SNAPSHOT REPORT:
AFGHAN RETURNEES FROM TURKEY AND THE EU
Returnee Longitudinal Survey

Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM)
Regional Evidence for Migration Analysis and Policy (REMAP)
International Organization for Migration (IOM)

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IOM
UN MIGRATION

ACRONYMS
AND CONCEPTS

ACRONYMS

AFN	Afghani (currency)
AVRR	Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration
BMA	Baseline Mobility Assessment
CBNA	Community-Based Needs Assessment
DTM	Displacement Tracking Matrix
EU	European Union
IOM	International Organization for Migration
REMAP	Regional Evidence for Migration Analysis and Policy
RLS	Returnee Longitudinal Survey
RSS	Reintegration Sustainability Survey
SDM	Survey on Drivers of Migration
SRR	Stabilisation, Reintegration and Resilience
USD	United States Dollar

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).

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).

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).

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).

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INTRODUCTION

Many Afghan nationals migrate abroad to access protection, security, livelihoods and remittances, driven by both conflict and a lack of employment in their home country. Since the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979, millions of Afghan nationals left mainly to surrounding countries such as the Islamic Republic of Iran and Pakistan, but also onwards to Turkey, the European Union (EU), south to the United Arab Emirates (UAE), east to Indonesia and finally Australia (IOM, 2014). More recent data shows that neighbouring Islamic Republic of Iran and Pakistan, as well as Turkey and countries in the EU, remain primary destination countries for Afghan nationals (IOM, 2019a).

Every year, hundreds of thousands of Afghan migrants return to Afghanistan from these destinations. From January to November 2021 alone, 1,170,494 undocumented Afghan nationals returned from the Islamic Republic of Iran and Pakistan (IOM, 2021). While most returnees return across the land border (cross-border) from these two countries, a more limited but still substantial amount return by plane from Turkey or the EU.

Returning to one's home country is not always a smooth transition as many returnees report difficulties upon return. In recent years, these challenges have become more widely recognized and awareness has risen that return migrants need support to improve their sustainable reintegration into society (IOM, 2019b). According to IOM:

> 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 (re) migration drivers. Having achieved sustainable reintegration, returnees are able to make further migration decisions a matter of choice, rather than necessity (IOM, 2017, p.3).[1]

To strengthen sustainable reintegration of return migrants, IOM Afghanistan, under the EU-funded Stabilisation, Reintegration and Resilience (SRR) programme, began providing immediate assistance upon arrival to Afghanistan as well as sustainable and comprehensive reintegration support to returning migrants mainly from Europe. Since its launch in 2017, the project has assisted returnees and their communities with interventions supporting sustainable reintegration and capacity strengthening for government counterparts.

An increasing number of migrants return to their home countries under Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration (AVRR)[2] programmes (IOM, 2016). However, there is little evidence on how migrants who take part in these programmes reintegrate into society, especially in regard to factors that influence sustainable reintegration (IOM, 2020). Even less research examines reintegration outcomes from a longitudinal perspective. Therefore, it is important to improve understanding of the reintegration process and the factors that influence reintegration outcomes both in the short and long term. This could feed into the design of policies and government programmes that address the immediate needs and challenges of returning migrants, as well as improve reintegration outcomes and eventually increase the positive effects return migrants can have on society.

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 is the result of the first round of data collection that took place from May to August 2021 with Afghan migrants who returned from Turkey and the EU in 2018, 2019, 2020 and 2021 through IOM's

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[1] For more information, see IOM's paper "Towards an Integrated Approach to Reintegration in the Context of Return" (IOM, 2017)"
[2] For more information on AVRR, see: https://www.iom.int/assisted-voluntary-return-and-reintegration

Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration (AVRR) and Stabilisation, Reintegration and Resilience (SRR) programmes. During the data collection period, 998 respondents were interviewed in person or over the phone across 102 districts in 17 provinces. The beginning of the data collection exercise consisted of in-person interviews. Starting in July 2021 and for the remainder of the round, interviews were conducted over the phone due to deteriorating security conditions.

This report is divided into three main sections. The first section summarises the key findings in this report. The second section starts with a description of the methodology and includes the research method, sampling information and limitations. The third section presents the analysis of the data that was collected between May and August 2021. The analysis chapter is further subdivided into eight thematic sections.

The first subsection covers the demographics and socio-economic profiles of the return migrants. This is followed by a subsection on the employment situation, occupational sector and income and debt status of the returnees (prior to migration; in Turkey or the EU and in Round 1, which took place from May to August 2021). The third subsection explores the reasons for migration. The fourth subsection examines the migration journey, including the reasons for migrating to Turkey or the EU. The following subsection dives deeper into the reasons for return and then an additional subsection goes into the challenges that returnees experience after returning to Afghanistan. Finally, the last two subsections examine prior migration experiences and re-migration intentions.

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KEY FINDINGS

1. Rates of employment are much lower after respondents returned to Afghanistan compared to before migration. Four out of five respondents (80%) indicated they were employed prior to migration compared to only half (49%) reporting they are employed after returning from Turkey or the EU.

2. The average income while abroad increased by 60 per cent compared to the income earned by respondents prior to migration. Incomes post-return in Afghanistan decreased by 51 per cent compared to their income level pre-migration.

3. Eighty-five per cent of respondents borrowed money to cover monthly expenses. However, a larger share of respondents who returned from Turkey reported to have borrowed money (88%) compared to the share among those who returned from the EU (66%).

4. Respondents reported high levels of debt at the time of the interview (Round 1, May to August 2021). Debt levels are significantly different between the countries where migrants have returned from, with debt levels being 44 per cent higher for those returning from the EU (USD 1,650) compared to those returning from Turkey (USD 1,146).

5. Livelihood opportunities and insecurity were reported as the most important reasons for respondents to migrate to Turkey or the EU and remain significant challenges experienced upon return after migration.

6. Many respondents (56%) reported having lived in other countries before migrating to Turkey or the EU. The most common countries respondents lived in before arriving in Turkey or the EU were the Islamic Republic of Iran (43%) and Turkey (23%).

7. Twenty-two per cent of respondents reported they had prior migration experience. Of those who had migrated before, the largest share came from Faryab province (22%), which is in line with results from IOM's Baseline Mobility Assessment (BMA) Round 13 (IOM, 2021d).

8. Nearly a quarter of respondents (22%) indicated they intend to re-migrate abroad during the next six months. Those returning from the EU were twice as likely to show interest in re-migration (38%) than those returning from Turkey (19%).

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METHODOLOGY

Based on IOM's DTM REMAP methodology and the Reintegration Sustainability Survey (RSS)[3] developed by IOM in 2017, the Returnee Longitudinal Survey (RLS) aims to better understand return migrants' profiles, the living conditions of returnees and their reintegration process over a period of time.

The RLS focuses on returnees who returned to Afghanistan through IOM's AVRR and SRR programmes. The sample was constructed based on five criteria:

1. Country of return: Turkey and the EU, specifically, Austria, Belgium, Germany, and Greece.[4]
2. Time of return: between January 2018 and July 2021.
3. Province of return: 17 out of 34 provinces of return were targeted (outlined on page 5).
4. Reintegration assistance: respondents received either in-kind or cash support from IOM.
5. Migration intentions: the RLS focuses on returnees who intend to stay in Afghanistan instead of re-migrating, as per the nature of a longitudinal returnee survey.

