowledge on how to access complaint mechanisms (56 per cent), with female returnees (66 per cent) more likely than males (53 per cent) to report this. Additionally, 35 per cent cited the unavailability of these mechanisms in their area, particularly in Kandahar (46 per cent) and Balkh (45 per cent). Adult women, refugees, and displaced persons were identified as the groups facing the most difficulty accessing information about humanitarian assistance.

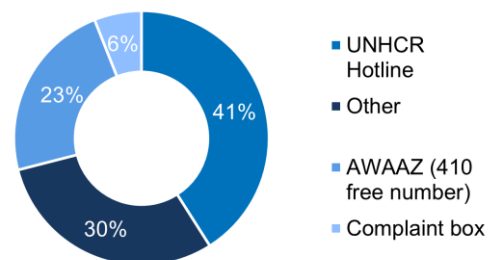
**CHART # 52**

Are you aware where to approach for complaining or asking questions related to humanitarian assistance?



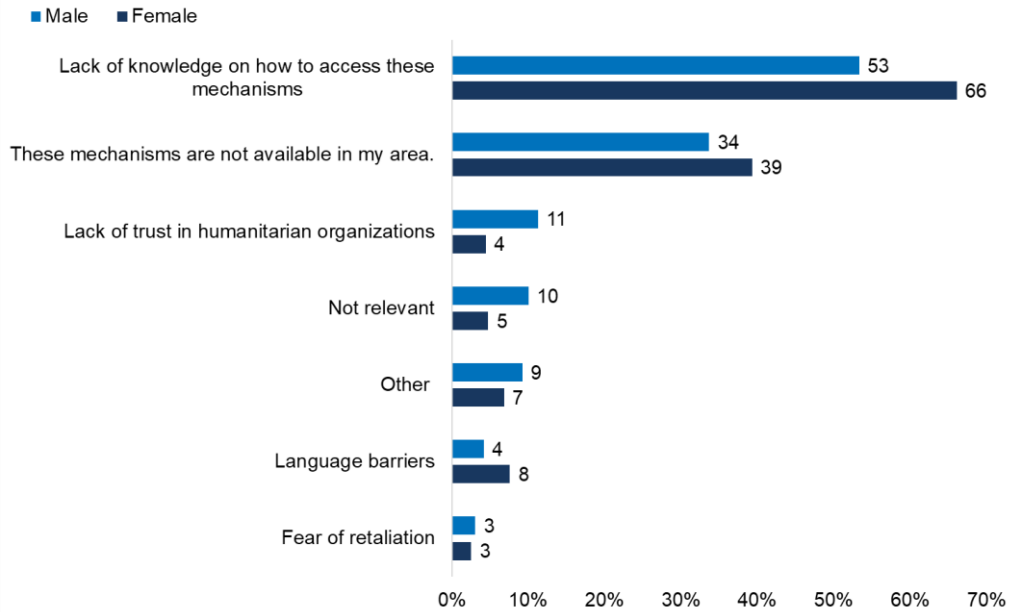
**CHART #53**

What mechanisms are you aware of?



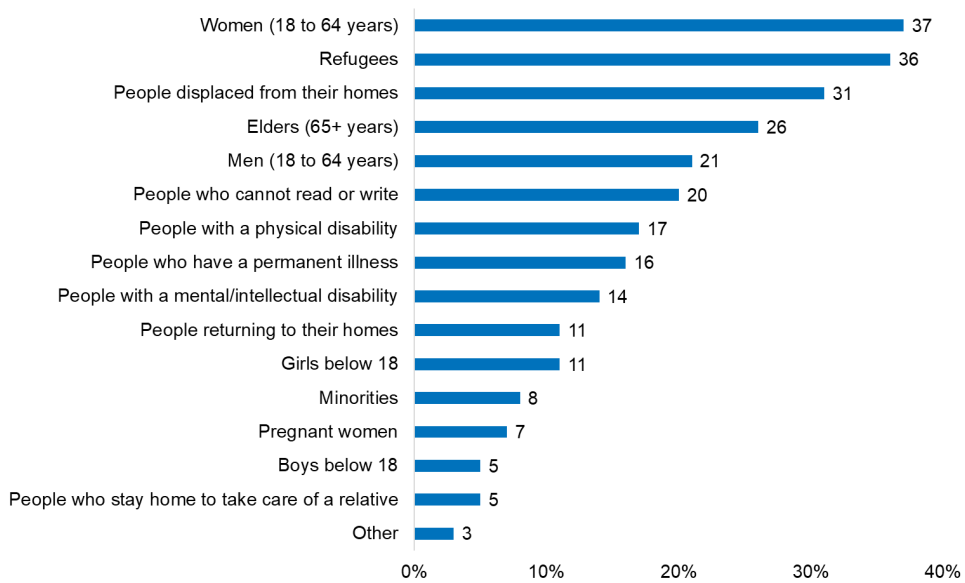
**CHART #54**

What are the main challenges that prevent you from contacting humanitarian organizations to make a complaint, ask a question or share feedback



**CHART #55**

Which groups have the most difficulty getting information on humanitarian assistance in your community?

