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BARRIERS TO EDUCATION FOR AFGHAN WOMEN: A STUDY OF MIGRATION, REPATRIATION, AND FUTURE CHALLENGES

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ABSTRACT

Forced Migration has created numerous social, economic, healths, educational and legal challenges for Afghan women. However, the situation in Afghanistan following the Taliban takeover remains unfavorable for their return and a quality life¹. This study investigates the impact of migration on educational status of Afghan women residing in three Camps in Charsadda' Utmanzai, Hajjizai, and Munda. Using a mix method research design, incorporating Focus Group Discussions (FGDs), and semi-structured interviews the study explores how migration has affected Afghan women's access to education. The findings reveal that Afghan girls living in these camps are less motivated to pursue education due to their parents' poor economic conditions, and the lack of nearby schools. As a result, uneducated parents are inclined to favor early marriages and confine their daughters to domestic roles. This raises a critical question: what will be the future of Afghan women's education after their repatriation and reintegration into Afghanistan.

Keywords: Barriers, Education, Afghan Women, Migration, Repatriation

Introduction

Keeping in mind the repatriation and reintegration of Afghan, we evaluated the social, economic, and educational status of Afghan

¹ Personal Interview with Malik Hameed Ul Rehman at Uthmanzai Camp, Charsadda, December 2024.

women and children in Charsadda through FGDs and semi-structured interviews to assess their coping mechanism in the event of their return to Afghanistan. This study aims to provide a comprehensive analysis of the educational experiences of immigrants of Afghanistan in district Charsadda, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan. It examines how Afghan immigrants have utilized non-formal educational resources and the alternatives they have adopted to attain education. Additionally, the study explores the impact of migration on their education and assesses the current status of female education in refugee camps.

In 1979-80, when Afghans were fleeing their country, their literacy rate was extremely low. A study by the Danish Refugee Council suggested that the literacy rate was 5-10% among males and only 1% among females.² According to the UNHCR Pakistan Facebook page, the literacy rate of Afghans was 6% in 1979, which increased to 65% in 2020 in Iran.³ In 1980, the literacy rate in Pakistan was 26.2% of the total population, while in Iran, 42% of females were literate. According to the World Bank data from 2022, the literacy rate in Afghanistan is 44%, in Iran 99%, and in Pakistan 65%.⁴ This indicates that Afghan refugees in Pakistan have not made significant progress in education. However, compared to Afghanistan, Pakistan is relatively on the path towards progress. Those who left Afghanistan in 1979-1980 received more education and exposure compared to those who remained in the country. Semi-structured interviews revealed that poor families who stayed in Afghanistan were unable to complete their education, neither themselves nor their children, resulting in a generational cycle of uneducated, impoverished families. In contrast, the middle-class and wealthy families had a complete different experience, excelling in their respective fields based on their interests.⁵

² Roger Zetter, Protection for Forcibly Displaced Afghan Populations in Pakistan and Iran, 2018. Page 64.

³ UNHCR Pakistan:

<https://web.facebook.com/192783240782982/photos/a.199976510063655/2864579243603355/?type=3&rdc=1&rdr#>

⁴ World Bank Data about Education Ratio:

<https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SE.ADT.1524.LT.FE.ZS?locations=IR>

⁵ Personal Interview with Nooriya Bazwan, "Opinion on Education of those who left Behind" Peshawar dated Dec 15, 2024.

The Pakistani government (GOP) has been intermittently emphasizing the repatriation and reintegration of Afghans, with the process accelerating since October 3, 2023. From September to December 21, 2023, a total of 478,800 Afghans returned to Afghanistan.⁶ The official stance of the GOP remains firm on sending Afghans back, and in 2024, a batch of 800,000 Afghans was repatriated.⁷ Not only is the Government of Pakistan adamant about repatriation, but the general public also strongly supports this policy, with approximately 84% backing the government Plan. The repatriation initiative has gained significant attention, with 69% Pakistanis aware of it. Studies indicate that 73% of Pakistanis believe the GOP should prevent Afghan reentries into the country, while 77% advocate for Afghans to return to Afghanistan. Additionally, an overwhelming majority (64%) perceives Afghan refugees as a key factor behind the disruption of peace and order of Pakistan⁸ Scholars like Anchita Borthakur acknowledge that instability in Afghanistan has a spill-over effect on Pakistan security landscape.⁹ As discussed earlier, following the repatriation phases of 2023 and 2024, the third phase of Afghan Refugee deportation officially begun in February 2025, initially from Islamabad.¹⁰ However, law enforcement agencies will take full action after June 30, 2025, if no further extensions are granted. This aligns with reality, as Prime

⁶ UNHCR, (Dec 21, 2023) UNHCR regional Bureau for Asia and Paacific (RBAP), Emergency Update#7: Pakistan-Afghanistan Return Response.

