

RETURNEE LONGITUDINAL SURVEY: SUMMARY FINDINGS - ROUND 1

Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Iraq and Pakistan

Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM)

Regional Evidence for Migration Analysis and Policy (REMAP)

International Organization for Migration (IOM)



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This report is part of the outputs under the European Union funded project “Displacement Tracking Matrix Regional Evidence for Migration Analysis and Policy (DTM REMAP)”. The objective of DTM REMAP is to strengthen the evidence-based formulation and implementation of humanitarian and development policy and programming on migration and forced displacement in Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Islamic Republic of Iran, Iraq and Pakistan through the use of the Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM).

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II. ACRONYMS AND CONCEPTS

ACRONYMS

AFN	Afghani (currency)
AVRR	Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration
BDT	Bangladeshi Taka (currency)
DTM	Displacement Tracking Matrix
EU	European Union
IOM	International Organization for Migration
IQD	Iraqi Dinar (currency)
PKR	Pakistani Rupee (currency)
REMAP	Regional Evidence for Migration Analysis and Policy
RLS	Returnee Longitudinal Survey
USD	United States Dollar (currency)

CONCEPTS

ASSISTED VOLUNTARY RETURN AND REINTEGRATION (AVRR): Administrative, logistical or financial support, including reintegration assistance to migrants unable or unwilling to remain in the host country or country of transit and who decide to return to their country of origin (IOM, 2019).¹

RETURN MIGRATION: In the context of international migration, the movement of persons returning to their country of origin after having moved away from their place of habitual residence and crossed an international border (IOM, 2019).²

SUSTAINABLE REINTEGRATION: In the context of international return migration, reintegration can be considered sustainable when returnees have reached levels of economic self-sufficiency, social stability within their communities, and psychosocial well-being that allow them to cope with possible (re)migration drivers (IOM, 2019).³

VOLUNTARY RETURN: The assisted or independent return to the country of origin, transit or another country based on the voluntary decision of the returnee (IOM, 2019).⁴

¹ IOM (2019), Glossary on Migration. Available online at: https://publications.iom.int/system/files/pdf/iml_34_glossary.pdf.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.



1. INTRODUCTION

To better understand the demographic profiles, living conditions and reintegration processes of returnees, IOM, under the EU-funded project “Displacement Tracking Matrix Regional Evidence for Migration Analysis and Policy (DTM REMAP)”, developed the Returnee Longitudinal Survey (RLS). This survey collects data on the profiles, vulnerabilities and needs of returnees, as well as on sustainable return and reintegration outcomes in both the short and long term. To this end, data is collected with the same individuals over the course of several years at regular intervals. Implemented by DTM at both the regional and country level, the objective of DTM REMAP is to strengthen the evidence-based formulation and implementation of humanitarian and development policy and programming on migration and forced displacement in Afghanistan, Bangladesh, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Iraq and Pakistan through the dissemination of insights gained through DTM’s activities.

This report intends to provide summary findings of the first round of RLS data collection that took place in Afghanistan (May to August 2021), Bangladesh (October 2020 to January 2021), Iraq (August to September 2020) and Pakistan (January to April 2021). While the RLS also collects data on the sustainability of reintegration (economic, social and psychosocial), this summary report solely focuses on the analysis and comparison of data collected in the four countries on the profiles of the returnees. The specific thematic areas for analysis include: socio-demographic background, employment status, income status, debt status, migration drivers, return journey and prior migration experience and re-migration intentions. For a detailed examination of the RLS Round 1 findings, individual country reports are available for Afghanistan, Bangladesh and Pakistan.⁵

2. METHODOLOGY






The RLS focuses on returnees who returned to Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Iraq and Pakistan through IOM’s Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration (AVRR) and other return programmes. The sample was constructed based on several criteria, included but not limited to, country where respondent returned from,⁶ time of return⁷ and reintegration assistance (either cash or in-kind).

During the data collection period, 2,544 respondents were interviewed in person or over the phone. The largest share of respondents were interviewed in Afghanistan (998), followed by Bangladesh (635), Iraq (494) and Pakistan (417).

As this report focuses on the analysis and comparison of Round 1 in Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Iraq and Pakistan, the analysis will be structured according to country of origin (Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Iraq and Pakistan). Please note that due to the differing sample sizes, any comparisons between the countries of origin should be interpreted carefully.

LEGEND

1. When the label “top 3, 4 or 5 answers” appears above a graph it means that only the three, four or five most common responses are represented in the graph. For this reason, totals may not add up to 100 per cent.
2. The report is structured according to country of origin. Each country has been assigned a colour for easy identification (the assigned colours can be found in the below table).

RESPONDENTS BY COUNTRY OF ORIGIN				
				
Total	Afghanistan	Bangladesh	Iraq	Pakistan
2,544	998	635	494	417

Disclaimer: The designations employed and the presentation of material on this map do not imply the expression of any opinion whatsoever on the part of the IOM or United Nations concerning the legal status of any country, territory, city or area or of its authorities, or concerning the delimitation of its frontiers or boundaries. The final status of Jammu and Kashmir has not yet been agreed upon by India and Pakistan.

⁵ Individual country reports are available on the DTM website: [Afghanistan](#), [Bangladesh](#) and [Pakistan](#).

⁶ For Afghanistan, countries where respondents returned from are: the EU (Austria, Belgium, Germany and Greece) and the Republic of Türkiye, for Bangladesh they are: Libya and Greece, for Iraq they are: Finland, Germany and Greece and for Pakistan they are: Bosnia and Herzegovina, Germany and Greece.

⁷ Time of return: Afghanistan (2018-2021), Bangladesh (2019 and 2020), Iraq (2019 and 2020) and Pakistan (2019 and 2020).



3. KEY FINDINGS

1. Respondents in the RLS are relatively young, with an average age between 18 and 34 years old. The majority of respondents were married at the time of the interview, except for respondents from Afghanistan, among which less than half were married.
2. Rates of unemployment were much higher during respondents' last three months prior to return as well as at the time of the interview (Round 1) compared to unemployment rates prior to migration.
3. Similarly to unemployment rates, the proportion of respondents who have no income increased in the last three months prior to return and at the time of the interview (Round 1) compared to prior to migration.
4. In general, the income distribution has shifted downwards, with more respondents reporting themselves in lower income brackets at the time of the interview compared to prior to migration.
5. More respondents from Afghanistan and Bangladesh reported to have incurred debt in the six months before the interview. However, respondents from Iraq and Pakistan reported higher amounts of debt.
6. Overall, respondents reported economic reasons as the main drivers to leave their country of origin. However, the security situation was more commonly cited among respondents from Iraq and Afghanistan.
7. The majority of respondents in all countries reported to have experienced challenges at the personal level in the six months prior to the interview. Challenges related to unemployment and insufficient income were the most common.
8. Both previous migration experience and re-migration intentions varied significantly among respondents from each of the four countries of origin. While respondents from Iraq reported the lowest rate (7%) of previous migration experience, they showed, by far, the highest re-migration intentions (68%).



