What are the experiences and outcomes of Afghans resettled in England?

Full Research Report March 2026

Authors:

Professor Caroline Oliver, Institute of Education, University College London (UCL)
Professor Louise Ryan, Centre of Global Diversities, London Metropolitan University
Dr Olga Cara, Institute of Education, University College London (UCL)
Professor María E. López, Centre of Global Diversities, London Metropolitan University
Mohammad Mustafa Raheal, Institute of Education, University College London (UCL)
Mursal Rasa, Institute of Education, University College London (UCL)
Dr Janroj Yilmaz Keles, School of Law and Social Sciences, Middlesex University

Photo credits: Youth participants in the project.

UCL LONDON METROPOLITAN UNIVERSITY Middlesex University London

Acknowledgements: We are grateful to the many people who supported this project and appreciate their generosity in sharing with us their experiences, advice, information, facilitation of connections, and feedback. We thank all the Afghan women and men, as well as stakeholders from local, national government and in civil society organisations or schools, who engaged with our interviews. We extend thanks to the young people who took part in the Photovoice exercises so constructively and those in the school that supported us. We are grateful to our peer researcher team, who worked with us alongside newly arrived Afghans, and continued to support our qualitative work afterwards: Abid Hamdard, Amanullah Nazari, Ebadullah Nassiry, Ghulam Bahauddin Hemmat, Gulalai Nuristani, Hazrat Maiwand, Hewad Mirkhil, Jamila Zadran, Latifa Faqirzada, Manizha Maroof, Mohammad Hamid Wardak, Mohammad Tamim Aryan Arghandiwal, Mursal Aman, Nadia Sediqi, Nasima Wahidy, Nazanin Qasimi, Sana Shinwari, Sediqullah Nasruti and Wajiha Muqbel.

The research benefited from working alongside staff members in seven local authority teams in four regions, working with four Strategic Migration partnerships, and we thank all those there who have helped us with survey recruitment and understanding the changing nature of schemes in their areas. We are appreciative of the work of Rob McNeil in supporting project communications. We are also deeply grateful to our advisory board of Prof Alice Bloch, Dr Catherine Dennison, Susan Fawcus MBE, Siobhan Gosrani, Quhramaana Kakar, Nick Scott-Flynn, Dr Neelam Raina and Fahima Zaheen for their engagement and constructive guidance.

The project was funded by the Nuffield Foundation. We thank them for support, as well as the guidance of Dr Catherine Dennison, Ben Brown and other Nuffield Foundation colleagues throughout.

The Nuffield Foundation is an independent charitable trust with a mission to advance social well-being. It funds and undertakes rigorous research, encourages innovation and supports the use of sound evidence to inform social and economic policy, and improve people's lives. The Nuffield Foundation is the founder and co-funder of the Nuffield Council on Bioethics, the Ada Lovelace Institute and the Nuffield Family Justice Observatory. This project has been funded by the Nuffield Foundation, but the views expressed are those of the authors and not necessarily the Foundation. Find out more at: www.nuffieldfoundation.org. Bluesky: @nuffieldfoundation.org. LinkedIn: Nuffield Foundation.

Suggested citation: Oliver, C. Ryan, L., Cara, O., López, M.E., Raheal, M.M., Rasa, M. and Yilmaz Keles, J. (2026). *What are the experiences and outcomes of Afghans resettled in England? Research report*. London: University College London.

CONTENTS

1 Introduction

From 2001-2021, following the 9/11 attacks, the UK military intervened in Afghanistan as part of the UN mandated International Security Assistance Force (ISAF). This included troops from 50 NATO and partner nations, to help remove the Taliban and support the new government. It represented a major military investment that saw the loss of more than 450 British service personnel (Kirkwade, Sturge & Mills 2024, Cabinet Office et al 2014) but also relied on around 7,000 locally employed Afghans, working in a variety of support roles, that included interpreters and translators on the frontline (Defence Select Committee 2018, de Jong 2022). The withdrawal from Afghanistan in 2021, the collapse of the internationally backed republican government and the subsequent unopposed entry of Taliban forces in Kabul, placed those Afghans who had been employed by or allied with the UK and other Western actors during the 20 years of democratic regime, at risk. Alongside military personnel, this also included Afghans who had worked in promoting democratic governance, women's rights, media freedoms, and the rule of law, those belonging to structurally marginalised ethnic and religious groups and LGBTQI+ communities. As a result, relocation and resettlement schemes were established by the British Government to evacuate and protect Afghans at risk, as well as their immediate family members.

The research detailed in this report explores the experiences and outcomes of the UK's Afghan resettlement programme following the evacuation and resettlement to the UK since 2021 of, to date, 37,950 Afghans (Home Office 2026) at risk of reprisal following the Taliban takeover. We explored multiple perspectives of Afghans, including women, men and young people, who were resettled under government schemes after facing the sudden risks posed through their involvement with the British military and wider NATO interventions. This group of relocated and resettled Afghans are in the UK with the support of the British Government and should not be confused with those who have arrived without authorisation or to seek asylum.

Our analysis is drawn from extensive mixed methods research, including a survey of around 800 newly arrived Afghans across English regions, as well as participatory research with 68 Afghan men, women and young people, and 7 peer researchers. We also engaged in qualitative research with 88 stakeholders involved with resettlement at local and central government, commissioned service-providers and other relevant actors (e.g. school staff, NGOs, healthcare providers). This aimed to develop an understanding of how Afghans are received into local areas and are faring as they moved on into settled accommodation, schools, colleges, workplaces and local communities across England, under the resettlement schemes operated by the British government.

While our research captures data on more obvious measures of 'integration', such as Afghans' outcomes in education, housing and employment, the research uses a conceptual frame of 'embedding' (Ryan and Mulholland, 2015; Mulholland and Ryan 2023) to understand how settlement is experienced in specific localities. We also employ broader measures of wellbeing, including Afghans' subjective understandings of belonging to localities after resettlement. We experimented with innovative methods such as walking interviews and Photovoice visual methods to generate rich and holistic data, to identify points of learning and improve the effectiveness of ongoing resettlement efforts. Research tells us that reception experiences have major long-term effects; the success – or otherwise – of resettlement has high stakes for social cohesion, in an era where public support for refugees is under considerable strain.

Our introduction sets out the projects' aims and objectives, introduces our research team, gives a brief historical account of the emergence of the schemes in the context of Afghanistan and British

relations. This is followed by an explanation of the UK schemes' evolution from 2021, outlining the support provided.

1.1 Aims, Objectives and Importance

Our aim was to understand the effectiveness of the Afghan resettlement schemes in mid-implementation. We had three objectives:

1. To provide a state-of-the-art picture of the implementation of the Afghan schemes synthesising and generating evidence on provisions across England (e.g. education, housing, employment and language support etc.)
2. To investigate the experiences of schemes, and their outcomes (especially in terms of employment, income, housing) of resettled adult Afghans (aged 18 and above), describing inequalities in experience according to population heterogeneity (especially gender, age, ethnicity) and region.
3. To understand heterogeneous experiences of schemes through a focus on how different groups of women, young people (16–19-year-olds) and men are navigating their new localities and embedding in new environments.

Such an exercise is particularly important at this juncture. In the recent White Paper: *Restoring Order and Control: A Statement on the Government's Asylum and Returns Policy* (Home Office, Nov 2025a), the UK government committed ostensibly to maintaining its long tradition of providing sanctuary and safety to people fleeing conflict and persecution, but the proposed asylum reforms are extensive, demonstrating an overriding concern with managing the UK border (ibid.) Its proposals include an emphasis on temporary and renewable protection status and much longer paths to settlement of up to 20 or 30 years in some cases, albeit reduced dependent on 'contributions'. It also proposes the removal of the automatic right to family reunion for refugees (ibid.)

In this significant restructuring of refugee protection, the Asylum Statement envisages 'safe and legal routes' becoming a key aspect of the government's vision for asylum but requires robust evidence on how this might be delivered. Recent research suggests the value of resettlement especially under the umbrella of community sponsorship (Hassan, Phillimore and D'Avino 2025), a smaller-scale approach, which is less costly than government schemes like those examined here (see National Audit Office 2026 report on costs of Afghan resettlement). Indeed, during this research, a community-sponsorship-based resettlement pathway was designed specifically for Afghans, *Communities for Afghans*, where sponsor groups in the community provide help with finding housing, orientation and integration support. However, this is much smaller in scale than the operation managed by local authorities, where it is expected that 500 Afghan families (2750 people) will be supported by the end of 2031 (see https://www.afghanwelcomeproject.org.uk/cfa2). Scholars also draw attention to potential risks of community sponsorship in shifting responsibilities to private actors (ibid.; see also Benson, Sigona and Zambelli 2024). Some also question how resettlement in general creates more restrictive regimes for asylum seekers (Mulvey 2018, D'Avino 2022). Our research here adds important new evidence to these understandings of resettlement, by exploring how organised, government-led programmes have operated at scale in dynamic circumstances.

The research is also important in generating knowledge around resettled Afghans, since to date there is little or no academic research on their experiences, and limited data from the government (NAO 2026). However, in relation to refugees, existing research shows that:

- Humanitarian migrants are often at risk of poor economic outcomes, not achieving employment commensurate with previous occupations, or parity with other migrants over the longer term (Kone, Ruiz and Vargas-Silva 2019).
- The structure of local reception is influential in supporting or undermining 'integration' (de Vroome and van Tubergen 2010).
- Geographic dispersal, i.e. placing refugees away from support networks and experiencing varying local conditions, which are key features of these schemes, worsens outcomes (Fasani, Frattini and Minale 2022). Downward mobility can be mitigated to some extent by social capital and networks within established populations (Ryan, 2023; Cheung and Phillimore 2014).

Building on this research, conceptually we employ Ryan and Mulholland's (2015) understanding of early settlement as a set of multifarious processes better conceptualised as 'embedding' rather than 'integration' (Mulholland and Ryan 2023). This recognises the centrality of place and draws attention to the geographic variations and local conditions that resettled persons must navigate to embed, including housing provision, rental costs, opportunity structures, access to social networks, community cohesion, and variations in local support and implementation of national schemes (Alraie, Collins and Rigon 2018; Oliver et al 2020).

The research is also distinctive in drawing attention to intersectional characteristics and recognising that resettlement is experienced differently rather than singularly. Rather than working with unhelpful notions of 'the Afghan community', we acknowledge the heterogeneity of experiences following Oliver et al (2023), for example considering how they vary among younger or older people, women, men or non-binary, the highly educated, the less well educated, and different ethnic groups etc. This helps to inform timely and appropriate tailoring of support interventions for different demographics, enabling us to inform the ongoing resettlement efforts for newly arriving populations. In the report, we limit references to other academic research for readability, while contributing to relevant debates in forthcoming publications with more in-depth reporting on specific data strands and themes.

1.2 The team

Our research team is based at University College London, London Metropolitan University and London Middlesex University, including Professor Caroline Oliver, Dr Olga Cara, Mursal Rasa, Mohammad Mustafa Raheal, Professor Louise Ryan, Professor María López, and Associate Professor Janroj Yilmaz Keles.

We adopted a participatory approach by working with Mursal and Mustafa who were employed throughout the project at UCL as Research Assistants (RAs). Both are young professionals from Afghanistan, who are experiencing resettlement themselves, and are fluent in both Dari and Pashto. We also recruited other locally based teams of Afghan peer researchers who shared certain characteristics, backgrounds and experiences with the study participants. During the survey period (July–December 2024), we collaborated with twenty Afghan peer researchers and conducted follow-up focus groups with seven of them (see Chapter 2). Although peer research has a long history in social science (see Ryan et al., 2011), it has also been criticised for exploiting members of a particular group to conduct low-cost research (see Gilodi et al., 2025). Aware of these ethical considerations however, we have found working with the two RAs and peer researchers throughout the project has been invaluable, keeping our research alert to the cultural sensitives, dynamics and nuance needed throughout the survey design, administration, qualitative research, analysis and writing up.