⁷ ALJAZEERA, (June 30, 2024) Pakistan to start second phase of Afghan deportations: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/6/30/pakistan-to-start-second-phase-of-afghan-deportations>

⁸ GALLUP PAKISTAN, Public Opinion in Pakistan on Government's Afghan Refugee Policy : Overwhelming support for government actions to repatriate Afghan nationals, 2023: <https://gallup.com.pk/wp/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/Report-on-Afghan-Refugees-6-Nov-2023-002.pdf>

⁹ Anchita Borthakur, (2017). AFGHAN REFUGEES: THE IMPACT ON PAKISTAN. Asian Affairs, 48(3), 488–509. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03068374.2017.1362871>

¹⁰ UNHCR (February 5, 2025) Joint Statement: UNHCR and IOM concerned about recent developments requiring Afghans to leave Pakistan's capital <https://www.unhcr.org/pk/21217-joint-statement-unhcr-and-iom-concerned-about-recent-developments-requiring-afghans-to-leave-pakistans-capital.html>

Minister Shahbaz Sharif has approved multi-stage eviction plan targeting nearly 3 million Afghans residing in Pakistan.¹¹

Considering the above situation, this study aimed to assess how much education female refugees received while living in camps in Pakistan over the years. Will they return to Afghanistan as educated individual? To answer this we, conducted FGDs with parents to evaluate the educational status of their daughters. Their responses were cross verified with factors as the unavailability of schools and the prevalence of early marriages, revealing that very little has been changed in lives of the camp inhabitants. To gain deeper insights, we conducted six FGDs to examine the available educational facilities and societal attitudes towards education.

Literature Review:

Sohail Anwar, Muhammad Hassan and Allauddin Kakar (2021) wrote a paper titled “Afghan Refugees: Implications on Pakistan”, which explored the economic, social, political, and environmental impacts of Afghan Refugees. The study highlighted issues such as rising unemployment, competition for resources, and tension between host and refugee communities. It also addressed public health concerns, including the spread of diseases, as well as environmental challenges such as resource scarcity and land degradation. Additionally, the paper examined security concerns, refugees’ repatriation, and future stability. However, one crucial aspect it did not discuss was education. The study overlooked the educational impact, contributions or challenges posed by Afghan refugees within host communities.¹²

Anchita Borthakur (2017) wrote “Afghan Refugees: The Impact on Pakistan”, and it appears that Sohail. et all (2021) replicated both the title and theme , as their topics and sub-topics closely align. Borthakur’s study highlights how the influx of Afghan refugees led to significant and lasting migration, altering the demographics of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan and contributing to population growth. It discusses the rise in criminal activities, the proliferation of militants groups, increasing sectarian violence, and

¹¹ Ayaz Gul, (Feb 05, 2025) UN sounds alarm over Pakistan's new Afghan deportation plans, Voice of America: <https://www.voanews.com/a/un-sounds-alarm-over-pakistan-s-new-afghan-deportation-plans/7964352.html>

¹² Anwar, S., Hassan, M., & Kakar, A. (2021). Afghan Refugees: Implications on Pakistan. Pak. Journal of Int’L Affairs, 4(3), 116-129.

overall insecurity, all of which have heightened social tensions. The study attributes Afghan involvement in harmful activities to findings from terror case investigations, which have led GOP to perceive them as a burden and pursue repatriation and reintegration plans. However, like the later study, Borthakur's work also overlooks the educational aspect, failing to examine the state of education at the time of the Afghan refugee influx into Pakistan.¹³

Mehreen Usman (2020) explored the impact of Afghan Refugees on education and health across different regions of Pakistan. She examined interrelation between health and education, arguing that resources scarcity can lead to trauma, particularly in rural areas. She highlighted that Afghan refugees arrived in Pakistan with pre-existing mental health issues, worsened by the traumas of war and displacement. During their stay cases of gender base violence were reported, which she links to mental health and broader social challenges. Usman recommended policy solutions for both rural and urban settings to ensure equitable access to healthcare and education. While her study aimed to identify policy gaps in these sectors, it primarily focused on healthcare. For health, she proposed specific policies and measures, whereas for education, she offered only general recommendations, such as promoting equitable opportunities.¹⁴

Fatemah Kamali Chirani (2021) wrote a short book titled "Pakistan: Incoming and Outgoing Migration- Framework for a discussion on Resettling Afghans in Pakistan after Taliban Victory". This work focuses on migration and population movements, with detailed discussions on labor migration and asylum seekers. . It examines the implications of migration, including remittances, labor market dynamics, and brain drain while linking these issues to the policy recommendations for international cooperation and development. Although the book briefly discusses the challenges faced by the Afghan diaspora in

¹³ Borthakur, A. (2017). Afghan refugees: The impact on Pakistan. *Asian Affairs*, 48(3), 488-509. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03068374.2017.1362871>

¹⁴ Usman, M. (2020). *Afghan Diaspora in Pakistan: Health and Education Policy Recommendations for Rural and Urban Areas*. Jepson School of Leadership Studies, University of Richmond.