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4. DATA ANALYSIS

4.1 Socio-demographic background

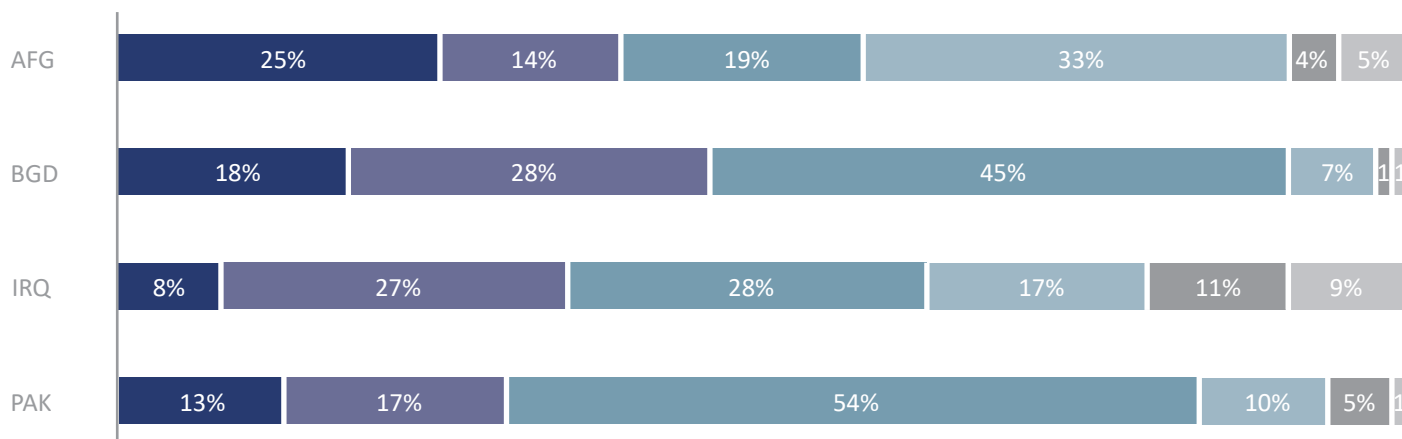
The following table presents various socio-demographic indicators by country of origin. Respondents to the RLS are relatively young, with an average age between 18 and 34 years old. The share of respondents who were married varied substantially between the countries of origin, from 42 per cent in Afghanistan to 68 per cent in Bangladesh. The average household size also differed between countries of origin. Respondents in Afghanistan reported an average household size of 10 members, while respondents in Iraq reported a household size of five members. Respondents in Bangladesh and Pakistan reported an average household size of six and seven members respectively. Finally, respondents were also asked how many of their close relatives were living abroad at the time of the interview. On average, respondents indicated that less than one close relative was living abroad, except for respondents from Pakistan, who reported fewer than two members living abroad.

DEMOGRAPHIC BACKGROUND

	 Average age	 Married	 Have children	 Average household size ⁸	 Average number of close relatives living abroad
AFG	18-24	42%	34%	10	<1
BGD	25-34	68%	47%	6	<1
IRQ	25-34	54%	45%	5	<1
PAK	25-34	65%	49%	7	<2

EDUCATIONAL LEVEL

The education level of the respondents varied significantly between different countries of origin. No education was most common among respondents from Afghanistan (25%), followed by Bangladesh (18%) and Pakistan (13%). Respondents from Iraq were the least likely to have no education (8%). Almost one-third of respondents from Bangladesh (28%) and Iraq (27%) reported primary school as their highest educational level. Respondents from Pakistan and Afghanistan were the least likely to report primary school as their highest educational level. More than half of respondents from Pakistan (54%) and 45 per cent of respondents from Bangladesh reported having secondary school as their highest educational level at the time of the interview. Returnees from Iraq and Afghanistan had the lowest shares of respondents who had secondary education as their highest educational level (28% and 19% respectively). Respondents who returned to Afghanistan were more likely to report high school (33%) as their highest educational level. Moreover, they were also more likely to report this educational level as their highest educational level compared to respondents who returned to other countries. Higher education (bachelor's and/or master's) was most common among respondents who returned to Iraq (11%). Respondents from Bangladesh were the least likely to have completed higher education (1%).



Legend: ■ No education ■ Primary education ■ Secondary education
■ High school ■ Higher education ■ Other⁹

⁸ Average household size includes people who share the same meal and roof on a daily basis.

⁹ Other selections include religious education, diploma, vocational, I do not know and I do not want to answer



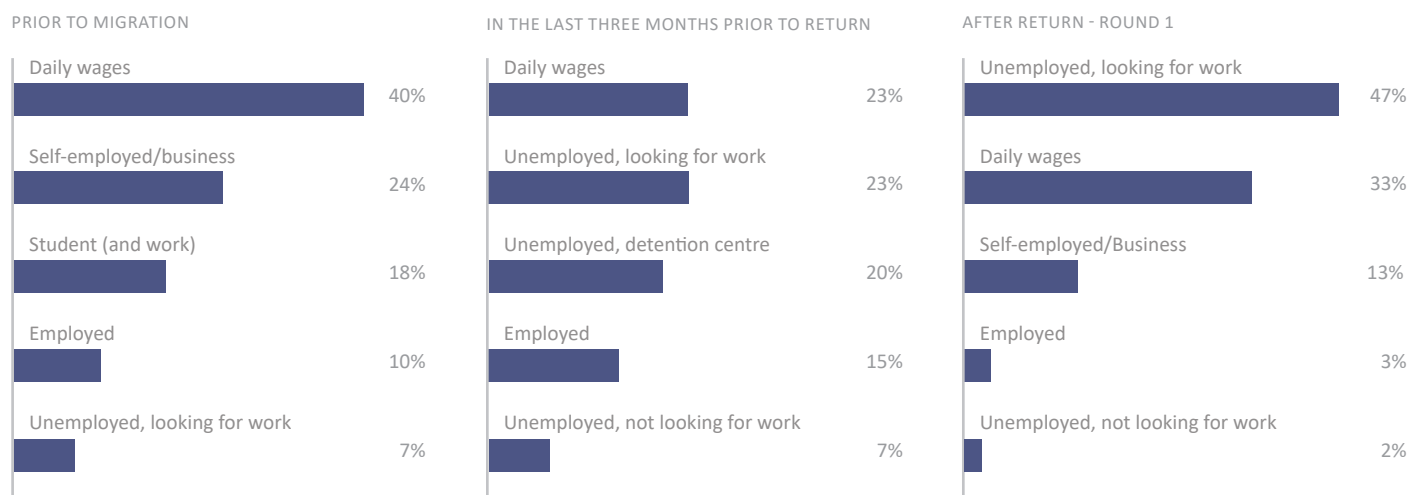
4.2 Employment status and sector

EMPLOYMENT STATUS BEFORE, DURING AND AFTER MIGRATION

The below visualizations provide an overview of the employment status of respondents during different stages in their migration journey (prior to migration, in the last three months prior to return and after return) by country of origin. Each visualization displays the five most common employment categories that were provided by respondents¹⁰.