Between May and August 2021, the DTM team in Afghanistan interviewed 998 returnees, located in 17 provinces (see page 5) for the first round of RLS. The vast majority of respondents (879) returned from Turkey and 119 respondents returned from countries in the EU (63 from Germany, 40 from Austria, 14 from Greece and 2 from Belgium).

The first round of RLS aims to provide a baseline for future rounds of data collection and includes questions on the following thematic areas:

- Socio-demographic situation,
- Employment and income/debt,
- Reasons for migration,
- Migration to Turkey and the EU,
- Reasons for returning to Afghanistan,
- Challenges at the time of the interview,
- Prior migration experience,
- Economic sustainability,
- Social sustainability,
- Psychological sustainability, and
- Re-migration intentions.

This report provides insights into various sections of the RLS survey. Sections on the sustainability of reintegration (economic, social and psychosocial) are not presented in this report.

ROUND 1 BREAKDOWN

Total respondents	Respondents who returned from Turkey	Respondents who returned from the EU
998	**879**	**119**

To ensure data quality, the research team regularly monitored data collection for indications of error. Additionally, there were quality control officers who randomly and regularly checked the data for accuracy. Both of these approaches limited possible errors in the original data and subsequent data analysis.

The results of this study should be interpreted carefully, as generalization of results and inferences are constrained by the design of this study. First, it should be noted that this study has a small sample size, which means that the sample is not necessarily representative of the survey's target group. Second, data collection only took place in a limited number of provinces. Therefore, the sample does not necessarily reflect the real situation of returnees in the country. Third, because the survey only focuses on returnees from Turkey and specific countries in the EU, results cannot be generalized to returnees from other countries[5]. Moreover, as respondents only returned through IOM's AVRR and SRR programmes, results are not necessarily representative for returnees that returned through other programmes or without reintegration assistance. Additionally, because only five females were surveyed, the report does not necessarily represent the needs and vulnerabilities of female returnees. Finally, the COVID-19 pandemic and the deteriorating security conditions in Afghanistan posed additional challenges to the data collection. Despite these limitations, the findings of this study can provide useful insights regarding reintegration outcomes, programmes and policies.

LEGEND

1. An asterisk (*) throughout the report signifies when a statistic is based off a sample size less than 10.
2. When the label "top 3, 4, 5 or 6 answers" appears above a graph it means that only the three, four, five or six most common responses are represented in the graph. For this reason, totals may not add up to 100 per cent.

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[3] See IOM- Migration Policy Practice special issue on Return and Reintegration, "Measuring sustainable reintegration" N. Nozarian and N. Majidi – Page 30.
[4] The countries of return were selected based on the numbers of migrants that returned to Afghanistan through IOM's operational support programmes.
[5] Due to the differing sample sizes in Turkey and the EU, any comparisons between Turkey and the EU should be interpreted carefully.

Number of respondents per province

◼ (light)	0-25
◼	26-50
◼	51-75
◼	76-100
◼ (dark)	101-300
◼ (gray)	Not assessed (17 provinces)
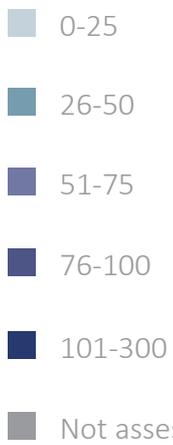
Target provinces

1. Faryab	7. Baghlan	13. Kapisa
2. Jawzjan	8. Takhar	14. Pansjher
3. Sar-e Pul	9. Badakhshan	15. Laghman
4. Balkh	10. Wardak	16. Nangarhar
5. Samangan	11. Parwan	17. Kunar
6. Kunduz	12. Kabul	

Disclaimer: The boundaries and names shown and the designations used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the United Nations.

ANALYSIS

SOCIO-DEMOGRAPHICS

42%
Respondents who are married

34%
Respondents who have children

10
Average Household size[6]

<1
Average number of household members living abroad

72%
Respondents with formal education

The sample population was almost entirely male (993 of 998 respondents). The most common age group among respondents was 18 through 24 (60%), and 30 per cent were between the age of 25 and 34. Almost half of respondents (48%) were single and 42 per cent were married. Over one-third (34%) of respondents had children. Most respondents with children reported having their children with them in their current location (96%). The average household size was 10 members, and households had on average less than one household member living abroad.
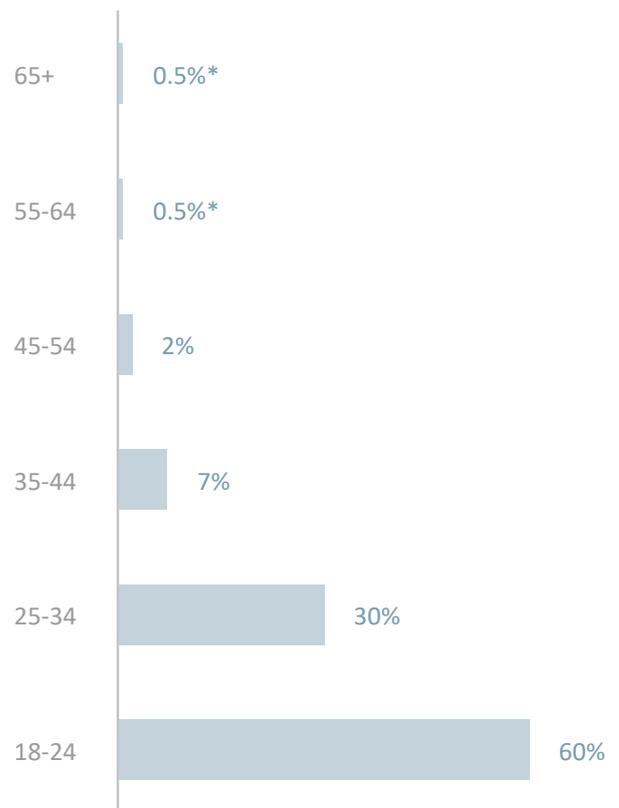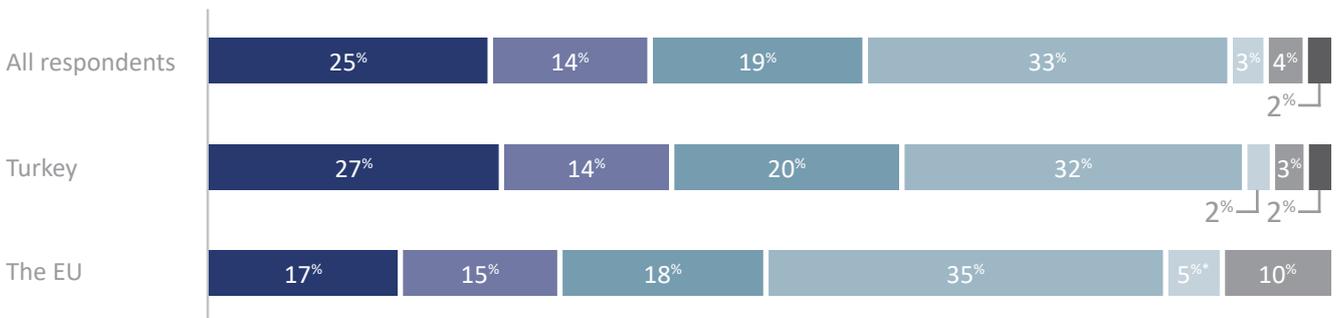
Seventy-two per cent of respondents had completed some level of formal education. This is only four percentage points higher than in the Survey on Drivers of Migration (SDM), in which 68 per cent of out-migrant respondents had some form of formal education (IOM, 2019a). In the RLS survey, respondents returning from the EU were 12 per cent more likely to have some form of education compared to those returning from Turkey. Among respondents who had completed some level of education, however, there was little variation between returnees from Turkey and the EU. Among those who did not have an education, 97 per cent were unable to read and write.

