



Return, Reintegration and Political Restructuring in Afghanistan: Survey of Return Migration to Kabul and Kandahar, 2022

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Return, Reintegration & Political Restructuring in Afghanistan:

Survey of Return Migration to Kabul and Kandahar, 2022

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Return, Reintegration & Political Restructuring Project

"Return, Reintegration and Political Restructuring" is one of the projects of the Migration and Displacement Stream, which is part of the LSE-led Gender, Justice and Security Hub and funded by UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) under the Global Challenges Research Fund (GCRF). The Project GCRF Hub – Gender, Justice and Security is a 5-year programme funded by UKRI, aiming to deliver innovative interdisciplinary research on the challenge of achieving gender justice and inclusive security in conflict-affected societies. The Hub addresses the overlapping of three major policy areas linked with Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) 5 on Gender Equality; SDG 16 on Peace, Inclusivity and Justice, and the implementation of the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda. To generate detailed knowledge from which to draw scalable conclusions and recommendations, the Hub focuses on seven countries in particular: Afghanistan, Colombia, Kurdistan-Iraq, Lebanon, Sierra Leone, Sri Lanka and Uganda. While each is distinctive in its experiences and timelines of conflict, the cases are broadly geographically representative and are all significantly conflict-affected. The Return Mobilities Project aims to understand and measure the opportunities, contributions and challenges for migrants, the 1.5 generation (having migrated abroad as a child), and the second generation (children of immigrant parents born in the country of settlement) in returning to their post-conflict countries of origin or their parental homeland that experienced profound political and economic instabilities. This cross-national, comparative, and interdisciplinary research project, which involved academics, NGOs, and policymakers from Afghanistan, Kurdistan, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, and the UK, is one of the most extensive studies on gendered return mobilities to conflicted and post-conflict countries. Our international team has generated qualitative and quantitative data on gendered return mobilities to politically and economically unstable countries. We generated first-hand data on the people on the move and their involvement in peace-building, participation in re-building and gendered struggles. This report presents the results of a household survey of Afghans who returned to Afghanistan between 2001 and 2021.

The project team consists of Co-Investigators Dr Janroj Yilmaz Keles, Senior Research Fellow, Middlesex University, Dr Muslih Irwani, Associate Professor of the American University of Baghdad, Researcher Dr Necla Acik, Middlesex University, in collaboration with Women for Peace & Participation (WPP), Afghanistan. Our Afghan colleagues Quhramaana Kakar, and Abida Kakar from WPP who led the project in Afghanistan and who were returnees themselves were compelled to relocate as a result

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of the fundamentalist Taliban re-seizing control of Afghanistan in 2021. Five other Afghan colleagues who contributed to data collection had also to leave Afghanistan and are now in exile.

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Finally, we would like to thank our research participants for giving up their time to participate in this study despite the ongoing turmoil in Afghanistan. We, therefore, dedicate this report to all of our Afghan research participants and colleagues who have once again been compelled to flee their homes, families, and loved ones into exile.

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Executive Summary

- Afghanistan has been witnessing one of the worst internal displacements and refugee crises in the world for more than 40 years. Every Afghan regime shift (1979 Soviet Invasion, the Mujahideen era (1989-1994), and Taliban rule (1994-2001 and again in 2021) brought up a fresh wave of refugee crisis and humanitarian disaster in the country. Since the 1970s, it is estimated that 6 million Afghans have fled their country.
- Despite the ongoing conflict, there have been sporadic waves of returnees settling back in Afghanistan in conjunction with political and power shifts in the country. The UNHCR¹ (2022) estimated that although 5.3 million refugees have returned to Afghanistan since 2002 and until 2021, 3.4 million Afghans are presently internally displaced and still 2.1 million registered Afghan refugees are "hosted" in Iran, Pakistan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, and Turkmenistan. In addition to this, with the latest regime takeover by the Taliban in August 2021, over 1,268,730 Afghans fled to neighbouring countries and only 5,622 refugees have returned to Afghanistan since then.
- This report is based on a survey (n= 198) and semi-structured interviews (n=28) with returnees carried out in Kabul and Kandahar between September 2020 and April 2021 and provides insights into the motivations and experiences of conflict faced by Afghans who returned to Afghanistan between 2001 and 2020.
- The majority of respondents taking part in the survey returned from Pakistan and other neighbouring countries after a prolonged time as refugees there with their families. One-third of the respondents returned from Western countries and a much smaller proportion from the Middle East.
- Overall, the sample represents working-age people with relatively high levels of education and employment, reflecting the profile of urban returnees in Kabul and Kandahar.
- While the most common reason for leaving Afghanistan in the first place was conflict, family and caring responsibilities constitute the most common reason for return, particularly for women. The second most common reason for both genders is the improved political situation in Afghanistan. For men, the next most common reasons were the end of their education abroad and being expelled/deported or lack of visa in the country of immigration, suggesting gendered emigration and return patterns.
- Return Assistance Programmes are crucial for populations with large refugee exodus and an important policy focus for many refugee-receiving countries. In our sample, only one-sixth of the respondents returned to Afghanistan with the help of such a programme funded by international humanitarian organisations, the Afghan Government and the governments in emigration.

¹ <https://data.unhcr.org/en/situations/afghanistan>

- The sample reveals that before the Taliban seized control, 57% of returnees were working, with those in full-time employment accounting for 25%, in part-time employment 15%, and self-employed accounting for 18%. Students made up 15% of the sample, a sizeable portion that shows the expanding student population in Kabul and more recently also in Kandahar. 15% of individuals in the sample are without jobs, with the majority of them actively looking for work. Women are more likely than men to work part-time and study, allowing them to balance family caring responsibilities and pursue further education at the same time. Qualitative interviews conducted for this study also confirmed this pattern.
- Regarding the sector of employment, women are more likely to be employed in international and local NGOs, in the education sector, the public service and home services and domestic work. These industries provide more employment opportunities for women than the private sector or the self-employment sector which is more common for men. The most common sector for men is also the education sector, although at a lower rate than women, and they are more likely to work in central or local government than women and be self-employed.
- Returnees experience high levels of social mobility in Afghanistan with a relatively high proportion of returnees employed in jobs that either correspond fully with their level of education or which require higher levels of education. This is in contrast with refugees or newly arrived migrants in Western countries who are often employed in jobs far below their levels of education and skills.
- Educational qualifications, social contacts and skills and knowledge acquired abroad are seen as useful in resettling in Afghanistan, whereas business contacts and foreign language skills acquired abroad or in exile are seen as less useful. This reflects narratives of respondents from qualitative interviews who reported that going abroad sets you back in terms of building important contacts and knowledge of how the system works in Afghanistan and gaining fluency in written Dari which is the dominant administrative language.
- Household poverty is more common among female returnees with one-fifth stating that they can't even afford basic food whereas one-third of men state that they have enough to pay for a new house and car. For the overwhelming majority of the sample COVID has worsened their household financial situation and again, the rates for women are higher than for men. Overall life satisfaction has also decreased significantly since COVID with much higher rates for women than for men.
- Only one-fifth of the returnees stated that they brought back capital with them and one-sixth invested in business since returning, which is dominated by men. This means that female returnees, who have financially a much weaker starting point, are less to start-up a business than male returnees. One-third of respondents indicated lack of sufficient capital as the most common reason for not setting up a business, followed by lack of interest and corruption. The data from the interviews also showed that, given the fluctuation of the markets in Afghanistan and the lack of adequate infrastructure to support businesses, it was safer to invest their capital in real estate. For those who set up a business, corruption and administrative issues were listed as the most common type of challenges faced by businesses.

- When returnees in Afghanistan came home, they encountered a variety of problems and hardships. There were significant differences between both genders when it came to raising children, obtaining work, accessing welfare and healthcare, adjusting to daily life, and dealing with bureaucracy. Women are more likely than males to report having faced difficulties.
- Returnees expressed concern about a number of issues in their neighbourhood, ranging from electricity cuts to littering, drugs and youth gangs, and interference by extremists. For women, the third most common problem experienced in the neighbourhood was verbal harassment and gossiping. Although at a much lower level, both men and women also selected domestic violence as being common in their neighbourhood. The least common problems were seen as interference by the police and the military. These institutions also enjoyed relatively high levels of trust among respondents.
- The perception of safety differs significantly between men and women. When asked how safe they feel walking in their local area or neighbourhood after dark nearly all of the female returnees said that they feel unsafe or extremely unsafe. The reasons for feeling unsafe are manifold and insight from the qualitative interviews shows that they range from street lighting, and lack of public transport to security threats such as bomb attacks to mugging, feud or revenge killings, and femicide. Women also faced verbal and physical harassment when travelling on their own, especially in the evenings such as harassment by taxi drivers and defamation by neighbours for arriving home late from work for example.
- Ethnicity and language were listed as the most common type of perceived group discrimination. Afghanistan is not only a multi-ethnic but also a multi-lingual society. The literature on Afghanistan documents well the racial prejudice faced by the Tajik and Hazara minorities. Yet, as this study demonstrates, language barriers are also a significant concern, particularly in Kabul, where tensions exist between Pashtun as the primary language spoken by the general population and Dari being used as the administrative language used for the majority of public sector jobs.
- Other group-based discriminations are gender, religion, political views, lifestyle and to a lesser extent age, sexuality and disability. Women are more likely to point out gender and language as a problem than men and men are more likely to emphasize discrimination based on ethnicity and political views.
- Men and women displayed similar attitudes toward gender roles in relation to family and children but unlike men, women don't see themselves confined to the private sphere and believe that women can also take up roles traditionally taken up by men such as politics, business leaders, employment and education.
- Among the returnees, trust in the Afghan armed forces received the highest levels of scores both for men and women, followed by women's organisations, the UN and other charitable and humanitarian organisations. Religious leaders, the political and legal system on the other hand received the lowest scores, especially among women. Trust in the Afghan Government enjoys also relatively high levels of trust, especially among women returnees while men have more trustful towards Banks and major companies than women. This indicates that on the one hand, it's the Government and the Armed Forces as well as humanitarian aid organisations and charities that are

seen as being perceived as important institutions that provide political and economic stability. Yet, it is exactly these institutions that have now vanished with the takeover of the Taliban.

I. Introduction

Global economic restructuring, conflict and climate change triggered unprecedented internal and cross-border mobility of men and women. While there has been an assumption in media and political discourses that migrants, refugees and displaced people intend to stay in the countries to which they go, recent years have seen increasing transnational mobilities and return migration because of the rapid development of transport and communication technologies and the relative improvement of political and economic situations in refugees and migrants' homeland². Anti-migration hostility and the exclusion of incoming people from the labour market in settlement countries have also played a role in return mobilities. In this context, the phenomenon of "return" migration has not only become a key component of the sociology of migration but is also an emerging issue of economic and political importance in many developing and post-conflict countries and regions³. The economic-based theoretical approaches have primarily considered "return" migration as resulting from migrants' economic failure or success in the host country. On the contrary, transnational approaches consider return migration and return mobilities to be an integral part of transnational mobility. Moreover, displaced people from neighbouring countries are also returning to their homeland for various reasons. In addition, the second generation of migrants become part of return mobilities for a sense of belonging to their ethnic, cultural and parental roots⁴. In this context, the phenomenon of 'return' mobilities, particularly gendered return mobilities, is not only a component of the sociology of migration, gender studies and international law but is also an emerging issue of economic and political importance in many post-conflict countries and regions for those who would seek to understand and develop policy and programme responses. However, the above approaches fail to consider the return of geographically displaced diasporas seeking to be agents of change in a post-conflict context and contribute to economic development or peace-building goals. Moreover,

² Keles, J.Y (2019) Return mobilities of highly skilled young people to a post-conflict region: the case of Kurdish-British to Kurdistan – Iraq. *Journal of Ethnicity and Migration* 3.530

³ Keles 2019

⁴ King, Russell, Anastasia Christou, and Jill Ahrens. 2011. "Diverse Mobilities': Second-Generation Greek-Germans Engage With The Homeland As Children And As Adults". *Mobilities* 6 (4): 483-501; Keles 2019; Bolognani, Marta. 2013. "Visits to the Country of Origin: How Second-Generation British Pakistanis Shape Transnational Identity and Maintain Power Asymmetries." *Global Networks* 14 (1): 103–20; Wessendorf, Susanne. 2007. "'Roots Migrants': Transnationalism and 'Return' among Second-Generation Italians in Switzerland." *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 33 (7): 1083–1102; Tracey Reynolds (2010), "Transnational Family Relationships, Social Networks and Return Migration among British-Caribbean Young People," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 33 (5).

the existing studies on return mobilities pay less attention to the gendered return mobilities in conflicted and post-conflicted regions.

This report, which is a product of the GCRF Gender, Justice and Security Hub's Migration and Displacement stream, presents the preliminary findings of our survey and semi-structured interviews that were conducted in Kandahar and Kabul, Afghanistan, to better understand the reasons why the conflict-induced Afghan diaspora from the neighbouring countries and Europe and Northern America has returned to politically and economically unstable Afghanistan since 2001. Our data unequivocally demonstrate that after the US-led coalition overthrew the Taliban regime in 2001⁵ and held a presidential election in 2004 and a parliamentary in 2005 in accordance with the 2001 Bonn Agreement, Afghan refugees began to return to Afghanistan from the neighbouring countries. They returned for short or longer periods to their homelands to meet their families, attend important family events and carry out their business, and then re-return back again to neighbouring countries. This 'in-out' and 'out-in' strategy (getting out of Afghanistan and coming back to Afghanistan approach) has been widely used by Afghan refugees. However, despite the violence, lack of security, and increasing Taliban presence, the contested elections in 2010, 2014, and 2018 gave Afghan refugees a sense of hope to return to Afghanistan. As a result of this, a significant number of Afghan refugees and highly skilled Afghan migrants including women from around the world returned to Afghanistan for longer periods and started to work for the Afghan Government, for NGOs, at universities or started up their own business ventures. This report shows that conflict-generated refugees and migrants (men and women) return to their post-conflicted homeland to contribute to the peace process, participating in re-building their war-affected country, taking care of their families that were left behind during the war, and playing a crucial role in the gendered struggle and political and economic process and progress. However, current migration patterns in Afghanistan are complex. The withdrawal of United States troops from Afghanistan and the return of the Taliban to power in August 2021 have already led to a new refugee flow with 1,268,730 Afghans fleeing to neighboring countries triggering a new wave of re-emigration by returnees in masses. Since the latest regime takeover by the Taliban in August 2021, only 5,622 refugees returned to Afghanistan.⁶

2. Background

5 RD Crews and Tarzi (2008) *The Taliban and the Crisis of Afghanistan*, Cambridge, Massachusetts and London: Harvard University Press

6 UNHRC 2022 Afghanistan in Iran and Pakistan <https://data.unhcr.org/en/situations/afghanistan>



Afghanistan has a population of 41,107,583 million people⁷, of which 42% are Pashtun, 27% are Tajik, 9% are Hazara, 9% are Uzbek, 4% are Aimak, 3% are Turkmen, 2% are Baloch, and 4% are unidentified as "other"⁸. Dari and Pashto are the two official dialects. Pashto is spoken primarily in Pashtun areas, whilst Dari is primarily spoken in the Tajik and Hazara areas. The northern parts of the country speak Uzbek and Turkmen. Hence, the majority of the population is multi-lingual. 99% of Afghans are estimated to be Muslim, and between 80% and 89% of them practice Sunni Islam, while the remaining 10% to 19% are Shia. Only 38.2% of Afghan adults over the age of 15 are literate, with men outnumbering women by a margin of 52% to 24%. Girls' education was prohibited during the previous Taliban rule (1996-2001) in Afghanistan⁹. However, Afghanistan's educational system underwent significant growth in the post-Taliban period (2002–2021), with numerous significant initiatives in the areas of women's rights and girls' education.¹⁰ But when the Taliban returned in 2021,

this progress was halted and the achievements are being undone with every day the Taliban consolidates its power in Afghanistan.

Due to its geopolitical importance, Afghanistan became a proxy war for competing ideologies between the US and Soviet Union during the Cold War, fueled by rival regional powers¹¹. Afghan warlords, tribal structures and exported ideologies imposed on the diversely ethnicized Afghan societies led to further polarisation and civil war in Afghanistan. Early migration from Afghans was limited to the Afghan elite, who left their homeland for political and educational reasons¹² The early phases of the conflict caused the outflow of refugees from the Afghan elite, consisting of the 'traditional' elite that is often defined by lineages, such as belonging to the royal family or localised political or religious leaders, and 'new' elites who accessed higher education and were

⁷ Worldometers (2022) Afghanistan Population <https://www.worldometers.info/world-population/afghanistan-population/>

⁸ Worldpopulationreview (2022) Afghanistan Demographics <https://worldpopulationreview.com/countries/afghanistan-population>

⁹ Nojumi, N (2016) The rise of the Taliban in Afghanistan: Mass mobilization, civil war, and the future of the region. Amazon.co.uk: Books.

¹⁰ Unterhalter, E (2022) The history of secret education for girls in Afghanistan – and its use as a political symbol <https://theconversation.com/the-history-of-secret-education-for-girls-in-afghanistan-and-its-use-as-a-political-symbol-188622>

¹¹ De Soysa, I. (2017). Proxy wars: implications of great-power rivalry for the onset and duration of civil war. The Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Politics/ Goodson, L. P. (2001). Afghanistan's endless war: State failure, regional politics, and the rise of the Taliban. University of Washington Press.

¹² Oeppen C. 2009. A Stranger at Home: Integration, Transnationalism and the Afghan Élite. University of Sussex: Sussex.

part of a relatively wealthy, urban class (Oeppen, 2009).

Afghanistan experienced the devastation of a civil war, greatly exacerbated by Soviet military invasion and occupation in the late 1970s and throughout the 1980s¹³. The civil war between the Soviet-backed Afghan government and the US-backed Mujahideen and the Soviet invasion unleashed a massive wave of migration from Afghanistan to Pakistan and Iran¹⁴. There were 3.5 million Afghan refugees in all who fled to Pakistan, 2 million to Iran, and the remainder to other countries. This was the first wave of migration from Afghanistan¹⁵¹⁶.

After the Soviet troops left Afghanistan in 1989 and the US-backed mujahideen rebels took control of Afghanistan, around 5 million people including supporters of the Afghan government and the Soviet Union fled to India and the Soviet Union to escape the Islamic extreme Mujahideen groups. This was the second wave of migration from Afghanistan. In parallel, Afghan refugees who had fled the Soviet invasion returned to Afghanistan from Pakistan and Iran¹⁷. According to various estimates, 3 million Afghan refugees returned to their country after the Soviet invasion ended, although there is no credible data on those who fled Afghanistan and those who returned.

Following the Taliban's takeover in 1994, which resulted in the imposition of Sharia law, restrictions on women's rights and girls' education, and persecution of numerous ethnic and religious minorities such as Hazara¹⁸¹⁹, the third wave of migration from Afghanistan to neighbouring countries, Europe, America, Canada, and Australia began. But when the Taliban government was ousted in 2002 by the US-led coalition and Afghan Northern Alliance fighters, the Taliban and its supporters fled the country for Pakistan. A large number of Afghan refugees returned to their homes after the Taliban regime ended. A large internal displacement and migration within Afghanistan began at that time, as a result of the US and NATO bombing of "Taliban-controlled areas" indiscriminately and the Taliban's force of conscription of young people. This internal displacement and migration are considered the fourth wave of Afghan exodus.

The withdrawal of United States troops from Afghanistan and the return of the Taliban to power in August 2021 have already led to a new refugee flow as well as the re-migration of returnees to neighbouring countries and elsewhere. Following this categorization, we can now talk about the fifth wave of migration. Again, there is not any reliable data but the UN estimates that 1,268,730 Afghans arrived in Iran, Pakistan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan since August 2021 to seek asylum in neighbouring countries and Western countries²⁰. To sum up, Afghanistan continues to experience one of the largest refugee crises due to decades of

¹³ Rubin, B. R. (2013). *Afghanistan from the Cold War through the War on Terror*. Oxford University Press.

¹⁴ Harpviken, K. B. (2009). *Social networks and migration in wartime Afghanistan*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

¹⁵ Jazayery L. 2002. The migration–development nexus: Afghanistan case study. *international migration* 40: 231–254

¹⁶ Newland, Kathleen, and Patrick, Erin. "A Nation Displaced: The world's largest refugee population." Migration Policy Institute (2001).

¹⁷ Jazayery, 2002; Oeppen, 2009

¹⁸ Marsden P. 1999. Repatriation and reconstruction: the case of Afghanistan. In *The End of the Refugee Cycle? Refugee Repatriation and Reconstruction*, Black R, Koser K (eds). Berghahn Books: New York and Oxford; 56–68.; Jazayery, 2002; Collins JJ. 2011. *Understanding War in Afghanistan*. National Defence University Press: Washington.

¹⁹ Abu Zaib, M. (2008), *The Regional Dimension Of Sectarian Conflict In Pakistan*, in Christophe Jafferlot (ed), p.26-45.