Moreover, we established helpful ongoing relationships with Resettlement Teams within local authorities and Strategic Migration Partnerships in all the regions. Our work has also been generously supported by an advisory board to provide feedback on our approach and findings, which includes the following experts:

- **Siobhan Gosrani** - Refugee Resettlement Lead at the London Strategic Migration Partnership, and Greater London Authority (GLA) coordinating 33 boroughs' work with the Home Office.
- **Nick Scott-Flynn** and **Susan Fawcus MBE** - the South East of England Strategic Migration Partnership, coordinating with 40 local authorities and the Home Office.
- **Associate Professor Neelam Raina** - Middlesex University post-conflict reconstruction expert, with first-hand experience in Afghan evacuation, humanitarian aid, and advocacy and Secretariat for the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Afghan women and girls in the UK Parliament.
- **Professor Alice Bloch** -Professor of Sociology at Manchester University and Fellow of the Academy of Social Sciences, expert on migration, refugees, and methodological issues of survey research with refugees.
- **Fahima Zaheen** -Executive Director of the Afghan Association, *Paiwand*, supporting refugees, asylum seekers, and migrants in Northwest London around housing, welfare, health, legal issues, and mental health support.
- **Quhramaana Kakar** - Founder and Director of Women for Peace and Participation, providing platforms for communities in conflict zones and the UK/European diaspora and Visiting Fellow at LSE.
- **Dr Catherine Dennison** – Programme Head, Welfare at the Nuffield Foundation.

1.3 What are the resettlement schemes and how did they emerge?

Our research initially set out to examine two relocation and resettlement schemes established by the Home Office and the Ministry of Defence, working collaboratively with the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, the International Organization for Migration and UNHCR's organised programmes for refugee identification and support, to offer safe routes to the UK following the Taliban coup between 2021 and 2025 (Figures from Home Office Feb, 2026):

- The **Afghan Relocations and Assistance Policy (ARAP)** – launched in 2021 and led by the Ministry of Defence and Home Office for Afghans who worked with UK forces in Afghanistan (n. 19,795). This application-based route was for ARAP families, comprising at least one member who had worked with the military in Afghanistan in a range of roles, from members of elite military units to lower ranks, interpreters, mechanics etc. as well as embassy staff.
- The **Afghan Citizens Resettlement Scheme (ACRS)** – a referral-based route launched in 2022 by the Home Office, with some coordination by UNHCR to select individuals (under pathway 2), to support vulnerable Afghans, including women and those at risk under Taliban rule (n.13,884). This included three pathways:
    - Pathway 1 (n.10,525) - for eligible persons including those who were evacuated initially, and then subsequently those who were unable to board flights.

- Pathway 2 (n. 1,680) – operated exclusively by UNHCR for those selected in neighbouring countries (Pakistan, Iran) according to standard international protection criteria.
- Pathway 3 (n.1,679) - for British Council contractors, GardaWorld contractors and Chevening scholars/alumni.

In 2024, another scheme was established covertly but was protected by a legal super-injunction following exposure of a previously undisclosed data breach in the MOD from 2022:

- The **Afghanistan Response Route (ARR[1])** – a scheme developed to relocate those placed at risk by the accidental sharing of personal details of nearly 19,000 Afghan applicants in February 2022 but discontinued in July 2025 (n. 4,241) (Ministry of Defence 2025).

Finally, all schemes above were replaced by a single pipeline:

- The **Afghan Resettlement Programme (ARP)** operational from March 2025 to deal with existing applications. This and all previous schemes were closed to any new applicants, although it remains active for existing cases.

Prior to the schemes, there was also an ex-Gratia redundancy scheme opened in 2013 for locally employed civilians following the earlier drawdown, which included relocation as an option for over 450 locally employed civilians (LECs).

Although now all schemes were consolidated under the ARP, there were differences between them, namely that ARAP is a *relocation* scheme, while ACRS is a *resettlement* scheme, more akin to existing refugee resettlement schemes in the UK (e.g. Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme, the UK Resettlement Scheme, see below) where those under it are assessed to have international protection needs. Most Afghans therefore do not have a legal immigration status as a 'refugee', since only those settled under ACRS pathway 2 were granted refugee status. Therefore, until the separated families route was (temporarily) introduced in 2024 (30th July – 30th October 2024) only those on pathway 2 of ACRS had access to family reunion rights.

In contrast to other displaced populations in the UK, however, Afghans on ACRS were granted immediate Indefinite Leave to Remain on arrival, while those under ARAP and the ex-Gratia scheme had the right to apply. They can apply for British citizenship after 5 years in the UK under existing rules (noting that the rules more generally are currently under scrutiny, with proposals made by the current Home Secretary for extending this period significantly to 20 years or more for other migrants).

By end February 2026, approximately 37,950 people had been supported under the humanitarian visa schemes for resettling Afghans, and in July 2025 the schemes were closed to new applicants. However, after the schemes' closure in 2025, many thousands of people's applications remained pending decisions as the government works to fulfil existing commitments before the end of the current Parliament (Connaught Law 2025). The National Audit Office (2026) reports that as of November 2025, 29,655 people were still waiting to hear the results of their eligibility assessments. As such, many are still living in limbo even though their applications have been granted, others, including additional family members are awaiting the outcomes of applications already submitted (NAO 2026). Others, including former Afghan specialist units (known as the 'Triples') who fought alongside British forces members, but were rejected under ARAP, are awaiting the outcome of a government review of rejections aimed at correcting errors in how they were treated. Investigations by some UK news outlets reveal more than 100 ex-Afghan forces have been killed in the country

since 2023 and others tortured, emphasising ongoing dangers facing servicemen left behind by allied forces (the Independent 2025).

1.4 Why do the schemes exist?

Afghans are supported under bespoke humanitarian schemes as part of the UK's commitment to providing 'safe and legal routes,' offering structured resettlement distinct from spontaneous asylum claims. These schemes arose from an urgent moral and political obligation to protect individuals closely associated with British military and diplomatic efforts (for example see de Jong 2022 on locally employed civilians). Sivanandan's aphorism 'we are here because you were there' is emphasised in Barnham and de Jong's (2024) photographic exhibition of Afghan interpreters' experiences with the British military, echoing (https://www.impressions-gallery.com/event/we-are-here-because-you-were-there/ and see also Patel 2021). This theme was claimed in this research by government stakeholders in reverse, as one in a military role told us that ARAP was vital to demonstrate that, 'we will stand with those who stand with us'.

The current Afghan resettlement reflects a much longer history of displacement, driven by decades of conflict and foreign intervention. Since the Saur Revolution in 1978, Afghanistan has endured near-continuous instability, from Soviet occupation (1979-1989), civil war (1992-1996), Taliban rule (1996-2001), followed by a twenty-year period of NATO-led state-building amid insurgency and regional proxy politics (Coll, 2004; Giustozzi, 2008). These cycles of violence, compounded by environmental shocks and economic crises, produced repeated waves of internal displacement and refugee movements across the region and beyond (Goodhand & Sedra, 2010; UNHCR, 2021, Scalettaris et al 2021).

The collapse of Afghanistan was accelerated by NATO's withdrawal following the formal conclusion of its combat mission in 2014, as well as the 2020 Doha Agreement, signed largely without Afghan government support, signalling waning international support that emboldened the Taliban (Maley and Jamal 2022). By mid-2021, Afghan security forces collapsed, already diminished by the limited support under NATO's reduced presence to a small 'train, advise, and assist' approach, and plagued by low morale, weak logistical capability and corruption (Jalali 2023). The Taliban gained provincial capitals, and ultimately in August 2021, Kabul fell, triggering a humanitarian emergency where hundreds of thousands fled amid fears of reprisals, persecution, and economic breakdown.

Operation Pitting, the UK's largest evacuation in modern history, marked the start of a new phase of Afghan displacement and resettlement under international protection frameworks (Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs 2022; UNHCR, 2023). While building on some legacies of previous resettlement efforts, including bespoke schemes for Syrians (VPRS) and the UKRS, the Afghan schemes were 'bespoke', nationality-based schemes created in response to the situation unfolding at hand (Tomlinson 2022; Berg & Zschomler 2025).

1.5 The resettlement operation

Before and during *Operation Pitting*, the UK evacuated around 15,000 Afghan and British individuals (Home Office 2026). Many brought family members with them, but others were separated in the chaotic scenes. Arriving under *Operation Warm Welcome,* they were then housed in up to 84 bridging hotels in the UK from Summer 2021 to Summer 2023. In the initial period of their introduction, Afghan resettlement schemes faced considerable scrutiny by the media and third sector organisations due to their spiralling costs (see Gower 2023 on costs of bridging hotels) and indications of failure. They were accused of 'not functioning properly' and being 'marred by ongoing substantive and procedural problems' (British Red Cross et al 2022, Human Rights Watch, 2022).

Housing families in hotels was considered as raising 'serious safeguarding issues for women and children in crowded accommodation' (Women and Equalities Committee 2023: 6) affecting groups already subject to human rights abuses (Human Rights Watch, 2022a) and exacerbating risks following resettlement, especially for the deteriorating mental health of women, in view of gender power dynamics (Human Rights Watch, 2022a and b).

Moving families on into housing from the bridging hotels was a challenge (see Chapter 2). By March 2023, around half (9,242) of those living in temporary placements in bridging hotels remained there, at great financial cost. In 2023 the use of bridging hotels for Afghans was withdrawn, with those still operating expected to close suddenly within a 3-month window, by the end of August 2023. As eviction notices were served to inhabitants, LA resettlement teams had to work very quickly to source housing, sometimes in the private rental sector, for families to be relocated and rehoused, albeit supported by ringfenced funds. The shift in approach led at the time to the Local Government Association (2023) warning of 'unsustainable pressures on housing, homelessness, and children's services teams'. At that time, if a household in bridging hotels refused three offers, they were expected to find their own accommodation via the 'Find Your Own' pathway (this was subsequently reduced to the refusal of one allocation). However, according to stakeholders, few families were ever given three offers, and most were considered fortunate if they were given a second one.

Following the discontinuation of using bridging hotels, *Operation Lazurite* began in Autumn 2023. This opened the Ministry of Defence estate to newly arriving Afghans, through 'Reception Onward Movement and Staging' (RSOM) sites and Transitional Service Family Accommodation (TSFA) sites across the country, utilising accommodation in military barracks and garrisons. This aimed to address the backlog of eligible Afghans awaiting migration, living in limbo for months in hotels in Pakistan, especially in the face of a new emergency where Pakistan began deporting Afghans to Afghanistan. Addressing the absence of transitional accommodation at that stage, when bridging hotels were no longer used, initially just one site at Garats Hay was intended for very short initial stays (48-72 hours). However, this proved to be insufficient, by far (see Chapter 7). Soon other parts of the Defence Estate were employed as RSOMs, providing initial reception, where families were expected to stay for a week to 10 days before movement to TSFAs or settled housing. Though planned as temporary reception sites, in reality, families stayed long-term for months before being moved on. This included sites across the UK, including in Staffordshire, Wiltshire, Shropshire, the Vale of White Horse, East Hampshire, St Athan (Vale of Glamorgan), Crowborough (East Sussex) and Lancashire.

In TSFAs, Afghans were expected to be housed for up to 9 months, with wraparound support and orientation provided by MOD contracted service-provider and housing company, Mears, before being offered settled accommodation in a matching process coordinated by the Home Office. Here, local authorities put forward a property offer, and the Home Office matching team match the offer with a family. Most recently, under ARP, from Spring 2025, however, Transitional Accommodation, again in hotels (but not 'bridging hotels'), is being run by the MOD as the military estate is 'drawn down', meaning those sites are returned to full military use. The housing company Mears was contracted by MoD to provide further accommodation and/or orientation.