What was your employment status prior to migration, during the last three months prior to return, and after return? (Top 5 answers)

AFGHANISTAN



Prior to migration, the largest share of respondents who returned to Afghanistan were working for daily wages (40%), followed by those who were self-employed (24%), students and/or working (18%) and employed (10%). Only seven per cent of respondents reported to be unemployed and looking for work prior to migration. In the last three months prior to return, 23 per cent of respondents were working for daily wages and 15 per cent were employed, while a total of 50 per cent of respondents were unemployed. Among those who were unemployed, 23 per cent were looking for work, 20 per cent were in a detention centre and 7 per cent were not looking for work. After return, 47 per cent reported to be unemployed and looking for work, while 2 per cent were not looking for work.

BANGLADESH

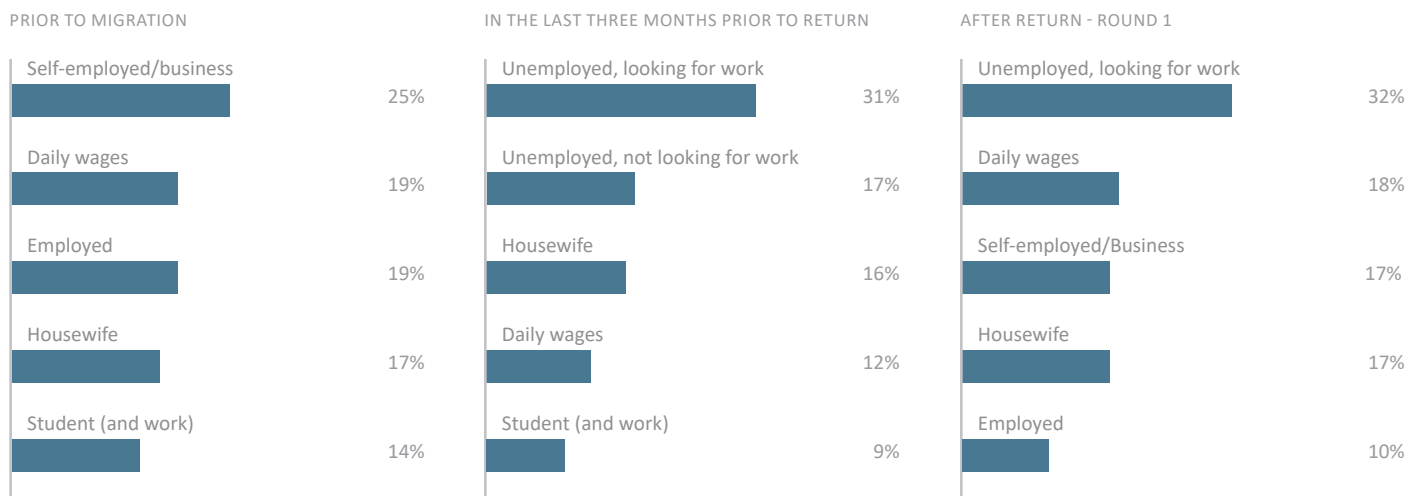


Thirty-nine per cent of respondents who returned to Bangladesh reported to be self-employed prior to migration, 24 per cent were working for daily wages, 21 per cent were employed, 11 per cent were students and/or working and only two per cent were unemployed and looking for work. Similarly to respondents from Afghanistan, unemployment increased to 50 per cent in the last three months prior to return. Among those who were unemployed, 27 per cent were not looking for work and 23 per cent were looking for work. However, almost a third of respondents (32%) were employed and 14 per cent were working for daily wages in the last three months prior to return. After return, unemployment decreased from 50 per cent in the last three months prior to return to 43 per cent after returning to the country of origin.

¹⁰ Please note that those who indicated that they were employed both before and after migration include those who were employed in the private sector, the public sector and those who were employed as contractors. Those who indicated that they were employed in the last three months prior to return include those who were working in the formal and informal sector.

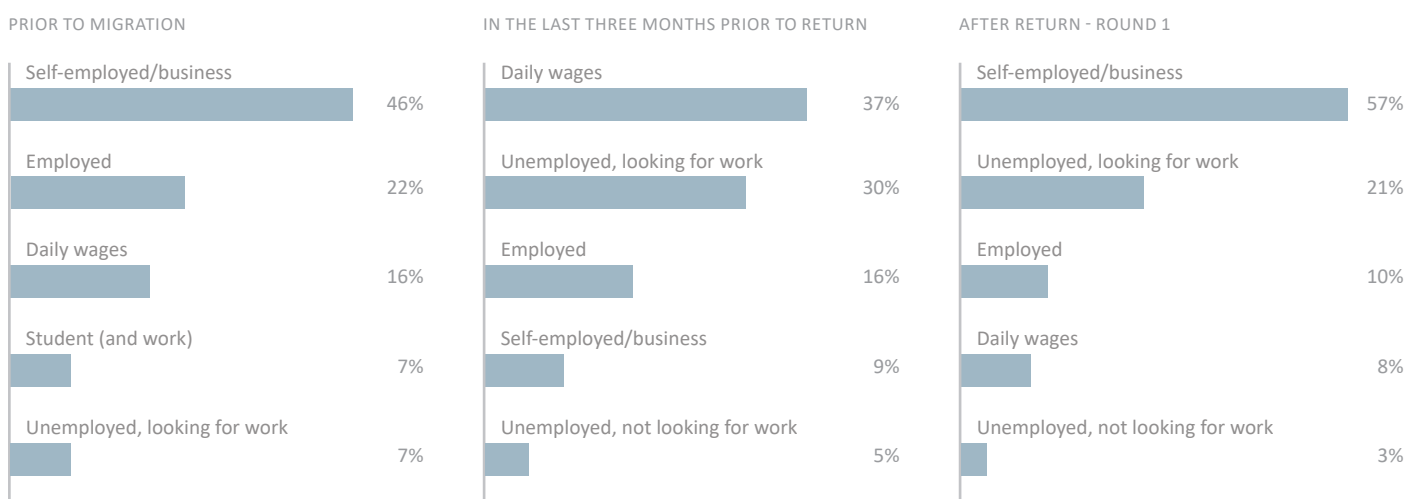


IRAQ



Prior to migration, self-employment (25%) was most common among respondents from Iraq, followed by daily wages (19%) and being employed (19%). A high share of respondents from Iraq also reported to be housewives (17% prior to migration, 16% in the last country of employment and 17% after return). This can be explained by the fact that more women participated to the RLS in Iraq compared to the other countries in this study. In the last three months prior to return, unemployment increased to 48 per cent among which, 31 per cent were unemployed and looking for work while 17 per cent were unemployed and not looking for work. Contrary to respondents from Afghanistan and Bangladesh, respondents from Iraq reported a decrease in unemployment after return as compared to the last three months prior to return. However, unemployment after return was still notably higher than prior to migration. After return, fewer respondents were self-employed (17%) or employed (10%) than prior to migration.