²⁰ UNHCR (2022) Situation Afghanistan situation - UNHCR data portal <https://data.unhcr.org/en/situations/afghanistan>

war and intra-state conflict, which have led 6 million to flee their homes and seek refuge in the neighbouring countries of Pakistan, Iran, Central Asian countries and as well as, India, Europe, Gulf countries, Turkey, North America, Australia, Russia, and other countries since the 1970s.

3. Methodology

This document reports on the results of the Return Migration Survey analysis conducted in Afghanistan between September 2020-March 2021 in collaboration with Women for Peace and Participation (WPP), an NGO based in Afghanistan and London. Afghan migrants who had lived abroad for a year or longer and returned between 2000-2020 were asked closed-end questions to capture their return experiences. The questions include standard socio-demographic questions, emigration and return reasons, challenges of adapting to life in Afghanistan, employment opportunities incl. Barriers to setting up a business, gender norms, social and political participation, and issues of security and safety among others. The survey questions were informed from the literature on return migration with input from the Afghan partners and a pilot version was tested to ensure that the questions and answer categories are relevant to the Afghan context. The Return Migration Survey was simultaneously carried out in Sri Lanka, the Kurdistan Region of Iraq and Pakistan, reaching an overall sample size of 679, of which the sample size for Afghanistan is 196.

The survey was a self-completion questionnaire in the two national languages of Afghanistan (Pashto and Dari) and administered online to returnees aged 18 and over. The survey was carried out in collaboration with Women for Peace and Participation (WPP) five Afghan researchers worked in the field and helped to carry out the surveys. A multiple-method approach to administering the survey was applied to minimize the barriers to completing the survey for respondents. This included visiting the returnees with a laptop, tablet or mobile phone and leaving it to them to complete the survey, helping those who required more assistance to read out the questions and register their responses or just sending them a link for self-completion. The free software package developed for humanitarian projects –KoboToolbox- was used to design the survey and the data was collected via the app KoboCollect which allows multiple surveys to be completed offline and uploaded to the server later. All fieldwork researchers were trained in using the app and in administering the survey to ensure that no further bias was introduced during the administration of the survey and for the smooth running of fieldwork.

A purposeful sample technique was used to identify returnees eligible for the study. The research team used the extensive network of the WPP to identify a diverse range of return migrants. Thus, the sample is not representative of the general returnee population of Afghanistan. Achieving a representative sample requires the existence of a central administrative data set with a complete list of Afghan returnees, from which a random sample of the returnee population can be selected. Given the absence of such a central database, it was not possible to select a random sample and therefore obtain a representative sample. Given the limited resources, time constraints and security issues on the ground, our researchers focused on Kabul and Kandahar and its suburbs in order

to reach as much of a diverse population as possible. These are the two major cities in which many returnees settle down as it offers opportunities for further education, employment and business ventures. Overall, the sample slightly over-represents men, working-age people (18-34), returnees from Pakistan, women in employment and with higher levels of education and those affiliated with civil society organisations. Yet, this is also the typical profile of returnees in Kabul and Kandahar. Although one-third of the returnees in the sample are from Western countries, only a small proportion indicated that they are non-voluntary returnees, a group with a particular interest in the Western countries who are engaged in return assistance programs for Afghan refugees. Further particularities of the sample are discussed further in the report. Despite these limitations, the collected data is relatively rich as it gives us an insight into a range of domains that are relevant for returnees such as educational and employment outcomes, gender norms, poverty, business ventures, challenges experienced adapting, perceptions of migrants, trust, political and civic behaviour, attachment and loyalties. With the regime change in August 2022 and the return of the Taliban, it is very unlikely that a similar survey will be conducted or for that fact, independent research will be carried out in Afghanistan in the foreseeable future. Thus, this data might be the last empirical data collected in Afghanistan for a long time to come. It is therefore important to report on all of the findings from the survey in detail. We hope that other academics and interested parties will find the data valuable, and make use of the figures and the findings.

4. Data analysis

4.1 Socio-demographics

Despite attempts to reach a gender balance, men are overrepresented in the survey with 66.8% (n=131) whereas only 33.2% are women (n=65). The researchers reported that it has been a particular challenge to reach out to women as some of them were reluctant to agree to take part without consulting their male relatives and others felt some of the questions were too intrusive such as those on household income, although these questions were not compulsory. In order to be able to make a meaningful comparison between the responses of women compared to the responses of men, we reported on the proportion of men and women separately and used this figure to discuss the differences between the two groups.

As Table 1 shows, the mean age of the sample is 32 ranging from a minimum age of 18 to a maximum age of 66. Three-quarters of the sample is age 18-38 which means that most respondents in the sample are returnees in their prime working ages.

Table 1: Age, return year and number of years in emigration

	Min	Mean	Max
Age	18	32	66
Year returned	2000	2014	2020
Number of years in emigration	1	12	46

The survey was limited to returnees who had returned since 2000 (Table 1), thus earlier returnees are not included in this survey. Only one-quarter of returnees

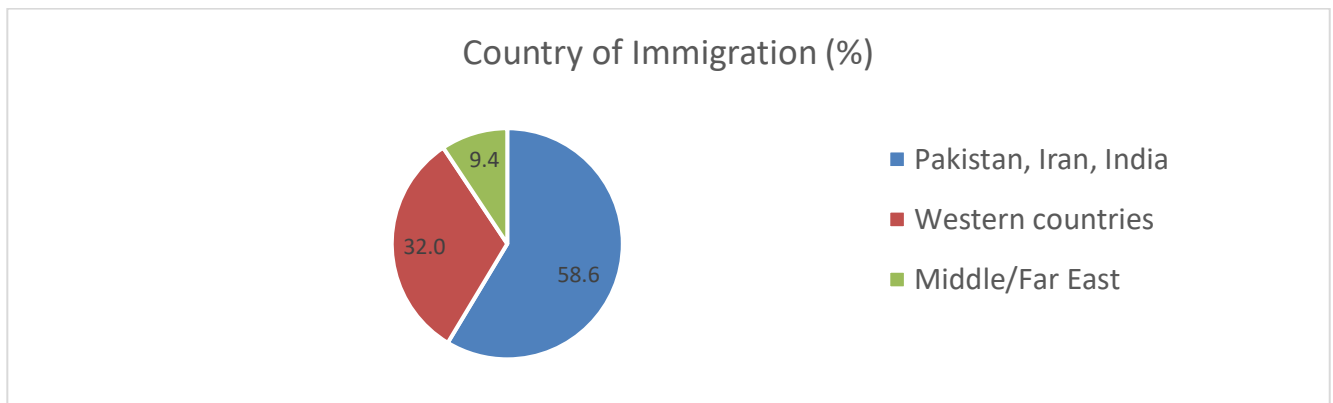
returned before 2010. The highest peak in return was in 2015 and one-quarter of the returnees came back to Afghanistan in the last few years i.e. 2018-2021. Overall, the majority of respondents in the sample have returned in the last 5 years, after 2015, when the political situation in Afghanistan began to stabilize until August 2021 when the Taliban took over the Government again.

Only respondents who stayed longer than a year abroad were included in this survey. Thus, the minimum year spend abroad starts with one year. Most respondents spend around 10-12 years abroad and three-quarters of the returnees spent up to 16 years abroad before returning (Table 1). There are very few returnees who were away for longer, only a quarter of them seemed to have left Afghanistan during the 1990s and very few during the 1980s.

First-generation Afghan returnees constitute 85% of the sample and only 15% are second-generation returnees in other words they were born abroad as children of refugees. Among those who were born abroad, most of them were second-generation returnees from Pakistan (21 respondents) and a small proportion from Iran (5) and Western countries (3) (Figures not shown here).

The next graph shows the country of immigration of returnees in percentages.

Figure 1: Main country of immigration in overall percentages



The majority of the sample are returnees from Pakistan (44.9%). If we include Iran (7.7%) and India (7.1%), then almost 60% of the sample are returnees from neighbouring regions. The rest of the sample are returnees from Western countries (32.7%) and a small proportion has returned from the Middle East (6.6%). Only 4 respondents or 1% of the sample have migrated to other countries. The pie chart above (Figure 1) only shows the three biggest clusters of countries that returnees had emigrated to before returning to Afghanistan.

Figure 2 below shows the marital status of the respondents, of which the overwhelming majority are married 65.8%. Single people represent over a third (29.6%) of the sample and only a small proportion are **divorced or widowed (4.6%)**.

Figure 2 Marital status in overall percentages

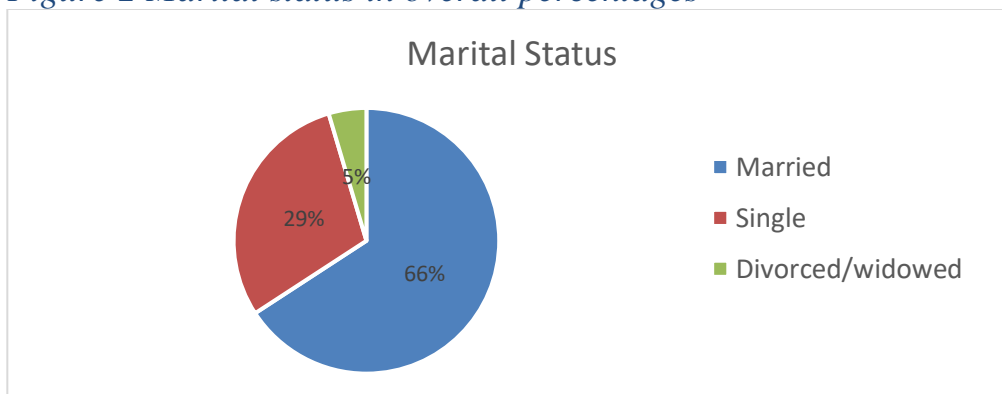


Table 2 below shows the ethnic and religious distribution of the sample. Afghanistan is a multi-ethnic country with a predominantly Sunni and a minority Shia population. The table shows that the overwhelming majority of the sample are Sunni Muslims (82.7%) with only 6.6% declaring that they are Shia Muslims. In terms of ethnicity, almost three-quarters of the sample are of Pashtun ethnic origin (70.1%) and only 16.8% of Tajik ethnic origin. No up-to-date census data is providing exact figures on ethnic and religious distribution in Afghanistan. Open-source data shows similar estimates for ethnic and religious distribution. According to estimates published by Statista for example, 42% of the Afghan population as of 2022 are Pashtuns and 27% are Tajiks. This means the survey sample does not represent the distribution of ethnic

groups in the total population. This distortion has most likely been caused by the focus of the survey on Kabul and Kandahar which tend to have a higher proportion of Pashtuns. In terms of religious distribution, current figures estimate the proportion of the Sunni population at 85-90% and the Shia population at 10-15% which is much closer to the composition of our sample.²¹

Table 2 Ethnic and religious breakdown in overall percentages

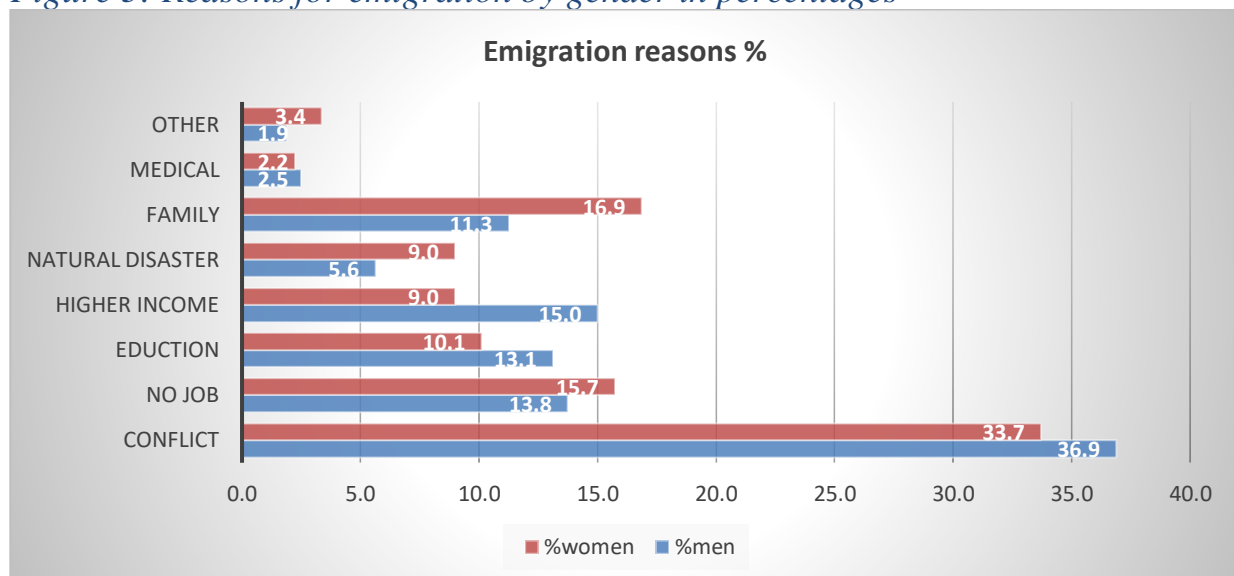
Ethnicity	Percentage
Pashtun	70.1
Tajik	16.8
Other	2.5
Not stated	10.7
Religion	Percentage
Sunni	82.7
Shia	5.6
Other	2.5

4.2 Emigration and Return

4.2.1 Reasons for emigration

As argued above, the majority of the returnees in the sample had left during the war in the 1980s and the Taliban regime in the 1990s. The figure below (Figure 3) shows the proportion of men and women by reasons of emigration.

Figure 3: Reasons for emigration by gender in percentages



The most common reason for leaving Afghanistan was a conflict for both men and women with 36.9% of men and 33.7% of women giving that as a reason. For women the second most common reason for emigration was family reasons including getting

²¹ See Statista (2022) Breakdown of Afghan population as of 2020, by ethnic group
<https://www.statista.com/statistics/1258799/afghanistan-share-of-population-by-ethnic-group/>

married and joining their spouse with 16.9%, whereas for men the second most common reason was to earn a higher income (15%), followed by having no job (13.8%) and to pursue education abroad (13.1%). Having no job is also a reason for emigration for women (13.8%) but not as high as for men and this is ranked after conflict and family as the most important factor of emigration. A disproportionately higher proportion of women (9%) than men (5.6%) indicated natural disasters as a reason for emigration. Due to climate change, Afghanistan has had several seasons of drought in recent decades, lasting for several years and causing food poverty and leading to internal displacement and as the graph shows also to emigration out of Afghanistan altogether.

4.2.2 Reasons for return

The reasons for return are multiple and respondents were first asked to state their *main reason* for return and in a subsequent question, they were asked to select *all reasons* for their return. In both questions, family and caring responsibilities emerged as the most common reasons.

Figure 4 above shows that 34.9% of women gave family and caring responsibilities as their *main reason* for return, and for men, this was much lower than 15 %. This is followed by the improved political situation with 19% for women and 16.7% for men. Other key reasons for men were expulsion, removal or no visa (14.2%) and the end of their studies (12.5%). Employment or business opportunities were the main reasons for return for a relatively small minority of men (7.9%) and women (5.8%). To get a more detailed insight into the return reasons by groups of returnees, cross-tabulations by country of immigration was carried out (data not shown here). This explorative analysis revealed that family reasons are the biggest factor for Afghan migrants from Western countries to come back, with the end of studies as the second most common reason among this group. For returnees from Pakistan, Iran and India on the other hand, it's the improvement of the political situation in Afghanistan that has triggered their return. This is followed by other family reasons (i.e. excluding caring responsibilities), expulsion, deportation or non-renewal of residence permit and end of studies. For returnees from Middle Eastern and Gulf countries non-renewal of residency permits, along with better employment opportunities in Afghanistan and job insecurity in the host country and family reasons are all equally given as return reasons. However, this is a relatively small group among the returnees and figures have to be viewed with caution. Nevertheless, the responses reflect their status as short-term labour migrant workers in the GCC countries.

Figure 4: Main reason for returning to Afghanistan by gender in percentages

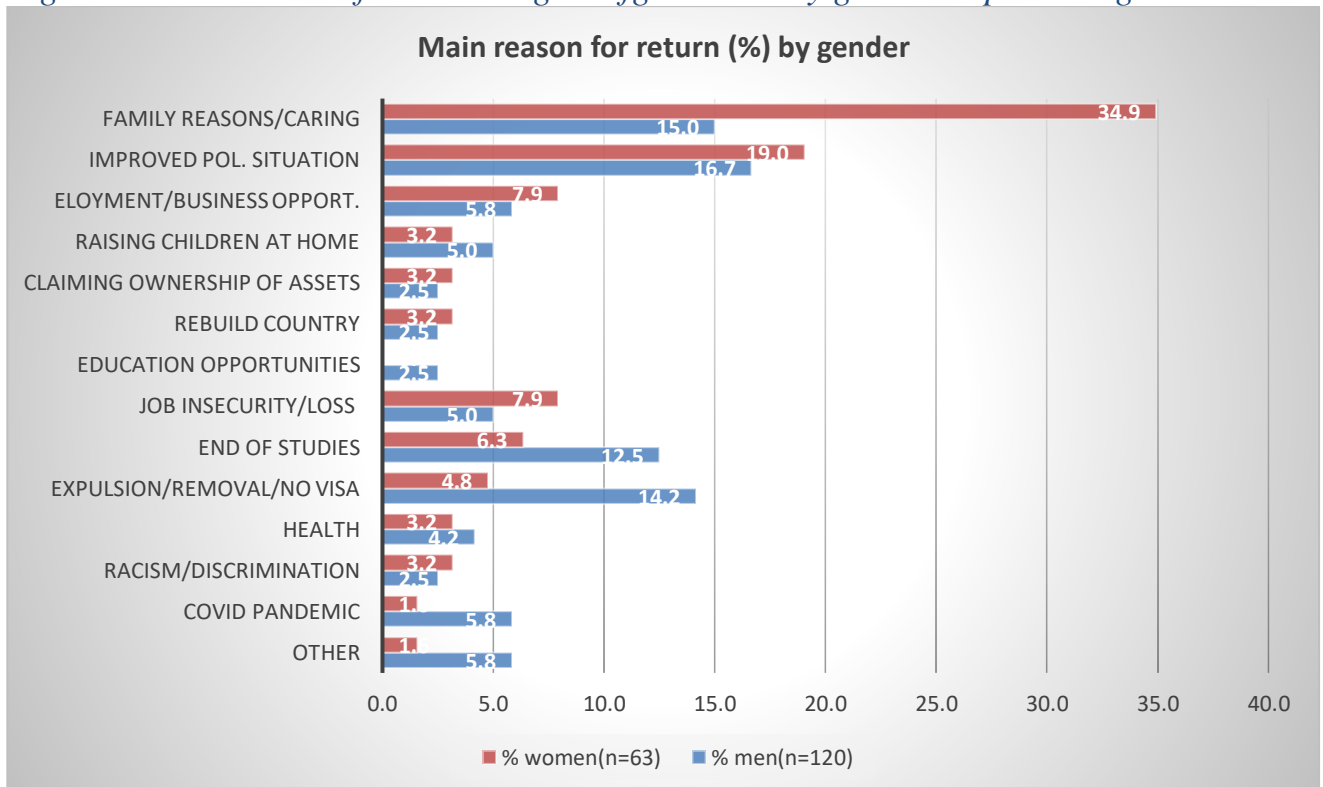


Table 3 below gives a more detailed breakdown of the main reasons for return for men and women with the top three reasons for both genders highlighted in bold. The answers have been ordered by pull and push factors and it's striking that the pull factors i.e. reasons related to Afghanistan itself are more common reasons to go back, than reasons related to the country of immigration such as the end of studies or issues of residency.

Table 3: Multiple reasons for return

Multiple Return Reasons	Men (%)	Women (%)
Pull factors (home country)		
Family (being with, getting married etc.)	8.6	15.6
Caring responsibilities	5.0	11.9
Country improved	8.6	10.1
Rebuild country	9.1	7.3
Employment better here	5.0	3.7
Education better here	4.5	2.8
Claiming assets	2.7	5.5
Push factors (country of immigration)		
End of my studies	7.7	6.4
Job insecurity	5.5	5.5
Expulsion/Removal	6.8	3.7
No residency	5.5	0.9
Health	5.0	5.5
COVID	4.1	1.8
Racism	3.6	1.8
Not raising children there	3.6	1.8
End of children's studies	2.7	0.9
Homesick	1.4	3.7
Achieved aim (saving)	0.0	3.7
Achieved aim (citizenship)	3.2	1.8
Divorce	0.9	0.0
Retirement	0.9	0.0
Other	5.5	5.5
Total	100.0	100.0

Similar to the results for the main reason of return, in the question on *multiple reasons*, the main trends still prevail, yet with a few exceptions; for men, the top three reasons are 1) family/caring responsibilities, 2) expulsion/removal/no visa, and 3) end of studies, followed by 4) rebuilding the country, and 5) improved political situation. For women the most common reasons are 1) family/caring, and 2) improved political situation, followed by 3) rebuilding the country and 4) end of studies (see Table 3). This suggests that the two factors expulsion/removal/no visa, and end of studies feature stronger as a return reason for men than for women.