Under ARP, those who arrived at TSFAs (and arriving now at Transitional Accommodation) have only one housing allocation, continuing a rule that was introduced on 1st April 2024 for those on ACRS. The 'one allocation' policy means that households are obliged to accept housing that is matched and offered to them (management of the matching process is by the Home Office). Housing can be anywhere (including in Northern Ireland). Families may decline for various reasons e.g. being close to networks or perceiving areas as isolated and unsuitable. However, if households decline their offer, they must find their own property (see below). Families who decline a HO matched property

can remain in transitional accommodation until the maximum of 9 months' transitional accommodation is reached. Families are issued a 'Notice to Quit' a month before this date and must make a homeless application if they have no other plan for accommodation. For new arrivals, the preference is also now for around half of families to be finding their own accommodation, with only the larger and more complex families matched. Currently, 3,550 people, over half of whom are children, are housed in transitional accommodation (Home Office 2026).

1.6 Resettlement support

The accommodation and integration-support of Afghans required a joint central-local government effort and although not mandatory, most LAs across the country pledged to house Afghans. LAs secured accommodation in social housing and the private rental sector, which was then 'matched' by the Home Office, who were responsible for issuing an accommodation offer to a family. Some ARAP families were also housed in 'service families accommodation' (SFA) where tenancies were offered for three years, in MOD housing in regular neighbourhoods (known as living 'outside the wire'). Another route was 'Find your own' accommodation pathway, run by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MCHLG) where families source their own housing in the private rental sector.

Resettlement operated on a markedly different scale; some small LAs, for example, in the North-West, were working with 20 or so families, whilst some of the larger LAs, such as in London, were working with several hundred families. According to government data, 11% of Afghans are currently housed in the private rental sector, approximately three quarters are supported in housing managed by local authorities and the remainder are in transitional accommodation; Afghans are also widely spread, albeit with 32% of arrivals living in London and the South East as of end June 2025 (Migration Observatory 2025, using Home Office Immigration Systems Statistics – gov.uk 2025c).

As we discuss further in Chapter 4, housing has been a major challenge in the resettlement operation, but the schemes were supported from their inception under the previous Conservative government. For example, 'buy-back' options and Flexible Housing Funds helped LAs address minimal shortfalls and secure private rentals. Moreover, Local Authority Housing Funds (LAHF) enabled councils to increase their stock (or become stock-owning councils for the first time) to offer additional housing. This extra ring-fenced UK government funding from the Treasury meant that Afghans were not placed on existing council housing lists, LAs were not using their existing budget to support the schemes and councils were not using existing council tax revenues to fund Afghan resettlement.

When in transitional accommodation (including formerly bridging hotels and TSFAs) families receive wraparound support from local authorities; when moving on into settled accommodation, they have integration support provided by allocated caseworkers. This provided new arrivals with three years of integration support including orientation on health, education, housing and welfare support, access to English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) classes as well as employment support. The government provided additional funding for children's education, adult English language support and healthcare. While funding has ostensibly increased under the recent funding rounds, some of the additional and specialised funding has de facto decreased, leading to, according to stakeholders, a reduction in overall financial support (Chapter 7).

1.7 Report structure

In the next chapter, we explain our methodology. In Chapters 3-6, we present headline findings from our research with Afghans across key domains of embedding: Families, Young People and Education (Chapter 3), Housing (Chapter 4), Employment (Chapter 5) and Wellbeing, Connections and Local Belonging (Chapter 6). This aims to give primacy to the experiences of those people going through resettlement and relocation, which to date is a perspective that is notably absent in current debates. Finally, in Chapter 7, we focus on stakeholders' perspectives about the schemes generally, and their views on how they have experienced working to support Afghans regarding policies and practice around resettlement and specific domains of education, housing, employment and ESOL, and wellbeing. We conclude with final observations and policy and practice recommendations.

2 Methodology

Our team carried out this research over a two-year period (2024-2025), employing a collaborative approach to understand Afghans' experiences, as they were settled into housing in localities. We employed a mixed-methods approach, involving a large-scale survey as well as 4 further strands of qualitative research, to capture both broader patterns from large scale data and insights from the lived experiences of individuals. Integrating diverse data strands allowed us to triangulate the findings and develop a nuanced understanding of the resettlement outcomes for Afghans across different localities. Here, we explain further details of each strand as well as provide an explanation of how we integrated the data and mitigated ethical issues.

2.1 The survey

A survey was carried out with Afghan adults aged 18+, who have moved into settled accommodation, thus were not in transitional accommodation (such as temporary service family accommodation in military sites). We employed and trained Afghan peer researchers to carry out face-to-face interviews either in person, or through pre-arranged video calls online at a time convenient to individuals. Peer researchers entered responses directly into Qualtrics online at the time of the interview. Surveys were carried out in seven councils (four borough councils and three county councils) across four regions: London, the South East, West Midlands and the North West. The 115-question questionnaire was offered in English, Pashto and Dari and split into eight thematic sections to generate data on:

1. **Household Composition**: household size, family members in UK/Afghanistan/other countries.

2. **Language and Education**: literacy, English language skills and training, interpreter use, education, aspirations.

3. **Children's Education**: school attendance, SEN support, satisfaction, parental engagement, understanding of the UK education system.

4. **Employment and Income**: employment before and after arriving in the UK, income and benefits.

5. **Accommodation:** arrival date, moves, reasons for relocation, current housing details, satisfaction

6. **Locality:** safety, discrimination, council support, cultural amenities, social connections, sense of belonging.

7. **Health & Wellbeing:** general health, long-term conditions, mental wellbeing, satisfaction with health services, social support.

8. **Demographics:** gender, age, ethnicity, religion, marital status, province of origin.

We worked with 20 peer researchers (10 women and 10 men) across the regions, including both Dari and Pashto speakers. On average, three peer researchers were employed in each area; these staff members had been resettled under ARAP or ACRS themselves. The project team trained them in survey administration and recruitment, research ethics and safety, drawing on previous research. After completing their training and survey administration, some of the peer researchers were further involved in assisting with recruitment for the women's walking interviews and the men's interviews.

At the end of the data collection phase, we organised two online focus groups and invited peer researchers to share their views. These sessions enabled us to collectively reflect on what the peer

researchers had gained from working on the project. We also discussed the potential experience of vicarious trauma and whether the peer researchers felt sufficiently supported by our weekly catchups and regular WhatsApp communications.

2.1.1 The survey sample

To recruit survey participants, we initially approached resettlement teams within local authorities and Strategic Migration Partnerships in seven councils: 3 in London, 2 in the South East, 1 in the West Midlands and 1 in the North West of England. This was important, since they had sampling frames, with numbers of all resettled Afghans housed in their areas. They, along with other Afghan community organisations and other civil society organisations, helped in recruiting the peer researchers, who were also on the schemes themselves. In turn, the peer researchers were able to reach other eligible Afghans, often with the help of both LA teams and migrant, refugee and community organisations to supplement their own informal networks in the different localities.

The survey closed with 819 responses (789 valid), achieving both gender parity among respondents, as well as diversity in terms of ethnicity (see Table 2.1). We achieved response rates of between 45% and 55% of resettled Afghan households in each region, with more respondents having been relocated under ARAP (58.8%) than ACRS (41.2%), reflecting national proportions. Therefore, while our study is not nationally representative, it draws on substantial, known and diverse samples of resettled Afghans across multiple sites. By achieving strong voluntary response rates within well-defined local sampling frames, the findings can reasonably be considered representative of Afghans living in those areas. To aid analysis and provide comparable numbers, we combined the London councils' responses into one area.

Table 2.1 ***Sample – demographic information***

		Area 1	Area 2	Area 3	Area 4	Area 5	Total
Gender	**Male**	78 (49.4%)	84 (49.1%)	67 (47.9%)	59 (49.6%)	93 (46.5%)	381 (48.4%)
	Female	80 (50.6%)	87 (50.9%)	73 (52.1%)	60 (50.4%)	107 (53.5%)	407 (51.6%)
Age	**18-24**	29 (18.4%)	43 (25%)	35 (25%)	23 (19.3%)	55 (27.5%)	185 (23.4%)
	25-34	56 (35.4%)	38 (22.1%)	46 (32.9%)	41 (34.5%)	48 (24%)	229 (29%)
	35-44	45 (28.5%)	53 (30.8%)	35 (25%)	35 (29.4%)	53 (26.5%)	221 (28%)
	45-54	10 (6.3%)	23 (13.4%)	12 (8.6%)	14 (11.8%)	35 (17.5%)	94 (11.9%)
	55-64	15 (9.5%)	9 (5.2%)	10 (7.1%)	6 (5%)	9 (4.5%)	49 (6.2%)
	65+	3 (1.9%)	6 (3.5%)	2 (1.4%)			11 (1.4%)
Ethnicity	**Pashtun**	65 (41.1%)	65 (37.8%)	54 (38.6%)	42 (35.3%)	67 (33.5%)	293 (37.1%)
	Tajik	70 (44.3%)	91 (52.9%)	63 (45%)	58 (48.7%)	108 (54%)	390 (49.4%)
	Hazara	17 (10.8%)	7 (4.1%)	18 (12.9%)	18 (15.1%)	21 (10.5%)	81 (10.3%)
	Uzbek	6 (3.8%)	7 (4.1%)			2 (1%)	15 (1.9%)
	Other		1 (0.6%)	3 (2.1%)	1 (0.8%)	2 (1%)	7 (0.9%)
Religion	**Islam**	156 (98.7%)	171 (100%)	139 (99.3%)	100 (85.5%)	200 (100%)	766 (97.5%)
	Other	1 (0.6%)			5 (4.3%)		6 (0.8%)
	Prefer not to say	1 (0.6%)		1 (0.7%)	12 (10.3%)		14 (1.8%)
Branch of Islam	**Sunni**	138 (88.5%)	160 (93.6%)	114 (82%)	93 (93.9%)	174 (87.9%)	679 (89%)
	Shia	15 (9.6%)	11 (6.4%)	20 (14.4%)	6 (6.1%)	24 (12.1%)	76 (10%)
	Prefer not to say	3 (1.9%)		5 (3.6%)			8 (1%)
	Married	111 (70.3%)	116 (67.8%)	89 (64%)	104 (89.7%)	142 (71.4%)	562 (71.8%)

Marital Status	**Widowed**	7 (4.4%)	6 (3.5%)	2 (1.4%)	4 (3.4%)	4 (2%)	23 (2.9%)
	Divorced	1 (0.6%)					1 (0.1%)
	Separated			3 (2.2%)		1 (0.5%)	4 (0.5%)
	Never married	39 (24.7%)	49 (28.7%)	45 (32.4%)	8 (6.9%)	52 (26.1%)	193 (24.6%)
Resettlement Scheme	**ARAP**	73 (46.2%)	93 (54.1%)	70 (50%)	59 (49.6%)	169 (84.5%)	464 (58.8%)
	ACRS	85 (53.8%)	79 (45.9%)	70 (50%)	60 (50.4%)	31 (15.5%)	325 (41.2%)

The survey data were collected in three separate Qualtrics datasets, corresponding to the language of the questionnaire (Dari, Pashto and English). These were then combined into a single dataset, which was imported into SPSS for subsequent data analysis. Approximately half of surveys (49%) were completed in English, the remainder in Dari and Pashto.