PAKISTAN



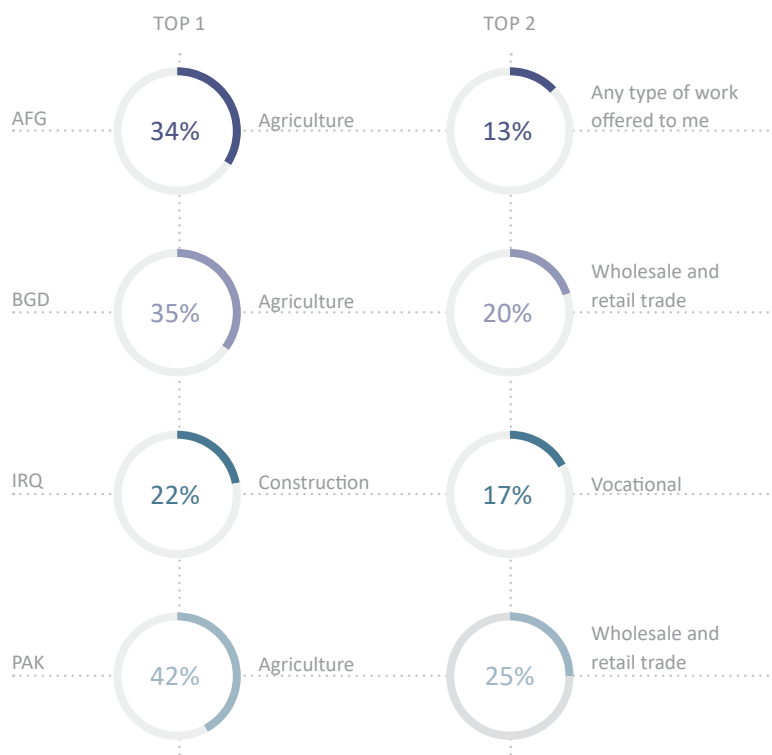
Almost half of respondents (46%) who returned to Pakistan reported to be self-employed before migrating to Europe. Twenty-two per cent were employed, 16 per cent worked for daily wages and 7 per cent were students and/or working. Seven per cent of respondent were unemployed and looking for work before migrating. Unemployment increased in the last three months prior to return to 35 per cent. The unemployment rate in the last three months prior to return is the lowest for respondents from Pakistan compared to respondents from other countries. Similarly to respondents from Iraq, unemployment decreases after return (35% to 24%) but was still notably higher than the unemployment rate before migration (7%). Different to respondents from other countries of origin, respondents from Pakistan reported higher levels of self-employment after return (57%) compared to prior to migration (46%).



Respondents were asked what their employment sector was at the time of the interview (after return). The visualization on the right side presents the two most common answers provided by respondents by country of origin. Those who were employed in agriculture were most common among respondents from Pakistan (42%), Bangladesh (35%) and Afghanistan (34%). Construction was the most prominent employment sector for respondents from Iraq (22%). The second most common answer varied more between the countries. Respondents from Bangladesh and Pakistan reported wholesale and retail trade as the second most common employment sector (20% and 25% respectively), while respondents from Iraq reported jobs in the vocational sector (17%). Finally, 13 per cent of respondents from Afghanistan did not specify an employment sector and indicated that they would take any job that was offered to them.

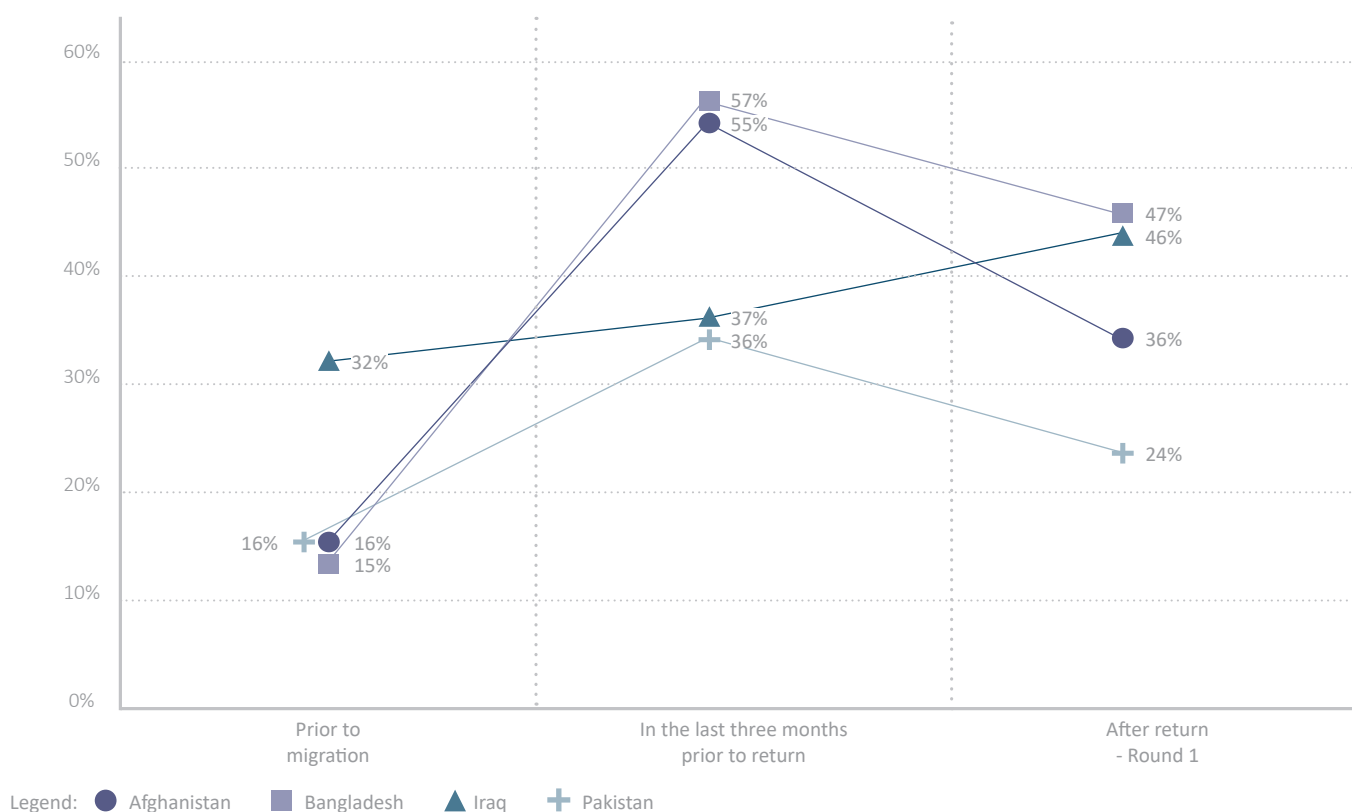
EMPLOYMENT SECTOR AFTER RETURN

What is your current employment sector, after return? (Top 2 answers)



4.3 Income situation

RESPONDENTS WHO HAVE NO INCOME (BEFORE, DURING AND AFTER MIGRATION)