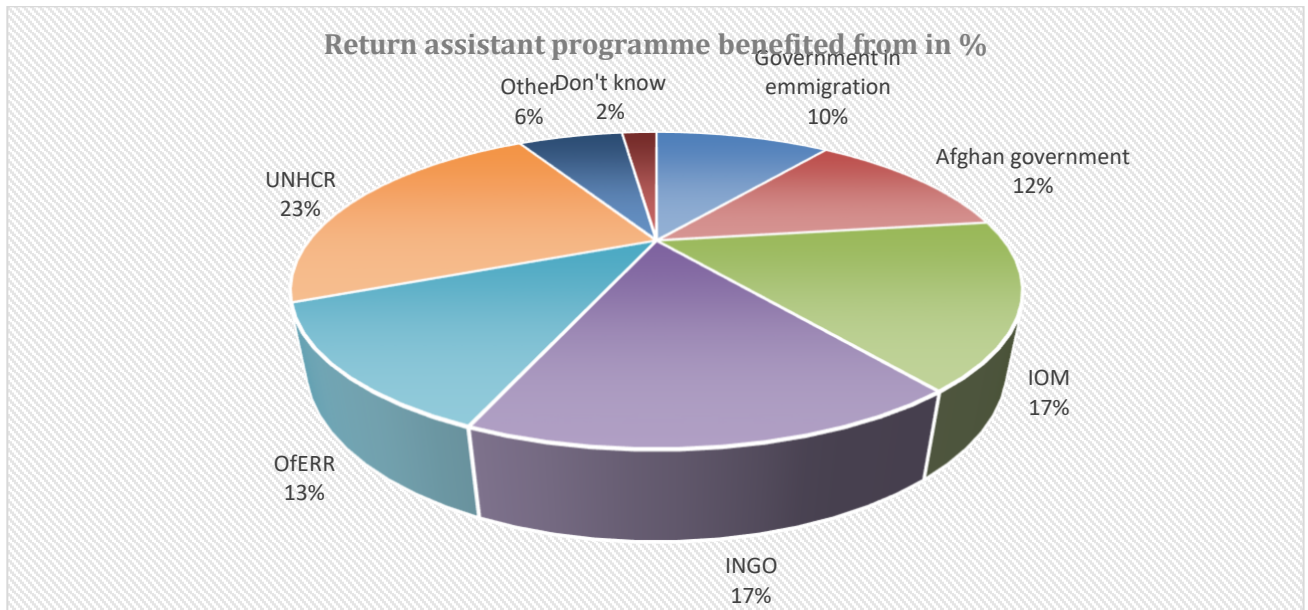
4.2.3 Return Assistance programmes

Many refugee-receiving countries have return assistance programmes in place to encourage voluntary return.²² Depending on the programme they can include help and support to obtain travel documents and eligibility to apply for funds to support returnees in their return and reintegration such as finding housing, a job or starting a business in their home country. In this sample, only 16.3% of the respondents stated

²² International Organization for Migration (IOM), 2021. *Return and Reintegration Key Highlights 2020*. IOM. Geneva, 96pp.

that they have received such assistance (n=32) with the majority being from neighbouring countries (n=15) and Western countries (n=14). In other words, 84% of the sample returned most likely without any assistance from any organisations supporting their return. Of those who stated that they received such support, the majority are from international humanitarian organisations as shown in Figure 5. Only a small proportion received support from the Afghan Government (12%) or the government in emigration (10%).

Figure 5 Return assistant programme benefited from

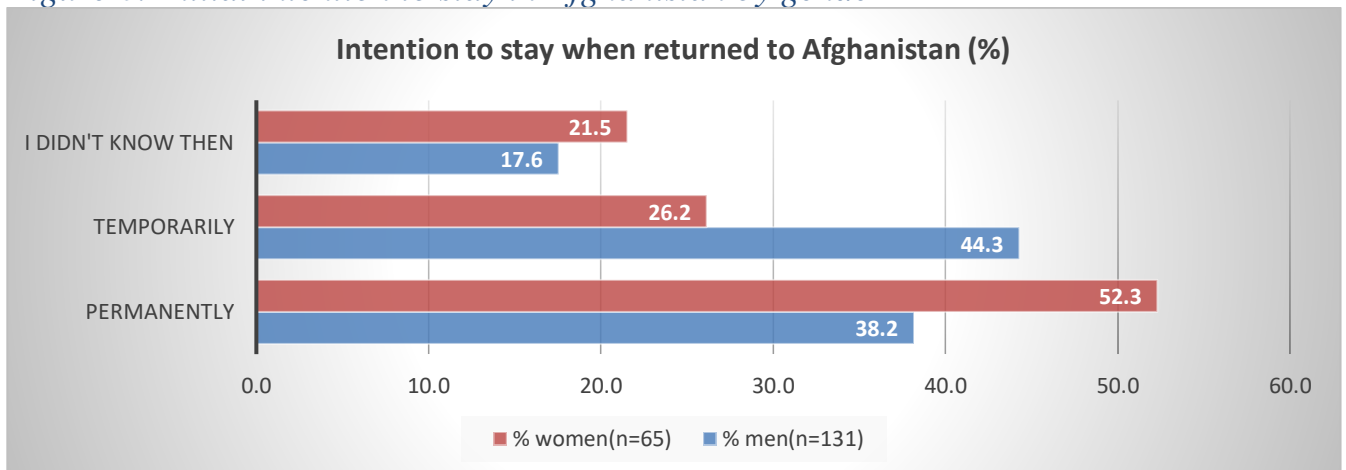


4.2.4 Return Re-emigration Intention

Research on return mobilities highlights the dynamics of migration and that a return is rarely an end stage of migration. The survey asked therefore a question of intention to stay at the time of their last return to Afghanistan as well as future re-emigration intention.

Figure 6 shows what the intention of the returnees was when they returned to Afghanistan. At the time of their arrival, 42.9% of the respondents had returned intending to stay permanently, 38.3% temporarily and 18.9% were not sure at the time of their arrival. If broken down by gender, 52.3% of women had the intention of staying permanently compared to 38.2% of men. On the other hand, 44.3% of men intended to stay temporarily when they returned to Afghanistan compared to 26.2% of women. The latter group was also more indecisive with 21.5% of women stating that they were not sure then whether they would return for good or re-emigrate again, compared to 17.6% of men. Thus, men seem to be less declined to see their return as final whereas the majority of women intended to stay for good.

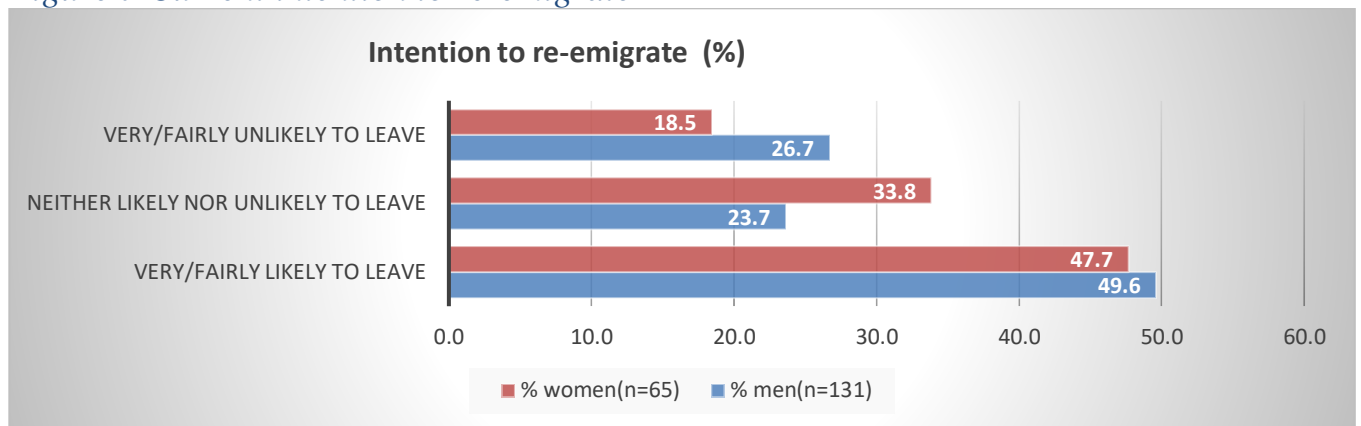
Figure 6: Initial intention to stay in Afghanistan by gender



The next figure (Figure 7) shows their current intention to re-emigrate. Both men and women indicated that they are very or fairly likely to leave again (49.6% and 47,7%

respectively). Only 18.5% of women and 26.7% of men were determined to stay and not to re-emigrate again.

Figure 7 Current intention to re-emigrate

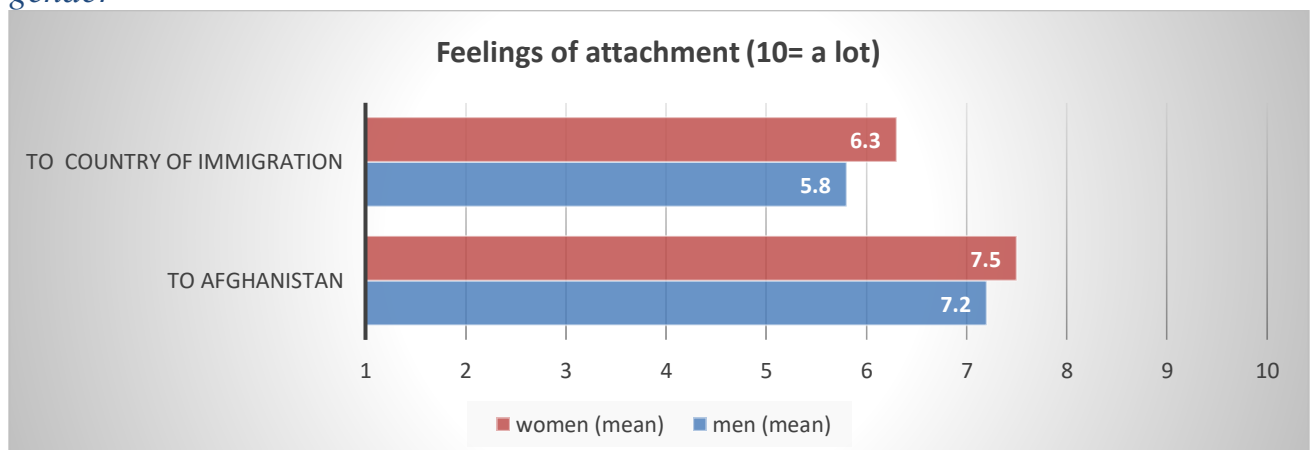


The re-emigration intention is highly situational and responses are likely to fluctuate. At the time the survey was conducted from September 2020 to March 2021, the Taliban were in peace negotiations with the Afghan government and the US. By the summer of 2021 when the Taliban took over the democratically elected Afghan government the conditions of living and working in Afghanistan has changed dramatically. This is likely to have an effect on how returnees reevaluated their future migration plans with almost half of the sample indicating that at the time of their arrival, they intended to stay permanently, whereas now only about one-fifth are stating that they have no intention to re-emigrate.

4.2.5 Attachment to the country of immigration and Afghanistan

Feelings of attachment to the home country and country of emigration are likely to play a role in returning and harbouring return inspirations. To capture these sentiments, respondents were asked the following questions: *How emotionally attached do you feel to Afghanistan?* This was followed by the question on attachment to the country of immigration: *And how emotionally attached do you feel to your main country of immigration?* The responses were recorded on a 10 points scale where 1 = 'not at all emotionally attached' and 10 = 'very emotionally attached'. Figure 8 shows the mean score of attachment for Afghanistan and the mean score of attachment for the main country of immigration by gender.

Figure 8 Feelings of attachment to Afghanistan and country of immigration by gender



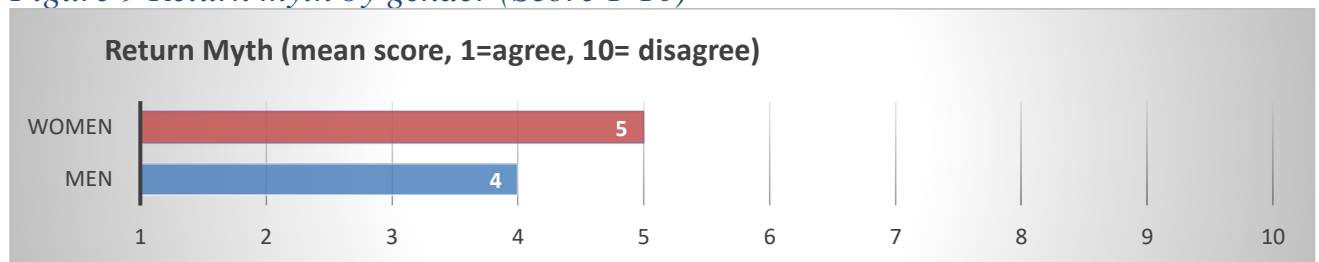
Score of 1=no attachment, 10=attached a lot

Given that the majority of respondents were first-generation emigrants, as expected, for returnees, feelings of attachment for Afghanistan are at higher levels (above 7.5 for women and 7.2 for men) than feelings of attachment for the main country of immigration (6.3 for women and 5.8 for men). However, both scores are relatively high although women report in both cases higher levels of attachment with both countries. In this sample, a small proportion of the returnees are also second-generation returnees (15%) and the average yearly spend in the country of immigration is 12 years which is arguably an important factor in attachment to the country of immigration.

4.2.6 Return Myth

The literature points out that many conflict generated refugees live with the 'myth of return' one day to their homeland²³. To capture this "return myth" respondents were asked how much they agreed with the following statement: *When living in the country of immigration, I always had the wish to come back to Afghanistan?*

Figure 9 Return myth by gender (Score 1-10)



Scale 1-10; where 1 means "completely agree" and 10 means "completely disagree"

The result showed that men had a stronger desire to return one day compared to women (mean score of 4 and 5 respectively); the lower the scale the more they agree with the statement. The gender differences resonate with attachment to the country of immigration which had higher rates for women than men. This might be driven by the average years spent in the country in immigration (12 years for this sample) as well as the proportion of returnees from neighbouring countries, especially from Pakistan. In the qualitative interviews conducted narratives from women returnees indicated that they felt quite settled in Pakistan and that the decision to return was driven primarily by family attachments and responsibilities.

4.3 Employment and Education

Employment and education are indicators of socio-economic status and are highly gendered, particularly in post-conflict societies. They are key socio-demographic variables crucial for statistical analysis and modelling as they have been found to be predictors of a range of outcomes. Women's education is a key strategy for reducing poverty and contributing to economic development by improving the productive capacities of the labour force²⁴ Observing education and employment outcomes is

²³ Keles, J.Y (2015) *Media, Diaspora and Conflict: Nationalism and Identity amongst Kurdish and Turkish Migrants in Europe*. I.B.Tauris:London& New York. ISBN: 978784530396

²⁴ Tuccio and Wahba 2015

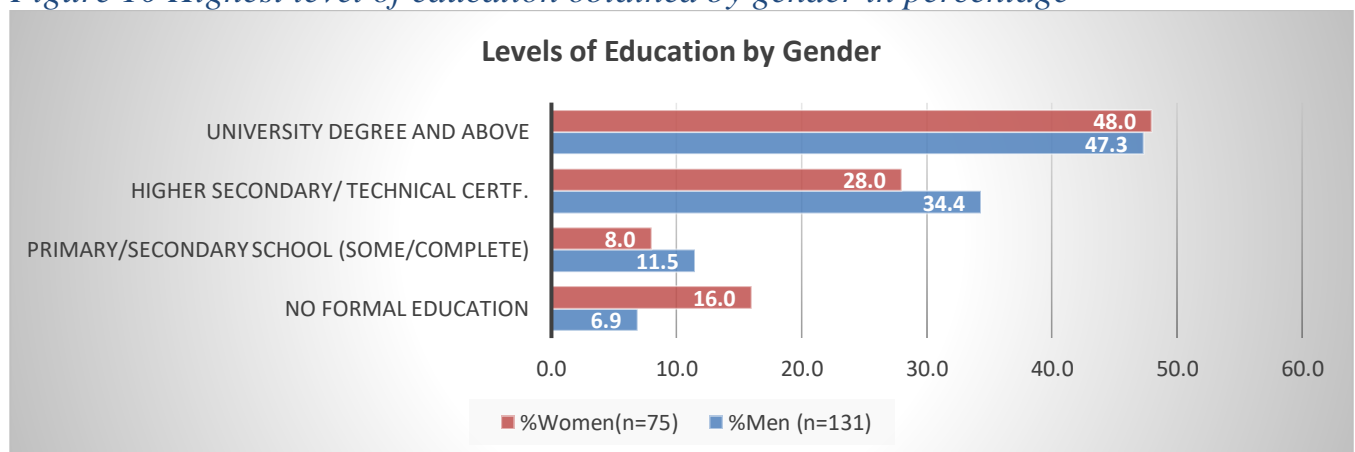
therefore important also for return migration and reintegration. Given the specific history of the Taliban regime which targeted female education and employment as well as the prevalent gendered norms in the society and limited employment opportunities for women, this section shows how these patterns are distributed within the sample of this study.

4.3.1 Education

Figure 10 shows the respondent's highest level of education. The graph shows that levels of education are skewed towards highly educated people with almost half of the men (47.3%) and half of the women (48%) having a university degree or higher. Together with respondents who went to school beyond secondary school, they represent 78.6% of the sample. While Kabul is known for being a university city, in recent years universities were also established in Kandahar which recruited students from the surrounding districts and enabled students in that region to study. As this survey was carried out in these two cities, the high proportion of students among the sample is likely to be representative of the two cities' populations.

Although the sample is more representative of a highly educated population it also includes a small proportion of respondents with little or no formal education. The graph shows that 21.5% have not received education beyond secondary schooling which is up to year 10. Moreover, compared to men (6.9%), the proportion of women with no formal education (incl. incomplete primary schooling) is much higher (16%). The stark gender differences in the groups with lower levels of education reflect the conservative gender norms prevalent in the society but might also be due to socio-economic hardship which restricts access to education for all.

Figure 10 Highest level of education obtained by gender in percentage



4.3.2 Employment

Table 4 below shows that 57.2% of the sample are currently in employment with those in full-time employment representing 24.5%, part-time employment at 14.80% and those being self-employed at 17.9%. Students represent 14.8% of the sample which is relatively high but represents Kabul's and recently also Kandahar's increasing student population. The rate of unemployed in the sample is 15.3% (n=37) with the majority of them looking for work, while a small proportion has no permission from their families to seek employment (3 men and 3 women) or are not

actively looking for a job (7 in total). This is a relatively low figure and might be due to the bias in the sample skewed towards educated returnees. The real figures in Afghanistan are expected to be much higher than female unemployment due to structural constraints as well as conservative family values which do not favour in general women's employment. The proportion of those who are a homemaker and not otherwise employed is 8.16%. This again is less likely to reflect overall Afghanistan figures and is more indicative of the specific sample selection of this study which has a high proportion of returnees of working age, highly educated and being in employment.

Table 4 Main occupation by gender in frequency and total percentages

Current main occupation	Men	Women	Total (n)	Total (%)
Full-time employee (30 hours a week or more)	36	12	48	24.49
Part-time employee (less than 30 hours a week)	17	12	29	14.80
Self-employed	32	3	35	17.86
Homemaker (looking after family/children not otherwise employed)	6	10	16	8.16
Student	13	16	29	14.80
Unemployed and actively looking for a job	18	5	23	11.73
Unemployed but not eligible to work (no work permit)	1	0	1	0.51
Unemployed but family doesn't give permission to work	3	3	6	3.06
Unemployed, and not actively looking for a job	3	4	7	3.57
Permanently sick or disabled	1	0	1	0.51
Retired/too old to work	0	0	0	0.00
Other	1	0	1	0.51
<i>Total</i>	<i>131</i>	<i>65</i>	<i>196</i>	<i>100.00</i>

Figure 11 below only shows the most common types of employment status by gender. Self-employment is five times higher among men than among women in the sample (24% and 5% respectively) and the proportion of men in full-time employment is again much higher compared to women (27% and 18% respectively). Women on the other hand are more likely than men to be in part-time employment (18% and 13% respectively) and are more than twice as likely to be in full-time education (25% and 10% respectively). As we will see below in this report, women are more likely to work in the third sector for NGOs and be employed in the education sector. These sectors allow women to take up part-time jobs and combine them with family duty and part-time further education. This trend was also confirmed by qualitative interviews in this study.

Among those who are homemakers and those who are not looking for work, the rate of women in this category is more than double the men's rate (15% and 6% respectively). Thus, despite the relatively high rate of employment in this sample, the

gender disparities are still clearly visible.