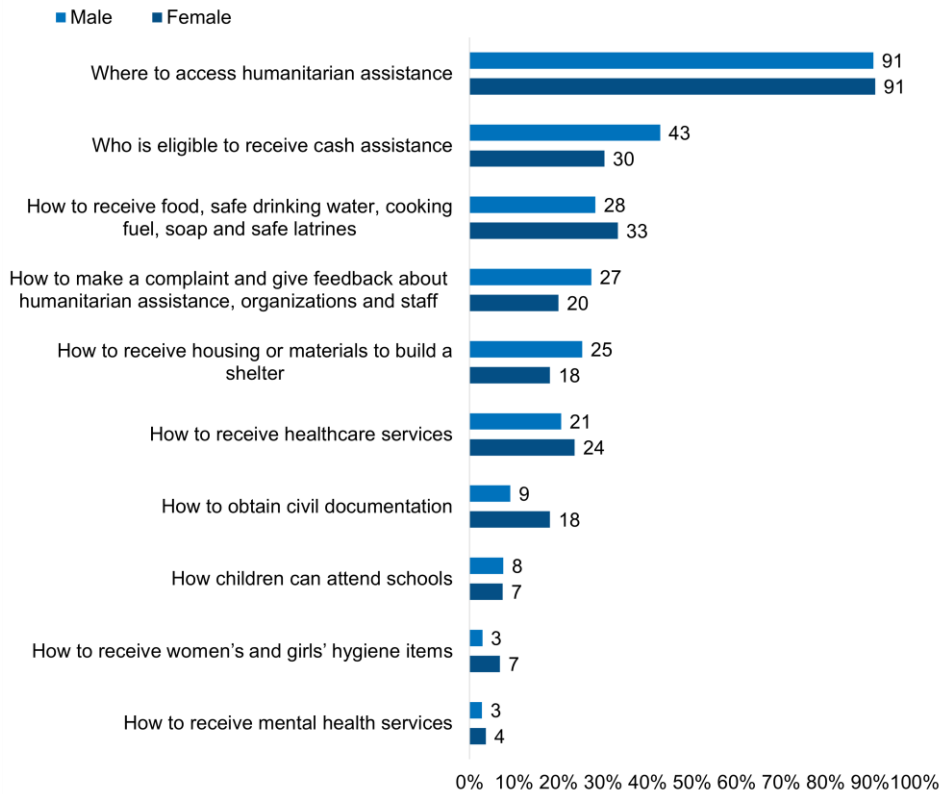


The vast majority of returnees expressed interest in learning more about how to access humanitarian assistance, with no significant differences by gender. Eligibility for cash

assistance was a key area of interest, particularly among male returnees, likely due to their higher likelihood of being household heads. Female returnees, on the other hand, showed greater interest in obtaining civil documentation, reflecting their lower likelihood of possessing these documents (as discussed in Chapter 15).

**CHART #56**

Top 10 topics about which respondents would like to learn more



## CHAPTER 20

# Conclusion and Recommendations

Returnees are settling in a fragile environment: the economy is unstable, access to basic services is limited, and debts are compounding returnees' vulnerabilities. Return dynamics reveal that more returnees are unable to settle back in their areas of origin, and there is a risk of increasing cyclical returns to Pakistan due to a lack of opportunities. Sustained engagement is needed - short-term humanitarian aid is crucial, but returnees require durable solutions, across material, physical and legal dimensions, including livelihood support, access to documentation, and to service provision. The importance of continued monitoring means that future surveys should keep tracking changes to assess whether reintegration efforts in Afghanistan are having an impact.

The below recommendations are intended to guide policy and programming for the UN, NGOs and other partners as they design interventions in Afghanistan in a context of increasing returns. The findings and conclusions might also inform the position and response of the broader international community, including the donor community.