Pakistan, it completely overlooks the education and learning activities of Afghan refugees.¹⁵

Valetina Hiegemann (2018) wrote “Repatriation of Afghan Refugees in Pakistan Voluntary?” for Oxford Monitor of forced migration to examine the reintegration of Afghan Refugees in Afghanistan. She argues that the term “voluntary repatriation” does not accurately reflect the situation, as refugees appear to be under immense pressure to leave Pakistan and return to Afghanistan. The study highlights that Pakistani authorities often overlook whether the conditions in Afghanistan are favorable or unfavorable for returnees. It also sheds light on key issues faced by Afghan Refugees in Pakistan, including police harassment, camps closures, denial of legal documents, restricted access to bank accounts and difficulties in school admissions. Hiegemann emphasizes the need to review repatriation policies and explore alternative solutions for long-term Afghan refugees in Pakistan. However, the study does not delve into the root causes of the problems and instead focuses directly on repatriation.¹⁶

S. M. Taha and Alamzeb Aamir (2012) wrote about the socio-economic impact of Refugees, highlighting changes in demographics, business, and both urban and rural life. They examined how refugee and host communities interact at times integrating and other time clashing, leading to social tensions. Their study primarily focuses on the economy, trade, transport, retail, and the rise in crime. However, we did not find any coverage of education, healthcare, or capacity enhancement in their work.¹⁷

Said Ali, Muhammad Hamza Zakir, and Imad Imran 2022, wrote on Afghan Refugees in Pakistan: Navigating the legal and Humanitarian Challenges. This joint venture revolves around legal ambiguities and difficulties Afghan faced in Pakistan. It pointed out the unavailability of legal back up of Refugees, as Pakistan is non-signatory of UN Convention on Refugees of 1951 and 1967

¹⁵ Fatemah Kamali Chirani, F. (2021). Pakistan: Incoming and Outgoing Migration. Friedrich Ebert Stiftung (FES), Pakistan.

¹⁶ Hiegemann, V. (2018). Repatriation of Afghan Refugees in Pakistan: Voluntary? Oxford Monitor of Forced Migration, 4(1), 42-45.

¹⁷ Taha, S. M., & Aamir, A. (2012). *History, Culture, and Cross-Border Migration: Impact of Afghan Refugees on Socio-Economic Environment of Peshawar. International Journal of Independent Research and Studies, 1(4), 174-185.*

Protocols. They are of the opinion that lack of legal framework furthered Afghan difficulties and they could not avail basic rights as education, healthcare, and employment. This study highlighted similarities and dissimilarities, discrimination, integration, and socio-economic competition. This study recommended that Pakistan's legal reforms must adhere to the International laws, and particularly UN conventions. It only highlighted education as basic need, but did not shed light in reasons and problems of uneducated female lot.¹⁸

Methodology:

To identify themes, trends and patterns in the impact of migration on Afghan girls education, we conducted six FGDs -three with men and three with women to explore the issue of lack of education, its causes and its foreseeable impact. A total of 75 men and 75 women aged 25-65, were interviewed separately in six different groups across three refugee camps: Uthmanzai, Hajjizai and Munda Camp. The purpose was to assess the impact of migration on education and gather meaningful insight. *Gathering and Assessing Outcomes (GAO)* is an investigation and intervention tool used to generate new findings about potential changes or processes within a targeted community, such as the settlement of Afghan refugees in Pakistani Communities and its effect on their education.¹⁹

The FGDs technique is particularly suitable for communities with low literacy levels,²⁰ making it an appropriate choice for Afghan communities in Pakistan, where literacy rates are extremely low.²¹ This supports our selection of research methodology. Due to migration, Afghan communities have lost confidence and are often hesitating to speak openly, feeling insecure and afraid to participate

¹⁸ Ali, S., Zakir, M. H., Imran, I., & Khan, S. H. (2022). Afghan Refugees in Pakistan: Navigating the Legal and Humanitarian Challenges. *Asian Social Studies and Applied Research (ASSAR)*, 3(2), 480-495.