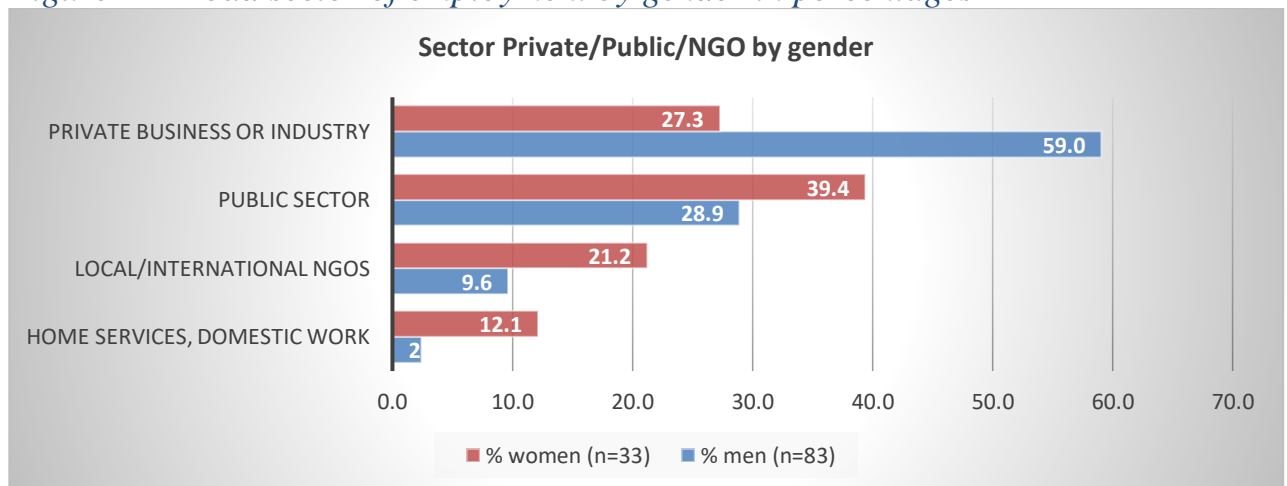
Figure 11 Most common types of employment by gender in percentages



4.3.3 Sector and industry of employment

The sector in which the respondents are employed (or were employed in the past if they are currently not working) is also highly gendered. Figure 12 shows that women are more likely than men to be employed in the public service sector (39.4% and 28.9% respectively) and twice as likely to work for local and international NGOs (21.2%) compared to men (9.6%). They are also five times more likely than men to be employed in home services and domestic work. Men on the other hand are twice as likely as women to be employed in private businesses or industry.

Figure 12 Broad sector of employment by gender in percentages



The next graph, Figure 13, gives more details about the sector and shows that the overrepresentation of men in the private business or industry sector is mainly driven by self-employment (32.5% men and 3% women). Moreover, the overrepresentation of women in the public sector is mainly driven by the relatively high rate of women in central or local government jobs (27.3% compared to 14.5% for men) and less in other public sector jobs (9.1% women, 12% men). A detailed breakdown of the NGO sector shows that 12.1% of women are employed in international NGOs and a smaller number in local NGOs (9.1%), for men, these figures are 2.4% and 7.2% respectively.

Figure 13 Detailed sector of employment by gender

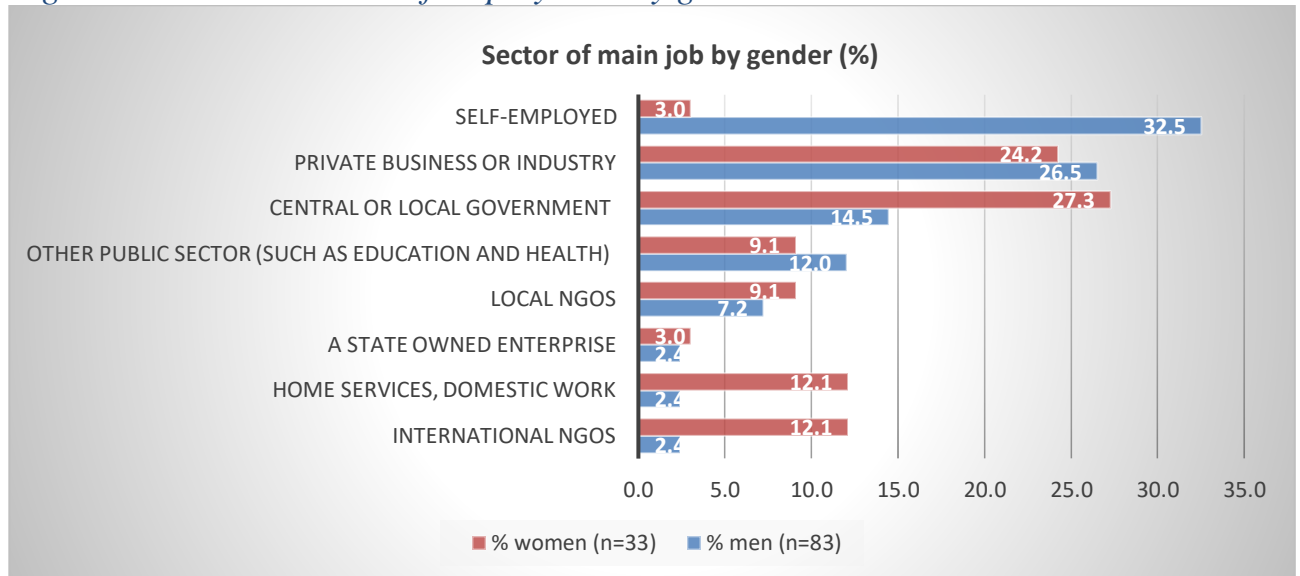


Table 5 shows the type of industry in which the respondents work. For women, by far the most common industry is education (39.4%), followed by public administration (12.1%), finance (12.1%) and health (9.1%). For men, on the other hand, the type of industry in which they work is more widely spread, with education (15.3%), construction/building industry (14.3%) and trade/car/domestic appliance repair (14.3%) being the most common industries of employment.

Table 5 Type of industry by gender in percentages

Employment sector by industry	Men %(n=98)	Women % (n=33)
Education	15.3	39.4
Construction/building industry	14.3	3.0
Trade/car/domestic appliance repair	14.3	3.0
Transport/communications	8.2	0.0
Manufactory industries	7.1	6.1
Agriculture/hunting/forestry	6.1	0.0
Public/social/private services	6.1	3.0
Public administration	6.1	12.1
Health sector / social activities	4.1	9.1
Financial services	4.1	12.1
Hotel/catering industry	3.1	3.0
Real estate/renting/business services	2.0	3.0
Other	9.2	6.1
Total	100.0	100.0

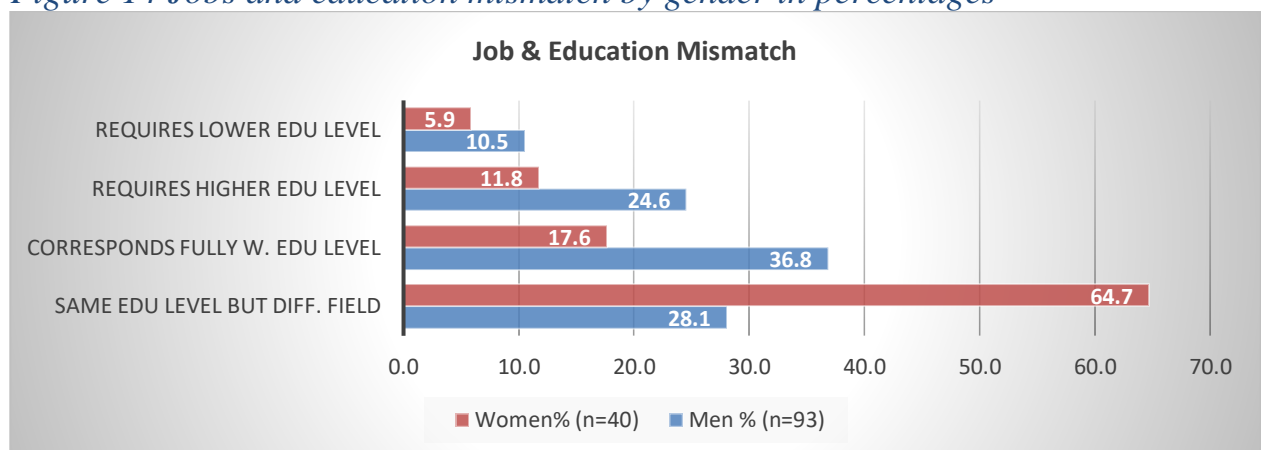
4.3.4 Social mobility: Job and education mismatch

Figure 14 below shows that most respondents are employed in jobs that correspond to their education level and 24.6% of men and 11.8% of women, are employed in jobs that require higher levels of education than they currently have, which is a clear sign of upward mobility. If we add to that those who work in jobs that fully correspond to their education, then 61.4% of men are getting a return for their

education, whereas for women this figure is only half of that (29.4%). The big majority of women (64.7%) are employed in jobs with similar education levels but in a different field for which they initially trained. Thus, despite the gender difference in skills mismatch, both men and women are getting a return for their education and only 10.5% of men and 5.9% of women state that they are working in jobs that require lower levels of education, which indicates under-skilling. Overall, these figures are remarkable and very much in contrast to migrant's employment patterns in the UK job market for example, which tend to be employed in jobs that are far below their education level (cf. Sirkeci et. al 2017).

After 2001 when the conflict was over in Afghanistan and the Karzai Government was formed return migration started to kick off in Afghanistan. From those early years until 2010, it was relatively easy for people with a university degree to get a job that corresponded with their education level. Also, a quota for women to ease their entry into public service jobs was being applied which increased their employment rates in these jobs. However, in the later years, as the proportion of women with a university degree in economics, law, business and finance increased and competition increased, women were more pushed to take up jobs in the education and NGO sector.

Figure 14 Jobs and education mismatch by gender in percentages



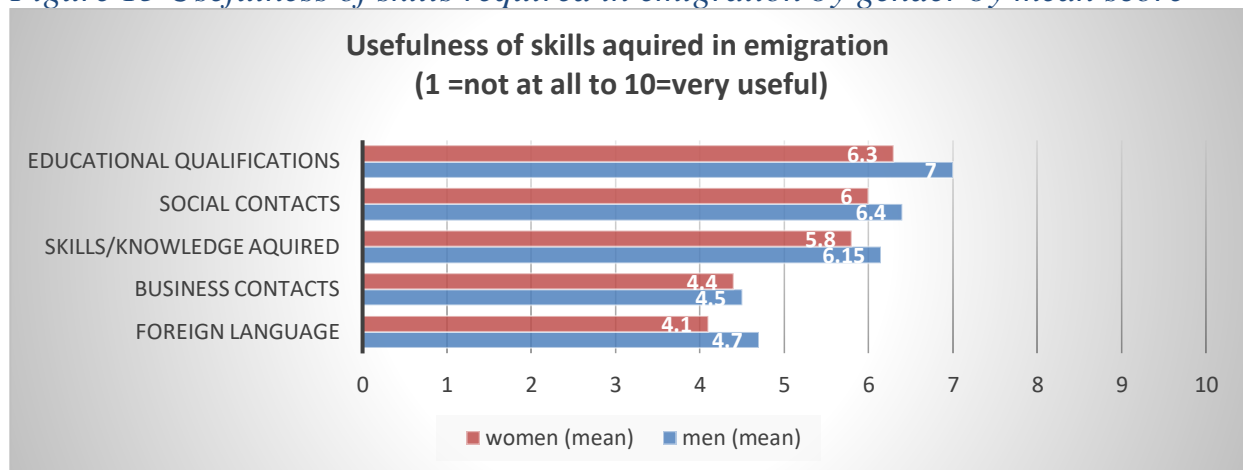
Question-wording: Does your current job correspond with your education level and qualifications? If you are not working at the moment, think about the main job you had since returning to Afghanistan.

4.3.5 Human and social capital

The survey included a proxy on human and social capital acquired abroad to gauge how useful these skills and contacts have been in reintegration in Afghanistan. Respondents were asked to indicate these domains on a scale between 1 and 10, with 1 not being useful at all and 10 being very useful. Figure 15 shows the mean scores of the sample by gender, and scores over 5 indicate their usefulness for the overall sample. The graph shows some gender differences but the differences are not great. Yet, it seems that men are slightly more likely to indicate the usefulness of the skills and business contacts for the job market in Afghanistan than women. Education qualifications, skills and knowledge and social contact gained abroad are seen as more useful than business contacts and foreign languages acquired in the country of immigration. The usefulness of foreign language does not reflect the insight we got

from the qualitative study, where many respondents highlighted that having received an English education at refugee camps in Pakistan has helped them in finding employment in Afghanistan. Moreover, respondents pointed out in the qualitative interviews that although going abroad to study puts you in an advantageous position in Afghan the labour market, returnees also lack the local know-how such as language fluency in Pashto or Dari and the social networks that are required to get a job when returning to Afghanistan. In that sense, the human and social capital gained abroad did not on their own provided them with entry requirements to the labour market in Afghanistan.

Figure 15 Usefulness of skills required in emigration by gender by mean score



Question-wording: How useful or not useful have been the following skills in helping you settle down in Afghanistan? Answer categories: 1= Not useful at all... 10= Very useful.

4.4 Household poverty and life satisfaction

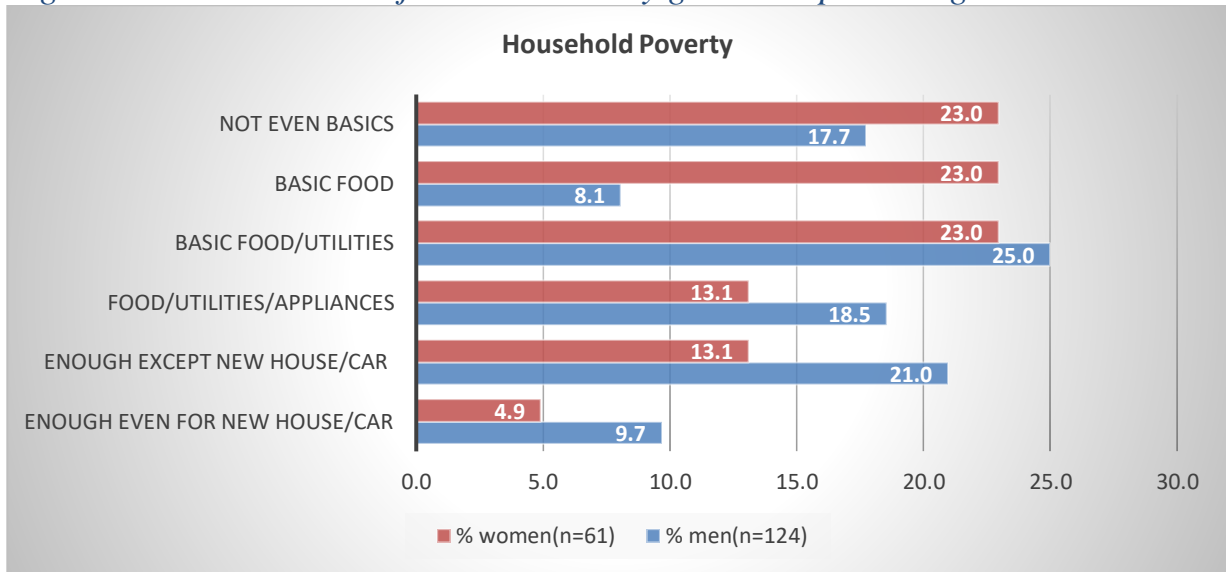
The survey asked a number of questions to capture the financial household situation of the respondents and the levels of poverty experienced. This includes subjective household income, whether the household borrowed any money due to economic hardship, source of household income, any savings and assets and how Covid had impacted their household income. In this section, we also discuss life satisfaction as poverty is a relative deprivation and strongly linked to a household's socio-economic situation.

4.4.1 Subjective household income

Respondents were asked to indicate their current household financial situation (see Figure 16). The figure below shows six levels of household financial situation ordered from 'not even meeting the basic needs to 'having enough to live on and in a situation to buy a house or car if wanted. Overall, women reported higher levels of household poverty than men. Although, household poverty shows great variations in the sample, with 23% of women and 17% of men stating that they are not being able to cover their basic food needs, while a small minority of women (4.9%) and a higher proportion of men (9.7%) indicate that they are relatively well off i.e. can even afford a house and new car. The most common category however is those who say that they can just afford food and pay for household utilities (23% women, 25% men). Yet, for

63% of the women, this is the maximum they can afford, while this proportion for men is 50.8%. Again, it is important to bear in mind that the sample was drawn from returnees from Kabul and Kandahar, two major cities that do economically relatively well, compared to rural areas and other small towns in Afghanistan and are therefore to be seen as not representative of Afghanistan.

Figure 16: Household subjective income by gender in percentages



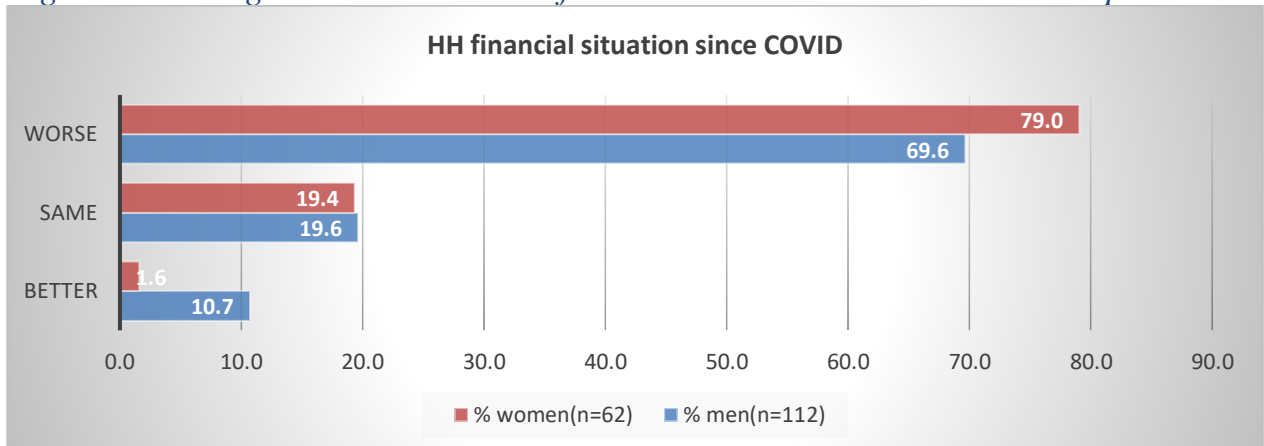
Question-wording: How would you say is the current financial situation of your household?

4.4.2 Household financial situation since COVID

The survey was carried out in the midst of the COVID 2021 pandemic. To capture the difference between the current household situation to the situation prior to the pandemic, the respondents were asked to indicate how much better or worse they asses their situation in order to capture how the COVID pandemic affected their household financial situation.

Figure 17 below shows that for 79% of women and 69% of men, their household financial situation had worsened since the pandemic, while only one-fifth of men and women stated that it stayed the same. For a small proportion of men, their household financial situation had even got better during COVID (10.7%) while for women this figure is negligible at 1.6%. This might be because a small fraction of businesses, which are often led by men, profited from the pandemic through trade such as importing food and medical items.

Figure 17 Changes in the household financial situation since the COVID pandemic.

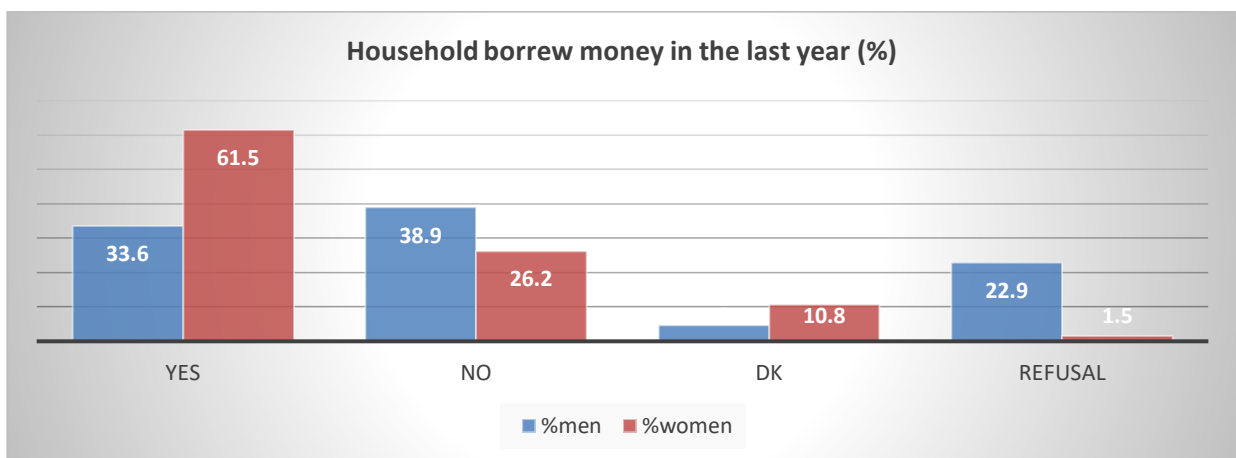


Question-wording: Has your household's financial situation remained the same, become worse or better since the Coronavirus COVID-19 pandemic in 2020?