AGE DISTRIBUTION

Age	%
65+	0.5%*
55-64	0.5%*
45-54	2%
35-44	7%
25-34	30%
18-24	60%

EDUCATIONAL LEVEL

	No education	Primary education	Secondary education	High school	Diploma	Higher education	Other
All respondents	25%	14%	19%	33%	3%	4%	2%
Turkey	27%	14%	20%	32%	2%	3%	2%
The EU	17%	15%	18%	35%	5%*	10%	

Legend:
- ■ No education
- ■ Primary education
- ■ Secondary education
- ■ High school
- ■ Diploma
- ■ Higher education (bachelor's and master's)
- ■ Other[7]

[6] Average household size includes people who share the same meal and roof on a daily basis.
[7] Other selections include religious education, I do not want to answer and I do not know.

EMPLOYMENT AND INCOME OF RETURNEES

Most Afghans are employed before starting their journey westward, as this portion of the population is able to afford irregular migration onwards through the Islamic Republic of Iran to Turkey and the EU. These findings are consistent with other assessments conducted by IOM DTM on irregular out-migration from Afghanistan. Prior to migration, 80 per cent of respondents were employed (mostly self-employed, earning daily wages or working in the private or public sector or working as an employed student).

Respondents provided other insights into their employment situations before, during and after migration. Most respondents were employed in the agricultural sector (33%), basic industrial sector (vocational) (11%), social sector (11%) or in construction (10%).

Employment status before migration and during migration differed; the percentage of respondents who were unemployed and looking for a job increased from 7 per cent prior to migration to 22 per cent in Turkey and 26 per cent in the EU. Moreover, an additional 22 per cent of respondents who returned from Turkey indicated they were unemployed because of detention in Turkey. Respondents who had returned from Turkey

were also more likely to have been employed as daily workers (25%) than those in the EU (10%).

Prior to migration, a large proportion of respondents indicated being employed (80%). At the time of the interview (after returning from migration) 49 per cent of respondents reported that they were employed. The number of self-employed respondents decreased significantly between pre-migration and at the time of interview (from 24% to 13%). The majority of returnees indicated not having an additional source of income (87%). Eighty-seven per cent said they were looking for a new job or a different job. Finally, 60 per cent stated they were not satisfied with their current economic conditions.

Both prior to migration and at the time of the interview, the most common occupational sector among respondents was agriculture, prior to migration (33%) and at the time of the interview (34%). However, due to the deteriorating economic condition, more respondents (13%) indicated taking any type of work that was offered to them at the time of the interview, compared to prior to migration (9%).

EMPLOYMENT SITUATION

Prior to migration

| 10% | 40% | 24% | 18% | 7% | 1% |

In the last country of employment - Turkey

| 13% | 25% | 6% | 22% | 22% | 6% | 5% | 1%* |

In the last country of employment - the EU

| 25% | 10% | 3%* | 16% | 26% | 2%* | 13% | 5% |
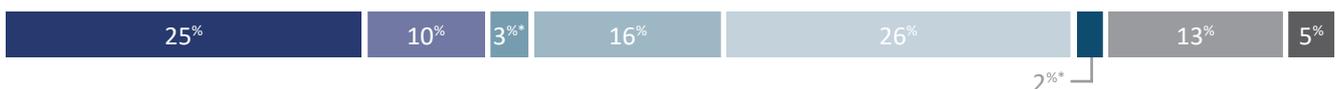
Round 1 (May to August 2021)

| 3% | 33% | 13% | 47% | 1%* | 2%* | 1%* |
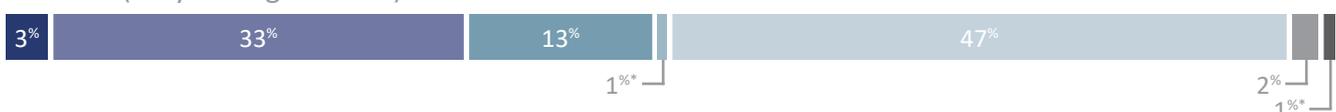
Legend: ■ Employed ■ Daily wages ■ Self-Employed/business ■ Student (and working)

■ Unemployed, looking for work ■ Unemployed, in detention centre ■ Unemployed, not looking for work ■ Other[8]

[8] Other selections include those who are employed as contractors, housewives, those who are retired, and those who did not want to answer.

OCCUPATIONAL SECTOR (top 6 answers)

	Agriculture	Vocational	Community/social and personal services	Construction	Any type of work offered to me	Wholesale and retail trade
Prior to migration	33%	11%	11%	10%	9%	6%

	Agriculture	Any type of work offered to me	Community/social and personal services	Construction	Wholesale and retail trade	Vocational
Round 1 (May to August 2021)	34%	13%	13%	13%	7%	7%

The average income prior to migration among respondents who migrated to the EU is significantly higher than those who migrated to Turkey. Those who migrated to the EU earned almost three times more than respondents who migrated to Turkey.

Respondent incomes increased notably upon migrating to Turkey and the EU. The average income while in the EU increased by 114 per cent and in Turkey by 39 per cent compared to the income earned by respondents prior to migration. However, incomes levels after returning to Afghanistan decreased compared to those before migration, indicating a significant worsening of respondents' financial situation post-return compared to pre-migration and whilst abroad. This situation is exacerbated by the high levels of debt migrants accumulate, as families often go into considerable debt to finance the original journey, selling income-generating assets such as land or housing. Domestic incomes are likely to continue to be reduced due to the rapid political change in the country, worsening exchange rates and economic contraction.