¹⁹ Peter van Eeuwijk and Zuzanna Angehrn, *How to Conduct a Focus Group Discussion (FGD): A methodological Manual* 2017. https://www.swisstph.ch/fileadmin/user_upload/SwissTPH/Topics/Society_and_Health/Focus_Group_Discussion_Manual_van_Eeuwijk_Angehrn_Swiss_TPH_2017.pdf

²⁰ Helene Bromley et al. (2003) *Glossary of Qualitative Research Terms*. London: King's College, University of London. Page. 13.

²¹ UNHCR: https://www.unhcr.org/pk/wp-content/uploads/sites/103/2023/11/Annex-A-ToR_UNHCR-Connected-Education-Programme_Pakistan.pdf

in individual interviews. In such situations, Individuals may struggle to express their views, require validation from others, or find it difficult to address sensitive topics.²² We conduct multiple FGDs to account for the complexity of people's perceptions regarding female education in refugee camps. Designate question were posed, and common responses were recorded in Table, 1. This approach generated sufficient data, allowing us to develop and test previous theoretical understandings, as suggested by Barbour.²³

Research Questions for Focus Group Discussion with General Answers

#	Question	Answer
1	Is every girl in Camp getting Formal Education?	No, not every girl is getting formal education. Most girls have access only to non-formal education up to class 3.
2	What are the barriers preventing girls/women of camp from accessing education?	Cultural restrictions, lack of nearby schools, financial constraints, limited parental support, and absence of secondary education facilities.
3	Is formal education facility available in camp for Girls?	Limited. Formal education is only available up to class 3, and some non-formal setups exist.
4	Up to which level formal education is available for girls of the camp?	Up to class 3 in non-formal settings; no higher secondary schools are available.
5	If available, is it formal or informal?	Mostly informal, with very limited formal education.

²² Peter van Eeuwijk and Zuzanna Angehrn, How to Conduct a Focus Group Discussion (FGD): A methodological Manual 2017.

https://www.swisstph.ch/fileadmin/user_upload/SwissTPH/Topics/Society_and_Health/Focus_Group_Discussion_Manual_van_Eeuwijk_Angehrn_Swiss_TPH_2017.pdf

²³Rosaline S. Barbour, 2005. "Making Sense of Focus Groups." Medical Education:

<https://asmepublications.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.1365-2929.2005.02200.x>

6	What are parents' perspectives about girls' education at camp?	Many parents believe that girls do not need education as they are not expected to contribute financially; others are hesitant to send them to distant schools.
7	If available, are their school teachers well trained in modern curriculum?	No, teachers are not well-trained in modern curriculum; abrupt curriculum changes (Pashto to English) make it harder for students and teachers.
8	Are there any technical or vocational capacities enhancement opportunities for girls in camp?	No, there are no vocational training centers or skill development programs for girls in the camps.
9	Is poverty a major barrier in getting education for female?	Yes, poverty is a major barrier, as parents cannot afford books, transportation, or school fees.
10	Are there any opportunities of higher education in the camp?	No, there are no opportunities for higher education in the camp.
11	If not available, are there any alternative learning spaces for girls at camp?	No structured alternative learning spaces exist; informal setups with limited hours are available.
12	Any Policy shift can change education of female if they are getting in Pakistan?	Yes, policy shifts allowing Afghan refugees easier access to Pakistan's educational institutions and scholarships could improve female education.

Table, 1. FGDs asked Questions and Average answers from all Participants.

In 2023, UNHCR Pakistan's Connected Education (CE) program aimed to improve access to quality education in refugee camps,

providing extensive support to 142 Refugee Villages (RV) Schools.²⁴ However, during this study in targeted district of Charsadda, we found that none of the three refugee camps in the district had a school for females. This suggest that the, as of December 2024, the initiative' target of 142 schools did not extend to the camps in Charsadda. Our research also found that the low literacy rate in the three camps is primarily due the lack of formal schools, with only nursery and KG classes available. Other contributing factors include the absence of higher-grade education (grades 10-12), the lack of primary and permanent schools for female within camps, and unsafe road conditions that make it dangerous for children to cross while traveling to distance schools. Additionally, the discontinuation of funding from UNHCR and GTZ for informal schools has further hindered girls' access to education.^{25&26} FGD's questions and answers provide further statistical clarification of the situation. In response to the question "Are there higher education opportunities in the Camp?" 90% of Afghan women answered "no" while 99% of Afghan men responded the same, indicating that men in the camps are comparatively more aware of the issue than women. . For the question "Is there a female Vocational/ Training Centre?" 60% of women responded "don't have" while 78% of men affirmed the absence of such facilities. Regarding "Are there trained teachers in the camp?" 62% of women and 80% of men answered "don't have". When asked whether "poverty is a barrier to female education" 78% of women and 90% of men agreed. Additionally, 80% of women 90% of men cited lack of schools as a key issue, while 70% female and 85% men acknowledge "cultural barrier as a significant factor. Lastly, 82% of women and 99% men agreed that limitations on girl's education persist in the camps (Figure, 1). The Figure 1 highlights the lack of educational opportunities for girls in the camp; however, men consistently perceive these deficiencies lacks are at higher rates compared to women. In other words, it reflects that