4.4.3 Household borrowed money

Borrowing money is another indicator of financial and economic difficulties experienced. Asked whether any member of their household borrowed money in the last year, a great gender difference is evident again (see Figure 18). While in total overall 42.9% of the sample borrowed money, if broken down by gender, the rate for women is 61.5% while for men it's 33.6%. Thus, women were more likely to borrow money to meet the needs of their household than men in the last year of the survey reference period (i.e. 2019-2020). It's also striking that over one-fifth of men refused to answer this question (22.9%) compared to only 1.5% of women.

Figure 18 Household borrowed money last year by gender in percentages

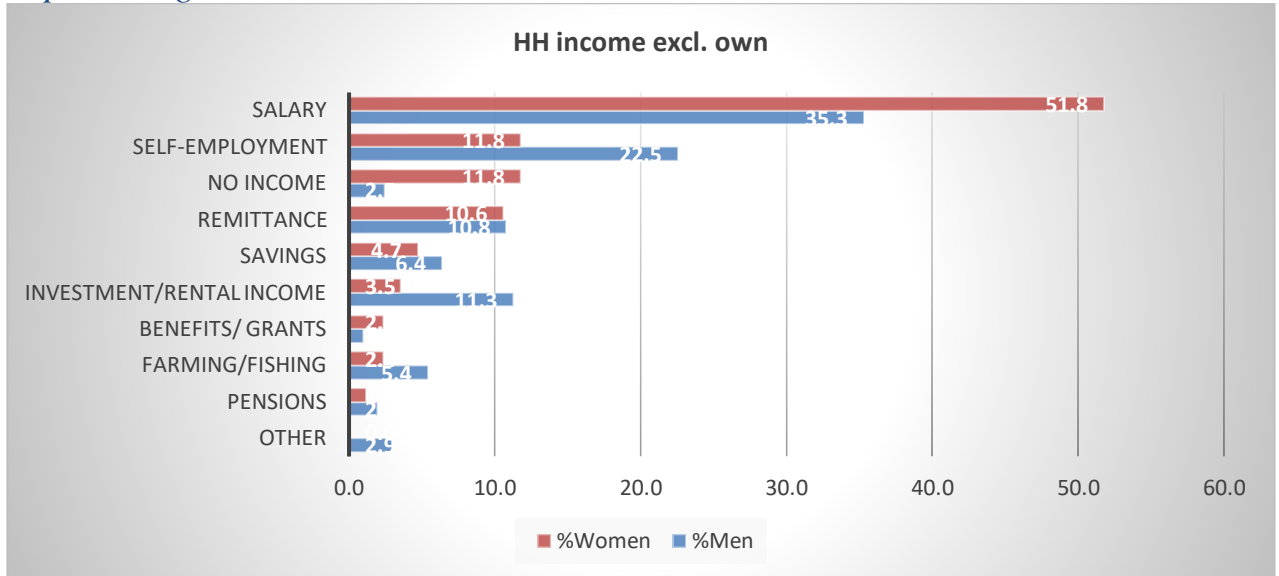


Question-wording: Over the past year did you or a member of your household borrowed money?

4.4.4 Household income

Respondents were asked about the source of their household income. First, they were asked a question about the source of their own income i.e. salary, self-employment, remittances, savings etc., then they were asked to select all income received by the household. Figure 19 shows the household income for the other members of the household and excludes the respondents' own income. The graph shows that the most common type of household income is income received from salary, especially in households with female respondents (51.8%). For men, income from self-employment is the most common income excluding their own income (35.3%). The proportion of female households with just one source of income is 11.8% whereas this figure for male respondents is only 2.5%, indicating again that more female-led households have higher levels of financial insecurity. Household income from remittances is around 11% for both genders, which means men and women-led households are both likely to rely on remittance from abroad. However, 11.3% of men live in households which have additional rental or investment income compared to only 3.5% of female respondents' households. Similar trends are also observable when the question on respondents' source of income is considered. Salary and self-employment remain the main source of income.

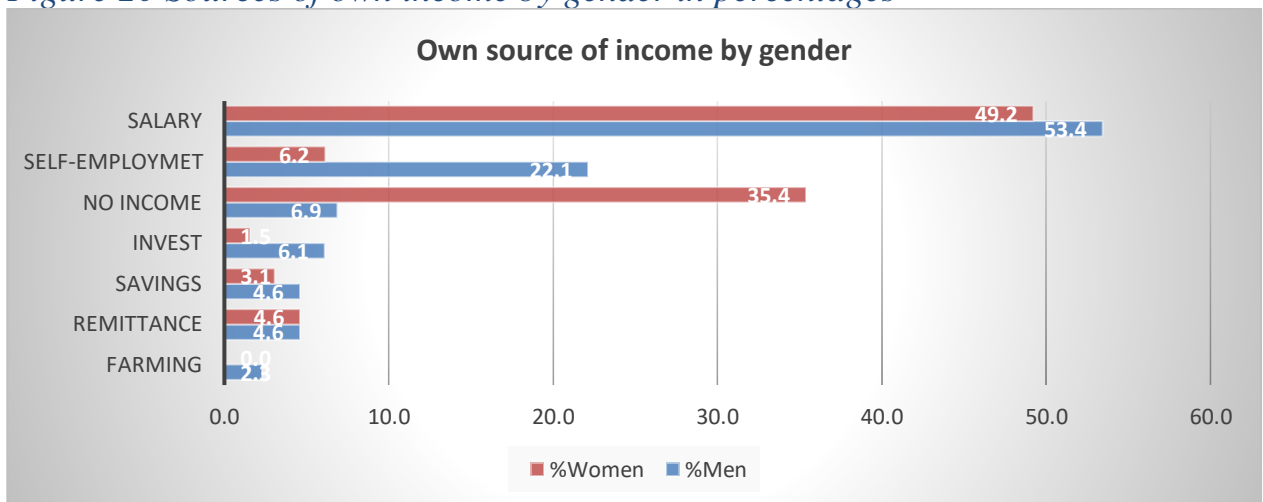
Figure 19 Sources of overall household income (excluding own income) by gender in percentages



Question-wording: Now, please consider the income of ALL OTHER household members and any income which may be received by the household as a whole, excluding your income. What are the main sources of income in your household? Multiple choice question (total number of categories selected 289, of which men=204, women=85).

Figure 20 shows the responses to respondents' own income. As with the previous graph, the same trends are observable here. The main source of respondents' income is salary (49.2% for women and 53.4% for men). Compared to men (22.1%) a relatively small proportion of female respondents have an income from self-employment (6.2%). In addition to that, the proportion of women who have no own income is much higher (35.4%) compared to men (6.9%).

Figure 20 Sources of own income by gender in percentages

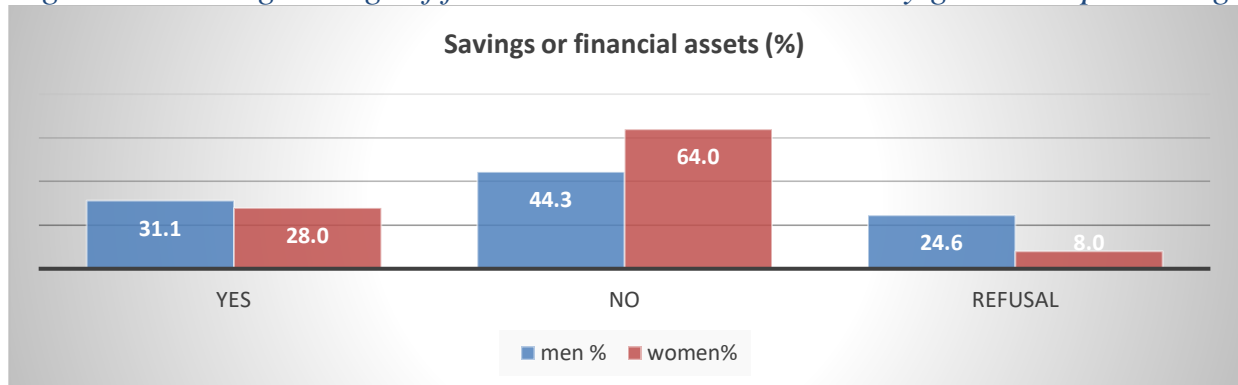


Question-wording: Please consider your own individual income. What is your main source of income? N=196 (men=131, women=65)

4.4.5 Savings or financial assets

Figure 21 shows the proportion of men and women having savings or financial assets in their name. The relatively high proportion of men refusing to answer this question (24.6% compared to only 8% of women) seems to have skewed the yes responses for men. It might therefore be more sensible to look at those who stated that they **do not have** any savings or financial assets which shows a great gender difference (44.3% for men and 64% for women). This is also more in line with the levels of poverty reported by women compared to men observed in the above questions of indicators of household poverty.

Figure 21 Having savings of financial assets in own name by gender in percentages

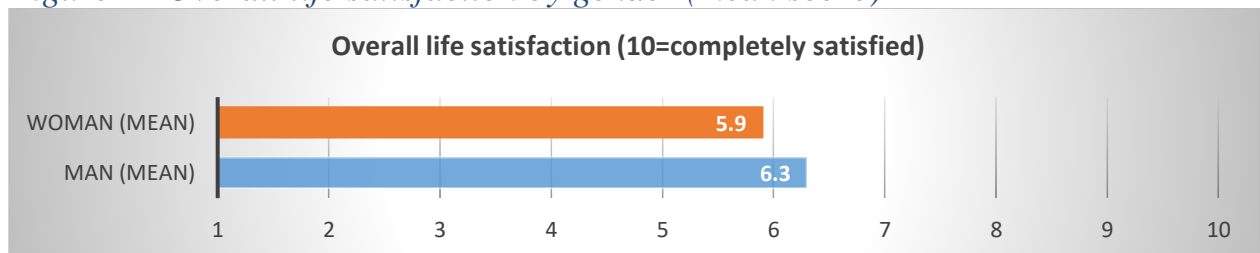


Question-wording: Do you have any savings or financial assets in your name?

4.4.6 Life satisfaction

Figure 22 shows levels of overall life satisfaction. On a scale from 1-10, where higher scores indicate greater overall life satisfaction, the mean score for women is 5.9 and for men slightly higher at 6.3.²⁵

Figure 22 Overall life satisfaction by gender (mean score)



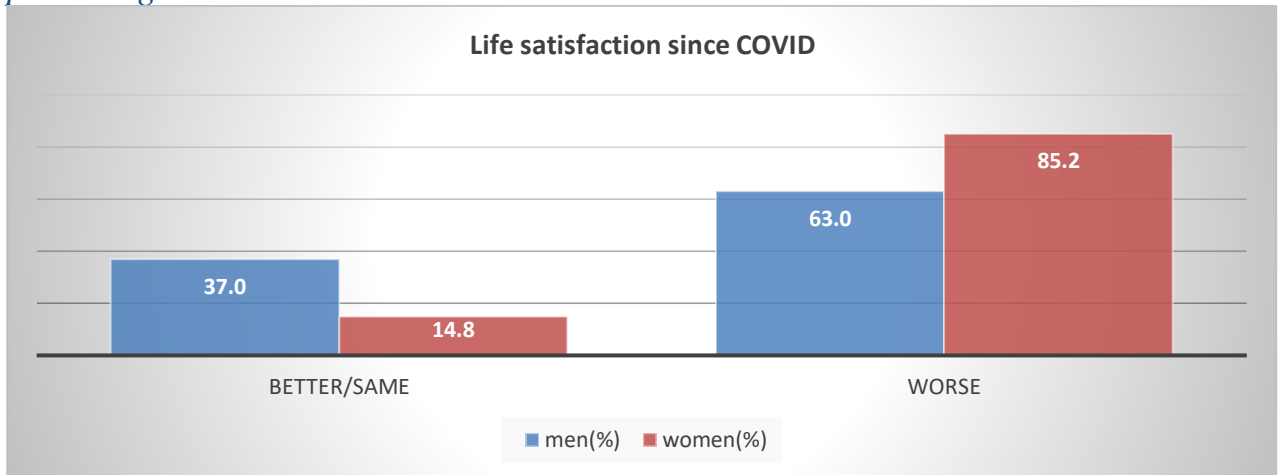
Question-wording: All things considered, how dissatisfied or satisfied were you with your life as a whole? Answer scale: 1=Completely dissatisfied 10=Completely satisfied.

The survey was carried out between September and March 2021 and the COVID pandemic is in full swing with COVID restrictions being in place. Thus, the graph below shows that particularly women report that their life satisfaction has become worse since the pandemic (85.2%) compared to (63%) of men. The lower levels of life satisfaction for women resonate with higher poverty levels among female

²⁵ These rates are slightly lower than the average for all countries that were included in the survey (Sri Lanka, Kurdistan, Pakistan, Afghanistan) and for women it represents the lowest level within the four countries.

respondents seen in earlier graphs. These inequalities were exacerbated during the pandemic. Many women are working from home and making an income from selling their handcraft. This income was lost due to the closing of the borders during the pandemic, which hit them not just in terms of selling/exporting their goods but also restricted the import of medicine which as the main breadwinner of their older relatives also meant a health provision hardship in addition to the lockdown measures which restricted social life severely.

Figure 23 Changes in overall life satisfaction since the Covid pandemic by gender in percentages



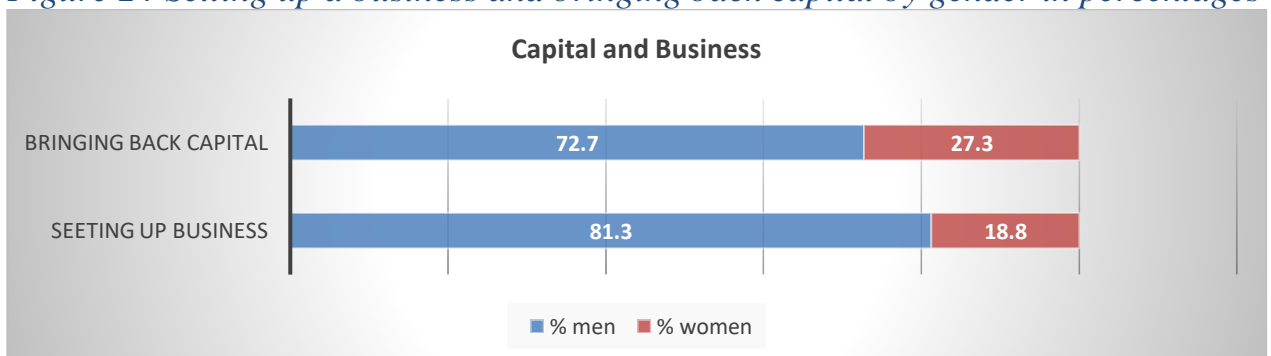
Question-wording: And would you say that your overall life satisfaction has remained the same, became worse or better SINCE the Coronavirus COVID-19 pandemic? Answer categories: worse, same, better, here recoded to better or same and worse.

4.5 Entrepreneurship

4.5.1 Setting up a business

Figure 24 shows that the proportion of returnees who brought capital with them when returning to Afghanistan was 24.3% and of this, the overwhelming majority were men with 72.7% and only 27.3% women. Consequently, the proportion of returnees who set up a business since returning to Afghanistan was only 16% with men constituting the larger proportion (26 men and 6 women).

Figure 24 Setting up a business and bringing back capital by gender in percentages



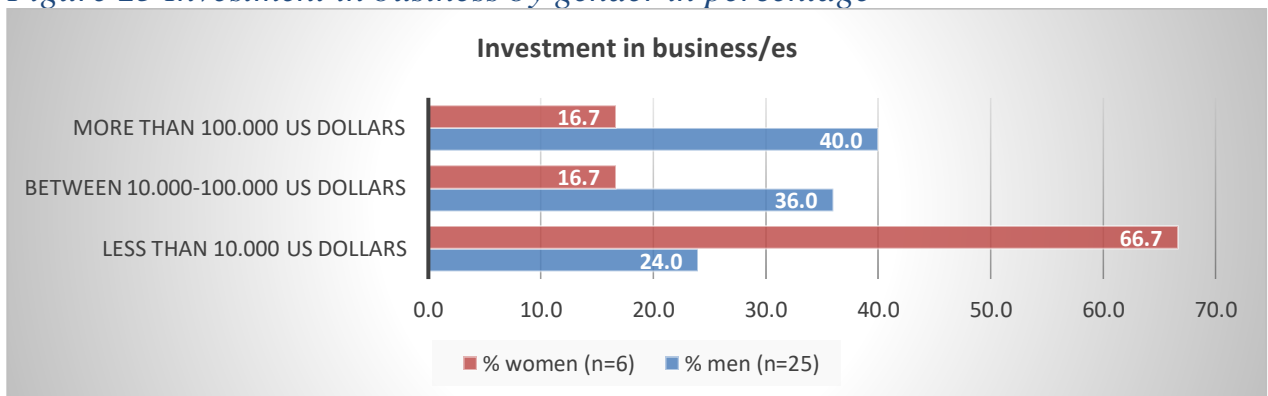
Question-wording: Did YOU bring your own capital with you when returning to Afghanistan?

Question wording: Since returning to Afghanistan, have you set up a business here?
Answers categories Yes, No, Prefer not to say.

4.5.2 Amount of investment

Those who indicated that they have set up a business (32 in total with a further 40 refusing to answer this question out of the total sample size of 196) were asked to indicate the amount of investment in their business(es). Only 25 responses were registered for this question. Despite this small number, the graph below (Figure 25) shows that, among those who invested, men were in a stronger position to make much larger investments than women. 66.7% of women invested less than 10,000 US Dollars, while 40% of men invested more than 10,000 US Dollars. Data from the qualitative interviews showed that the type of business women set up related to handcrafting such as making traditional dresses, hair and beauty salons, setting up education centres and a few small restaurants.

Figure 25 Investment in business by gender in percentage

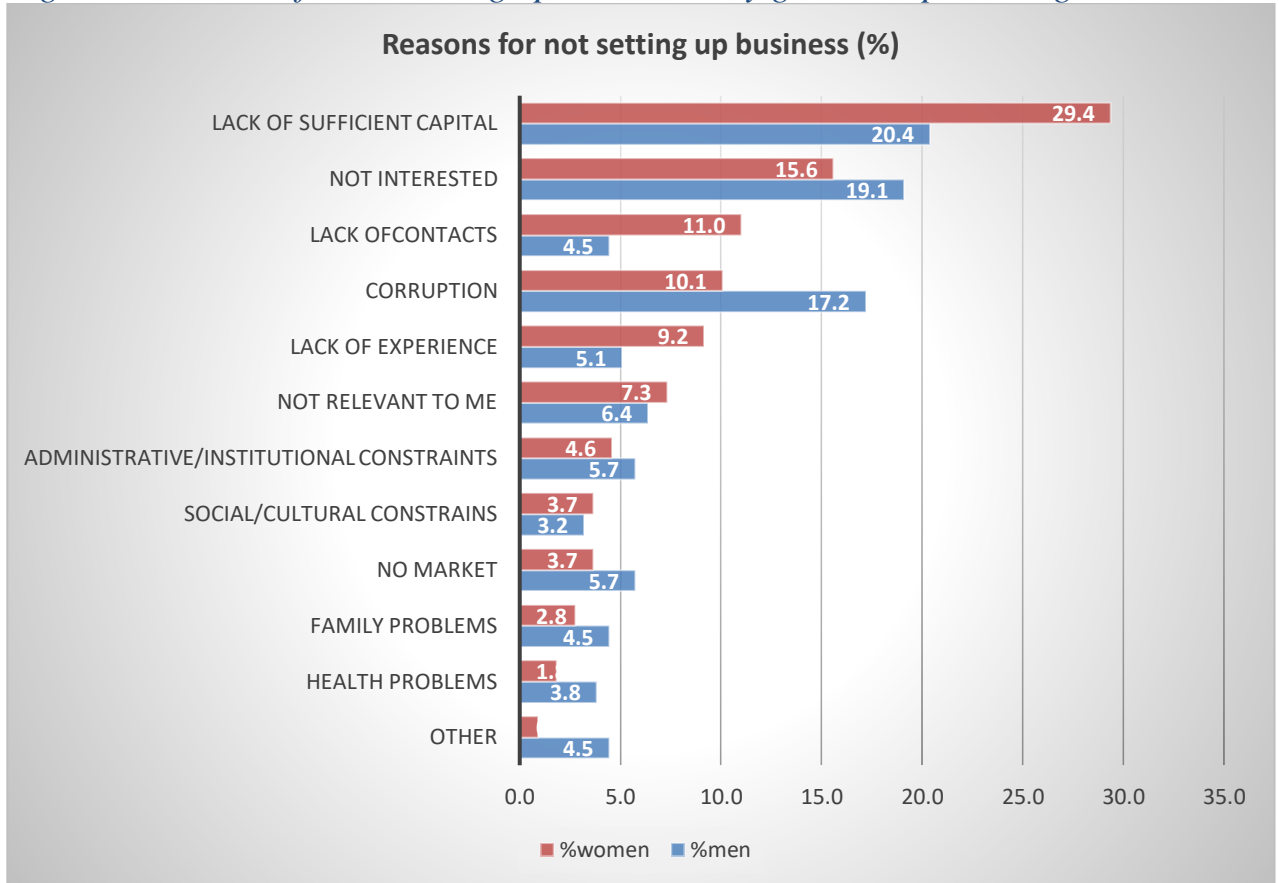


Follow-up questions to those who set up a business: Overall, how much money in total have you invested in your business(es) in Afghanistan?