This significant worsening of respondents' income-generating potential once returned to Afghanistan partially explains their propensity to re-migrate.
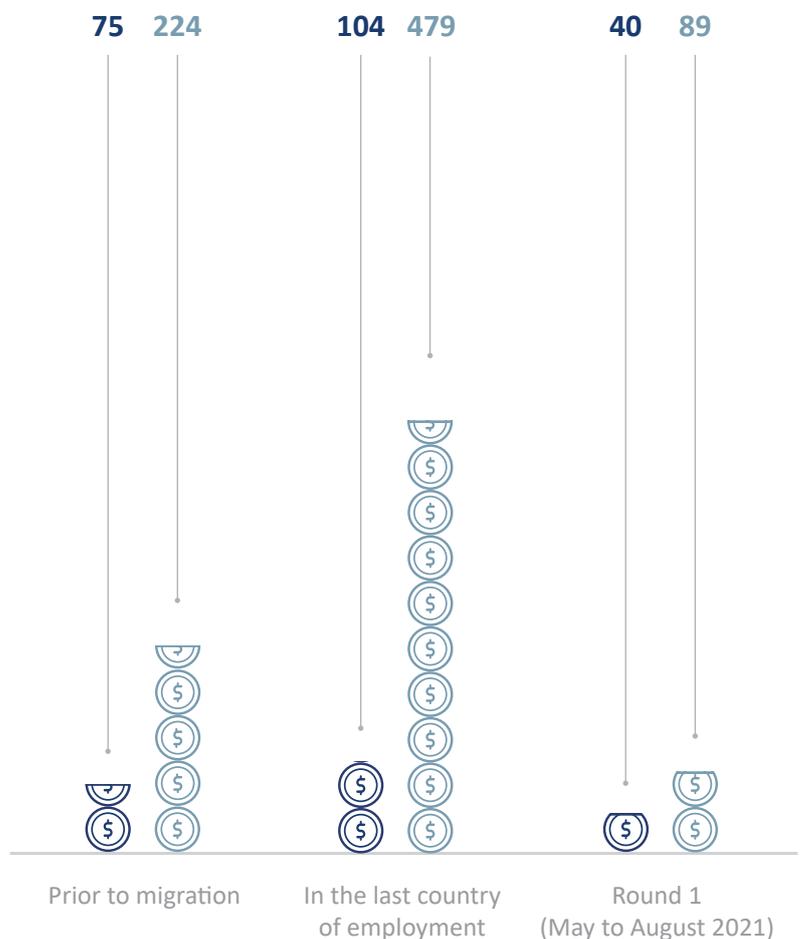
AVERAGE PERSONAL MONTHLY INCOME (USD)[9]

Ⓢ = Turkey   Ⓢ = the EU

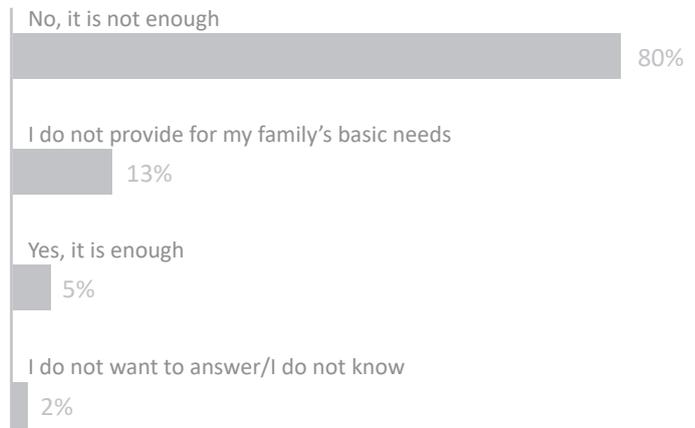| Prior to migration		In the last country of employment		Round 1 (May to August 2021)	
75	224	104	479	40	89

Ⓢ = 50 USD

[9] Data was originally collected in Afghani. Exchange rates were 1 AFN to 0.01276 USD on 8 June 2021.
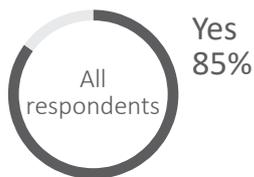
Eighty per cent of respondents indicated that the household's monthly income was not enough to meet the family's basic needs. Only five per cent of respondents reported that the household's income was sufficient. Thirteen per cent did not contribute to their family's basic needs and could therefore not provide information on the household's income situation.

In addition, respondents provided insights into their personal debt situation. Eighty-five per cent of respondents borrowed money to cover monthly expenses in the six months prior to Round 1. However, a larger share of respondents who returned from Turkey reported to have borrowed money in the six months before the interview (88%) compared to the share among those who returned from the EU (66%).

IS THE HOUSEHOLD'S MONTHLY INCOME ENOUGH TO MEET THE FAMILY'S BASIC NEEDS?

No, it is not enough
80%

I do not provide for my family's basic needs
13%

Yes, it is enough
5%

I do not want to answer/I do not know
2%

HAVE YOU BORROWED MONEY TO COVER PERSONAL MONTHLY EXPENSES IN THE PAST SIX MONTHS?

All respondents — Yes 85%

Turkey — Yes 88%

The EU — Yes 66%

AVERAGE DEBT AND INCOME BY COUNTRY OF RETURN IN ROUND 1 (MAY TO AUGUST 2021) (USD)[10]

All respondents: Income 46, Debt 1,191

Turkey: Income 40, Debt 1,146

The EU: Income 89, Debt 1,650
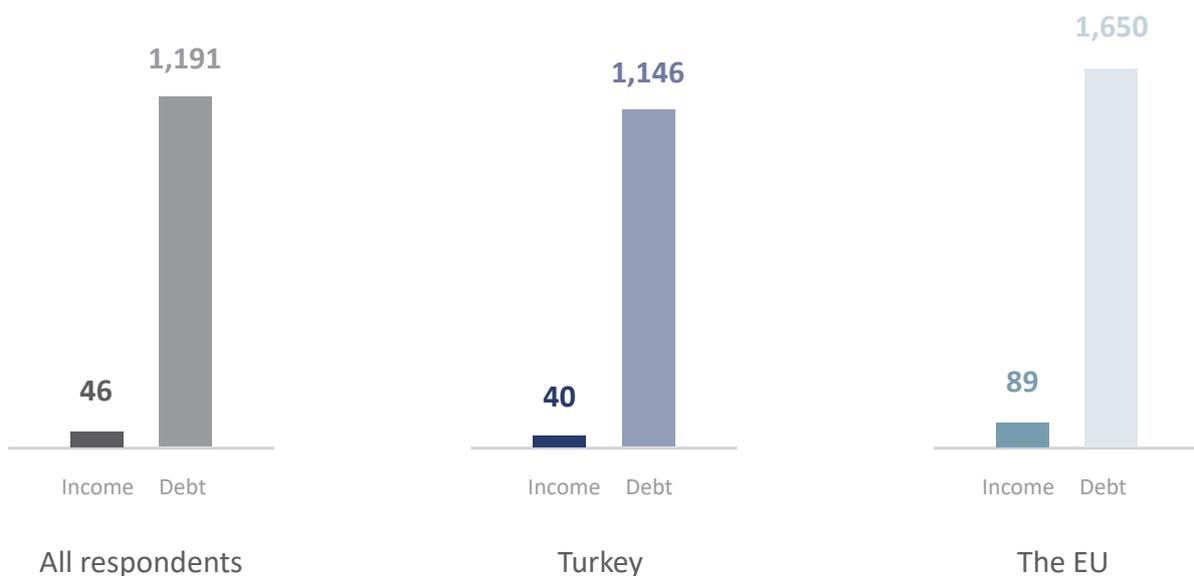
On average, the total accumulated debt of respondents is USD 1,191. Debt levels are significantly different between those who went to and returned from Turkey compared to the EU, with debt levels being 44 per cent higher for those returning from the EU.

When comparing the average monthly income of respondents with the average total accumulated debt in Round 1 (May to August 2021), debt is more than 25 times higher than monthly income, which is on average USD 46.

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[10] Data was originally collected in Afghani. Exchange rates were 1 AFN to 0.01276 USD on 8 June 2021.