²⁴ UNHCR: https://www.unhcr.org/pk/wp-content/uploads/sites/103/2023/11/Annex-A-ToR_UNHCR-Connected-Education-Programme_Pakistan.pdf

²⁵ Majid Ali, Social Behavior Change for Children and Related problems at Uthmainzai Camp. Report submitted to UNICEF on November 30, 2024. Page. 15

²⁶ UNHCR: https://www.unhcr.org/pk/wp-content/uploads/sites/103/2023/11/Annex-A-ToR_UNHCR-Connected-Education-Programme_Pakistan.pdf

men in that mentioned camps are more aware than women of the on-going cycle of illiteracy (See Figure, 3). Contrary to men's awareness, women's lower response rates indicate their limited direct engagement in decision-making about education, and their involvement in educational activities. This gap in responses also highlights the trend of male dominance in decisions making.

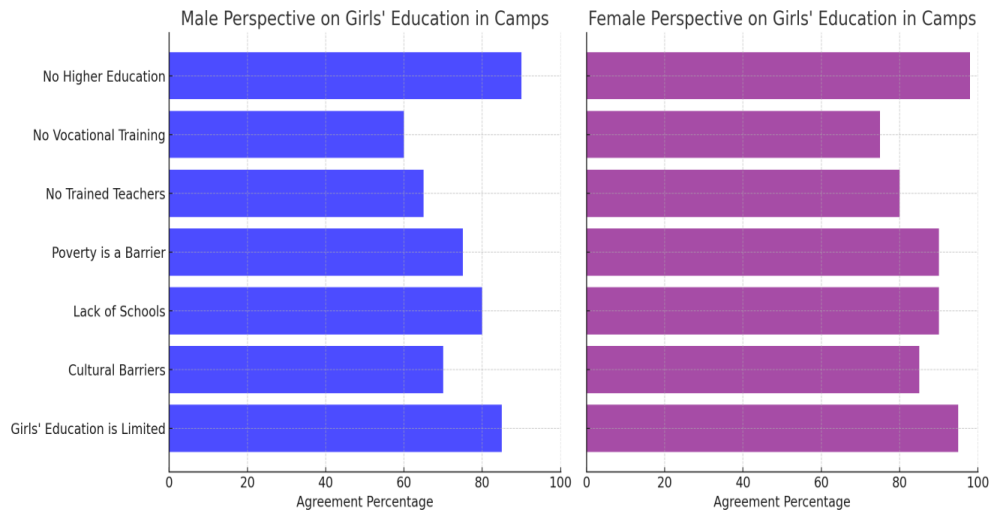


Figure 1. Sex wise understanding of reasons of lack of Education for girls (FGDs result)

In Munda camp, during an interview with locals, it was revealed that parents often do not allow their daughters to attend distance schools due to insecurity and lack of adequate transportations. During FGDs in Hajjizai camp, a participant shared that he observed a lower quality of education in the informal school in the camp school compared to those outside the camp. In response, a teacher present in FGD acknowledged the issue, stating that while the concern about teachers quality is valid, the primary reason is that the government abruptly changed the curriculum to English. However, the teachers, being from the older system, did not receive proper training on the new curriculum and teaching materials.²⁷

²⁷ Majid Ali, A New Dawn: Social and Behavioral Change for Addressing Children's Issues in Camps in Hajjizai, District Charsadda. Report Submitted to UNICEF on December 08, 2024.