We began with descriptive statistics to summarise key characteristics of the sample and explore distributions of outcomes and predictors. Next, we conducted bivariate analyses to examine associations between individual variables and the outcomes of interest for resettled Afghans. To further examine factors associated with various outcomes, we employed fixed-effect multilevel regression models appropriate to the type of dependent variable (e.g., logistic for binary outcomes, linear for continuous measures). To account for broader locality-level on individual outcomes, we incorporated the Indices of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) as area-level covariates in our multilevel models. IMD (https://deprivation.communities.gov.uk/) is a composite measure that captures socio-economic disadvantage across several domains, providing a nuanced representation of locality characteristics. Incorporating these dimensions allowed us to model individual-level factors alongside structural and environmental characteristics, ensuring that analyses reflected both individual and contextual characteristics. By using a multilevel framework, we accounted for variations at both the individual level (such as age, gender, and education) and higher-level contextual factors of locality. This method provides robust estimates of predictors while considering the hierarchical structure of the data.

In this report, unless noted, we present only those differences and key variables that were identified as statistically significant in our analyses. To analyse the survey data, we used descriptive statistics, chi-square tests, t-tests, ANOVA, and regression analysis which indicated where differences and correlations were statistically significant. A significance level of $p < 0.05$ was used for all statistical testing in this report. Statistical significance means that a result is unlikely to have occurred purely by chance. As we base our conclusions on a sample rather than the whole population, random variation can make groups look different even when they are not. When a finding is statistically significant, we can be more confident that the pattern we observe in the sample rather reflects a real underlying trend in the population. For example, if we compare education levels between Afghan men and women, and find that women, on average, have lower levels of education, a statistical test might produce a p-value of 0.02. This p-value indicates that there is only a 2% probability of observing a difference this large in our sample if, in reality, no true difference existed between men and women. In other words, such a result is unlikely to be due to sampling chance and likely reflects a genuine disparity in education levels. This approach ensures that the findings highlighted are supported by robust evidence rather than random variation, allowing readers to focus on results that have meaningful implications for interpretation and decision-making.

2.2 Walking interviews with women

Towards the end of 2024, we began undertaking 26 walking interviews with women and one transgender individual to understand processes of embedding and belonging across very different geographical contexts (Ryan et al., 2021). Participants were recruited in London, Birmingham and rural settings and small towns across the South-east and the North-west with the help of NGOs, Local Authority resettlement teams and peer researchers. Participants led the walks, deciding on the route and duration. Each walk was followed by a seated interview in a quiet location. Translation was provided as needed by our research assistant or by a peer researcher. These mobile methods revealed the places where the women live, socialise, shop, and feel safe, but also places where they feel unsafe, isolated and lonely. All the interviews were audio recorded, anonymised and coded in NVivo, and analysed thematically and we also followed up with a short demographic survey. Due to the small sample size, some individuals could potentially be identifiable. We disguised details to maintain confidentiality, while ensuring the integrity of the data. Fuller details on methods and findings are available in a recently published paper (Ryan, López and Rasa, 2026).

2.3 Photovoice with young people

We worked with 17 young people, aged 16–19, who had arrived since 2021, in group workshops in late 2024 at a London school and in early 2025 in a community space in a Northern city. Working with our RAs, themselves young people from Afghanistan, we used Photovoice, a visual method used where participants are recruited as co-researchers to take photographs to capture elements of their lives, which are then discussed collectively in a group setting to generate recommendations for community change (Wang and Burris, 1997). We provided training and invited young participants to document their experiences relating to their neighbourhoods and institutions they inhabit through photographs. The London school had in 2021-22, admitted over 80 Afghan young people mid-year, who had been housed in bridging hotels locally, and we worked with some of the students remaining in the borough, after most had been moved to other locations in England. In the northern city, we employed a young peer researcher who attended college herself to use her own social networks, in collaboration with one of our employed RAs living in the city, to recruit other more dispersed resettled Afghan young people.

We held five sessions over ten weeks, on bi-monthly occasions in both sites. We used an introductory session to explain the research and method, trial taking photos and discussing them, exploring consent and ethical issues and collectively choosing the first theme for the photographs. During following sessions individuals were given their printed photos to discuss in smaller audio-recorded breakout groups, separated by gender (in line with their wishes). At the end of each session, the research team held group discussions to explore common themes in the photos. The final session involved individual follow-up interviews and a short demographic survey. Conversations were facilitated in home-languages if preferred. All focus group breakouts, group reflections and individual interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed and translated where necessary. Following the workshops, our team collectively analysed the photographs, grouping them by theme and developing a coding tree for the transcripts based on prior reading, familiarity with the workshops. Transcripts were then coded in NVivo.

2.4 Male interviews

We conducted 25 in-depth life-history interviews with Afghan men across all research sites. Participants were recruited with the support of NGOs, Local Authority resettlement teams, and peer researchers who assisted in connecting us with individuals from different regions, ages, and family

backgrounds. All interviews were held online, via Microsoft Teams or Zoom, and were carried out by male members of the research team, including Mustafa Raheal, the RA who is fluent in both Dari and Pashto to ensure linguistic and cultural accessibility.

The interviews followed the *River of Life* method, a narrative technique that invites participants to reflect on their life trajectory moving through different stages and transitions. Using this approach, men narrated their experiences from their early lives in Afghanistan, through periods of conflict and displacement, to their evacuation, arrival in the UK, and ongoing resettlement journeys. This method allowed participants to move between past and present, highlighting moments of stability, rupture, and adaptation in a way that linear questioning often cannot.

All interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed verbatim, cleaned, and subjected to an initial round of inductive coding to identify emerging concepts and patterns which was sufficient to supplement analysis from other strands for the purposes of the report. As of early 2026, a detailed and systematic thematic analysis has been since undertaken in NVivo and will be reported in full in academic papers to follow. To protect participants' anonymity, identifying information has been altered or removed, and contextual details have been carefully adjusted to ensure confidentiality without compromising the authenticity or analytical value of the data.

2.5 Stakeholder research: interviews and regional roundtables

We conducted interviews with 43 stakeholders, including members of local authority resettlement teams, regional strategic migration partnerships, agencies, government departments and civil service organisations that work as commissioned service providers, as well as school and healthcare providers. Most of the interviews were conducted online with two members of the research team present. All interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed, and team members checked and corrected the transcripts for accuracy. Due to the sensitive nature of the discussions and to adhere to ethical protocols, detailed accounts of stakeholders' job titles, departments or organisations are not provided in this report.

The interviews were supplemented by three in person regional roundtables with local council resettlement teams, including 45 resettlement caseworkers from 30 councils in London and the South-East; the West Midlands; and the North-West. These events provided valuable opportunities for resettlement teams to share their experiences. We undertook analysis through hand-coding the data inductively (meaning that themes were identified and refined throughout). This was most appropriate since the themes emerging were highly specialised, relating to specific and evolving policies.

2.6 Data integration - mixed methods

This report includes 'headline learnings' from all data strands across four outcome areas for Afghans: education, housing, employment and wellbeing. Our mixed-methods analysis began with an examination of the survey sample to identify patterns within each thematic area, focusing on how individual characteristics and local contexts interact to shape outcomes for Afghans. Building on these quantitative insights, we seek to deepen understanding and give voice to the lived experiences of Afghans in various localities by drawing on the qualitative research strands, especially walking interviews with women, Photovoice exercises with young people and *River of Life* interviews with men. This integrated approach allowed us to both illustrate and explore in more depth the patterns observed in the survey data through participants' narratives and visual accounts. By including our stakeholder views last, we can identify to what extent findings are common across Afghan participants in the research and those working to support them, and where divergences might lie.

2.7 Ethical issues

This research received ethical approval at the Institute of Education at University College London. Our approach adheres to rigorous protocols of informed consent, pseudonymisation, secure data storage, in accordance with UK legal requirements and the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). We provided information sheets (available in Pashto, Dari or English) that were tailored for each data strand, and participants signed an informed consent form in hard copy or online, to confirm their voluntary participation, acknowledging their right to withdraw from the research at any time. For participants with limited literacy skills, research assistants and fieldworkers read the documents aloud and encouraged participants to ask questions for clarification.

Participants in the survey were entered into a prize draw to receive one of ten £50 supermarket vouchers, while those in the walking interviews and male interviews, received a £15 supermarket voucher as a token of appreciation for taking part. In the Photovoice project, participants received five £15 supermarket vouchers as a mark of appreciation throughout the work and their travel costs were covered, if necessary. This was not advertised prior to participation, although it was referenced discreetly in case costs of attendance prevented participation.

There was a risk of an imbalance of power when collecting personal data from Afghan participants and fieldworkers. Our RAs helped us build trust, while throughout the project, following the initial intensive training, we held regular catch-up sessions with the peer researchers to provide support and oversee the survey. Upon completion of their engagement with the research, we kept in touch with many of the peer researchers, and provided them, as well as our young participants, with letters of recommendation for future employers and supported many with job references. We invited them to participate in a reflective conversation about their involvement. We also hope to invite some peer researchers and research participants to participate in writing or dissemination events to support their future career ambitions.

In line with the British Sociological Association's (2017) guidelines for ethical research, the research team provided the RAs and peer researchers with training on how to respond if participants became upset and how to signpost them to relevant local support services. Participants were reminded that they could pause interviews at any time if needed. During Photovoice sessions, the team cultivated positive and collaborative group dynamics by setting ground rules and intentions for the research space. To minimise distress among the research team, we held regular reflective conversations and check-ins after the interviews and Photovoice groups.

3 Families, young people and education

Introduction and key findings

Children and young people comprise over half of the resettled Afghan population (NAO 2026); thus, it is important to begin from the perspective of families with children and young people, where much of their resettlement journeys have been shaped by their interactions with education. This chapter presents insights from relevant survey data and draws especially on our Photovoice sessions with young people in London and a northern English city, using photographs to illustrate many points. We also draw on relevant insights from the other qualitative datasets as well as some specialist educational stakeholders (see also Chapter 7 on stakeholders).

After long periods in temporary accommodation and significant disruption noted in Chapter 1, we identified that for the young people, schools and colleges quickly became key spaces where they rebuilt routine, made social connections and felt a sense of belonging. At the same time, our evidence suggests that parents faced major challenges understanding the UK education system, navigating transitions, and supporting children in a new linguistic and cultural environment. Our key findings are that:

- Survey data indicates variation and gaps in parents' understanding of aspects of the educational system, and a particularly gendered lack of knowledge and involvement that strongly shapes how families engage with the school system. Though mothers are most involved in family care (see Chapter 5), they report much less confidence than fathers in navigating school processes.

- Parents are well engaged and satisfied with their children's schooling. They are committed to supporting their children but have limited confidence in their ability to help with schoolwork. Some also face logistical challenges in relation to schooling.

- Young people experienced significant disruption, delays in accessing education and being able to learn English, especially through transient accommodation. This especially affected those arriving during or approaching critical school years of GCSEs and post-16 phases, and there were also some issues in placing children correctly by age.

- Corresponding with parental backgrounds (see Chapter 4) students had a diversity of prior educational backgrounds. Some were arriving following limited, disrupted or no education; those coming from private schooling were able to navigate that transition more smoothly.

- Despite a challenging start due to culture shock, language problems, issues around correct age-placement, and for a few, bullying, we found that schools and colleges emerged as vital spaces of emotional safety and belonging, providing stability after displacement for young people. Those working in schools with Afghan young people also reported how the young students' presence in school was enriching.

- Locality affects educational embedding. Our research demonstrates how students experience varied; one group arrived in a large group at the same school with other Afghans, which offered some protection. The scale meant they benefited from support that was targeted to their capabilities. In the second site, students were more spread out across

schools and colleges, and less concentrated in large numbers; some were able to maintain close-knit networks with other Afghan young people, but not all.

- Young people's experiences of discrimination and racism varied. They reported more opaque than overt discrimination, whereas some faced overt discrimination outside of school, especially in spaces where they presented as a more visible minority. Being more dispersed however offered some positive opportunities to make connections with others in the locality (see also Chapter 6, wellbeing).