REASONS FOR MIGRATION

Lack of jobs and livelihood opportunities (69% of respondents), the security situation (20%) and financial problems or debt (10%) were the main motivations among respondents who migrated to Turkey and the EU. Lack of jobs and livelihood opportunities was much more important for those who migrated to Turkey (74%) compared to those who migrated to the EU (30%). Security was more important for those who migrated to the EU (62%) compared to Turkey (14%).

Financial and security reasons for migration are intertwined, mutually reinforcing one another. Years of prolonged conflict have led to a lack of overall economic development, perpetuating further conflict. As such, an approach that looks at longer-term support for Afghanistan, focusing on the root causes of Afghan migration, is recommended.

WHY DID YOU LEAVE AFGHANISTAN? (top 4 answers)

TURKEY

PRIMARY REASONS

- 74% Lack of jobs/livelihood
- 14% Security situation
- 11% Financial problems/debt
- 1% Other

SECONDARY REASONS

- 39% Security situation
- 28% Financial problems/debt
- 14% Lack of jobs/livelihood
- 14% I only have one reason

The EU

PRIMARY REASONS

- 62% Security situation
- 30% Lack of jobs/livelihood
- 3%* Financial problems/debt
- 5%* Other

SECONDARY REASONS

- 37% I only have one reason
- 26% Security situation
- 16% Lack of jobs/livelihood
- 8%* Financial problems/debt

MIGRATION TO TURKEY AND EUROPE

WHEN DID YOU LEAVE AFGHANISTAN?

○— Number of respondents who left
Afghanistan per year[11]

292
271
119
77
42
53
74
0 3 0 1 0 1 0 0 0 0 3 3 4 8 27
2000 2001 2002 2003 2004 2005 2006 2007 2008 2009 2010 2011 2012 2013 2014 2015 2016 2017 2018 2019 2020 2021
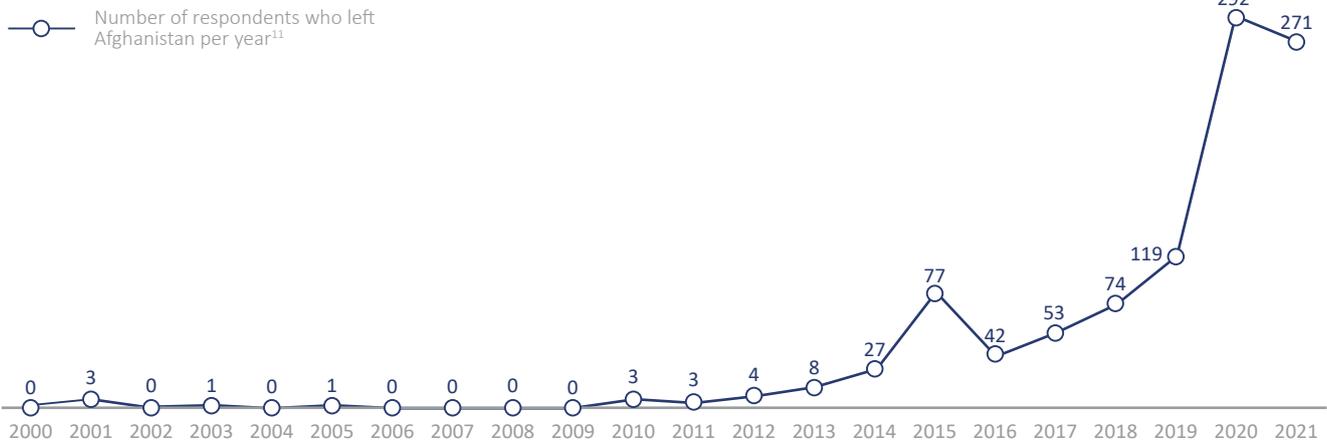
Among respondents, migration from Afghanistan rose steadily from 2013 until 2015. Outward migration slightly decreased between 2015 and 2016, after which there was a sharp rise in 2019, during which 12 per cent of respondents left Afghanistan. In contrast to other countries in the region where the RLS is being conducted, the RLS in Afghanistan did not register a drop in outflows following the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 and 2021.

The vast majority of respondents (879) returned from Turkey, while 63 returned from Germany, 40 from Austria, 14 from Greece, and 2 from Belgium. The duration of stay after returning to Afghanistan varied. Respondents who returned from Austria and Germany on average reported the longest durations of stay compared to those who returned from Greece, Belgium, and Turkey.

Many respondents indicated having lived in other countries en route to Turkey or the EU.[12] These countries included the Islamic Republic of Iran (43%) and Turkey (23%) most predominantly. Slightly less than half of respondents (44%) indicated migrating directly to Turkey or the EU without stopping in other countries on their journey.

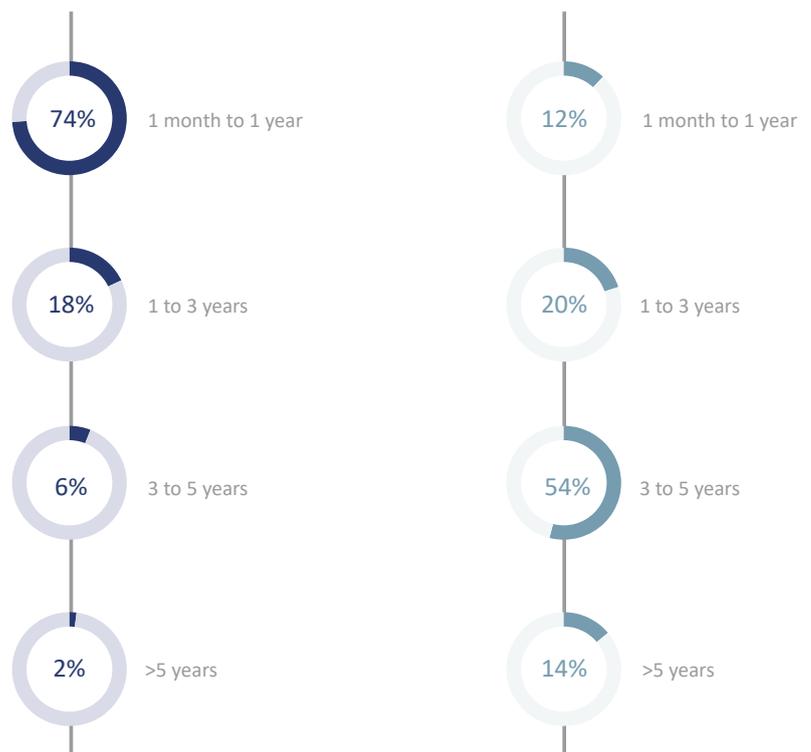## COUNTRY OF RETURN

879
Returned from
Turkey

119
Returned from
the EU

Disclaimer: The boundaries and names shown and the designations used on these maps do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the United Nations. Maps are not to scale.

How long were you staying there?