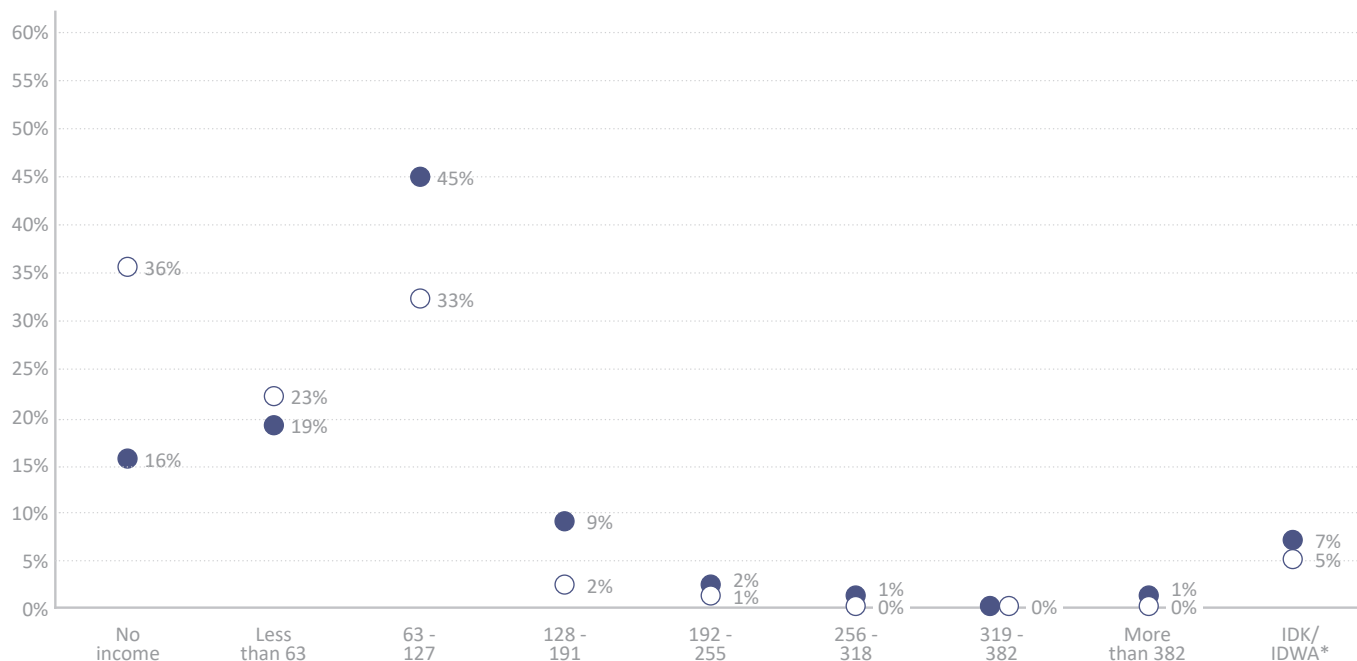
The above graph displays the share of respondents who had no income during their migration journey. The graph shows an increase of respondents who had no income in the last three months prior to return, this is consistent with the fact that a large share of respondents reported to be unemployed during this period. After return, the share of respondents who had no income decreased, however, this share was still higher than before migration, demonstrating that respondents' income were worse off after return.



INCOME PRIOR TO MIGRATION AND AFTER RETURN (USD)

The below graphs display the income of respondents prior to migration and after return (Round 1) by country of origin. The income is presented in ranges in USD. In general, the income distribution has shifted downwards, with more respondents reporting themselves in lower income brackets at the time of the interview (Round 1) compared to prior to migration.

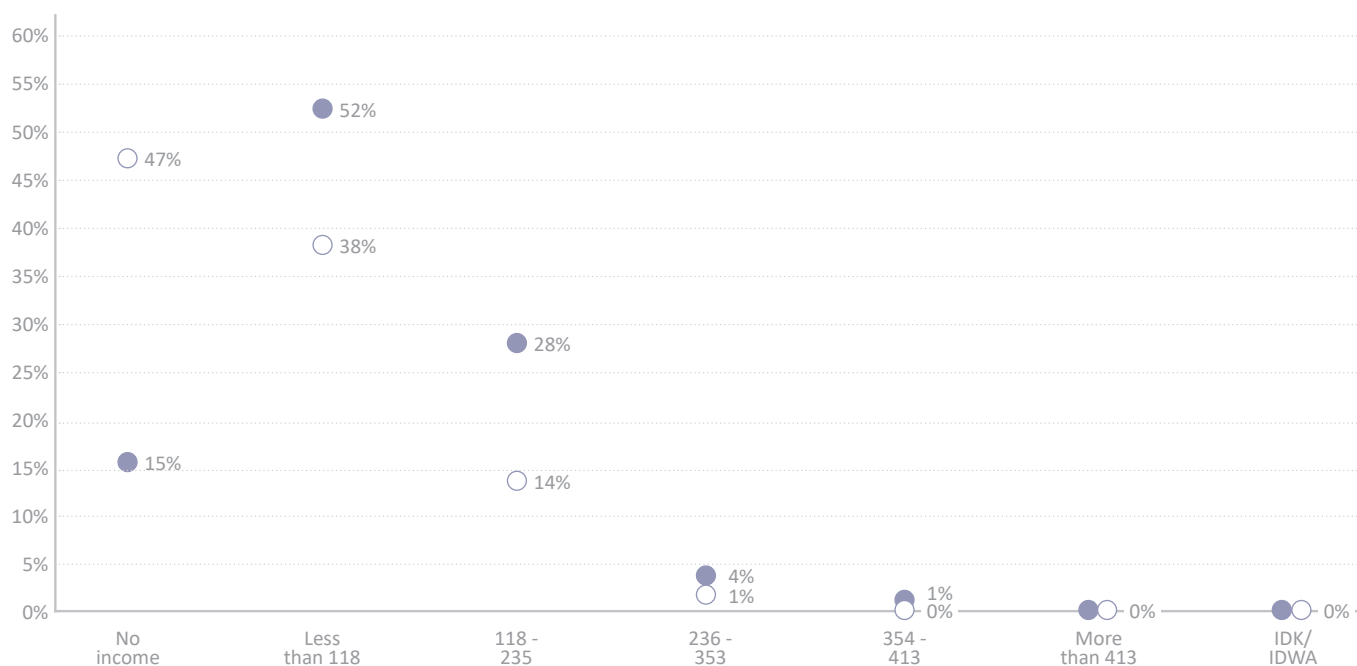
AFGHANISTAN



Legend: ● Income prior to migration¹¹ ○ Income after return (Round 1)

Respondents who returned to Afghanistan and had no income more than doubled (36%) after return compared to prior to migration (16%). Those who earned less than USD 63 increased slightly (from 19% to 23%), while those situated in the higher income brackets decreased, especially in the income ranges of USD 63-127 and USD 128-191.

BANGLADESH



Legend: ● Income prior to migration¹² ○ Income after return (Round 1)

Almost half of respondents (47%) who returned to Bangladesh had no income at the time of the interview (Round 1) compared to 15 per cent prior to migration. Those earning less than USD 118 declined from 52 per cent to 38 per cent. Respondents situated in the higher income brackets also decreased between both periods.