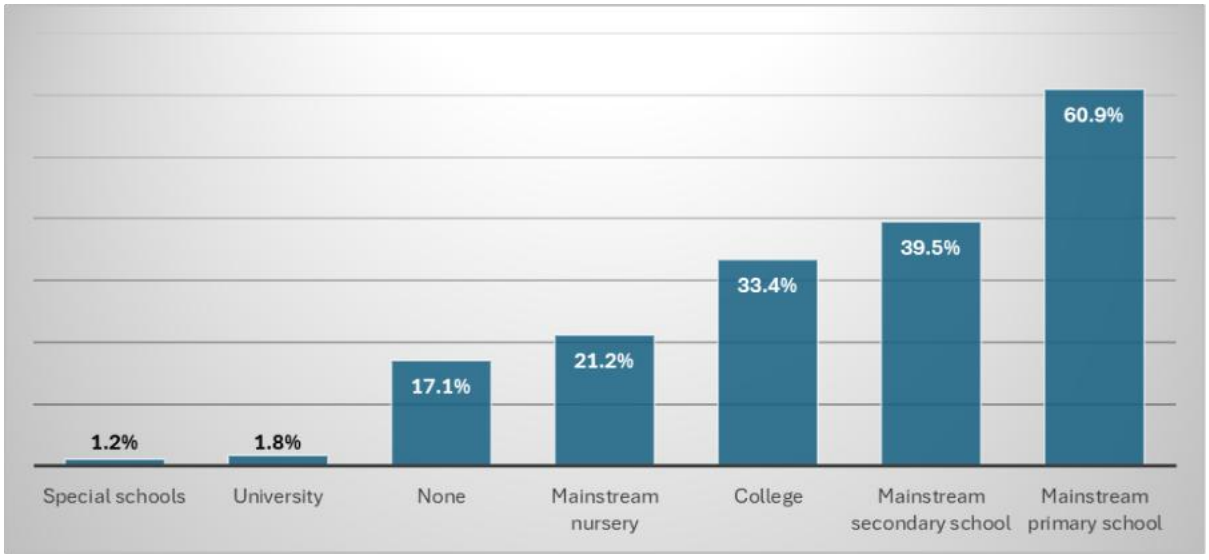
3.1 Children's participation in schooling

Children and young people form a significant part of the household composition among the families surveyed. 60% of respondents reported having children under the age of 19 living in their household, while the average number of children was 4 and 25% of the respondents have more than 5 children in their households.

Due to this population composition, issues around children's schooling and young people are central to many of the Afghan families. The survey suggests that most children attend mainstream schools (see Figure 3-1), with 60.9% attending a state primary school and 39.5% state secondary school. A relatively large proportion were attending colleges (33.4%) and one-fifth (21.2%) nursery[1].

17.1% respondents reported that their children did not attend any educational institution. As we looked more into this number, we could see that most respondents in that group only had children outside of compulsory education age. Even so, 4.3% of the survey participants with compulsory school age children still reported that they were not attending any education, indicating that there may still be persistent problems of accessing education for some young people.

Figure 3-1 ***% Type of educational institution attending****, (N=509), multiple choice, all who have children living with them*



[1] Because households often include more than one child enrolled in different types of educational settings (for example, one child in nursery and another in secondary school) the total percentage adds up to more than 100% - as households can be counted in more than one category.

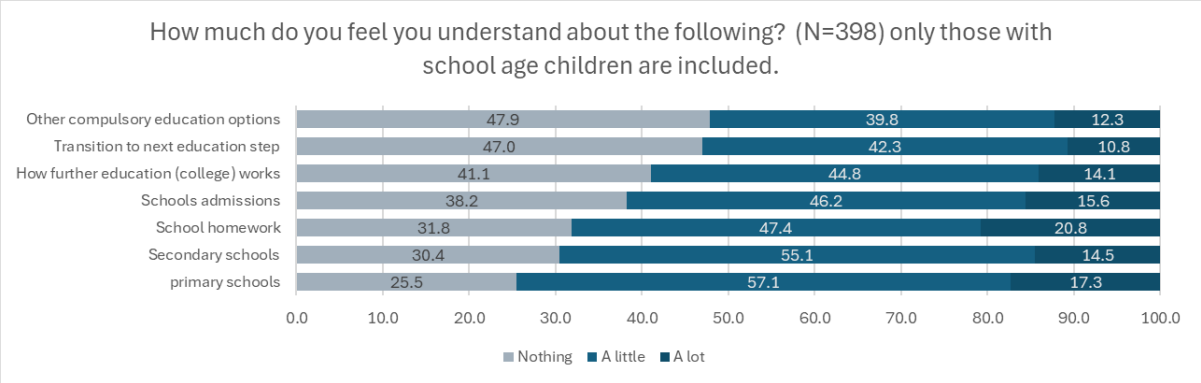
Only 2.9% of the Afghans who participated in the survey and who had children living with them said their child or multiple children received special education needs and disability support. We suspect this is likely to be an underestimate of the actual identified or non-identified need due to several factors: delays in diagnosis, lack of knowledge of the SEND support system, and potential stigma (see Oliver and Singal 2017). Moreover, our fieldwork with stakeholders suggests that families with children with SEND may still have been living in transitional accommodation rather than in settled accommodation, thus we would not have recruited them into our sample (see Chapter 2.1). In our discussions with educational stakeholders, it was also discussed that where some of the children were not making progress in English language support, it was difficult to discern whether this was a learning need or English language need, indicating some of the complications around SEND in the contexts of migration (see Oliver and Singal 2017).

3.2 Parents' understanding of schooling

A key finding from the survey is that Afghan parents have varying levels of understanding of the UK education system. While many feel confident about basic aspects of schooling, there are large gaps in knowledge about admissions, transitions, and post-compulsory pathways. Overall in the survey, 17% of Afghans with children report understanding the UK education system 'not well at all', with a further 29.3% saying they do not understand it 'well'.

Self-reported understanding of key education topics varies widely, as Figure 3-2 demonstrates. The strongest area of confidence among respondents is primary schooling, where only 25.5% report knowing nothing, while 57.1% say they know 'a little' and 17.3% 'a lot'. For secondary schools, 30.4% report no understanding, 55.1% a little, and 14.5% a lot. Understanding of school homework is relatively weak, with 31.8% saying 'nothing' and 20.8% reporting 'a lot.'

Figure 3-2 ***How much do you feel you understand about the following?*** *(N=398) [only those with school-age children are included].*



Knowledge about school admissions and transition to the next education step is more limited. For admissions, 38.2% report knowing nothing, and only 15.6% feel they know a lot, while for transitions, 47% say they know nothing and just 10.8% a lot. Awareness of further education (college) and other compulsory education is even lower: 41.1% and 47.9% respectively report no understanding, with only 12–14% claiming a lot of knowledge. The levels of understanding of the information provided by schools were relatively low among resettled Afghans (4.8 out of 10) with around half reporting low understanding or no understanding at all.

Understanding of the various aspects of the UK education system shows a significant gender divide among resettled Afghans. Across all areas from primary schools to transitions between education

stages, women are far more likely to report knowing 'nothing,' with rates often double those of men (e.g., 58.6% of women vs. 34.9% of men for transitions). Men consistently report higher confidence in their knowledge and understanding, with up to 32% saying they know 'a lot' about school homework compared to just 9.8% of women. This aligns with wider survey findings showing lower literacy and English proficiency among Afghan women (see Chapter 5) which strongly correlates with this data on their reduced understanding of the education system.

This picture was also confirmed in the qualitative research. Fathers typically talked about schooling as 'one of the most significant aspects of the resettlement experience for their children', often comparing this with the disrupted educational opportunities they experienced before coming to the UK. Some of the fathers showed a good knowledge of the way the UK educational system functioned concerning school enrolment, the way children progress through the system according to their age, and the value of regular attendance at school. For instance, Omar spoke about his involvement with his children regarding schooling. He talked about his pride when they learn something new and stated that he is aware of, 'what they [their children] study, how the education system works, and when they receive appreciation from teachers, I feel proud'. All expressed commitment to the value of education in shaping their children's futures. As Najeeb noted, 'I plan for all my children to go to university. Education is my priority; it is the most important thing in life.'

However, research in countries in the global north shows that in general among the wider national parent body, knowledge of educational pathways varies significantly, and that this knowledge critically shapes children's outcomes (e.g. see Forster and van de Werfhorst 2020 using Dutch school cohort data). However, this can be especially so for minoritised and migrant groups, even where highly educated. For example, Gil et al's (2023) study of highly educated international scholar parents found that 'school expectations were unclear and rarely explained explicitly'(ibid.:52). Likewise, here, some of the parents also described confusion about the UK schooling structure and transitions. As Afruz, one of the fathers in our study explained, 'we were not familiar with how the education system works in the UK… I had no clue what GCSEs are, what college is, what grades you need, or what UCAS and PTE exams are'. Some male participants noted challenges in fully supporting their children's education due to language barriers or unfamiliarity with curriculum expectations. This was illustrated by Naveed, who stated that he and his wife found it hard to support their children with homework because, 'we can't speak English to help the children with their studies'. This lack of system knowledge sometimes led to parents feeling confused in understanding placements, as Naveed explained, 'My son was in year 3 in Afghanistan, but because of the rules here he was placed in year 8. It is too difficult to jump from year 3 to year 8 directly' (see below).

Although most women were satisfied with the education system, our data from walking interviews reinforces the findings from survey data, suggesting that many of the mothers struggled to communicate with schools (see also Chapter 5 on language). Children and caseworkers (see Chapter 1.6) often acted as interpreters between schools and parents (reflecting Orellana and Phoenix's 2017 observation of the 'non-normative childhoods' of immigrant children, where children may act as language brokers). Other women are reliant on their husbands to liaise with schools. For example, Malika was a housewife and mother of six from the north of England. She explained that her husband communicates with the primary school teacher in Urdu, with secondary school teachers via email with Google Translate, and with the caseworker acting as an interpreter.

There are also logistical issues that affect parents' relationships with schools. Madina, a widow and mother of three, does not speak English and lives in a village in northern England. She said that despite never having attended school before, her children were placed in Years 7 and 8 directly. Although they were excited about starting school, she said that joining a classroom where everyone

spoke English was ‘a bit difficult’: ‘I don’t know how they manage it’. She wished they could attend a school closer to home. Due to health issues with her mobility, she often arrives late to pick them up and explained: ‘they [the school] just call the caseworker and he will call me back: ‘where are you, why didn’t you pick up the children from school?’’

These gaps in understanding, misunderstandings and logistical challenges mean that young people arriving during critical stages from Year 9 onwards lose important guidance on next steps to take, such as the implications of subject choices at GCSE and beyond. Some educational stakeholders in local authority teams reported that families with older children arriving at these key educational transition points have the most challenging experience. Whereas in primary school, all children are learning basic issues together, those arriving in more advanced stages are more likely to experiencing bullying, may also have been out of education for some time and may struggle with the psychological impacts of displacement simultaneously. An education specialist in a local authority expressed that in addition,

> we're putting them in a year 10 when it's options, GCSE: what are they? Families don't understand what those are, let alone that you're going to have the skills to achieve any of those grades. And then of course that does affect your onward chances around sixth form entry and stuff like that, because schools will not accept them if they're not going to hit the GCSE grades.

In summary, although Afghan parents show strong commitment to their children’s education many show limited understanding of key processes such as admissions, transitions and post-16 routes. These gaps highlight the need for both targeted supports, particularly to improve women’s access to information about schooling and admissions, since they often fulfil all caring duties in the families, as well as recognition of father’s key roles in liaison with schools. In the next part, we consider parents’ engagement with schools in practice and the ways gaps in understanding shape their involvement.