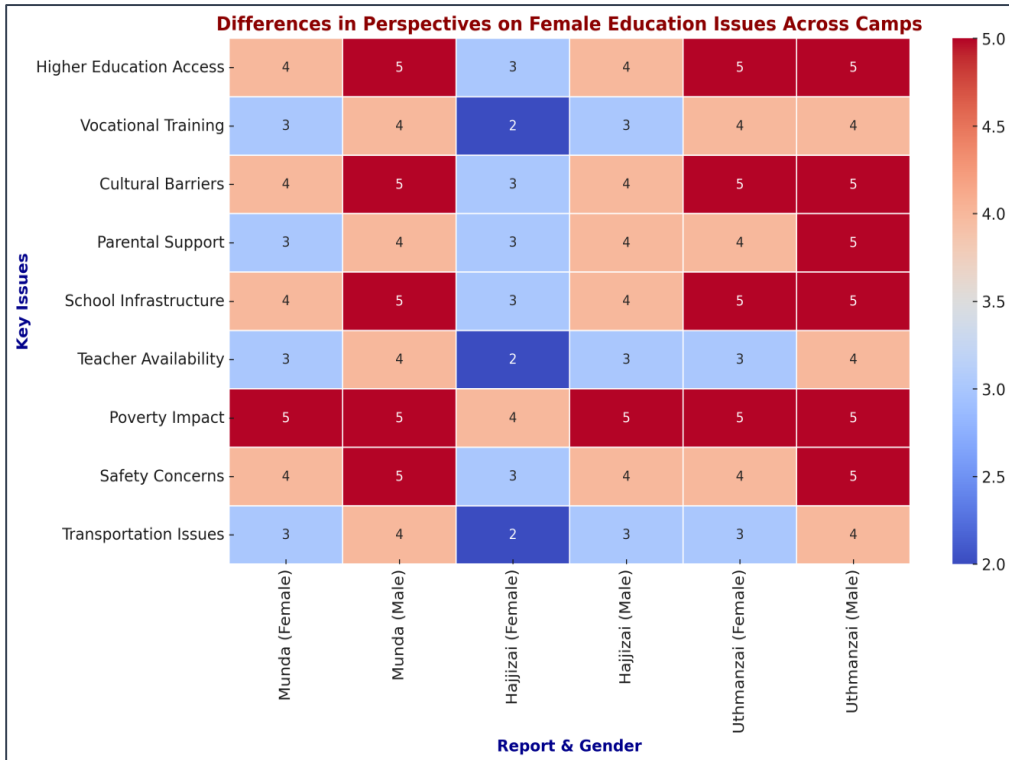


Figure 2, Heatmap showing Difference the color intensity represents the level of concern (1= least, 5 Highest).

Trends Analysis:

The Heatmap analysis provides a detailed comparison of the perspectives of males and females across the three camps within the same district. For example, the lack of higher education opportunities and facilities within camp is not a major concern for females of Hajjizai camp. However, it is a significant issue for males in Munda camp as well as both males and females in Uthmanzai camp. The lack of vocational training centers within the camps is a mild impediment for both males and females across all three camps. Cultural barriers are highest reason for the lack of female education among males in Munda camp and both males and females in Uthmanza, while for them, the lack of school infrastructure is also the most significant reason for the lack of female education. The most frequently cited reason for the lack of female education is poverty, which has been rated the highest by both males and females across all three camps. However, women in the three camps do not perceive the mentioned issues unanimously, leaving a gap for further research to understand the

reasons for this disparity among women of same the ethnicity, district and circumstance regarding a common issue. Similarly, males in Hajjizai camp are not in synch with their counterparts in the other two camps, indicating a gap in knowledge and perceived importance of the issue (See Figure 2). In the sphere of education, reflecting on the past and envisioning the future of women under the Taliban regime (following the 2021 takeover), it is evident that women education, health, and socio-economic status will be severely impacted by forced migration from and into Afghanistan, if the repatriation plan is fully implemented. Under the Taliban government, strict regulation on women and girls will be enforced, effectively depriving them of their fundamental rights to education, employment and mobility. The UNHCR country representative remarked on the forced return of Afghan Refugees, stating, “It could place some people’s lives at risk”.²⁸ Additionally, mothers fear the cycle of violence and the possibility of their Children being recruited as soldier, as reported by ALJAZEERA.²⁹ This ban will not be confined to restricting women from working outside their home; it will also prevent them from running beauty salons. As a result women will be experiencing isolation, marginalization, depression, trauma, and, more specifically, psychological distressed.³⁰ IOM and UNHCR expressed their concerns about the returnees, stating “Afghan nationals, who may face harm upon their return, include ethnic and religious minorities, women and girls, journalists, human rights activists and members of artistic professions such as musicians”.³¹ Studies have validated that once

²⁸ Ayaz Gul, (Feb 05, 2025) UN sounds alarm over Pakistan's new Afghan deportation plans, Voice of America: <https://www.voanews.com/a/un-sounds-alarm-over-pakistan-s-new-afghan-deportation-plans/7964352.html>

²⁹ Mahwish Qayyum, (May 9, 2019) Why Afghan refugee women in Pakistan fear repatriation, ALJAZEERA: <https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2019/5/9/why-afghan-refugee-women-in-pakistan-fear-repatriation>