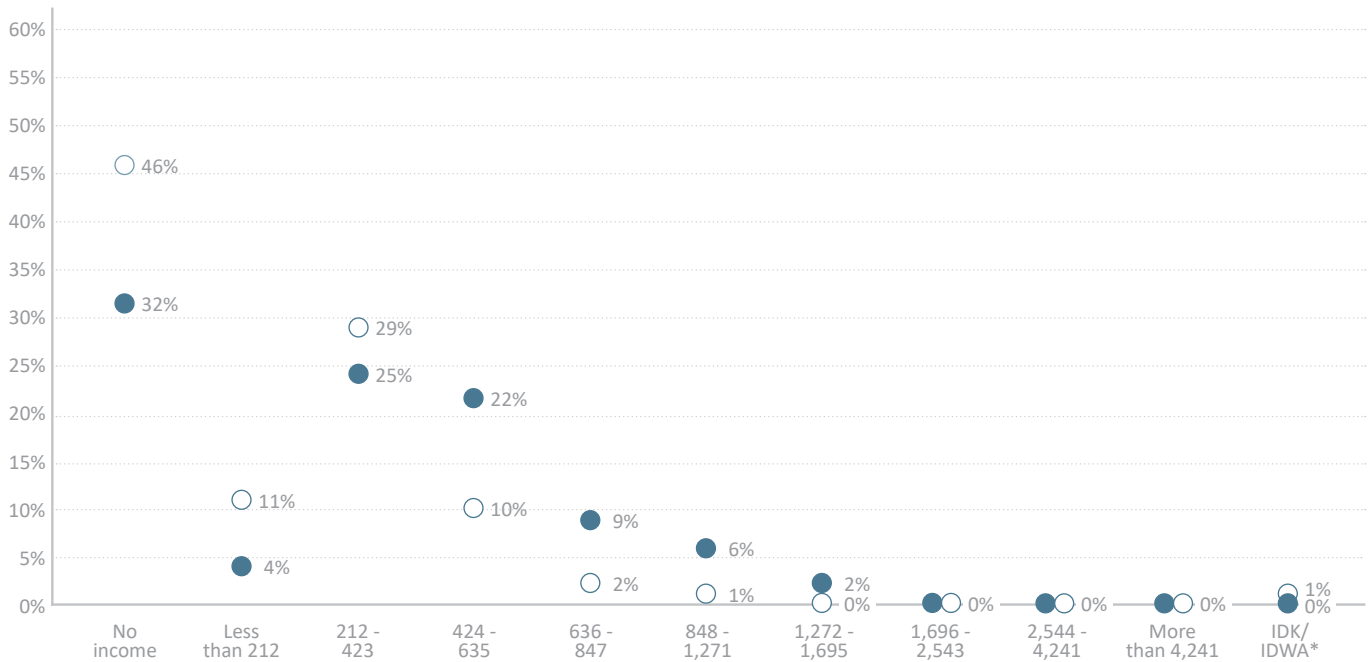
¹¹ Data was originally collected in Afghani (AFN). The exchange rate was 1 USD to 78.3956 AFN on 8 June 2021.

¹² Data was originally collected in Bangladeshi Taka (BDT). The exchange rate was 1 USD to 84.4 BDT on 1 October 2020.

* IDK: I do not know and IDWA: I do not want to answer.



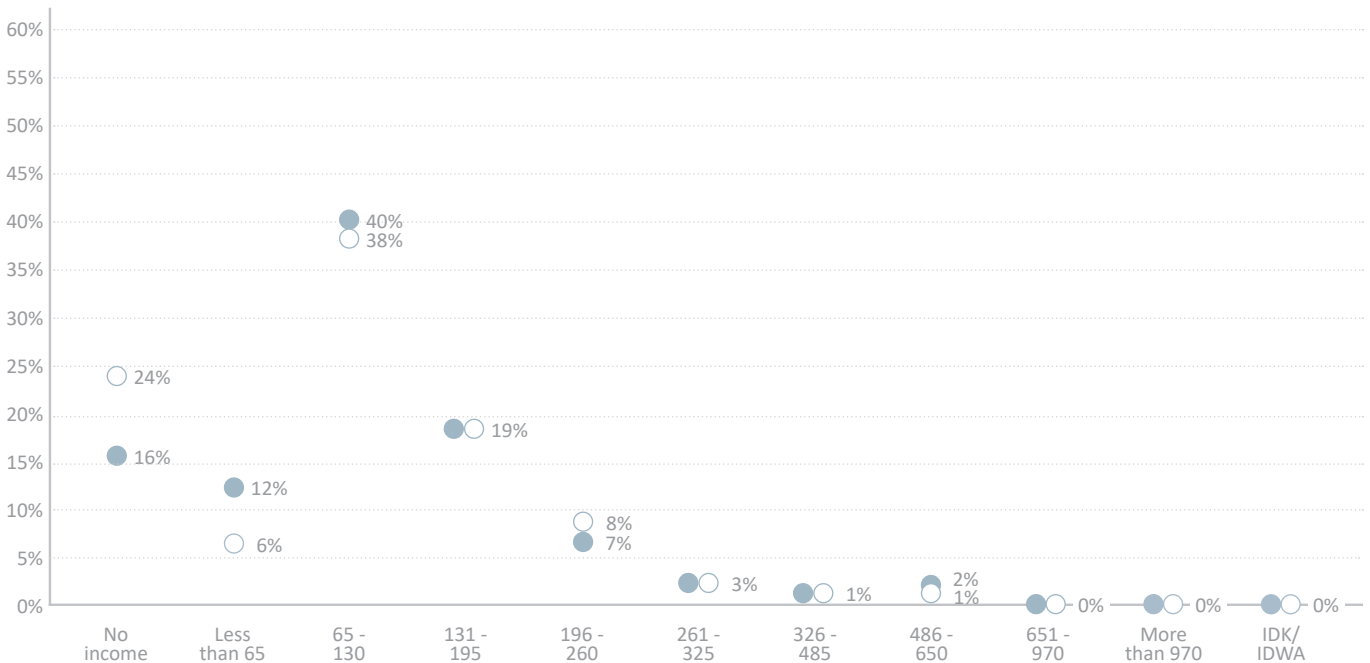
IRAQ



Legend: ● Income prior to migration¹³ ○ Income after return (Round 1)

A higher share of respondents (32%) who returned to Iraq reported no income after return as compared to respondents from the other countries. However, after return this share increased further to 46 per cent. Respondents who earned less than USD 212 also increased after return from 4 per cent to 11 per cent. Those who earned between USD 212 and USD 424 increased slightly (24% to 29%), while the highest income brackets decreased or remained the same before migration and at the time of the interview.

PAKISTAN



Legend: ● Income prior to migration¹⁴ ○ Income after return (Round 1)

Finally, respondents from Pakistan also reported an increase in the share of those who earned no income at the time of the interview compared to prior to migration (from 16% to 24%). Those who earned less than USD 65 decreased by half, from 12 per cent to 6 per cent. Respondents situated in the higher income brackets did not experience major shifts between both periods.

¹³ Data was originally collected in Iraqi Dinar (IQD). The exchange rate was 1 USD to 1,179 IQD on 1 August 2020.

¹⁴ Data was originally collected in Pakistani Rupee (PKR). The exchange rate was 1 USD to 154.316 PKR on 6 January 2021.