4.5.3 Reasons for not setting up a business

Among those who did not set up a business the most common reason for it was lack of sufficient capital (29.3% women and 20.4% men). The second most common reason for both genders is not being interested in setting up a business (15.6% women, 19.1% men). For men, the third most common reason is corruption (17.2%) whereas for women it's lack of contacts (11.1%) followed by lack of experience (9.2%). Overall, the barriers to setting up a business vary greatly by gender. See Figure 26 below for more details. Given the economic and political instability in Afghanistan and the lack of adequate infrastructure and security, setting up a business is a highly risky endeavour in Afghanistan, which explains perhaps the high proportion of returnees who indicated that they are not interested in setting up a business. In contrast to these uncertainties, the NGO sector offered more stable employment opportunities. In the qualitative interviews, some respondents remarked on the employment conditions of the international NGO sector, where they felt they faced less discrimination than in other male-dominated job sectors.

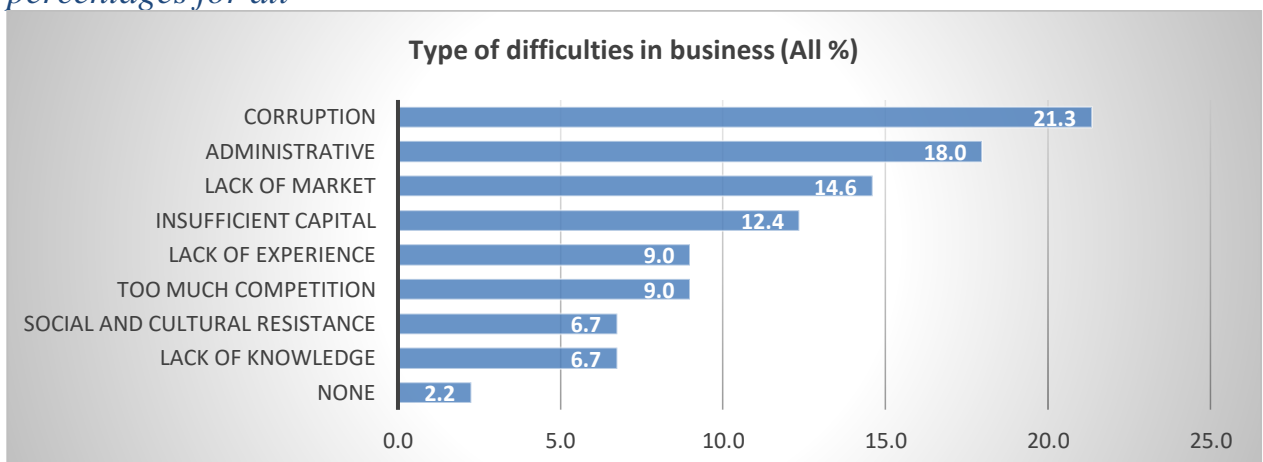
Figure 26 Reasons for not setting up a business by gender in percentages



A follow-up question asked to those who did not set up a business: What were the reasons for not setting up a business in Afghanistan? Multiple-choice possible.

Figure 27 shows that among those who set up a business, the most common problems experienced were corruption (21.3%), administrative issues (18%), lack of market (14.6%) and insufficient capital (12.3%) to maintain the business. Only a small proportion (2.2%) indicated that they did not have any difficulties in their business. Only a few responses were from women, which made gender comparison for this variable non-reliable, thus the figure represents overall responses and is not broken down by gender.

Figure 27 Difficulties experienced in setting up and running a business in percentages for all

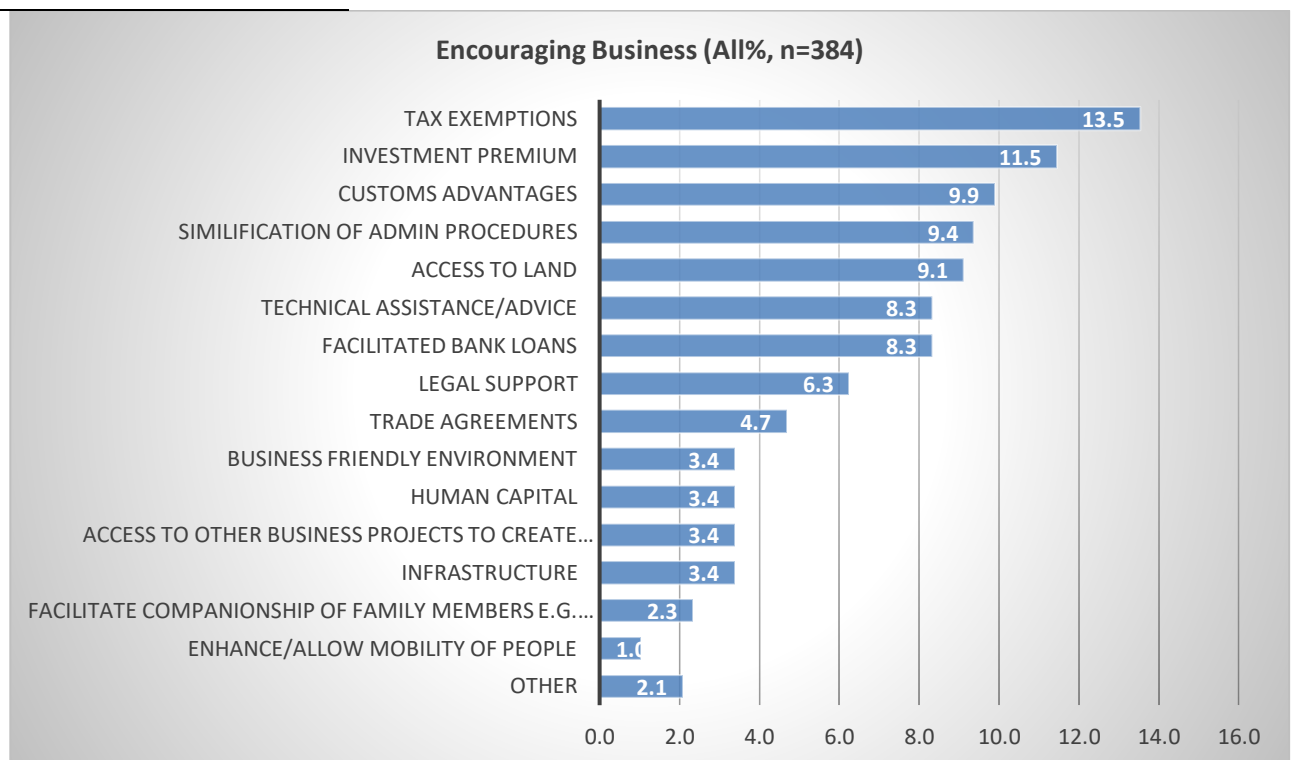


Follow-up questions only asked those who set up a business. Question wording: Have

you had difficulties realising this business (es) and if so, what kind?

Regardless of whether they had set up a business or not upon their return, all return migrants were asked what could be done to encourage returnees to set up a business (see Figure 28 below). This was a multiple-choice question which allowed the respondents to select as many as appropriate. In total 384 selections were made. Among the most popular two factors were suggestions that tax exemptions (13.5%) and investment premiums (11.5%) which reflects that finance/capital is a key hurdle and therefore an area that the respondents identified as in need of more structural support by the government as well as the industry. The next set of factors related to the legal infrastructure of the country allowing business to flourish such as custom advantages (9.9%), simplification of administrative procedures (9.4%), access to land (9.1%), technical assistance and advice (8.3%), facilitate bank load (8.3%) and legal support (6.3%).

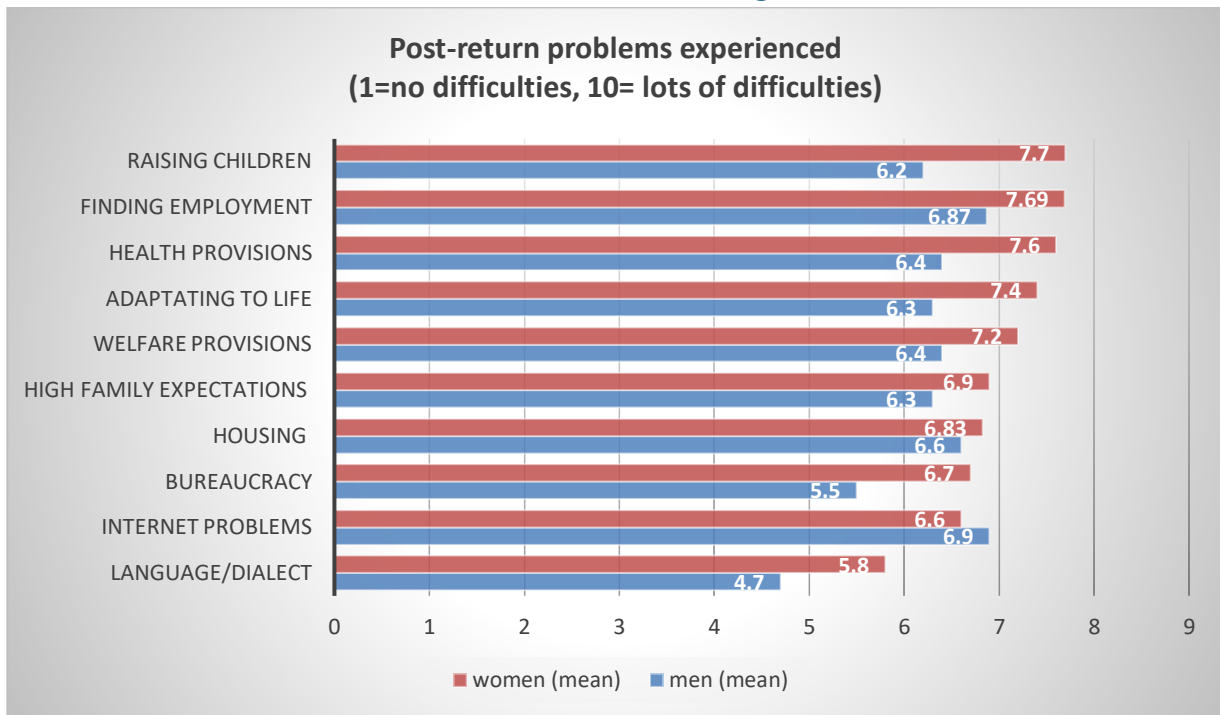
Figure 28 Measures to encourage business; multiple choice



4.6 Post-return challenges

One of the key aims of the study was to identify the challenges returnees faced in adapting to life after having been in exile for a substantial number of years or after having been abroad for at least a year. Figure 29 shows that returnees face numerous cultural, political, economic and language challenges. Respondents were asked to indicate on a scale from 1 to 10 how many difficulties they experienced when they returned to Afghanistan. The graph below shows the mean scores for men and women and the higher the scores the higher levels of difficulties experienced.

Figure 29 Post-return problems experienced by gender (mean scores)



With the exception of problems of language and/or dialect for men (mean score 4.7), the overall level of problems experienced by returnees is 5 and above pointing out that post-return problems were common. For most categories, women are more likely than men to state that they experienced problems and the differences between both genders are particularly wide for raising children, finding employment, welfare and health provisions, adapting to life, and issues of bureaucracy. The gender differences are less pronounced for high family expectations, housing, and internet problems where men and women indicated that this was an issue for both of them.

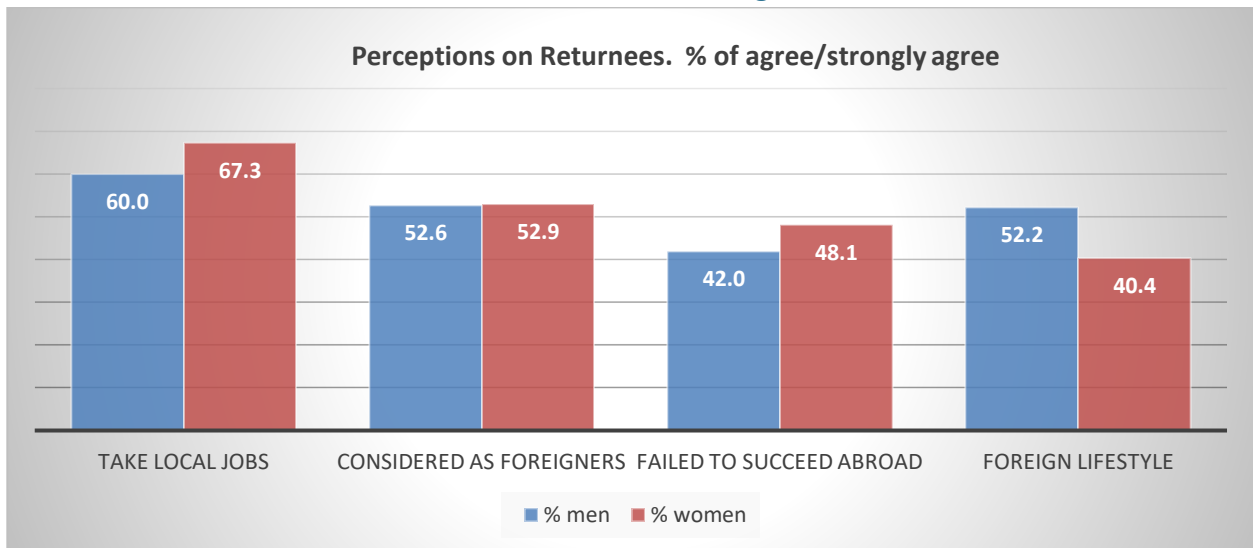
4.6.1 Perceptions on returnees

To capture how returnees are perceived in Afghan society in general, we drafted a series of statements that attempt to capture prejudice against returnees in their home country which might hinder reintegration. Respondents were therefore asked to indicate how much they agree or disagree on a 4-point Likert scale with the following statements:

1. *People here are worried that return migrants like me might take their jobs.*
2. *People here consider migrants like me as foreigners.*
3. *People here think that migrants like me returned because they were not successful in the country of immigration.*
4. *People here think that migrants like me bring back a lifestyle that is not compatible with our culture.*

The categories “Agree Strongly and Agree” were collapsed into one category and Figure 30 shows the percentage of respondents who state that they agree or strongly agree with these statements.

Figure 30 Perceptions of returnees by gender



The bar chart above shows that for the returnees in the sample, the perception that returnees take local jobs has the highest rates of agreement for both men and women (67% of women, 60% of men). The reason why this perception is higher among women could be related to the specific characteristics of the sample with a considerable proportion of women being highly educated and in employment. Thus, in a society where men are seen as the main breadwinner, female returnees' employment might be seen as more of a threat than that of male returnees who are expected to be the main breadwinner and provide for their families and therefore seen less as a threat. This is the case, especially for the public sector and government jobs, where women face more barriers to entering such jobs, despite quotas to encourage their entry into these sectors. In addition to that, most Afghans who emigrated to Pakistan lived in conservative and tribal areas where women were allowed to study but had fewer opportunities to enter employment.

Over half of the sample agreed that returnees are perceived as foreigners with around 53% for both genders. Interestingly, women feel stronger that returnees are being judged as a failure (48.1%) compared to men (42%). Returning home, especially after considerable time abroad leads often to changes in lifestyle which can cause adaptation issues and become a source of discrimination as we have seen in the responses to the discrimination based on lifestyle questions above. Again, men seem to suffer stronger from adapting to the lifestyle upon return with 52.2% of men agreeing that returnees are perceived as bringing back a lifestyle that is not compatible with the culture at home, compared to 40.4% of women. Thus, the majority of women (60%) don't agree with the statement that returnees come back with a lifestyle that is alien to their own culture. In the qualitative interviews, women reported that they were initially criticized for keeping their Pakistani dress codes. However, these rules have become more relaxed over the years as returnees' diverse lifestyles have become more acceptable. However, the pressure to adhere to traditional dress codes is still prevalent, although is more dominant in Kandahar than in Kabul. This might be that, despite pursuing education and employment upon return, most female returnees harbour also strong traditional gender roles as will be shown in the graphs and table on gender norms further below in this report.

4.7 Neighbourhood safety and discrimination

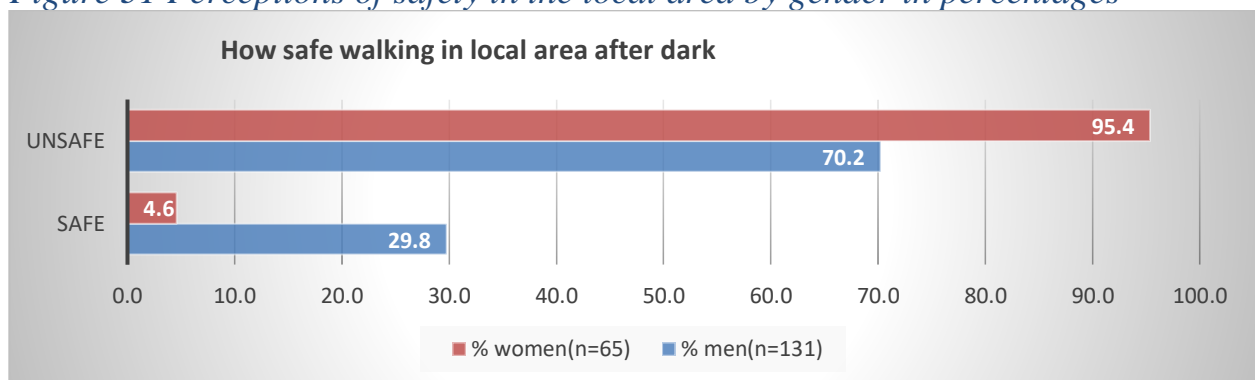
The next set of questions relates to perceptions of safety and security and group discrimination which undoubtedly are important to successful reintegration.

4.7.1 Personal safety and the neighbourhood

One of the greatest variations between men and women is their perception of safety (Figure 31 below). Asked how safe they feel walking in their local area or neighbourhood when it gets dark, almost all of the female returnees in the sample (95.4%) responded that they feel very unsafe or unsafe. Although a relatively high proportion of men (70.2%) also felt very unsafe or unsafe, almost one-third of men (29.8%) stated that they feel safe or very safe, whereas for women this rate goes down to 4.6%.

The reasons for these extraordinarily high levels of feeling unsafe are manifold and relate to street crimes such as mugging, feuds or revenge killings among families, femicide and the general security situation in Afghanistan where terror attacks have been common. In addition to that, women who walk alone at night are frowned upon, being questioned by neighbours and gossiped about when they return late from work for example or harassed by taxi drivers when they travel on their own as one respondent from the qualitative interview explained. There are also infrastructural issues such as limited street lights, and lack of adequate public transport contributing to the problem. These problems however are not limited to late hours and are also problems faced by women when they travel on their own.

Figure 31 Perceptions of safety in the local area by gender in percentages



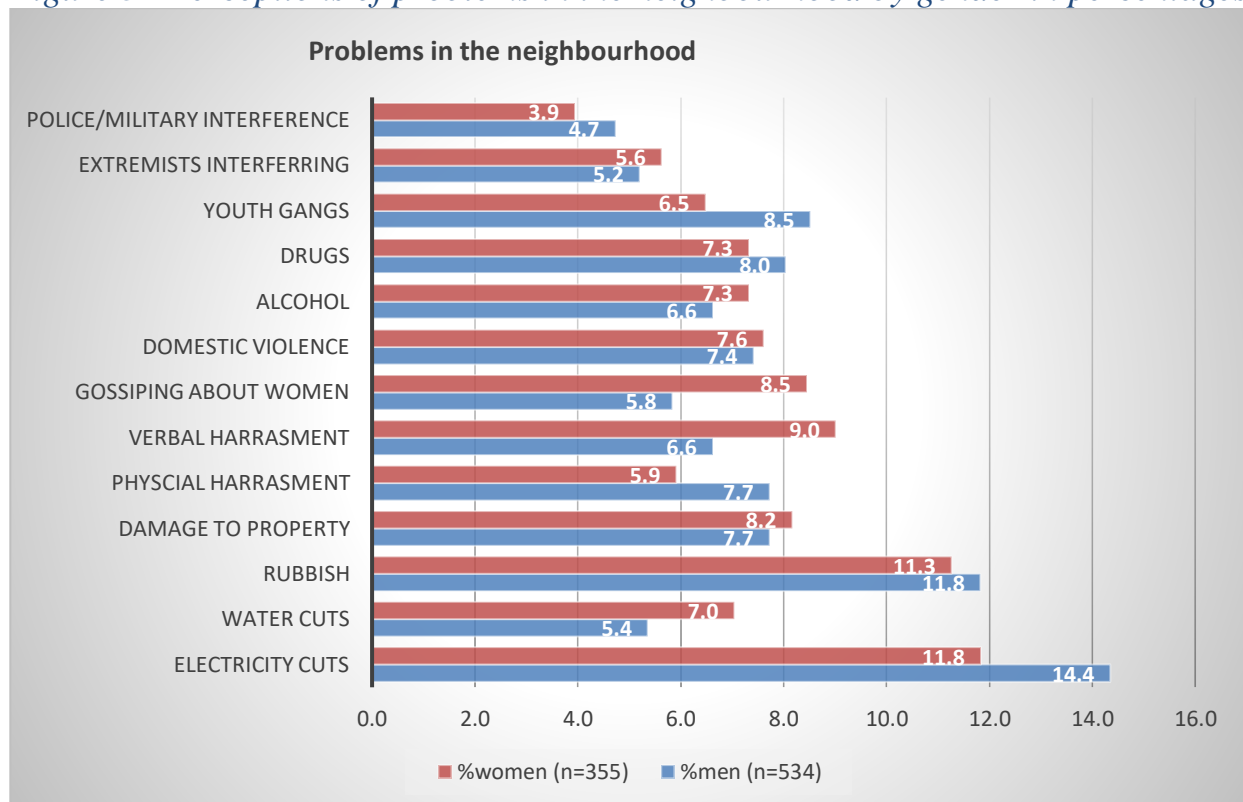
4.7.2 Problems in the neighbourhood

Respondents were asked to indicate what problems they believed are prevalent in their neighbourhood. This includes a range of factors that reflect the quality of their life, the socio-economic profile of their neighbourhood and socio-cultural issues such as domestic violence, and harassment. Thus, rather than asking directly whether they have experienced such problems, which can be an intrusive question, a more general question on how common they perceive these problems to be in their immediate surrounding is also a reliable indicator of how widespread these incidents are.