³⁰ Nasiba Hamiday, (Sep 17, 2024) Mass Deportation and Detention of afghan Refugees from Pakistan: Focusing on the Situation of Women. Center for Migration Studies: <https://cmsny.org/mass-deportation-detention-afghan-refugees-from-pakistan-focusing-on-women-091724/>

³¹ Ayaz Gul, (Feb 05, 2025) UN sounds alarm over Pakistan's new Afghan deportation plans, Voice of America: <https://www.voanews.com/a/un-sounds-alarm-over-pakistan-s-new-afghan-deportation-plans/7964352.html>

a conflict disrupts a child's education, it becomes difficult to resume.³²

Breaking the cycle of uneducated generations, particularly among poor Afghans families, remain significant challenges. In 1979, many Afghan fled to Pakistan, Iran, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Türkiye in search of a better and more secure life. Other countries like Iran improved the refugees quality of life- for example, increasing education rates to 65%) by implementing strong policies and being signatories to the UN Convention on status of Refugees.³³ As of the February 2025, Pakistan continues to voluntarily host a large refugee population of approximately 3 million.³⁴

³² Charlotte Jenner, (Sep, 2015) Breaking the Cycle: Education and the Future For Afghan Refugees. NRC and UNHCR: https://adsp.ngo/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/R-1_Breaking-the-cycle_Education-and-future-for-Afghan-Refugees.pdf

³³ Refugees, Asylum Seekers, Migrants, and Internally Displaced Persons : <https://www.hrw.org/legacy/wr2k2/refugees.html>

³⁴ Ayaz Gul, (Feb 05, 2025) UN sounds alarm over Pakistan's new Afghan deportation plans, Voice of America: <https://www.voanews.com/a/un-sounds-alarm-over-pakistan-s-new-afghan-deportation-plans/7964352.html>

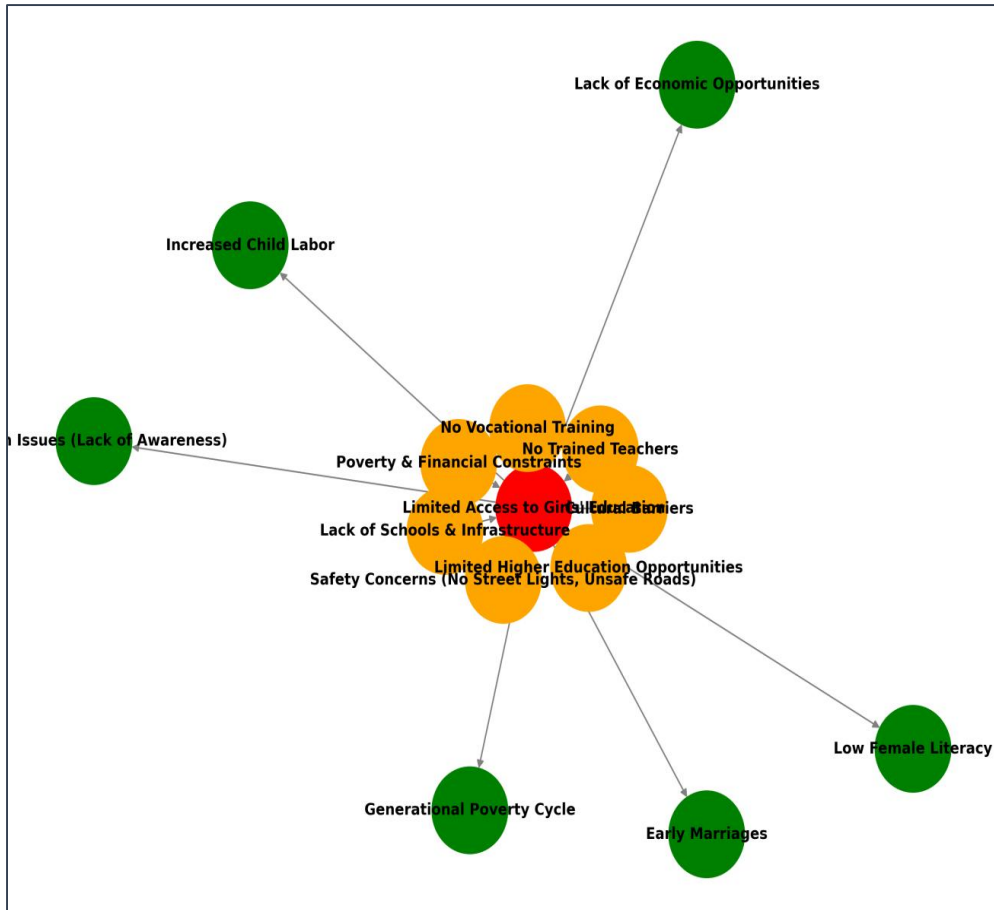


Figure. 3, Problems and its consequences data of all three Camps about Education

The Pakistani Government is making significant efforts to enroll Afghan women in educational program by offering them scholarships. Additionally, last year, Helvetas Pakistan enrolled more than 1,400 Afghan children in Non-formal schools. These children were selected from Uthmanzai, Hajizai, Munda, Jalala, Khazana, Kabayan, Naguman and Mera Kachori camps. Of the 1400 enrolled children, 728 were female and 672 were male.³⁵