Turkey	EU
74% 1 month to 1 year	12% 1 month to 1 year
18% 1 to 3 years	20% 1 to 3 years
6% 3 to 5 years	54% 3 to 5 years
2% >5 years	14% >5 years

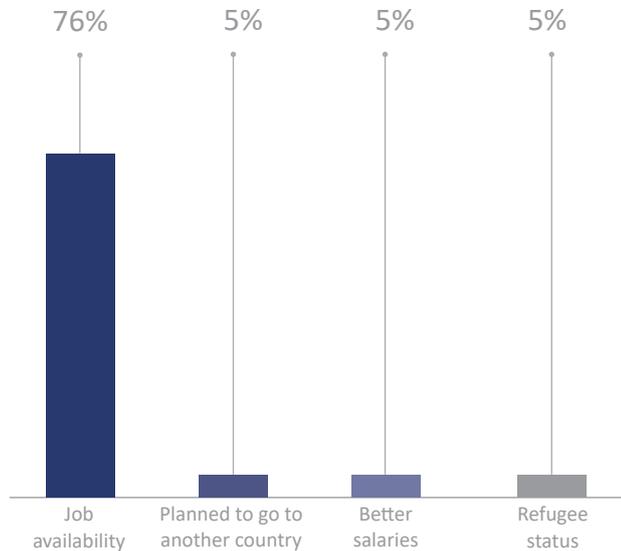[11] Three respondents left Afghanistan before 2000. 17 respondents did not know when they left Afghanistan.
[12] This question includes multiple answers. This means a respondent was allowed to provide more than one answer. For this reason, totals do not add up to 100 per cent.
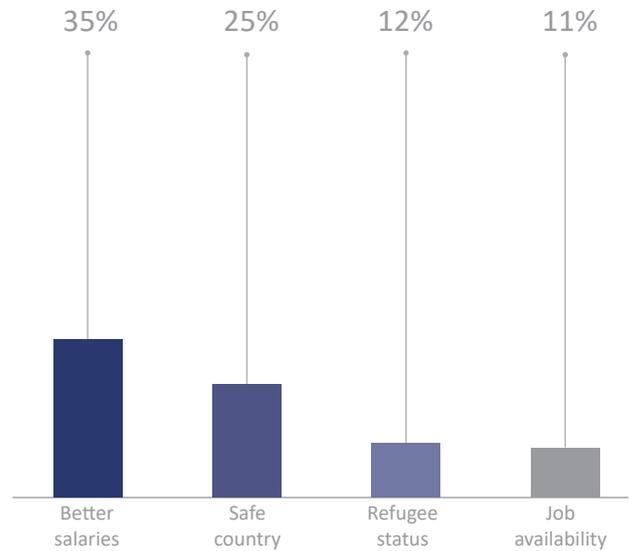
WHY DID YOU MIGRATE TO TURKEY/THE EU (top 4 answers)?

TURKEY

PRIMARY REASONS

76%	5%	5%	5%
Job availability	Planned to go to another country	Better salaries	Refugee status

SECONDARY REASONS

35%	25%	12%	11%
Better salaries	Safe country	Refugee status	Job availability

Respondents who migrated to Turkey were focused on job availability (76% of respondents) while those who went to the EU were focused on obtaining refugee status (41%) followed by job availability (28%).

Among the secondary reasons for migrating to each destination, those who went to Turkey cited they believed the country had better salaries (35%) and was safe (25%). Those who went to the EU cited safety (37%) and obtaining refugee status (23%) as the top secondary reasons for migration.

These reasons largely correspond to the findings of IOM's Survey on Drivers of Migration (SDM), which was conducted in 2019 (Round 1) and between November 2020 and March 2021 (Round 2) among potential migrants in Afghanistan. The SDM Round 1 reported that job availability was an important factor in explaining migrants' decision making (IOM, 2019a), while respondents to SDM Round 2 cited the search for work/better livelihood opportunities as important factors to choose to go to their intended destination (IOM, 2022).

The EU

PRIMARY REASONS

41%	28%	10%	8%*
Refugee status	Job Availability	Safe country	Planned to go to another country

SECONDARY REASONS

37%	23%	13%	6%*
Safe country	Refugee status	Job availability	Better education (children)
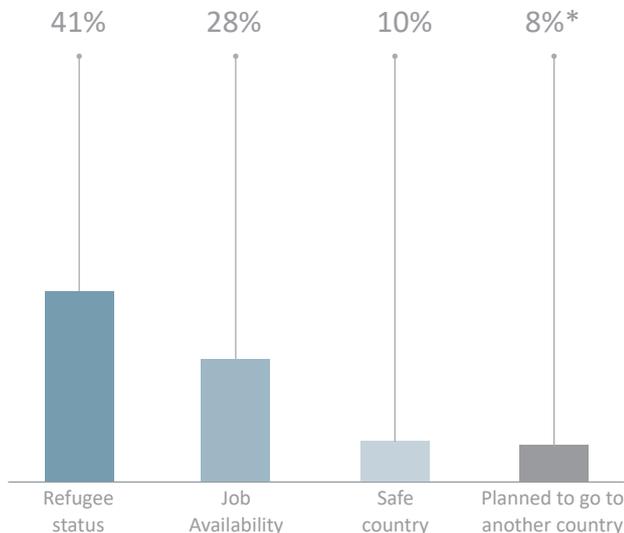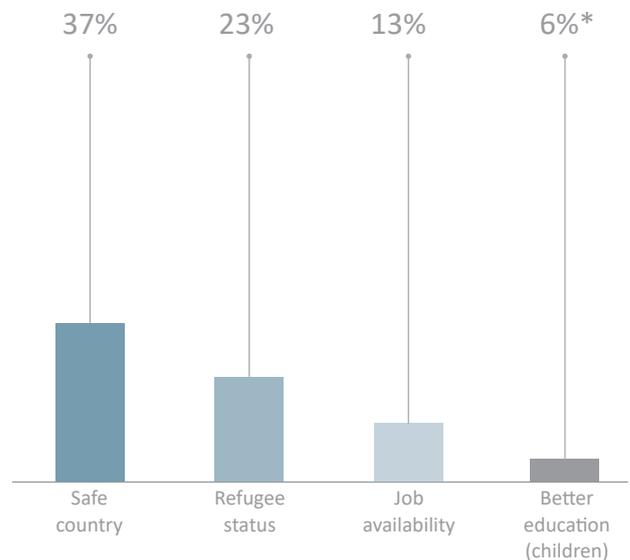
RETURN

The most common periods during which respondents returned to Afghanistan were the first and second quarter of 2021 (66%) and the last quarter of 2020 (9%). Reasons for return differed between those returning from Turkey and those returning from countries in the EU. Over three quarters (78%) of respondents returning from Turkey reported forced return as the primary reason, while the most common reason reported by those returning from the EU was their asylum claim being rejected (45%). Reasons related to family issues were also cited by over one-third of respondents (36%) who returned from the EU. Not finding a job, missing cultural customs in Afghanistan, and socio-economic and other cultural considerations did not prominently feature as reasons for return both among those returning from Turkey and from the EU.

Upon return, most respondents returned to the same province and district where they lived before migration (91%). Of respondents who did not return to the same province, many returned to Kabul (33%) or Balkh (20%).

WHY DID YOU RETURN TO AFGHANISTAN? (top 3 answers)

TURKEY

PRIMARY REASONS

Forced return	Detention centre	Claim rejected
78%	13%	6%

SECONDARY REASONS

Detention centre	Forced return	Only one reason
60%	19%	11%

The EU

PRIMARY REASONS

Claim rejected	Family reasons	Tired of waiting
45%	36%	8%

SECONDARY REASONS

Family reasons	Tired of waiting	Claim rejected
24%	21%	17%

WHEN DID YOU RETURN TO AFGHANISTAN?