Figure 32 shows that for respondents by far the largest problems in the

neighbourhood are electricity cuts (14.4% men, 11.8% women) and rubbish laying around on the streets (11.8% men, 11.3% women). Perception of domestic violence in the neighbourhood is roughly the same for men (7.4%) and women (7.6%). For 9% of women, verbal harassment is a problem compared to 6.6% of men. Similar rates can be observed for gossiping about women. For physical harassment, men (7.7%) reported a higher rate than women (5.9%). There is no alcohol production in Afghanistan and alcohol is not sold openly but is available illegally under the counter. Despite this, alcohol consumption was considered by 7.3% of women and 6.6% of men as a problem. Similarly, respondents were concerned about drug consumption to similar levels of alcohol (see graph), which unlike alcohol is produced albeit illegally in the country and hence presumably more easily available and includes most heroin, coke and opium. Youth gangs are mostly involved in petty street crimes such as mugging. Extremist interference in one's life is seen by 5.6% of women and 5.2% of men as a problem and this most likely refers to local town/neighbourhood leaders, mullahs and religious leaders who feel they are responsible for their town or communities' reputation and hence take the right to tell residents about appropriate and inappropriate behaviour. Police or military interference on the other hand is seen as the least problematic in terms of neighbourhood problems or everyday life.

Figure 32 Perceptions of problems in the neighbourhood by gender in percentages



4.7.3 Perceived group discrimination

The question on perceived group discrimination was asked in the following way in the survey: *Would you describe yourself as being a member of a group that is discriminated against in Afghanistan? If yes, on which grounds?* 31 out of 196 stated no discrimination experiences (15.7%) and 42 refused to answer the question (21.3%). Respondents who answered this question (63%) had the option to tick all

that apply. Thus, these figures are based on a sample size of 124 people. For both genders, ethnicity is perceived as being the most common form of group discrimination, and the rates are slightly higher for men (24.1%) than for women (20.7%). The ethnic discrimination experienced by the Hazara and Tajik minority is to a certain extent well documented in the literature on Afghanistan. Given that the majority of the sample are Pashtuns, the figures also show that Pashtuns feel discriminated against based on their ethnic origin and it most likely refers to prejudices experienced by Hazaras and Tajiks against Pashtuns, although they are the dominant ethnic group. Language discrimination is the second most common form of perceived discrimination (16.3%). Language problems are particularly an issue in Kabul where most of the public sector work is conducted in Dari and the population is mainly Pashtun-speaking. There is no provision for a bi-lingual administration meaning that Pashtuns are required to learn Dari but not the other way around. In the qualitative interviews, the returnees from Pakistan explained how this constituted a barrier for them to enter public sector jobs.

Gender-based discrimination is seen as the third most common form of discrimination by women (14.1%) in strong contrast to men (6.9%). Thus, women are twice as more as men likely to state that they feel discriminated against because of their gender. Men on the other hand feel more targeted because of their political views (14.5% men, 10.9% women). Religion also emerges as a source of discrimination for both genders (13.8% of men, and 12% of women). Harassment due to lifestyle choices is a problem for both genders (around 11%). Age-based discrimination is slightly higher for men at 8.3% than for women at 6.5%. This might be due to men who had gone abroad and interrupted their studies and are now competing with a younger age group in the labour market. Also, younger age groups are more tech-savvy and the older ones might feel that they are excluded from digitalized jobs where younger age cohorts have better prospects. On the other hand, older men are more likely to have access to public sector and governmental jobs, from which younger generations might feel more excluded. Younger women, on the other hand, are seen as less capable of carrying out professional jobs as they are seen as too young and inexperienced. Another age factor that causes discrimination is that the prime age for getting married is in the 20s and even younger in rural areas and once they have passed 30, chances of getting married are slim, especially for women. Out of these dimensions of perceived group discrimination, sexuality and disability are seen as the least common types of discrimination with around 5% for sexuality for both genders and 4.8% of men saying that they feel discriminated against because of their disability compared to 3.3% of women.

Table 6 Perceived group discrimination by gender in percentages

	% men	% women
Ethnicity	24.1	20.7
Language	10.3	16.3
Gender	6.9	14.1
Religion	13.8	12.0
Political views	14.5	10.9

Lifestyle	11.7	10.9
Age	8.3	6.5
Sexuality	5.5	5.4
Disability	4.8	3.3
<i>Total</i>	<i>100.0</i>	<i>100.0</i>

4.8 Social norms, civic attitudes engagement

4.8.1 Social norms and gender

All respondents were asked how much they agree or disagree with a number of statements that are commonly used in the cross-national survey to measure gender norms in a number of domains. The table below (Table 7) shows the mean scores for men and women for a number of statements with regard to gender norms. The table has been ordered by statements which received the greatest disagreement for women.

Table 7 Gender norms (mean score for men and women)

	Men	Women
1= Strongly agree, 10 = strongly disagree		
A woman should tolerate violence in order to keep her family together.	6.4	8.4
A university education is more important for a boy than for a girl.	5.5	7.8
On the whole, men make better political leaders than women do.	4.1	7.5
On the whole, men make better business executives than women do.	4.1	6.9
Being a housewife is just as fulfilling as working for pay.	4.9	5.4
When a mother works for pay, the children suffer.	4.2	5
A woman should be able to choose her own friends, even if her husband disapproves.	6.3	3.2
Women's opinions are valuable and should always be considered when household decisions are made.	3.5	3.1
Having a job is the best way for a woman to be an independent person	4.37	2.8

Question-wording: And finally, your personal views about the role of men and women. On a scale from 1 to 10, how strongly do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

Both men and women tend to disagree that women should put up with domestic violence for the sake of the family, yet, the mean rate of disagreement is much higher for women than for men. Women also reject the statement that university education is more important for a boy than for a girl (score of 7.8 out of 10), while for men it bears some importance (means score for disagreement 5.5 out of 10). The most striking difference however is that women have a much higher rate of disagreement with the statements that men make better political leaders and better business executives. While men tend to agree more with this statement (score 4.1), women tend to disagree more (7.5 and 6.9). In terms of women's roles as 'wife' and 'mother',

the gender difference is not great and both genders tend to agree that women's opinions should be sought when household decisions are made, pointing to a consensus of the domain of home and family is that of a woman. It is common in Afghanistan that elderly women are involved in decision-making related to the home, but not necessarily outside the home. In terms of women's independence (choosing their own friends despite husbands and working best for women's independence) women agree more strongly with these statements than men. Thus, this table indicates that while perhaps the gender roles in relation to family and children are not questioned much, the women don't see themselves confined to the private sphere and believe that women can also take up roles traditionally taken up by men such as politics, business leaders, employment and education.

4.8.2 Trust in institutions

Respondents were asked to indicate their level of trust in a number of institutions ranging from 1 (not trust at all) to 10 (completely trust). These questions appear often in cross-national surveys and are used as a proxy for social capital and the health of democracy with higher levels of trust indicating better democracy and higher levels of social capital. Table 8 is ordered by the highest trust levels among women and compares it with men's level of trust.

Table 8 Trust in institutions by gender, mean score

(Mean score)	Men	Women
The armed forces	7.5	8
Women's organizations	6.5	7.7
The United Nations i.e. UNHCR.	7.4	7.4
Charitable/humanitarian orgs.	7	7
The Afghan Government	6.3	6.7
The banks	7.3	6.6
The police	6	6.2
Major companies	6	5.1
The parliament	5.1	4.9
The legal system/courts	5.1	4.8
Political parties	5.2	4.7
Politicians	4.7	4.2
Religious leaders and institutions	5.4	4.1

Question-wording: How much do you personally trust each of these institutions? Please indicate on a scale between 1-10, where 1 means 'you do not trust an institution at all, 'and 10 means 'you have complete trust.

Trust in the armed forces has the highest levels of mean scores (8 for women and 7.5 for men out of 10) whereas trust in religious leaders and institutions yields the lowest levels of trust (4.2 for women and 5.4 for women). Trust in United Nations organisations and charitable organisations is also relatively high up the rank and both genders score the same level (7.4). Women's organisations score relatively high, for

women (7.7) it's the second most trustful institution after the armed forces, whereas for men, it is still relatively high (6.5) but it ranks 5th most trustful institutions after the armed forces, the UN, the banks, charitable and humanitarian organisations. In terms of trust in business and finance, men are more trustful towards banks (7.3) and major companies (6) compared to women (6.6 and 5.1 respectively).

The relatively high levels of trust in the UN, charitable, humanitarian and women's organisations might be explained by the particular sample we have. As seen in the variables on education, employment and sector, the sample is biased towards people with higher levels of education and relatively high levels of employment with a considerable section working in public services and national and international organisations. In addition to that, fieldwork was carried out by a women's NGO thus further introducing a bias that is geared towards people who are in contact with such organisations. Nevertheless, they also reflect the prototype of returnees of the working-age population living in big cities such as Kabul and Kandahar who rely on these sectors for employment. However, independently of this bias, women's organisations are generally respected in society due to the successful work they carried out on the ground, providing women with skills and opportunities for development.

For both men and women trust in the political system with the exception of the Afghan Government (6.3 and 6.7 respectively) is relatively low (5 and below), although men have slightly higher levels of trust in the political system incl. the parliament, the political parties, politicians and the legal system and courts. This is in contrast to the armed forces, the Afghan Government, and the police, who in the context of Afghanistan play a crucial role in providing security and preventing terrorist attacks. They enjoy trust levels of 6 and above. The relatively high levels of trust are related to the history and composition of the Afghan National Army (2002-2021). The Army recruited from a wide and diverse section of the population and has not been tainted like other government departments with accusations of corruption. It has therefore enjoyed a reputation for serving the people and fighting to protect the Afghan population as a whole.

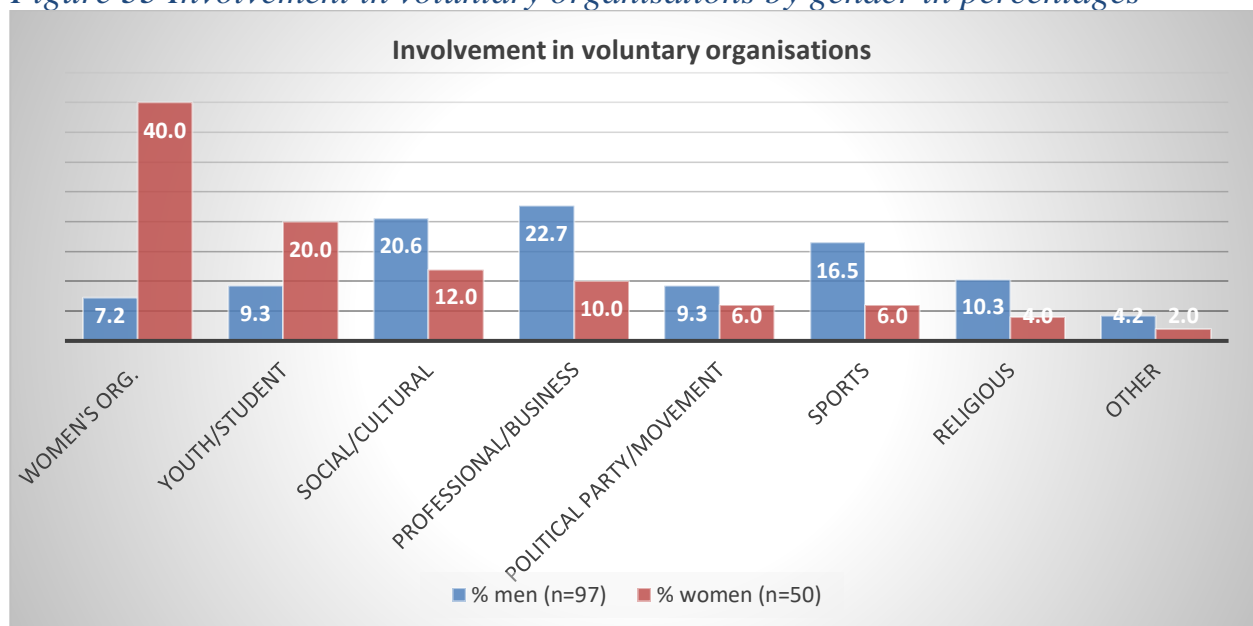
The identification of institutions that enjoy higher levels of trust is important for peace-building and democratisation efforts as they point out areas of improvement to build and strengthen trust and show the role women's organisations play.

4.8.3 Involvement in voluntary organisations

Respondents were asked the following to capture their involvement in voluntary organisations: *"In the last 12 months, have you been involved in any of the voluntary organisations? This includes being a member, participating in their events or activities and donating money."* This question allowed multiple choice and the graph (Figure 33 below) therefore reflects the proportion of men and women involved in each type of organisation. Overall the responses were low with the exception of involvement in women's organisations which for women is 40% and for men 7.2%. This might be due to bias introduced through fieldwork, as the NGO that conducted this survey in Kabul and Kandahar was a women's organisation, thus a large proportion of the sample was drawn from the network of the researchers who are

affiliated with this organisation. One-fifth of the women in the sample we also involved in youth or student organisations, compared to one-tenth of men, again reflecting the sample which included many women being in full-time education. Men's largest proportion of engagement is with professional and business organisations (22.7%) compare to only 10% of women. Also, more men are involved in religious organisations (10.3%) than women (4.2%). Men are almost three times more likely to be involved in sports activities and events (16.5%) than women (6%). Compared to engagement in sports organisations, women are more likely to be engaged in social and cultural activities (12%) but their rate of involvement is still half of that of men (20.6%). Involvement in a political organisation is relatively low for both, although men (9.3%) tend to be more involved than women (6%). Although the sample is a very specific sample as discussed above, it nevertheless indicates, a relatively high level of engagement in the voluntary sector which is not surprisingly a reflection of the many NGOs that have been active on the ground in Afghanistan until very recently when the Taliban regained power and most of the NGOs has ceased their work.

Figure 33 Involvement in voluntary organisations by gender in percentages



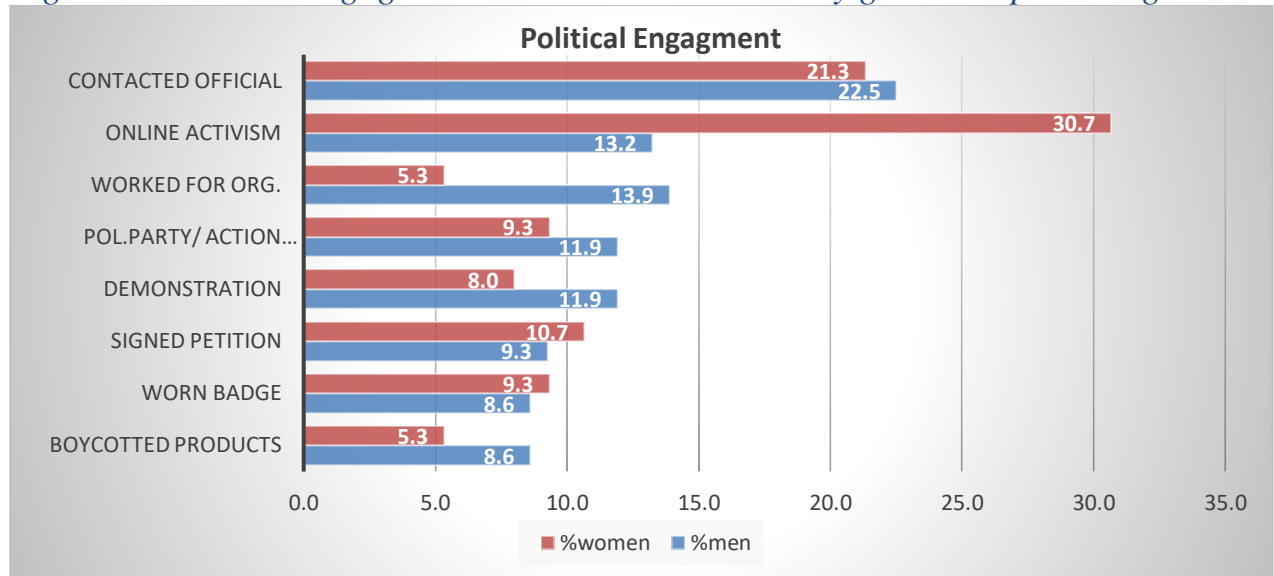
Question-wording: In the last 12 months, have you been involved in any of the voluntary organisations? This includes being a member, participating in their events or activities and donating money.

4.8.4 Political engagement

The question on political engagement yielded low levels of response, but among those who answered these questions, contacting a politician, government or local government official in the last 12 months was overall the most common type of political engagement (21.3% women, 22.5% men). For women, however, posting or sharing political content online, for example on blogs, via email or on social media such as Facebook or Twitter is 30.7% whereas for men this is only 13.2%. Men are also more likely than women to work for an organisation (13.9%) or a political party or action group (11.9%) whereas for women this is much lower (5.3% and 9.3% respectively). Men are more likely to take part in demonstrations (11.9%) at similar

levels to engage in a political party but women are more likely to sign petitions (this is presumably driven by online activism) (10.7%) and wear or display a campaign badge/sticker (9.3%) compared to men (9.3% and 8.6%). Boycotting products not surprisingly is the least common type of activism, although men are more likely to do that.

Figure 34 Political engagement in the last 12 months by gender in percentage

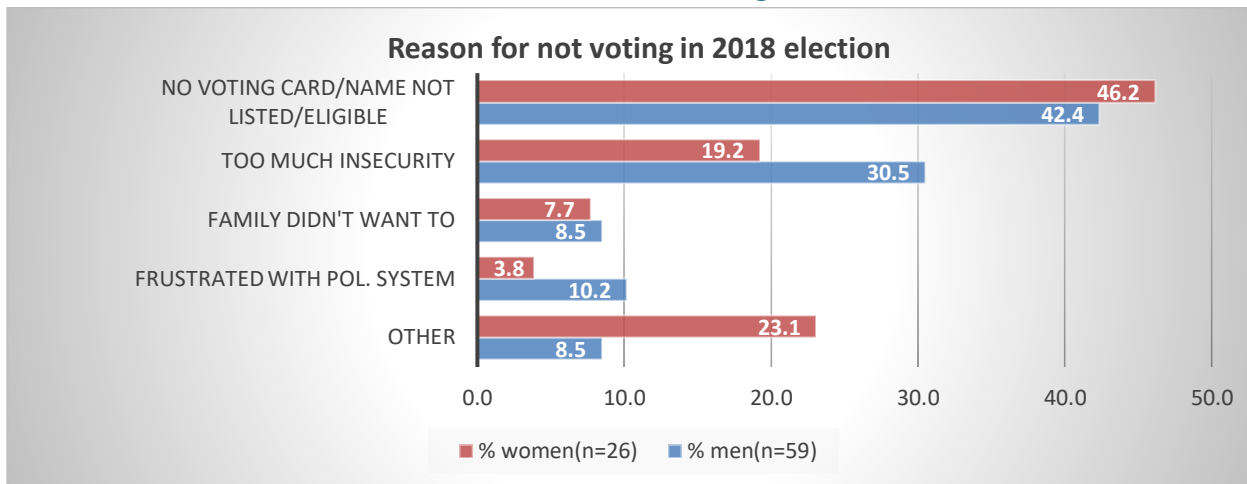


Question-wording: There are different ways of trying to improve things in Afghanistan or help prevent things from going wrong. During the last 12 months, have you done any of the following? Multiple choice questions.