3.3 Parental engagement

Despite uncertainty about the UK education system, Afghan parents remain highly engaged in their children’s education. For those whose children were in schools and colleges, parents’ satisfaction was generally high (around 90% are very or fairly satisfied with their children’s education). In the qualitative research, they repeatedly emphasised their determination to be engaged with their children’s schooling and education and encourage academic success, as Farid, one of the fathers admitted: ‘I told my children: ‘I have done what I could to be able to bring my family here. Now your responsibility is to study. Nothing is more important than education for having a good future.’ Sharif linked parental involvement to long-term goals for stability and success by describing how he encouraged his kids to concentrate on their learning because, ‘education is very important for their future here’.

As a result, we find that engagement in school activities is strong: the survey shows that two-thirds of Afghan parents with children attending nursery, primary and secondary schools participate in parents’ meetings. In the qualitative research, many men talked about their active involvement with schools, including ensuring regular attendance, attending meetings and closely monitoring children’s learning progress. However, the survey shows that language barriers seem to limit participation in parent meetings and school events (21-25%). The other minor reasons for not attending mentioned were other caring responsibilities (4%) and work (1-3%)[2]. Interpreting support varies across schools:

[2] Percentages vary and are slightly different for nurseries, primary and secondary schools.

slightly more than one third (38.2% for primary and 39.5% for secondary schools) of Afghan parents in the survey reported that their schools provided interpreters for the meetings.

Similarly to issues of understanding, although parents expressed commitment, their confidence in helping their children with schoolwork was also quite low. Survey respondents with children were asked '*How confident are you that you can help your child with the work they bring home from primary/secondary school?*' using a scale of 0-10. Even where levels of confidence reported by Afghan parents in supporting their children in primary schools is higher (e.g. 5.2 out of 10, compared to secondary schools, where it is 4.2 out of 10), this is still quite low. Confidence is also gendered, where fathers reported significantly higher confidence in helping children with schoolwork at primary level (6.4 out of 10) and secondary (5.3 out of 10) as well as in understanding school communications (6.5 out of 10). Mothers were more likely to report low confidence in helping children with their schoolwork (3.9 and 3.2, respectively) and limited understanding of the school information (3.2).

The data indicate that the literacy levels and English knowledge of parents are associated with their confidence in how they can help their children with their education and schoolwork (this is explored in greater depth in chapter 5). As Naveed described: 'I and my wife both can't speak English to support our children with their studies, this is one of the main challenges we are dealing with.' This also explains lower levels of knowledge and confidence among Afghan women who, as we discuss in chapter 5, have pronounced lower levels of literacy and English language proficiency. These language barriers translate into everyday parental struggles.

Our qualitative research highlights further how this is borne out in changes in gendered roles for family administration, with fathers increasingly taking on responsibilities for children's schooling in the UK. Najib noted: 'Here, I take them to school and bring them home. That was never my responsibility before. Now I share this with my wife.' In households where mothers had limited English, fathers often acted as intermediaries. For example, according to Harron: 'My wife doesn't speak English well, so I handle appointments, children's school matters, and benefits.'

Overall, the data suggest that Afghan parents seek to be involved in, and supportive of the education of their children. While they are somewhat confident about day-to-day schooling and homework, they lack clarity on details around admissions, transitions, and post-compulsory education areas, where for many, and particularly for women, literacy and English language knowledge serve as a barrier. This indicates the need for careful, targeted information and support for Afghan families and young people.

3.4 Young people's experiences of education

3.4.1 Initial experiences of schooling: resettlement shock and rebuilding

Moving now to the perspectives of young people in school, the young participants we worked with in our Photovoice research sessions, coming from a range of academic levels, demonstrated strong capacities to adapt to changes they had faced, as well as to achieve. Some of those we met had progressed rapidly through English levels, excelled in maths and sciences, and articulated ambitious educational goals, including careers in medicine, engineering, law and teaching. Others were supported to pursue more vocational courses in construction or beauty but were still also appreciative of their educational establishments as the first stable environments where they could regain a sense of normality, safety and belonging.

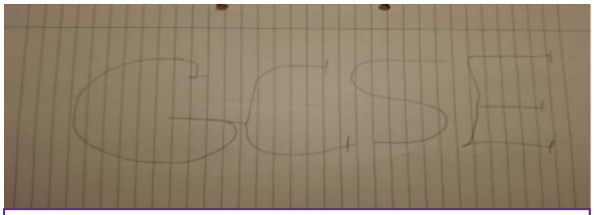
All the young people in the qualitative research unanimously expressed 'resettlement shock' upon arriving in the country, explaining how they had struggled with language, unfamiliar housing, environments, and experiences, while often having to juggle schooling with assisting with familial responsibilities. Several explained the embarrassment at not knowing how to go about everyday aspects of life in England, such as getting a bus or ordering food when on a school trip, which left them feeling vulnerable. For instance, Sahil in London referred to the nervousness he felt walking to catch a bus and fearing someone would approach him to ask him something. In the northern site, Rose reflected on the abrupt transition and need to relearn everything, saying, 'We did not know the language and our way around and we did not know anyone. Everything suddenly changed… We did not even know if what we ate was halal or not. But we got used to it eventually'.

For several of our participants, the transition to schooling was made difficult by their initial accommodation in bridging hotels or Transitional Service Families Accommodation (TSFAs, see Chapters 1, 4 and 7). Rose's experience was particularly difficult since her family lived for a long time in transient hotel accommodation in a less diverse area in the East of England for a long period. Not understanding much beyond one or two words, and as one of only three Muslim Afghan young women in the school, she experienced frequent bullying: 'We were bullied by other kids,' she explains, noting that she often returned to the hotel in tears, 'I was crying almost every day… I was so happy when I was done with school.' Students blocked their access to bathrooms, laughed at them during lunch, took pictures of them on school-issued iPads, and she reported, 'sometimes they threw pieces of paper or pens at us.' This environment made it difficult for Rose to learn: 'I was so depressed that I could not even focus on learning the language,' she explained. In this transient environment, Rose shared only limited information with her family. They did not ask the school for help, 'because we did not know anyone, and my parents did not know who to refer to', which again underlines the distance between home and school and the impacts of limited understanding. Although the school issued detentions and other punishments for the young people involved, these measures had little effect, and Rose felt, 'they did not care at all'.

Sadaf, North, 2025, referring to studying English from scratch.

Throughout our work with young people, we heard how the young people gradually rebuilt their lives emotionally, practically, and socially following the shock of resettlement, with schools providing a hard, but ultimately rewarding experience. One London-based student, Seddiqi, recalled how language barriers made daily life and schooling overwhelming at first, but demonstrated a keenness to adapt:

> Before we couldn't speak a single word and it was really hard for us… I was in class, the teacher was speaking, and I could understand one or two words… then throughout the summer I watched movies, learned English, spoke with friends… Now it's like full language for me.



Ahmad, London, 2024: 'I didn't write anything on the paper and gave them to the examiner. It made me a lot depressed, and it took me a lot, and the GCSE was very hard for me….'

Pressure was certainly felt among the young people we worked with, who arrived during the critical period of sitting GCSEs (school years 10 and 11). Ahmad aged 19 in London explained what arriving the year before he was due to sit GCSEs meant for him. He took pains in one of our sessions to dig out from his phone a transcript of scores in his school in Afghanistan. He showed us

how he had been ranked top in his cohort but found sitting exams shortly after arrival challenging. He explained, how when sat with an exam paper, 'I didn't write anything on the paper and gave them to the examiner. It made me a lot depressed, and it took me a lot, and the GCSE was very hard for me.... And during the GCSE the first, after six months when I came to the UK, I was aware that my father had cancer as well and it was very hard'.

Hamidi echoed the sense of students rebuilding from the ground up through education, having to grapple with the immense challenge of passing English GCSE to be able to pass through into A levels. He explained, 'at first, I couldn't speak English… in Afghanistan we just learned basic things like 'this is a cat' or 'this is a book,' but here I jumped to grammar, essays, and metaphor… It was hard, but now I'm so happy I passed and can move forward'.

As such, teachers reported to us how their work with Afghan pupils initially involved cultural orientation as much as educational work, explaining local customs, traditions, as well as filling in educational gaps. Reflecting the polarisation evident in parental backgrounds (see Chapter 4), teachers working in a London school explained that the group was very diverse, with some having no or basic schooling, and others coming from private schools, an observation reflected in our qualitative sample. In the Northern city, we met Rayhan, a young woman who had spent 4 years out of school under the Taliban, compared to Yusuf, a young man fluent in English, who had studied at an international school in Afghanistan. The teachers referred to a steep 'learning curve' they confronted, to work out what subjects the children had learned and what they have been exposed to, explaining

> it was all very ad hoc because we would do things like 'oh actually they haven't learnt about the solar system, so we need to do that with them'. So, it was kind of, a lot of it was creative thinking (teacher, London school).

Some of our participants also expressed broader problems in relation to appropriate placement. Heda, who arrived at age 14, described being sent straight to college despite the college teachers insisting she should have been placed in school, indicating some discrepancy between actual age and placement. She explained, 'The teachers… were like, shocked. Like you are 14, you have to be in school… You have two more years to be 16 and then you can continue college.' To what extent this situation arose from misplacement or parental misunderstanding (see 3.2 and also Chapter 7) she progressed quickly through ESOL levels moving from first step to entry 3 within months. Arya, living in a Northern city also explained 'Because I was 15 at that time and they didn't send me to school. They sent me straight to college. And then I started ESOL there… I did ESOL for two years and then after that I did one year of Health and Social and one year of, now, I'm doing a Level 3 applied science.'

However, stakeholder accounts from the London site indicate that age-placement issues were not only about decisions made by authorities, describing cases where parents had reported children as older than they were to the Home Office, believing incorrectly this would provide quicker access to college or better educational opportunities for their children. In one instance, staff reported working with the Home Office to correct a child's age so that appropriate schooling could be arranged. These examples illustrate a broader challenge around age-appropriate placement across sites, shaped by a combination of rapid resettlement decisions, parental expectations, and limited local resources. In both areas, mismatches between reported age, assessed age, and educational pathways created uncertainty for schools and young people, sometimes delaying stable integration into the appropriate stage of education.

3.4.2. School and college as positive spaces

Arya, North, 2025: college as her 'happy place'.

From our research, it became clear that once young people were in settled accommodation, schools and colleges were generally appreciated as positive spaces for their educational and social learning journeys and sense of belonging. Arya aged 18 and living in the north of England arrived in the UK 'not knowing a single English word,' but college quickly became the place where she felt settled, choosing a picture to demonstrate this (see left). As she explains, 'that was the place where I felt happy… the place I started learning English,' where she now feels confident because 'I'm able to talk in English and understand everyone.' The opportunities for growth provided by college over the last few years have been vital. Despite being only at the college for two years, Arya had been appointed in student governor roles in the student council. To her, 'college just means so much to me… for some people it might not be their happy place but for me it is.' Her next step is already taking shape, noting about one university, 'they've already offered me a place… even though I haven't done the first year.'

Many of our young participants experienced very low feelings and trauma following displacement and observed this among their parents and other family members too. Inclusion in schools helped mitigate some of the harsh experiences. Thus, despite Rose's initial experiences in the school close to the bridging hotel, once she moved to her settled accommodation in a Northern city, she explained: 'I really liked college… even though I was struggling with depression, I went because I *had* to. I had low expectations. But both students and teachers are very helpful and supportive, and the environment is so good.' It was clear throughout our research that school and college functioned not only as positive spaces for academic purposes but also as primary social environments where interaction with unfamiliar others felt accessible and emotionally safe. Sadaf explained,

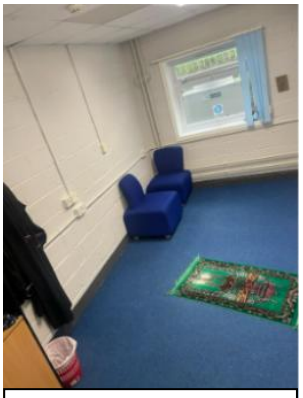
Rose, North, 2025, 'We are five friends from five different countries'.