Period	%
3rd quarter of 2021 (Jul-Sep)	1%*
2nd quarter of 2021 (Apr-Jun)	38%
1st quarter of 2021 (Jan-Mar)	27%
4th quarter of 2020 (Oct-Dec)	9%
3rd quarter of 2020 (Jul-Sep)	6%
2nd quarter of 2020 (Apr-Jun)	2%
1st quarter of 2020 (Jan-Mar)	4%
Before 2020	11%
DK/DWA	2%

CHALLENGES

The vast majority of respondents reported facing either personal, household, or community challenges in the six months before Round 1 (May to August 2021). These results will help form a common understanding of the challenges related to return and reintegration after migration.

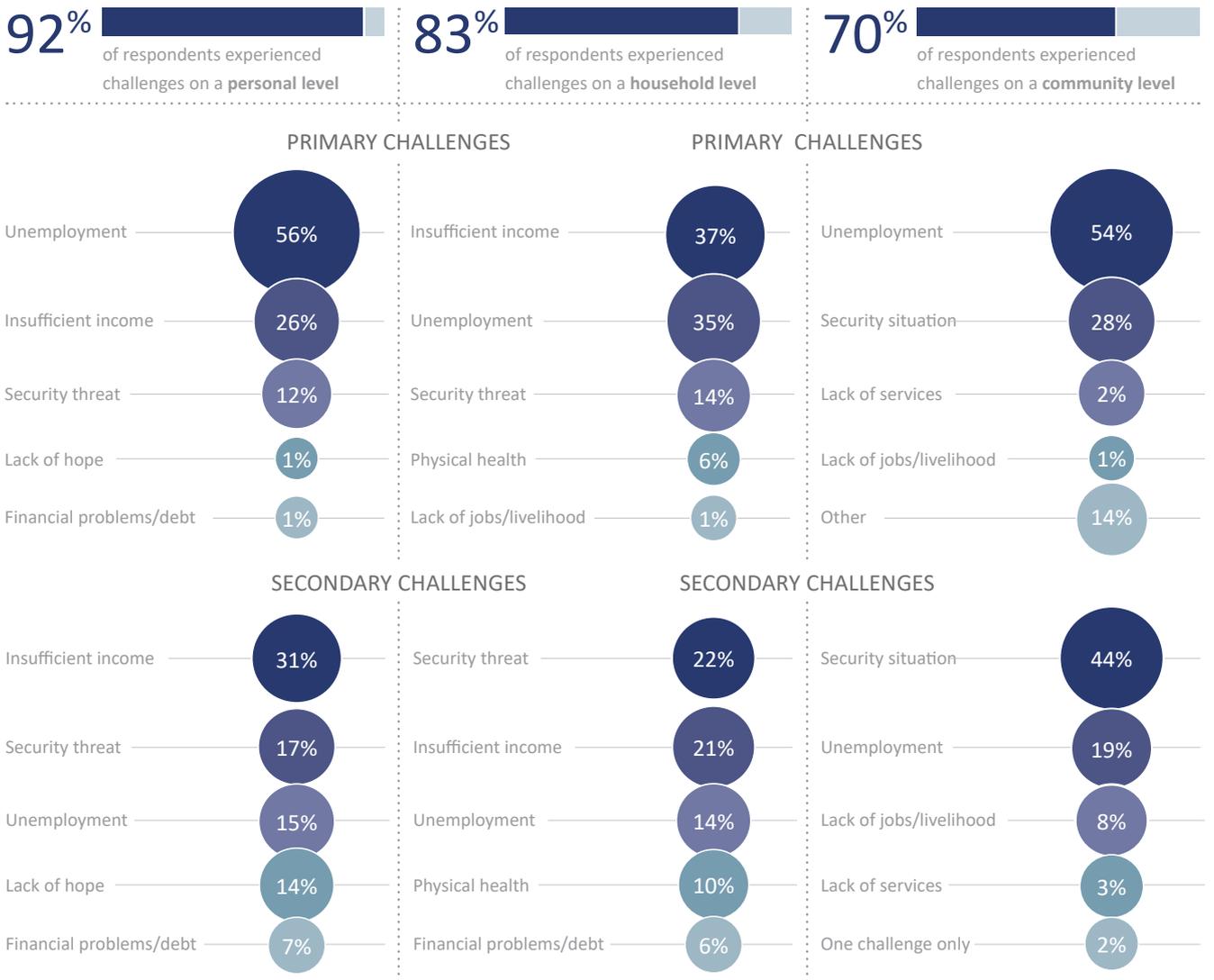Ninety-two per cent of respondents reported facing personal challenges during the six months prior to interviewing. Unemployment was the most commonly reported primary personal challenge (56%) and insufficient income was the most commonly reported secondary personal challenge (31%).

At the household level, 83 per cent of respondents reported facing challenges. Insufficient income was respondents' primary concern (37%) on the household level, followed by unemployment (35%). Security threats was the most cited secondary household challenge (22%).

Personal- and household-level challenges were present among the respondents at higher rates compared to community-level challenges. However, community-level challenges were still reported at the relatively high rate of 70 per cent of respondents. The most common community challenge among respondents was unemployment (54%). Similar to personal- and household- level challenges, respondents frequently listed the security situation (44%) as a significant secondary community challenge. COVID-19-related challenges were not frequently mentioned as challenges at any level.

The high frequency of challenges reported at individual, household, and community levels showcase the complex nature of returning from migration and that sustainable return is dependent on more than the returning individual. In line with their reasons for leaving Afghanistan, respondents underlined both economic and security-related challenges faced at individual, household, and community levels.

EXPERIENCED CHALLENGES (top 5 answers)

92% of respondents experienced challenges on a **personal level**

83% of respondents experienced challenges on a **household level**

70% of respondents experienced challenges on a **community level**

PRIMARY CHALLENGES

Personal		Household		Community	
Unemployment	56%	Insufficient income	37%	Unemployment	54%
Insufficient income	26%	Unemployment	35%	Security situation	28%
Security threat	12%	Security threat	14%	Lack of services	2%
Lack of hope	1%	Physical health	6%	Lack of jobs/livelihood	1%
Financial problems/debt	1%	Lack of jobs/livelihood	1%	Other	14%

SECONDARY CHALLENGES

Personal		Household		Community	
Insufficient income	31%	Security threat	22%	Security situation	44%
Security threat	17%	Insufficient income	21%	Unemployment	19%
Unemployment	15%	Unemployment	14%	Lack of jobs/livelihood	8%
Lack of hope	14%	Physical health	10%	Lack of services	3%
Financial problems/debt	7%	Financial problems/debt	6%	One challenge only	2%

PRIOR MIGRATION EXPERIENCE

Twenty-two per cent of respondents reported that 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 more common among respondents who had returned from the EU (27%). Twenty-one per cent of those who returned from Turkey had prior migration experience. The highest share of respondents with prior migration experience are between 18 and 24 years of age (50%). This was followed by respondents between 25 and 34 (39%) and 35 and 44 (8%). Respondents of 45 years old and above represented the smallest share (3%*). Forty-five per cent of those with prior migration experience had a secondary school or high school certificate, 15 per cent had a primary education certificate, while 30 per cent had no education.