## Cash assistance

All returnees in the survey reported receiving cash assistance upon arrival, primarily using it for immediate needs such as food, shelter, transportation, healthcare, and debt repayment. However, for most households, the cash grant lasted only one to three months, leaving many returnees struggling to sustain themselves beyond this period. Given the limited economic opportunities available in Afghanistan, particularly for returnees who have lost their contacts and networks after years in exile, complementary support is needed to ensure longer-term financial stability. While most returnees continue to prefer cash assistance (69 per cent), there is a growing preference for a mix of cash and in-kind assistance (24 per cent, up from 13 per cent), highlighting the need for flexibility in aid delivery.

### Opportunities to explore:

- Increase the adequacy of cash assistance by exploring phased disbursements or targeted top-ups for the most vulnerable groups, including female-headed households and large families.

- UNHCR call on donors to consider the allocation of additional resources to strengthen the protection-sensitive cash-based interventions (CBI) led by UNHCR and other partners. CBI interventions play a vital role in supporting the safe, dignified, and sustainable reintegration of returnees and deportees, while addressing their immediate needs and contributing to longer-term durable solutions. Enhanced support will enable UNHCR and partners/stakeholders to better respond to protection risks and vulnerabilities, and to foster resilience and inclusion within communities of return.
- Further link cash assistance to sustainable livelihood opportunities through vocational training, small business support, and employment programs.
- Further expand financial literacy and debt management initiatives to help returnees optimize their assistance and reduce financial vulnerability.
- Assess feasibility of hybrid assistance models (combination of cash and in-kind support) to better address long-term needs based on regional variations in economic opportunities.

## Education

Access to education remains severely restricted for returnee children, particularly girls. One-third of returnees reported that their children could not access the same educational opportunities as the host community, with 37 per cent of girls facing enrolment barriers compared to 24 per cent of boys. The primary reason for girls' exclusion was the ban on female education (25 per cent), while boys were more often kept out of school due to economic pressures (16 per cent). Improved access to education for returnee children, particularly girls, is a priority while aligning with the broader humanitarian stance on community-based education (CBE). Additionally, 85 per cent of returnees cited lack of documentation as a barrier to enrolment.

### **Opportunities to explore:**

- Advocate with the DfA to simplify documentation requirements and facilitate Tazkira issuance for children.
- Provide financial assistance for school-related costs to reduce economic barriers to education especially for boys.
- Continue to advocate with the DfA on removing restrictions on girls' education.

## Healthcare

Despite 88 per cent of returnees reporting access to medical facilities, many still face serious challenges in receiving healthcare. In the past six months, 34 per cent of households needed medical care but were unable to access it, with financial constraints, distance, and lack of transportation as major barriers. Women were particularly

disadvantaged, with 16 per cent of female returnees reporting no available healthcare in their communities, compared to 11 per cent of men.

**Opportunities to explore:**

- Further expand mobile health services in areas with limited infrastructure to improve outreach to underserved populations and provide employment for female healthcare workers.
- Enhance access to reproductive and maternal healthcare, particularly for women who face heightened barriers in reaching services.

## Food security

While food insecurity has improved compared to previous rounds, it remains a critical issue for returnees, with 57 per cent reporting inadequate food access. Female-headed households were particularly affected, with 64 per cent struggling to secure sufficient food, compared to 56 per cent of male-headed households. Nearly three-quarters (74 per cent) of returnees reported skipping meals or reducing food intake due to a lack of food, reflecting the precarious economic conditions they face.

**Opportunities to explore:**

- Scale up emergency food assistance programs in the most food-insecure areas.
- Support agricultural initiatives for returnees, especially those that newly arrived in rural areas without the relevant experience who might be in need of additional skills and targeted support, including access to seeds, fertilizers, and climate-resilient farming techniques to improve long-term food security.
- Advocate with the DfA to address barriers to market access for women, ensuring that they can safely and independently buy food.
- Explore mobile food distribution points in areas where movement is restricted.
- Support female-headed households and vulnerable groups with targeted food and livelihood interventions, including community-based food production (e.g., kitchen gardens, poultry farming) and tailored financial assistance to offset economic barriers.

## Housing and shelter

The majority of returnees (71 per cent) live in substandard houses, with no major improvements from the last survey. 61 per cent of renters cannot afford their rent, and 31 per cent face eviction threats. Female-headed households are particularly vulnerable, with 63 per cent relying on borrowed money to cover rent.

**Opportunities to explore:**

- Expand shelter programs, prioritizing durable housing solutions for returnees, with a focus on vulnerable groups such as female-headed households and persons with disabilities.
- Strengthen rental assistance programs by providing targeted cash grants for at-risk renters and scaling up legal aid services to mitigate and address eviction risks.
- Increase financial assistance for rent to mitigate eviction risks and improve stability for the most at-risk households.