I want to choose the picture from college. I do not know if it is all refugees or it is only me, [but] I love college. Back then I used to go to college 4 days a week but now I am done with math, and it is only 2 days a week and I really miss college.

Rose, see picture (left) similarly described the contrast between the monotony of home and the social vibrancy of college life:

Sometimes I get bored at college as well, but at home the days get too long… At least at college I have my friends. We are a group of 5 close friends so even if the classes are boring, I have quality time with my friends.

Across all sites, the young people were developing relations with others beyond their Afghan peer group, although across all sites, relationships with other Afghans were initially important in making them feel safe. Some like Rayhan were surprised to find teachers from other backgrounds, including one from Poland and Serbia, which made her feel more comfortable and less alone. Among our female participants in the North, the college prayer room served as an important initial site in which social connections developed organically, free from concerns about cultural judgment or misinterpretation. Rayhan also emphasised the importance of the prayer room as a social hub (see photo, right): 'All of the Afghan girls and Muslim girls I met them in the prayer room' (see also Chapter 6). Together, these reflections highlight how school and college environments and their routines, shared spaces, and supportive peer groups provided a sense of safety and belonging.



Rayhan, North, 2025, Prayer room.

Accounts across both sites commonly highlighted strong and trusting relationships with teachers, with young people frequently describing staff as 'kind,' 'supportive,' and willing to correct mistakes or provide extra help. Other figures in London outside school were referred to similarly, such as ESOL teachers and a boxing instructor, the latter becoming what one of the participants referred to as 'a good friend'. This finding aligns with positive feedback from school stakeholders in the wider project, many of whom described the arrival of Afghan students as enriching their school communities. Stakeholder interviews consistently emphasised Afghan young people's motivation, politeness, and strong work ethic, noting that their desire to succeed positively influenced classroom dynamics and peer relationships.

3.4.3 Locality-based variations: pathways and opportunities

Across the two sites, young people described markedly different school entry pathways, reflecting the wider variation in local school capacity and the scale of Afghan arrivals in different sites. In London, where larger cohorts of Afghan students arrived together, schools often had the resources and structures to manage group induction. Several participants noted how they were provided with uniforms, and they were supported through a dedicated 'inclusion base', a space in the school where all students were initially taught to assess their level of English before placement into wider support. This also gave them access to Afghan-speaking staff and bilingual peers who initially helped with translation, creating a cohort-based transition in which students could rely on shared experience and mutual support while gradually moving into mainstream classes as their English improved.

Ibrahim, London, 2024, learning English at school.

In contrast, young people in the site in the North arrived individually or in very small groups and therefore encountered more fragmented provision. Some entered schools where they were the only Afghan student in their year and received limited structured language support. Several described relying on online tools, siblings, or self-study to progress in English because no dedicated inclusion space or translation assistance was available, albeit some noted the importance of a single teacher or support figure who made a difference to them. These differences shaped their early orientation: some describing a slower, more isolated adjustment, whereas

particularly the young men, clinging together more, at least initially, finding safety in their larger number and there were some risks with this (see Chapter 6).

Ahmad, London, 2024, post-16 study books.

The young people we spoke to in London had positive memories of the time in 'the inclusion base' (see above). They particularly appreciated the additional support that was put into helping them pass their GCSEs at this crucial time. Through the extra sessions, focussed specifically on exam questions, they felt supported to improve. Hamidi, referred to how they were so happy receiving his crucial '4' pass mark, having failed every mock exam that he had sat, demonstrating the speed of improvement. Ahmad, who earlier referred to how he had submitted blank GCSE mock papers was now thriving in his A level studies and planning to go to university (see picture of his study books, right). However, others in the London site who were less confident in English, reported wanting more ESOL support than they had. Others also referred to how in some cases they were understood by teachers as being less academically capable than they were, because of their limited language. For example, Arya, a young woman in the North described how she successfully negotiated a placement in Health and Social Care at a higher level at college, despite being initially placed in Level 1. This had relied on her confidence to speak up and challenge her educational downward mobility:

> I was really sad because I was like, 'no, I want to do Level 2'… At the end of the induction day, I talked to the manager… [who said] 'if you give me a good explanation of that question, I will then decide whether you should report on level 2 or not'… Then I did… and she put me on the course. So that was really a good one.

Hamidi, London, 2024, on internships.

Opportunities for young people varied by locality. In London, several of the students reported that they had been able to participate in extra-curricular placements. For instance, one student told us how he was selected to be part of London AI campus. Other high achieving students described numerous opportunities with other companies and businesses, such as Citi Bank and Astra Zeneca, and were receiving business mentoring that would likely lead to further work experience. Students on more vocational pathways were also provided with opportunities such as motorbiking in small groups, or boxing classes, which they really enjoyed. Ahmad referred to how such experiences had led to him making friends and widening his network with older people outside his usual circle. He explained that making those relationships with others helped to ameliorate the depression he had been experiencing.

The young people rarely reported overt bullying, discrimination or racism in school, albeit they referred to other signs of opaque discrimination and exclusion. This included in the London site one instance of being called 'a refugee', not being picked for sports teams, teasing and being perceived of as a 'gang' when hanging out with other young Afghan males (see Alexander's research in 2000 on Asian young men and gangs). One of the stakeholders in the London school explained that one of the Afghan pupils had experienced various traumas of bombing, shelling and personal sadnesses, but said:

> when she came here she [said she] felt more scared here at school, because the kids were mean to her. So other people laughing at her, her English wasn't very good […] She said that doesn't happen in Afghanistan […] She found that harder than living in a conflict zone and seeing conflict and seeing that experience felt worse for her.

On occasions where students had experienced name-calling, however, they felt very supported by the school, and this was addressed swiftly.

Others referred to experiencing discrimination out on the streets, including hostility while walking to Friday prayers, or on local buses and sometimes in college. Conversely however, some reported more opportunities to mix and get to know people in the Northern site, as they experienced more spaces of everyday encounters and sociability than the 'anonymity' that participants described in London. For example, Yousuf referred to a 'beautiful experience' walking to the bus stop to go to college, when he met a ninety-three-year-old man. He explained:

> So yeah, I don't know why for some reason I'm really like social with the elderly people, you know. And when I take the bus from college to home a lot of the elderly sit next to me on the bus, and it's just the conversation automatically comes into place.

The older man told him that his wife unfortunately passed away on the weekend, and Yousuf explained, 'so I was like that, I'm sorry for your loss and everything. So I was like [consoling the older man, explaining] 'it's okay people come and go that's part of life you know'. He continued, 'I shook his hand, then we walked to the bus stop together' (see more on community cohesion in Chapter 6).

Conclusion and recommendations

Education is one of the most important arenas in the resettlement journeys of Afghan families. Some young people experienced highly disrupted pathways, experiencing fragmented or limited schooling in both Afghanistan and then in transitioning into educational settings in UK as they moved through bridging hotels or Temporary Service Families Accommodation (TSFAs). Most possessed limited English upon arrival. However, the young people we worked with demonstrated narratives of adaption, ambition, hard work and achievement.

Young people's experiences in the Photovoice exercise also show how educational spaces were vital spaces of (largely) safety, belonging and opportunities for learning both academically but also socially. These learning environments are natural and accessible spaces for people to grasp and understand the world around them. For some participants like Rose, school as a receiving environment was experienced less positively and required her to navigate inter-personal hostility. However, the obstacles - language, social interactions and a sense of alienation - are often approached by both young people and educators as solvable problems.

That said, the academic potential of young people, remains unevenly supported by parents, where there is variable understanding, and is shaped in some cases by limited parental knowledge. The research shows that parents were deeply committed to their children's learning but some parents, like many other parents in the UK, struggled to understand the UK education system, particularly admissions, transitions and post-16 routes. These gaps left many young people navigating complex academic decisions with limited familial guidance, dependent on support provided by school or colleges, even as they were excelling in coursework or aspiring to high-status professions.

Finally, the research further revealed contrasts across localities. In London, entry into school occurred in larger initial groups of Afghan students, and this scale provided a specialised 'inclusion unit'. They were also facilitated to experience extracurricular opportunities. These helped students

accelerate academically and socially, with several describing rapid gains in English and strong encouragement from teachers to pursue ambitious pathways. In the northern site, the experience was different as the young people arrived in smaller numbers into colleges and schools. They looked to each other and other minority pupils for support to settle, and experienced opportunities for convivial exchange in neighbourhoods.

Across all settings, young Afghans showed resilience, ambition, and a strong desire to contribute. Stakeholders frequently described them as hardworking, motivated and positively influencing school environments (see also Chapter 7). When schools and colleges provided structured English support, caring relationships with teachers, extra-curricular opportunities, and culturally safe spaces such as prayer rooms, young people flourished not only in their sense of belonging but in measurable academic attainment. Ensuring that such support is available equitably is essential for enabling Afghan youth to rebuild their learning pathways and pursue the fuller futures they imagine for themselves in the UK.

Our findings have policy implications, pointing to the need for clearer, multilingual information for parents about admissions, transitions and post-16 routes, with particular attention to reaching parents (especially) mothers with lower levels of English and literacy. Strengthening parental knowledge through accessible communication, interpretation and targeted guidance is therefore critical for enabling sustained educational progression. As Leon (2025:3) observes, 'whilst the Department of Education provides guidance for supporting unaccompanied displaced children and young people into education (Department for Education, 2017; Department for Education, 2018), no such provision exists for children arriving with their families'. The impacts of this lack of guidance and wider strategy can be demonstrated quite acutely in our evidence here.

Attention to swift placement in schools, consistent English language support for young people, the provision of culturally safe spaces (including induction facilities such as the inclusion base example) and age-appropriate placement can reduce lost learning time. Finally, the research shows that financial investment in schools is important within resettlement programmes due to their centrality as key resettlement sites. Further opportunities for staff to share experiences and resources that sustain the kinds of pastoral and academic support described here, would help ensure Afghan young people's resilience and ambitions translate into long-term educational attainment.

4 Housing

Introduction and Key Findings

This chapter reports on findings related to housing experiences and outcomes. After protracted periods in temporary accommodation, especially bridging hotels, participants in the research were relieved to be rehoused in settled accommodation in local towns and cities. This chapter focuses on our respondents' levels of satisfaction with their housing and their feelings of safety in their new localities. We consider their feelings of stability, including navigating challenges of securing future housing and considerations of how they are adapting to living their new homes. Housing size, availability, quality and costs varied by region and this will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 7 (on stakeholder perspectives). Our key findings are that:

- Afghan households are primarily families with children; in our survey, only 12% of respondents lived alone. Among respondents with children, the average number of children per household was four but 25% of respondents with children had five or more.
- Safety in the UK, though relative, remains one of the most valued outcomes of resettlement. The vast majority (90%) also reported feeling safe in their locality, appreciating the help they received to become established. Some reported incidents of discrimination and racism; qualitative findings provide insights into these encounters in local neighbourhoods.
- Afghans experience some mobility and instability in housing. Over half of respondents have lived in two different accommodations (including for some, quite protracted periods in temporary accommodations, such as bridging hotels) but over one third have lived in three.
- Our data show that most people are renting and are satisfied with their current accommodation. The majority reported feeling supported by their local council. As with other families in the UK, some experienced challenges with some of their housing conditions, including damp, mould and over-crowding.
- Overall, across the survey and qualitative data, the findings highlight that geographic location, perceived safety, access to essential services, and social networks are the strongest predictors of accommodation satisfaction. Structural features like outdoor space and cultural amenities seem to play an important, but somewhat secondary role.