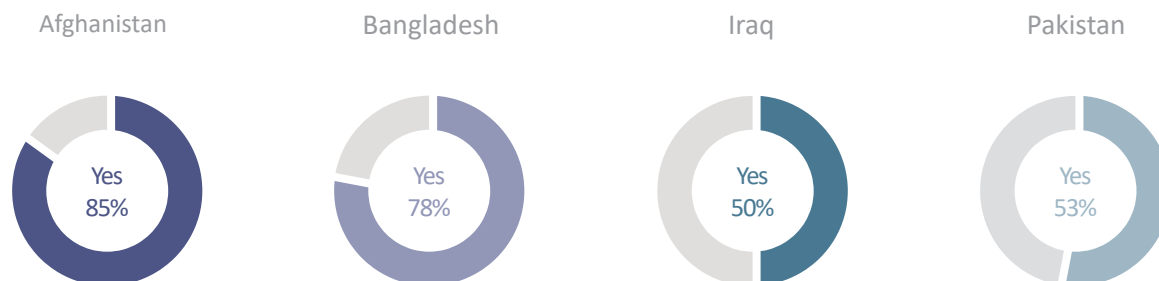
* IDK: I do not know and IDWA: I do not want to answer.



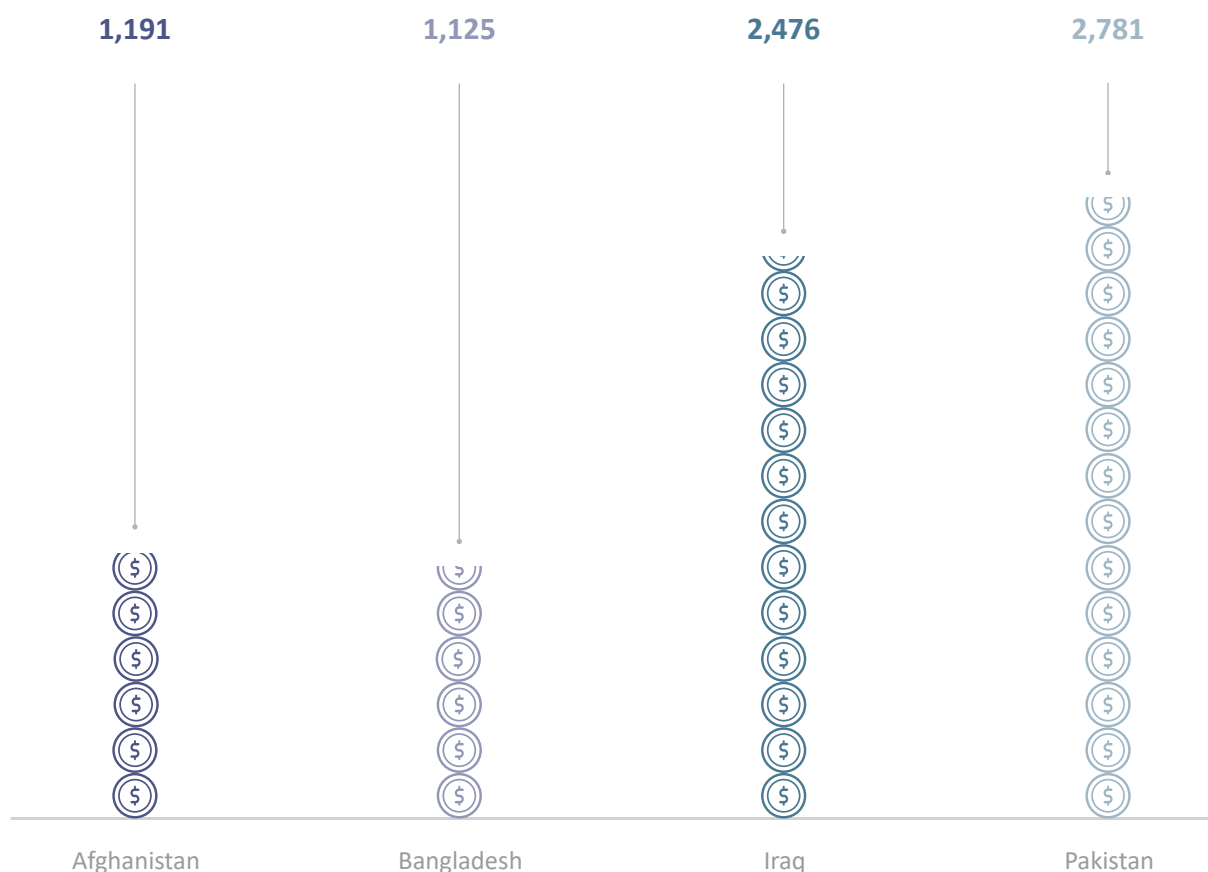
4.4 Debt situation

BORROWING MONEY IN THE PAST SIX MONTHS

Did you borrow money in the past six months?



If you borrowed money in the past six months, how much is the approximate total amount you borrowed (USD¹⁵)? (Average calculation)



= USD 200

The percentage of respondents who reported having debt varied significantly between the countries of origin. A substantial share of respondents from Afghanistan and Bangladesh reported to have borrowed money in the past six months (85% and 78% respectively), while fewer respondents from Iraq and Pakistan reported to have borrowed money (50% and 53% respectively).

However, when asked how much money they borrowed in the past six months (before Round 1), respondents from Iraq (USD 2,476) and Pakistan (USD 2,781) reported, on average, much higher levels of debt than respondents from Afghanistan (USD 1,191) and Bangladesh (USD 1,125). More specifically, respondents from Iraq and Pakistan, on average, borrowed more than double in the six months prior to the interview than respondents from Afghanistan and Bangladesh. The higher level of debt reported by respondents from Iraq and Pakistan could be explained by the fact that they were more likely to have returned from Europe, where the cost of migration and of living is, on average, higher than other host countries.

¹⁵ For exchange rates, please see footnotes on page 6 and 7.



4.5 Migration drivers

To better understand the factors that influence the initial decision to migrate, respondents were asked about their primary reasons to leave the country of origin. Due to different country contexts, reasons to leave or migration drivers vary between the countries of origin. The majority of respondents (69%) from Afghanistan indicated a lack of jobs and/or livelihoods as the most important reason to leave Afghanistan. Twenty per cent reported the security situation as their primary driver to leave the country. The security situation also featured as the most common reason for respondents who migrated from and then returned to Iraq (35%). Other primary reasons for leaving Iraq were unemployment (16%) and friends and/or relatives who were migrating encouraged the respondent to join them to leave the country (12%). More than half of respondents from Bangladesh (51%) reported a low salary in the local job market as their most important reason to leave Bangladesh. Finally, respondents who returned to Pakistan reported mainly economic reasons to leave the country (26% cited unemployment and 25% cited low salary in the local job market). Moreover, another 21 per cent of respondents from Pakistan said they left the country because they did not see a future for themselves in Pakistan.