## Livelihoods

Despite 60 per cent of returnees reporting that they earn an income, only 16 per cent of female returnees had earnings, indicating severe gender disparities in economic opportunities. 61 per cent of returnees rely on daily wage labor, and 73 per cent earn below 10,000 AFN (USD 140) per month.

### Opportunities to explore:

- Expand vocational training and skill-building programs tailored to local labor market demands, with a specific focus on women, persons with disabilities, and youth. Training should include certification pathways to enhance employability and market value
- Leverage the comparatively higher education and skills of the recent returnee cohort by developing advanced training programs in business management, financial planning, and digital skills to increase access to better-paying jobs.
- Facilitate access to microfinance and business grants, particularly for female entrepreneurs and female-headed households.
- Promote home-based and remote work opportunities for female returnees facing mobility restrictions, including support for digital literacy, e-commerce, and teleworking models. Advocate with the DfA on removing movement restrictions on females.

## Civil documentation

A lack of civil documentation remains a major barrier for returnees, with 76 per cent of households reporting at least one family member without a Tazkira. Women are disproportionately affected: 25 per cent of female heads of households lack a Tazkira, compared to 4 per cent of male heads of households. 50 per cent of returnees said they were unable to access essential services due to missing documentation.

### Opportunities to explore:

- Scale up mobile Tazkira registration campaigns, particularly for women and children.



- Increase legal assistance and awareness-raising programs, informing returnees of their rights and the process for obtaining a Tazkira through radio, SMS, and community outreach campaigns.
- Introduce community-based documentation facilitators, particularly trained returnees, to support others in the process by providing guidance, assisting with paperwork, and acting as liaisons with authorities.

## Complaints and feedback mechanisms

Findings indicate that only 15 per cent of returnees were aware of complaint and feedback mechanisms, highlighting a critical gap in access to accountability measures. Women were more likely to report being unaware of these mechanisms (66 per cent) compared to men (53 per cent). Additionally, 35 per cent of returnees cited the absence of these mechanisms in their areas, particularly in Kandahar (46 per cent) and Balkh (45 per cent). Persons with disabilities face additional barriers, as many existing mechanisms do not accommodate their needs.

### Opportunities to explore:

- Strengthen outreach and awareness campaigns to improve returnees' knowledge of complaint and feedback mechanisms, using multiple communication channels such as hotlines, in-person support, and radio messaging.
- Ensure complaints and feedback systems are accessible to persons with disabilities, including sign language services, braille materials, and voice-based complaint systems for individuals with visual impairments.
- Expand community-based feedback mechanisms, including trusted local networks, women's organizations, and disability rights groups, to ensure diverse populations can access such mechanisms despite their mobility or digital barriers.
- Increase physical accessibility of complaints and feedback mechanisms' infrastructure, ensuring that complaint boxes, help desks, and information centers are reachable for persons with mobility impairments.

## Way forward

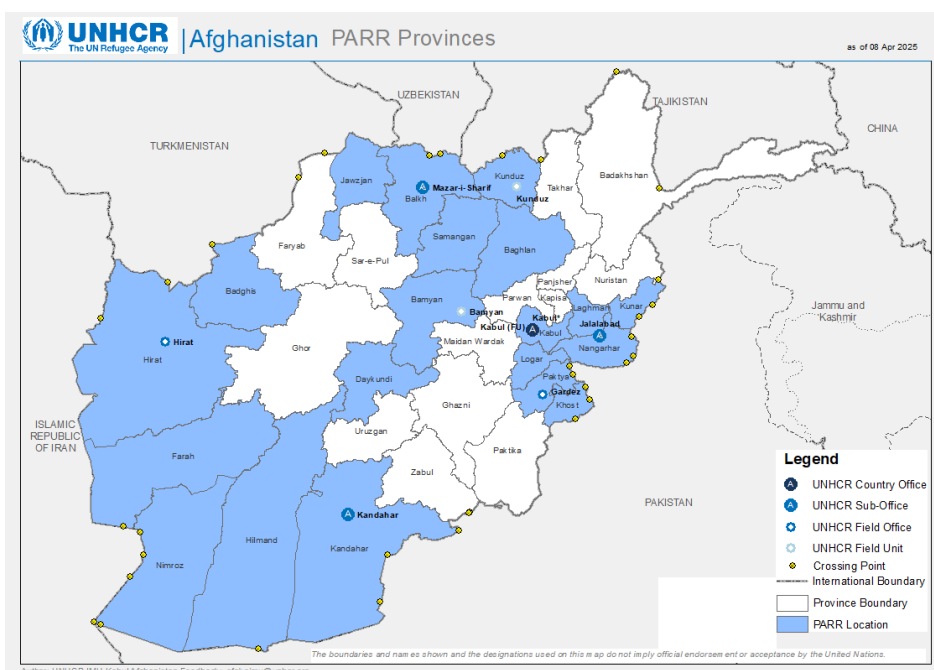
With resources stretched and humanitarian needs at a high, integrating returnee feedback to ensure targeted, cost-efficient, sustained, and flexible assistance is essential to supporting returnees and the communities hosting them, thus preventing further instability, conflicts over limited resources and displacement. While returnees demonstrate resilience, the scale of unmet needs continues to grow, at a time when funding constraints are limiting the capacity to provide support.