This type of enrollments and support is not welcomed by resident of Uthmanzai, and Munda camps. “It is temporary uncertain. Once the project is completed, funding stops, and our children’s

³⁵ The News International, (Jul 13, 2023) Refugees happy as 1,400 Afghan kids enrolled at non-formal schools: <https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/1089976-refugees-happy-as-1-400-afghan-kids-enrolled-at-non-formal-schools>

education is discontinued” said participants of FGDs in semi-structured interviews.

A durable solution for female education lies in addressing the core problems identified in Figure 3, otherwise, the same cycle of consequence-Early marriages, generational poverty, low female literacy, increased Child labor and unawareness will continue to repeat (Figure, 3). SRSP with the Help of UNHCR delivered three months capacity enhancement program in district Charsadda for equipping Afghan refugee women for sustainable livelihood.³⁶ Instead of government of Pakistan’s permission to enroll their children at schools, the enrolment of Afghan children is 80% low, is resulting an extreme illiteracy.³⁷ Breaking free from the constraints of social norms that confine girls to their homes, and the Taliban’s restrictions on women’ education has been possible through online testing. This initiative provides an opportunity for female students whose education was disrupted after the Taliban came into power in 2021 and banned women from attending universities.³⁸ UNICEF Afghanistan presents an even more alarming situation, reporting that 3.7 million Children are out of school, and 60% of them are being girls. The reasons are same to those in Pakistan, including traditional norms, a lack of female teachers, the absence of only girl’s schools, poor sanitations and deeply rooted cultural beliefs that create barriers to girls’ education.³⁹

Conclusion:

This study underscores the profound impact of forced migration on Afghan women's education, highlighting systemic challenges in refugee camps in Pakistan. Despite years of displacement, Afghan refugee women continue to face barriers such as economic hardship, lack of access to schools, and restrictive cultural norms that discourage female education. The findings reveal that while some initiatives have aimed to improve education for Afghan girls,

³⁶ SRSP: <https://aw1.srsp.org.pk/site/2024/05/17/empowering-afghan-refugee-women-in-charsadda-vocational-training-for-sustainable-livelihoods/>

³⁷ UNHCR: https://www.unhcr.org/pk/wp-content/uploads/sites/103/2023/11/Annex-A-ToR_UNHCR-Connected-Education-Programme_Pakistan.pdf

³⁸ Muska Safi, and Roshan Noorzai, (Jan 27, 2025) Afghan women Take scholarship test offered by Pakistan. Voice of America: <https://www.voanews.com/a/afghan-women-take-scholarship-tests-offered-by-pakistan/7952691.html>

³⁹ UNICEF: <https://www.unicef.org/afghanistan/education>

including scholarships and non-formal schooling, enrollment rates remain significantly low. The absence of higher education opportunities within camps, combined with security concerns and financial constraints, has led many families to prioritize early marriages over education, further perpetuating the cycle of illiteracy.

With the Pakistani government's ongoing repatriation policy, which has already displaced hundreds of thousands of Afghan refugees in 2023 and 2024, the future of Afghan women's education is increasingly uncertain. As of 2025, Afghanistan remains a highly restrictive environment for women and girls under the Taliban regime, with strict bans on university education, employment, and public participation. This raises critical concerns about the reintegration of repatriated Afghan women, who may return to a society where their educational aspirations are entirely suppressed. The study also indicates that although migration has exposed some Afghan families to better educational opportunities in host countries, the lack of a sustainable education policy within refugee camps has limited their long-term progress.

To prevent a generational crisis of illiteracy and socio-economic marginalization, urgent policy interventions are required. The Pakistani government, along with international organizations such as UNHCR and UNICEF, must strengthen efforts to ensure accessible education for refugee girls. Additionally, Afghanistan's international stakeholders must push for the protection of women's rights, particularly in education, as a core condition for future diplomatic engagements. Without immediate and coordinated action, Afghan women—both in refugee camps and post-repatriation—face an alarming future where education remains an unattainable right rather than a transformative opportunity.