4.8.4 Voting

Overall, 53.9% of the sample voted at the national elections in Afghanistan in 2018 with the rates for men (55.1%) being slightly higher than that of women (51.1%) (Graph not shown here). In other words, 46% did not cast their vote and these were asked the follow-up question about their reasons for not voting. Figure 35 shows that 46.2% of women stated that they had no voting card/name not listed/not eligible to vote compared to 42.4% for men. Too much insecurity was the second most common ground for men (30.5%) as well as women (19.2%). For a small minority, the families didn't want them to vote, presumably for security reasons. Frustration with the political system was given as a reason by 10.2% of men and only 3.8% of women. The other category consists of multiple reasons, that received very low numbers such as forgetting to vote or being away on election day.

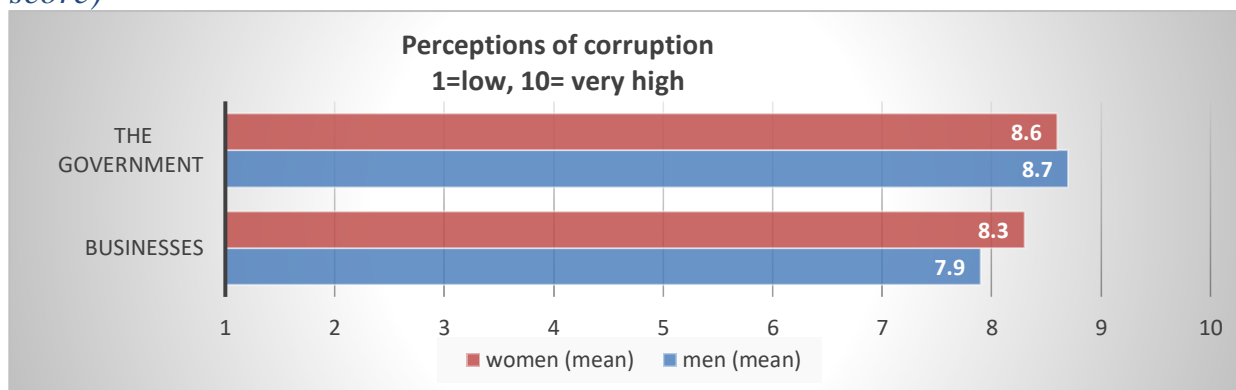
Figure 35 Reasons for not voting in the 2018 parliamentary election by gender



4.8.6 Corruption and bribery

Corruption and bribery constitute barriers to accessing government services and prevent equal opportunities. Returnees were asked to indicate how widespread they thought corruption is within the government and businesses on a 10-point scale where 1 denotes no corruption and 10 denotes very high levels of corruption. It's not an objective measure of corruption but measures the perception of the returnees. Both genders reported high levels of corruption, perceiving slightly higher levels of corruption within the government (men 8.7 and women 8.6) as compared to businesses (7.9 men and 8.3 women).

Figure 36 Perceptions of corruption in government in business by gender (mean score)



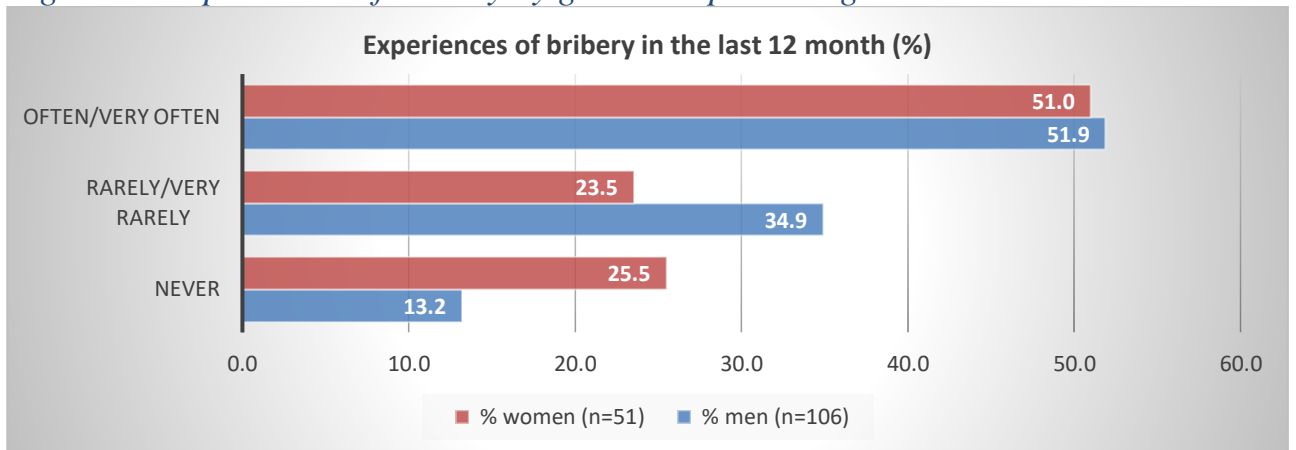
Question-wording: How widespread do you think that corruption is within the government in Afghanistan?

How widespread do you think corruption is within businesses in Afghanistan?

The question on bribery on the other hand asked about actual experiences of bribery. Asked whether they have given a bribe or a present in order to solve their problems or receive services which are supposed to be free in the last 12 months, over half of the sample, both men and women, stated that they have done this very often or often (see figure 37). One-fourth of women however stated that they have never had to do it in this period compared to 13.2% of men. Overall, if we add the proportion of men and women who gave a bribe in the last 12 months, over 86.8% of men and 74.5% of women have had to give bribery in order to receive the services that are meant to

be for free.

Figure 37 Experiences of bribery by gender in percentages



Question-wording: Sometimes people have to give a bribe or a present in order to solve their problems or receive services which are supposed to be free. In the last 12 months, how often were you personally faced with this kind of situation in Afghanistan?

5 Discussion of key findings

In this section, we summarise the key points of the data and how to return mobilities that have been experienced in Afghanistan.

5.1 Returning to build a life in Afghanistan

The returnees in this study had left Afghanistan in the first place due to conflict in the country. Linked to that, many also stated that they left to join their families who had already left or were living abroad and to make a better living for themselves as job opportunities were scarce, and for educational reasons in particular further education was limited in Afghanistan. Natural disaster such as long periods of drought that has become more prolonged in Afghanistan leading to loss of income and livelihoods also appeared as an important factor in emigrating. Consequently, the return reasons reflect two key issues that led to their emigration in the first place: the political stability of the country and caring and family responsibilities. With this, returnees saw better employment and business opportunities for themselves in their home county, after living in exile for an average of 12 years, had the desire to reconnect to their country and communities and raise their children there or come back because they still had land or a house that belonged to them, and because they have the desire to rebuild their country.

With the establishment of the American University of Afghanistan in 2006 and a number of other higher education institutions, returning to Afghanistan to study has also become a reason for men to return, albeit in a small number. It is important to note that no women have indicated this as a reason for return. However, in the qualitative interviews conducted for this study, respondents pointed out that studying in Afghanistan or studying part-time and working part-time has the advantage of build-up a social network crucial for finding a job and having a career in Afghanistan.

Besides, these pull factors of return, common reasons for returnees were the end of their studies, the end of their visa and expulsion or removal as well as job loss and job insecurity. A smaller number also indicated racism and discrimination experienced in the host country and finally, the Covid pandemic was given as a reason and this is the case, particularly for men who went to work as labour migrants in the neighbouring

regions as well as in the Gulf states.

A large majority of the returnees have returned without the support of a return assistant programme, although both the Afghan Government as well as Afghan refugees hosting countries and a number of international aid organisations developing return assistance programmes in order to encourage and facilitate returnees, the former because they are keen for various reasons to reduce their refugee populations. Feelings of attachment to Afghanistan

Education and employment play key factors in return mobilities. This study sampled over-proportionally among returnees with high levels of education as well as employment. While certainly not representative of the Afghan returnee population, it nevertheless captures the socio-economic position of a substantial subgroup mainly located in two big cities which returnees settled in after coming back to Afghanistan as it offers more opportunities to further their education and find employment relevant for their levels of education and career aspirations. The largest proportion of women in this sample are employed (40%) and this includes either part-time or full-time employment and a small proportion is self-employed (5%). Men's level of employment is 64% and a great bulk of this is driven by self-employment (24%) and full-time employment (27%). The key difference between gender in terms of employment is that men are more likely to be self-employed, whereas women are more likely to be students (25% compared to 10% men) and work part-time (18% women and 13% men). Unemployment for both genders is around one-fifth indicating that finding adequate employment is an issue for a substantial minority of the sample. Another gender difference not surprisingly is that 15% of women are a homemaker and not looking for work, while this proportion only makes up 6% among male returnees. The sectors in which women find most employment are the public sector and the third sector with the industry they work in being mainly education, public administration, finance and health. In the qualitative interviews, especially female respondents pointed out, that they prefer to work particularly in international NGOs as they faced less discrimination there compared to other sectors dominated by men.

Men on the other hand are more likely to find employment in private industries and

private businesses. Compared to women, they have a range of industries in which they work, ranging from education, construction and building industry, trade, car and domestic appliance repair, transport and communications, manufacturing industry to agriculture, public sectors, health, finance etc. These gender differences point out the expanding yet still limiting areas of employment opportunities for women in Kabul and Kandahar. Another measure of assessing the socio-economic status of returnees is to look at the mismatch between education and the jobs they hold. The data showed, that most returnees are being employed in jobs that correspond to their education level and only a small fraction of men and women indicated that they are being under-skilled. That means, that for the majority of returnees, returning to Afghanistan has led to upward social mobility. This is very much in contrast to the down-skilling of newly arrived migrants who tend to be employed in jobs that is below their levels of education (Sirkeci et. al 2017).

Returnees are thought to contribute to the home country's economy through the human, social and economic capital they accumulate abroad. This puts them in an advantageous position vis-à-vis non-migrants, particularly in a war-torn country, where resources have been scarce and the infrastructure to provide education, training and employment severely hampered. The results of the survey confirmed these approaches mostly. On average, returnees found that their levels of qualification, the skills and knowledge they gained abroad as well as the social contact they made while in emigration have been useful to them when returning and settling down in Afghanistan. Surprisingly, establishing business contacts abroad and acquiring foreign languages were perceived as less useful for their reintegration in Afghanistan. This might be due to the low proportion of returnees returning with capital (24%) and an even smaller proportion who then set up a business upon their return (16%). While the reasons for not setting up a business were multiple as discussed in the report, those who were able to set up a business referred to corruption, administrative issues, lack of market and having insufficient capital to keep their business afloat. These point to the lack of adequate infrastructure to allow a business to survive and grow and make a business endeavour a highly risky undertaking. The suggested measures to encourage businesses to be set up refer mainly to legislative, administrative and financial issues such as tax exemption,

investment premium, and custom advantages and very few respondents indicated a lack of human capital. Thus, while returned return with valuable human capital skills, the lack of adequate provision for businesses to flourish is not given.

5.2 Challenges faced

One of the biggest problems returnees in this survey identified in relation to their reintegration is finding employment. Thus, despite the upward mobility experienced by return migrants, access to the labour market in Kabul and Kandahar has come with challenges for return migrants. Returnees felt that they are perceived as a threat to locals who have not migrated and who are competing for the same jobs. Again, we observe a gendered pattern where female returnees have a higher perception of being perceived as a threat to a local job. In a society where men are seen as the main breadwinner, female returnee's employment might be seen as an unnecessary competition more than male returnees who are expected to be the main breadwinner and provide for their families and therefore seen less as a threat.

Throughout the survey, gender differences are striking. Ethnicity and language aside, gender is seen as the most important makers in group discrimination against female returnees. For male returnees, other group-based discriminations are more common such as ethnicity, language, political views, religion, lifestyle and age than gender. Group-based discrimination based on sexuality and disability is the least acknowledged form of discrimination for both genders. A gendered pattern was also observed in relation to attitudes towards women's agency within the family as well as in public life. Women are more outspoken about domestic violence, against boys' university education being given preference over girls, and in favour of women choosing their own friends. Women also agreed on average more than men that paid employment is the best way for women to be independent and that women are as much suited to be political leaders and business executives as men. Both genders have similar levels of attitudes towards women's roles within the family and children's upbringing. These responses suggest that the female returnees in the sample are more in favour of gender equality than men and while valuing roles as mothers and housewives they also see this as compatible with women taking up leading roles in public life. Yet, women suffer many barriers to achieving these roles in

public. For women, one of the most common forms of problems experienced in their neighbourhood is verbal harassment and gossiping about women. As insight from the qualitative study has provided, working women who have the approval of their families to pursue employment outside the home are still faced with harassment at work and in public. They also fear that their reputation will be tarnished due to gossip which has the function of social control and puts constraints on women to be in public spaces. The overwhelming majority of women also felt unsafe walking in their local area or neighbourhood after dark. Although safety is also an issue for men, they face fewer constraints being in public spaces. Men, however, reported higher levels of physical violence in their neighbourhood, who also worried about physical harassment perceived neighbourhood, police and military interference, youth gangs being a problem in their neighbourhood and drugs being taken. Extremists interfering in their lives is also seen as a common problem for men and women almost equally. Thus, the immediate neighbourhood which are places people use on a regular basis in order to go to work, education and other activities in public is generally not perceived as safe places to be and indicates the constraints on civic life.

5.3 Participation in public life

Nevertheless, respondents reported involvement in a range of voluntary organisations. Although the proportion of overall engagement among the sample is difficult to establish, as this was a multiple-choice question, for men's engagement in social and cultural events, in professional and business organisations and in sports organisations followed by religious organisations, political parties or movement and youth and student organisations were more common. Women on the other hand had relatively high levels of engagement in women's organisations, followed by youth and student organisations and socio-cultural organisations. A small proportion was also engaged in professional and business organisations. Responses for political engagement showed that for women the most common type of political engagement by far was online activism followed by contacting an official. Men's most common type of political engagement was contacting an official followed by online activism, working for an organisation, working for a political party or action group and attending a demonstration. Thus, the range of

activities for men involved in voluntary organisation and political activities is much broader than that of women suggesting again to women face much more constraints than men in being active in civic life. The exception to this is involved in women's organisations and online activism which arguably provides fewer barriers to involvement in public life.

Voting constitutes the most fundamental act of political engagement and forms the basis of democracy. Overall, just half of the returnees in the sample indicated that they voted in the last 2018 parliamentary elections. Almost half of women and a slightly lower proportion of men who didn't vote indicated that they did not have a voting card, that their names were not listed on the voter registration or that they were not eligible. This means that a considerable proportion of returnees face primarily administrative hurdles in exercising their political will. The security situation being volatile also constitutes a common reason, especially for men not voting. Trust in institutions plays a crucial role in providing the basis for people engaging in society and building the brickworks of democracy. In the survey, the armed forces received the highest levels of trust. The Afghan National Army (2002-2021) recruited among different segments of Afghan society and unlike other government departments, has proven plagued with corruption. It has therefore enjoyed a reputation for serving the people and fighting to protect the Afghan population as a whole. Women's organisations, humanitarian and charitable organisations incl. UN organisations received also high levels of trust. This points to the importance of the establishment and support of such organisations in a post-conflict society that plays a crucial role in providing support to the most vulnerable and marginalised population groups in society. The identification of institutions that enjoy higher levels of trust is important for peace-building and democratisation efforts as they point out areas of improvement to build and strengthen trust and show the role women's organisations play in such a process.

5.4 Temporality of return migration

The temporality of return has been clearer for men than for women, with the majority of women believing that they would settle down in Afghanistan for good at the time when

they returned to Afghanistan. This proportion became smaller when asked how they feel about re-emigration, with only one-fifth of women and a slightly higher proportion of men stating that they are unlikely to leave. This suggests, that returnees were hopeful that they would build a lasting future for themselves in Afghanistan and at the time of the survey when peace negotiations were ongoing between the then-Afghan Government and the Taliban representatives in 2020 and 2021, many more returnees began questioning the permanency of their return. Without a doubt, other factors such as socioeconomic and political unrest and the rise in the Taliban played a role in the decision to return. Feelings of attachment to their home country are relatively strong both among men and women. Women, however, have stronger feelings of attachment towards their country of immigration and have less harboured a desire to return to Afghanistan when they were living in exile. This might be due to the second generation of Afghan returnees for whom their host country has become more of a home than for their parent generation. It might also be due to the fact that it's mainly men who went abroad to study and work in the GCC countries for a short period of time. Thus, The experiences of returnees are likely to be influenced by all these factors.

6 Conclusions

Afghanistan has a long history of conflict and has experienced since the 1970s several major waves of exodus to neighbouring regions, western countries and transit and final destinations. In between these conflicts, waves of return migration have also occurred, with the latest one reaching a peak in 2015 when Afghanistan was in the midst of building its young and promising democracy and the Government was working towards socio-economic stability, expanding its education system, building the infrastructure for women to gain education and employment and strengthening civil society. All this halted when the Taliban took over power in a dramatic move in August 2021, causing the fifth wave of exodus, as they started to revert to an authoritarian and androcentric Taliban rule limiting and preventing the right of women to education, employment, political representation and public visibility in general.

One of the aims of this study has been to identify the challenges returnees face and contribute to identifying areas of improvement for policymakers in Afghanistan. That aim has lost its relevance for the time being as the current Taliban Government is eagerly working towards undoing the achievements of the last 10-15 years, which despite its shortcomings allowed men and women to build a future for themselves and their families in Afghanistan. That was the hope of returnees when they went back to Afghanistan and that was the hope that kept many in Afghanistan going despite the challenges they faced on many levels. Nevertheless, this study has still important implications for understanding return mobilities in conflicted and post-conflicted societies and provides empirical insight into a hard to reach populations and countries. Perhaps, the abrupt end to the democratically elected Government in Afghanistan and the unlawful prosecution and persecution of many Afghans who had participated in rebuilding the country shows the fragility of post-conflict societies to which many migrants return too. It also highlights again the non-linear and temporal trajectories of migration mobilities and arguably, nowhere has this been more evident than in the recent case of Afghanistan.

The data collected during 2020-2021 in Kabul and Kandahar provided a unique

opportunity to observe and capture the experiences of Afghan returnees. However, within six months of data collection, the data became historical and almost outdated. Moreover, one month after presenting the results of these findings to Afghan and other international policymakers in London, the return migrants we interviewed found themselves in a completely different reality, with the research partners on the ground fearing for their lives and going underground and trying desperately to get out of the country. Despite this, this study hasn't lost its relevance. On the contrary, it bears witness to the hard work and great sacrifices that returnees make in order to rebuild a future for themselves, their families and their country.

Recommendation

Following the fall of the Afghan government and the power seizure of the Taliban to power, many of Afghanistan's most skilled and educated people such as medical doctors, journalists, politicians, artists, human-rights activists, humanitarian aid workers, former government officials, high-profile civil-society figures, women, and members of ethnic minorities, have been forced to flee again and others who stayed are no longer permitted to use their skills and qualifications to carry out their professions. The hostile and oppressive environment alongside economic and political uncertainties in Afghanistan is causing a devastating brain drain to an already fragile society and economy. The majority of the Taliban lack the political and economic knowledge and skills required to govern a population of 40 million people and meet their fundamental needs. The Taliban regime and its administration are already in a dire situation. The Afghan people pay a heavy price for having a non functioning and insufficient government. Nearly 20 million people, including 10 million children, are believed to be suffering from hunger right now. During the early phases of the Taliban's rise to power, Zabihullah Mujahid, their spokesperson, urged the highly skilled people to stay in the country because "this country needs its own experts". However, the Taliban continue to persecute and obstruct highly qualified people particularly women from making contributions to their country. Afghans' frustration with the Taliban's inefficiency will grow, along with inequalities, a system of gender apartheid, and further radicalise the country's diverse ethnic groups and other Islamic groups. The terror organisation Islamic State Khorasan Province (ISKP) is already establishing its stronghold among

the uneducated and underprivileged rural and urban populations. In this context,

1. if the Taliban regime want to gain official international recognition, it must abolish its system of gender apartheid and human rights violations and allow skilled individuals, including women, to contribute to their country.
2. the international community should use whatever leverage it has over the Taliban to pressure them to begin the stalled peace process and reconciliation with all facets of society, especially women and highly qualified individuals.
3. to support Afghans in their homeland and the region, the intergovernmental organisations including the UN, as well as the countries hosting Afghan refugees and Afghan diaspora organisations, need to develop policies to identify Afghan experts and determine how to best capitalise on their social, and human, cultural, and economic capital.
4. the decision of returnees to stay in Afghanistan, leave Afghanistan, or re-return to Afghanistan will be influenced by the governments' and international organisations' recognition and acknowledgement of the contribution of returnees to the country's economy, development, and reconstruction.
5. in the event that the Taliban regime is prepared to stop terrorising people and re-starting peace process and start utilising the human capital of returnees, it is imperative to ensure a safe and dignified return and reintegration process in Afghanistan as well as the protection of the rights of the diverse Afghan population (gender, ethnicity, and religion, access to education, and employment). Having said this, it is the fact that the fundamentalist Taliban's brutal practices show that the Taliban regime is infamous for promising too much as a political and ideological strategy to gain international recognition and never following through on any of its pledges.

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