REASONS FOR LEAVING COUNTRY OF ORIGIN

What was the primary reason you wanted to migrate from your country of origin? (Top 3 answers)





4.6 Return journey

The visualization on the right displays the four most common primary reasons for return provided by respondents by country of origin. More than two in three people (69%) who returned to Afghanistan reported forced return as the most important reason to return. Other reasons were less important. Reasons for return are more diversified for respondents from the other countries of origin. Respondents who returned to Bangladesh reported not finding a job (22%) and human trafficking (20%) as primary reasons to return, while respondents who returned to Iraq reported more reasons related to the asylum procedure, such as the asylum claim being rejected (38%) or being tired of waiting for migration procedures (18%). Thirty-four per cent of respondents who returned to Pakistan reported documentation issues as the most important reason to return along with not finding a job (21%). Family reasons also featured as a reason to return for respondents but was generally less important.

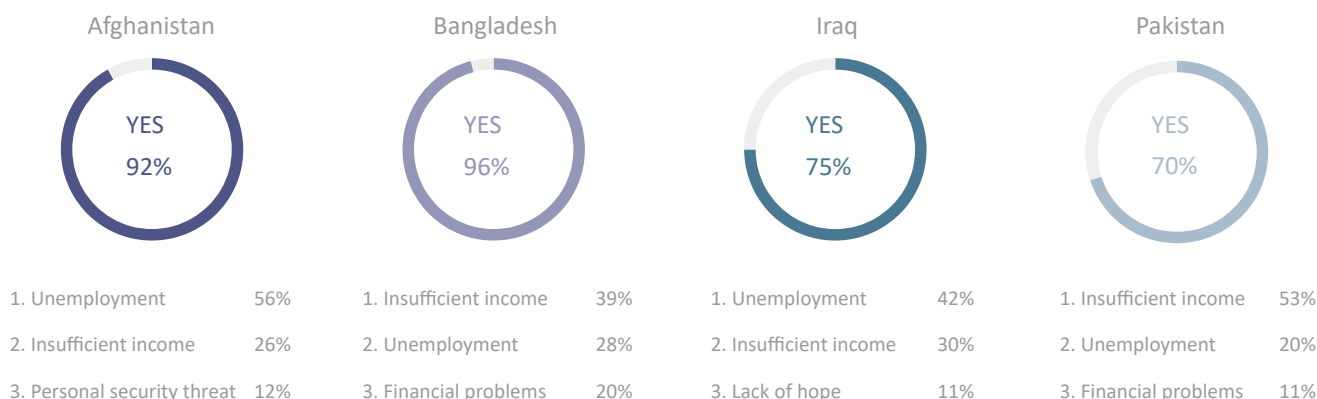
REASONS FOR RETURN

What was the primary reason you wanted to return to your country of origin? (Top 4 answers)



PERSONAL CHALLENGES AFTER RETURN

Have you experienced personal challenges since your return, and if so, what are these challenges? (Top 3 answers)

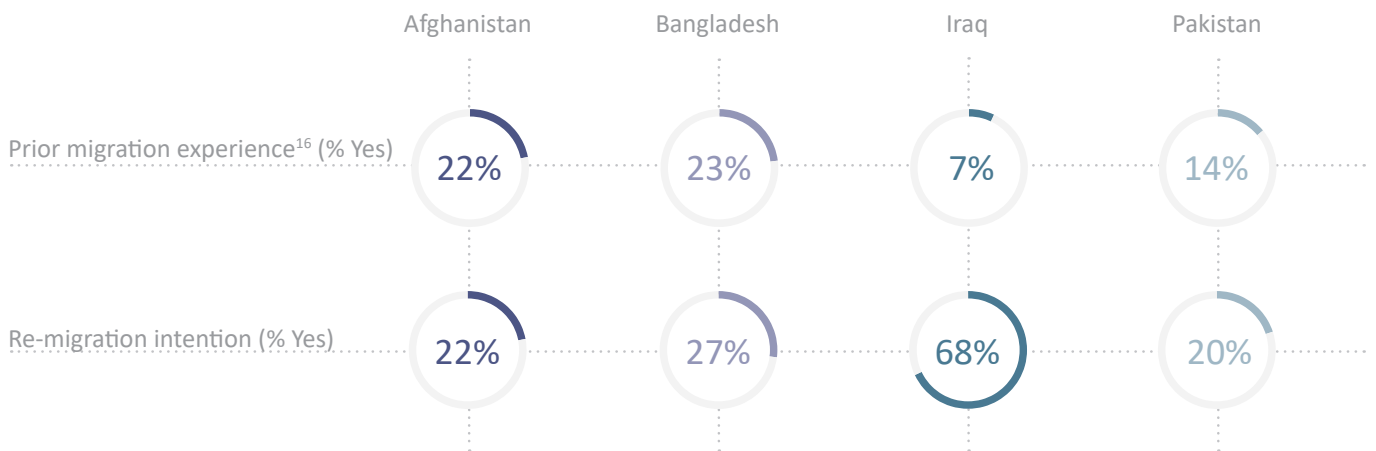


The majority of respondents in all countries of origin discussed in this study reported to have experienced challenges at the personal level in the six months before Round 1. Respondents who returned to Bangladesh and Afghanistan reported the highest level of personal challenges (96% and 92% respectively).

Respondents were also asked to specify the primary challenges they experienced at the personal level. The above visualization presents the top three most common answers among respondents by country of origin. Unemployment and insufficient income were most commonly answered by respondents in all countries of origin. Financial problems, such as debt, also feature as a personal challenge in Bangladesh and Pakistan. Notably, 12 per cent of respondents who returned to Afghanistan reported personal security threats as a challenge at the personal level in the six months before the interview took place.

4.7 Prior migration experience and re-migration intentions

PRIOR MIGRATION EXPERIENCE AND/OR INTENTION TO RE-MIGRATE



Respondents were also asked about whether they had migrated internationally for a period longer than six months at least once prior to the migration journey discussed in this study. Reviewing this previous migration experience helps form an understanding of how it shapes new patterns of mobility. Previous migration experience was most common among respondents who returned to Bangladesh (23%) and Afghanistan (22%), followed by Pakistan (14%). Respondents who returned to Iraq (7%) were the least likely to have previous migration experience.

However, when asked if they have the intention to migrate again (re-migration) from their country in the six months following the interview, respondents who returned to Iraq reported by far the highest share (68%) compared to the other countries of origin. Almost one-third of respondents (27%) who returned to Bangladesh indicated the intention to re-migrate, while respondents who returned to Afghanistan and Pakistan showed less interest in re-migration (22% and 20% respectively). Although re-migration intentions among respondents from Afghanistan and Pakistan were lower compared to the other countries, the fact that one in five people intended to re-migrate in the six months following the interview is still significant. It is also worth noting that re-migration intentions is captured shortly after return (Round 1), and therefore does not show the evolution of re-migration over time and in future rounds of data collection. Moreover, the RLS in Afghanistan specifically focused on returnees who intended to stay in the country. Therefore, the results cited for Afghanistan may be an underestimation of the actual re-migration intentions as respondents who intended to re-migrate were excluded from the survey.



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¹⁶ Only if the respondent crossed an international border and stayed outside the country of origin for at least 6 months. This does not include the respondents' most recent migration experience to the country where they returned from.



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