Of those with prior migration experience, 25 per cent wanted to re-migrate in the next six months. This is higher than the overall share of respondents who want to re-migrate (22%).

HAVE YOU MIGRATED INTERNATIONALLY BEFORE?[13]

22%
of respondents had prior migration experience

BREAKDOWN BY COUNTRY OF RETURN

Turkey	The EU
21%	27%

Twenty-two per cent of those who had migrated abroad prior to their most recent migration were from the province of Faryab, 15 per cent came from Balkh and another 15 per cent from Takhar. This is in line with results from the BMA Round 13 (IOM, 2021b), where Faryab had the most recorded Afghans who moved or fled abroad.

Of those with prior migration experience...

50 per cent were aged between 18 and 24

30 per cent had no education

25 per cent wanted to re-migrate in the next six months

22 per cent came from Faryab province

[13] Only if the respondent crossed an international border and stayed outside Afghanistan for at least 6 months. This does not include the respondents' most recent migration experience to the country where they returned from.
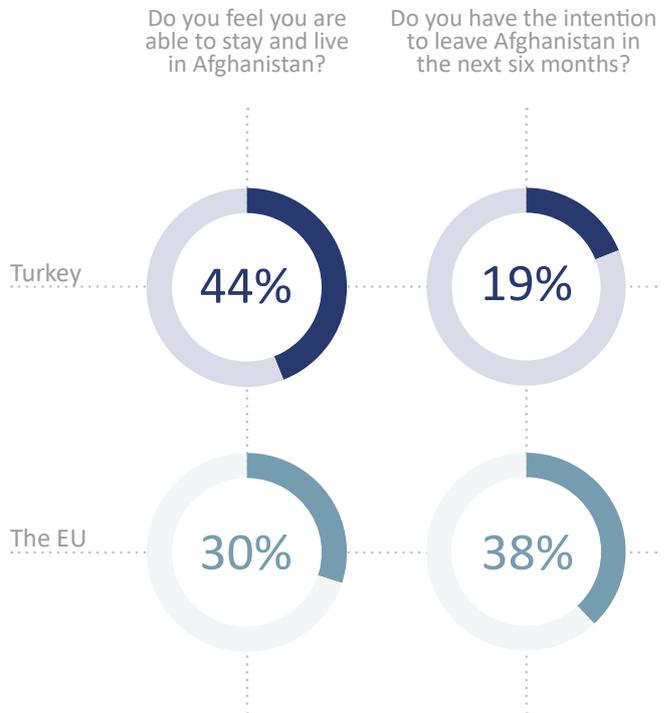
RE-MIGRATION

Less than half of respondents answered affirmatively when asked whether they felt they were able to stay and live in Afghanistan (44% for those who returned from Turkey and 30% for those who returned from the EU). When asked if they intended to leave Afghanistan during the next six months, 22 per cent of respondents indicated they would like to do so (19% for those coming from Turkey, and 38% for those coming from the EU). It should be noted that, due the longitudinal nature of this survey, the RLS specifically focused on returnees who intended to stay in Afghanistan. Therefore, the results cited may be an underestimation of the actual re-migration intentions as respondents who intended to re-migrate were excluded from the survey.
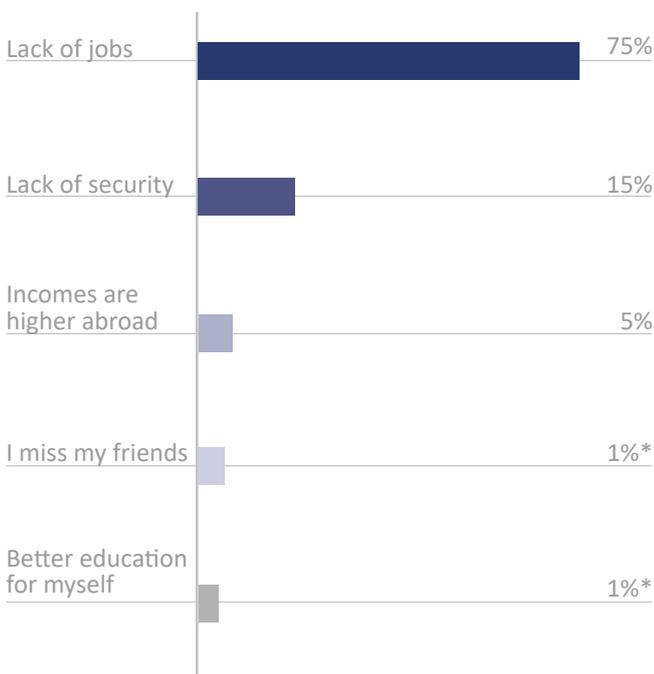
Three fourths of respondents who intend to re-migrate during the next six months state lack of jobs in Afghanistan as the main reason. Fifteen per cent cited the lack of security in Afghanistan and five per cent stated higher incomes abroad as their motivations to re-migrate. The international troop withdrawal featured as a reason for only 1%* of respondents.
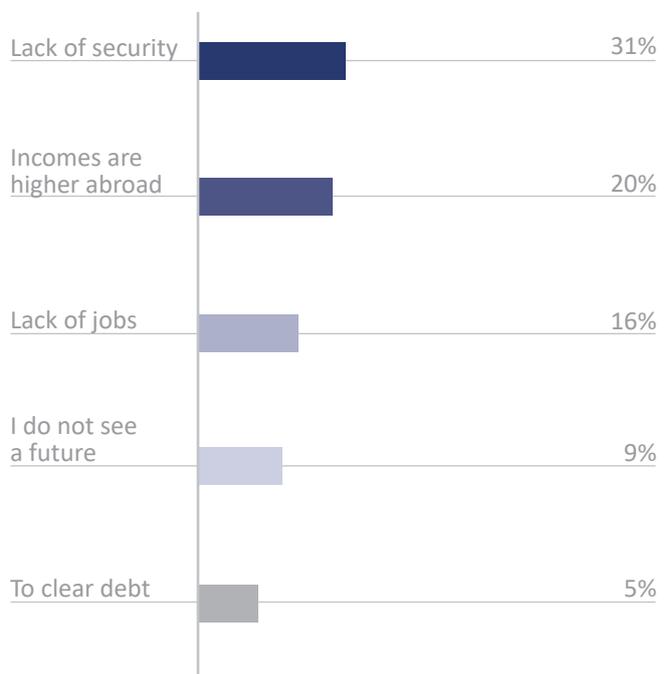
RE-MIGRATION INTENTIONS

Do you feel you are able to stay and live in Afghanistan?

Do you have the intention to leave Afghanistan in the next six months?

Turkey
44%
19%

The EU
30%
38%

WHY DO YOU WANT TO RE-MIGRATE? (top 5 reasons)

PRIMARY REASONS

Reason	%
Lack of jobs	75%
Lack of security	15%
Incomes are higher abroad	5%
I miss my friends	1%*
Better education for myself	1%*

SECONDARY REASONS

Reason	%
Lack of security	31%
Incomes are higher abroad	20%
Lack of jobs	16%
I do not see a future	9%
To clear debt	5%

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