The findings of this report highlight persistent challenges in returnee reintegration, particularly regarding economic vulnerability, access to basic services, civil documentation, and protection concerns. Food insecurity, lack of adequate shelter, and limited livelihood opportunities continue to drive economic hardship, despite some improvements and returnees self-reporting a greater set of marketable skills than in the previous round of monitoring. Across the sample and across indicators, women, female-headed households, and persons with disabilities face disproportionate challenges in accessing assistance, legal documentation, and basic services. To address these issues, targeted interventions are required across multiple sectors and tailored to specific groups. By aligning interventions with the specific needs of returnees—including gender-responsive programming, accessibility improvements for persons with disabilities, and flexible assistance modalities—more sustainable reintegration and improved protection outcomes are possible.

Overall, the recommendations speak to the need to complement cash assistance with greater efforts towards economic and financial inclusion and efforts to ensure that returnees can exercise their rights (e.g. by ensuring acquisition of civil documentation) and access key services such as education, health care, and housing. Underlying all of these – and a key finding of this monitoring – is that many returnees report that they struggle to understand where to access support and how to provide feedback on the assistance received. Stronger coordination among actors involved in returnee support and reintegration is therefore needed. For this reason, the recommendations in this report are not meant to be addressed solely by UNHCR.

UNHCR is committed to continuing to work with sister UN agencies and other relevant actors to address the needs of returnees and promote sustainable reintegration. As a part of these efforts, UNHCR has reimaged its approach to Priority Areas of Return and Reintegration (PARRs), transitioning from 80 district-level PARRs to 20 province-level ones. This shift came as a result of an in-depth review conducted in 2024 to refine and sharpen UNHCR's approach to returnee response and reintegration. The review considered various factors such as previous UNHCR and UN investments, the ratio of returnee and forcibly displaced to host community population, and the results of an in-depth Socio-Economic Vulnerability Assessment (SEVA), among others<sup>42</sup>.

<sup>42</sup> The PARR review included: 1) a desk review; 2) a Socio-Economic Vulnerabilities Assessment; 3) a situational analysis with field colleagues. In the desk review, UNHCR used the composite Reintegration Index methodology to analyse the following factors: forcibly displaced to host community ratio; financial resources invested by UNHCR; financial resources invested by Special Trust Fund for Afghanistan (STFA); presence and number of other stakeholders (UN/NGOs) in a PARR; demographic data of refugee returnees, IDP returnees, IDPs and host communities; and border monitoring return figures collected by IOM.



*Map of the 20 Priority Areas of Return and Reintegration*

Reintegration will continue to require efforts at national level, and prioritization of efforts in 20 PARRs does not mean UNHCR’s support in non-PARR provinces will entirely cease. The PARR approach places focus on targeted high-return areas with the hope that they can serve as models — beacons of hope — for UNHCR, UN agencies and other partners to invest in a modular and predictable approach that increases the absorption capacity of host communities and enables the provision of assistance and key services to all populations.

UNHCR’s post-return monitoring aims to support these efforts by providing data and evidence to guide humanitarian and basic human needs responses. Maintaining a dialogue with returnees, mapping interventions to address their needs and monitoring their impact through future rounds of post return monitoring are essential commitments in a context of increasing returns from Iran and Pakistan, including forced or coerced returns, expected in 2025. The first weeks of April 2025 are witnessing a significant increase in returns and deportations, a worrying sign for the rest of 2025<sup>43</sup>. As Afghanistan faces complex, overlapping challenges, the increase in returns currently projected for 2025 is likely to place further strain on already struggling communities.

Sustained engagement and coordinated action are needed from the UN, civil society and the international community not to lose hard-won gains and continue progressing on the delivery of essential services, promote social cohesion, and advance sustainable reintegration for the benefit of returnee and host communities alike, in support of national and regional harmony and stability.

<sup>43</sup> Please see the latest data at: <https://data.unhcr.org/en/situations/afghanistan>

# POST- RETURN MONITORING REPORT

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