4.1 Households and accommodation

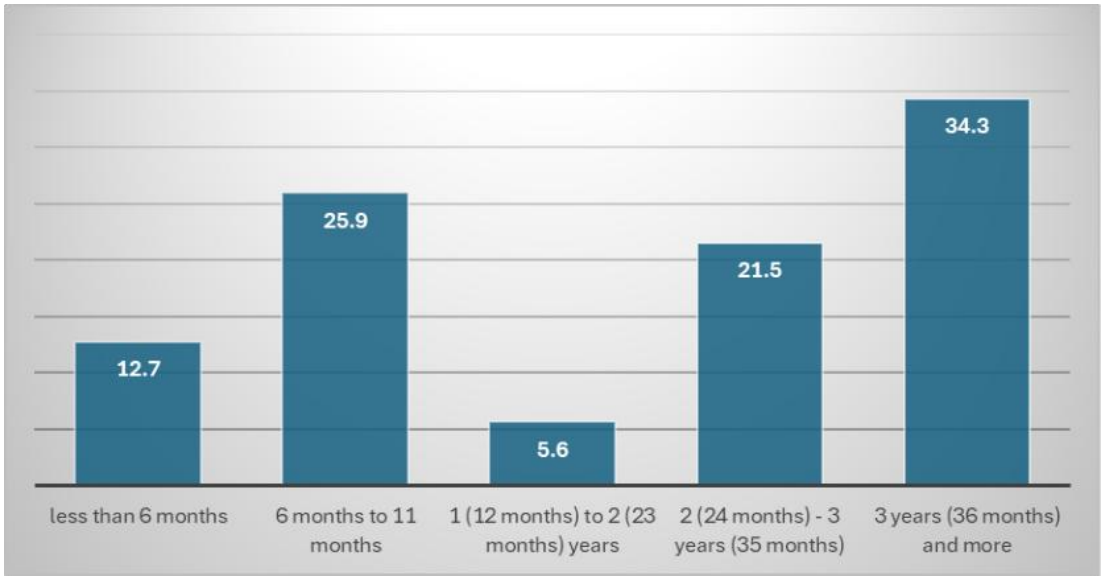
Household composition: Among our survey respondents, the average number of people in a household was 5, ranging from 1 to 13 people, with those in our West Midlands region having the largest average household size of 7 people. Only 12% of survey respondents said that they lived alone; two thirds (66%) of the respondents reported living with a spouse or partner, 21% of respondents lived with parents and 13% lived with other relatives. In our sample, 60% of the respondents had children under the age of 19 living in the household.

The average number of children in households was 4, ranging from 1 to 11 children, with the most common number of children being 2, and 25% reporting that their household had more than 5 children. One fifth (21%) of households had children under the age of 6 and 18% of families had children aged 19 and older living with them. These figures reflect the pattern of Afghan resettlement

which mostly involved families rather than single individuals (see also Chapter 7: Stakeholder perspectives).

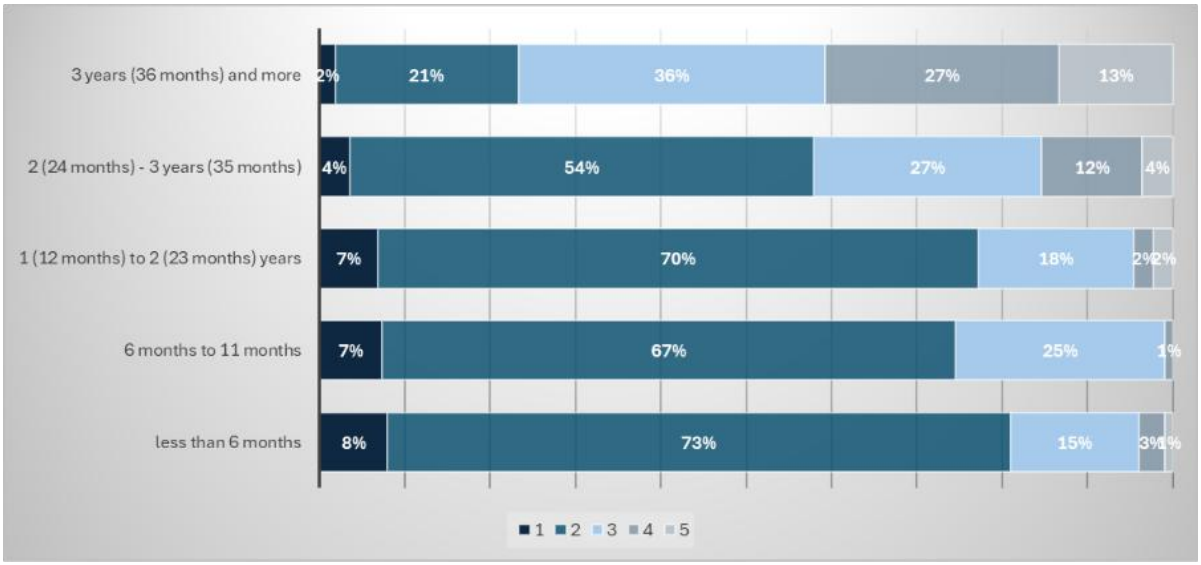
Length of stay: One third of Afghans (34.3%) who participated in the survey reported that they arrived three years or more ago. The next most common duration of stay in the UK was 6 to 11 months, accounting for 25.9% of valid responses. Those who arrived two to three years ago represent 21.5%. People arriving more recently were less common in our sample: 5.6% arrived 1 to 2 years ago, while 12.5% of the respondents arrived in the last six months before the survey. This makes sense as many newer arrivals would still be in temporary accommodation, whereas the survey was carried out with those moved into settled accommodation.

Figure 4-1 ***Time since arrival in the UK*** *(N=787)*



Housing stability: Since their arrival, nearly half (50%) of the survey participants have lived in two different accommodations and 27% have lived in three. Unsurprisingly, as Figure 4-2 demonstrates the longer Afghans have stayed in the UK, the more accommodations they have lived in. Early arrivals tend to stay in one or two places and over time, mobility increases. There is a noticeable shift among those who had stayed for 3 years or longer having lived in 3 or more accommodations, comprising 76% of that group.

Figure 4-2 ***% Number of accommodations lived in by the time since arrival***



Our qualitative research confirms the transience experienced by resettled persons. Some participants had spent extended periods in hotels, including being moved around to different hotels and this had disruptive impacts on their embedding. For example, sisters Jaheda and Sadia spent almost a year in a hotel in the countryside that was far removed from all amenities: 'We were 10 months in a hotel, but we didn't go to college because the college was very far away from the hotel.' One participant, Ahmad, recalled the initial period in a hotel in London: 'We were like a prisoner in the hotel… couldn't go to school or work for months. If they gave us places for sports or something, it would have helped take out the stress'. Under evolving provision, stakeholders report now that leisure activities are a key part of what is offered, but nevertheless confirm that initially, provision was targeted at meeting basic needs (see Chapter 7).

Several of the male interviewees described this time in temporary hotel accommodation also as a period of uncertainty and described how a move into more settled housing was often marked by a mix of relief and adjustment. A case in point is Omid, who explained, 'I stayed in a hotel for a year and a half before moving to our current accommodation'. The men we spoke with were grateful for the security afforded by this move into housing (see section 4.3). For instance, Sharif emphasized the sense of relief that came with moving into permanent housing, saying, 'we are settled and everything is fine now'.

While some families were housed in new areas away from hotels, others remained in the same local area, which helped with continuity of children's education. In the Photovoice research, some of the young people noted positive efforts from local authorities, for example in London, to maintain continuity in their education by housing them locally, having been supported in a local school close to a bridging hotel. They explained: 'it was like a multi-agency work, talking with council, with our parents and hotels so they have all tried to find us accommodation in this area near school'. However, other young people described repeated relocations. Arya, a young woman in the Northern city explained: 'In four years, we moved four times…'

In terms of **housing stability**, we were interested in how Afghans were navigating challenges of securing future housing and avoiding homelessness, an issue raised also by many stakeholders (see Chapter 7). Although none of the women in our qualitative research mentioned fear of homelessness per se, it was apparent during the walking interviews that some were uncertain about

the future of their housing situation. For example, while walking around a Ministry of Defence site, Hasina said that she and her husband would like to buy the house they rent from the MOD, even though this was not actually possible, 'And then we told them if they can find us like nearby, in the area where we are right now. And then they said like register your name and we'll try our best…'

Indeed, across all constituents in the research, we noted that there was faith expressed in LAs to assist families in securing their tenancies. One of our young participants, Baset told us that their contract was running out on their small flat in London. As stakeholders explained (see Chapter 7) this might likely put them at risk of homelessness, since it may prove difficult to find affordable housing as a large family in London. He referred to how the council had found them one outside of London, but they were embedded in the local area: 'we didn't go there, because of our school and everything, like my dad's college, my brother's college'. The family have a strong preference to stay in the area where they are now. While the realities of finding affordable housing were creating insecurity, his family were looking to the council for help and advice to help them move on locally. Some, like Najib, expressed that housing was in the hands of the authorities; after being relocated into temporary accommodation he explained, 'Nobody has told me exactly what the next move is. They told me not to ring them. They will ring me'.

Housing tenure and type: The vast majority (98%) of the survey respondents said they were renting; only 0.4% owned their homes. Most were housed by councils (32%) or housing associations (22%) using the ringfenced funding (therefore not affecting local housing lists) with 21% by private landlords (21%). Most Afghans (89.6%) reported being supported by the Home Office and/or local authority in finding their accommodation, with a relatively small proportion reporting that they found their accommodation themselves (5.1%) or being assisted by their family or friends (3.7%). Almost all respondents were living in houses (75%) or flats (24%) and around two thirds (72%) reported having an outdoor space. The average number of bedrooms in the property was 3, ranging from 1 to 6 and 15% report their family is split across accommodations.

In our qualitative research, some of our young participants in large families reflected on their experiences of living across two houses, noting how it impacts the nature of family life. Sadaf who lives in the Northern city in a house twenty minutes' walk away and ten minutes by bus from the other house, explained,

> I think all children, Afghan children, are…close to their parents and family, but because of that we can't be separate. When you're separate, I think it is very hard. When you are separate, for example my two sisters' [here] and my brothers [at the] other house… [In] this house, we call all the time, we video call for example, 'hi mum, what are you doing? We are watching a film, what are you doing? We are doing this, what are you doing?'

4.2 Local area perceptions: safety and support

Safety: Most Afghans who participated in the survey (90%) reported feeling safe in the area, with 61% feeling 'very safe' and only 2.3% feeling 'not at all safe'. It is interesting to note that both genders reported similar feelings of safety. Older respondents felt safer (65+: 100% felt 'very' or 'somewhat' safe) than younger respondents (18–24: 91.8% felt 'very' or 'somewhat' safe); that could be explained by younger people being more mobile in the areas at different times of the day and having more social encounters.

The perception of safety is supported across the qualitative research. During the walking interviews we met Gulshan, in her quiet suburban neighbourhood in the Midlands; she told us that she feels 'very safe'. Similarly, in London, Zamina, after the traumatic evacuation from Kabul said, 'we can

sleep peacefully in our beds'. In interviews with male participants, most said they felt secure in their new neighbourhoods. That sense of safety mattered a lot for families adjusting to new routines and unfamiliar places. As Omar put it, he and his family felt at ease because 'neighbours give a family-like feeling... we feel relaxed about security,' which echoed what many participants said about their new neighbourhoods.

Yousuf, North, 2025. Night-time picture taken on the way to the gym: 'it just portrays how safe I feel in England'.

Similarly, the young people frequently expressed their satisfaction of living in new localities, expressing a sense of relief and newfound freedom in comparison with their more restricted lives in Afghanistan. As Yousuf reflected on his photo (left),

in Afghanistan, I wasn't really allowed to go outside past 6pm because it was just not very safe, especially for children to be outside… Here this is a picture [see left] I took when I was on the way to the gym it was quite late, around 10pm and it just portrays how safe I feel in England… This picture really spoke a lot because it gave me freedom to go wherever I wanted and whatever time it is.

Aryan, a young man in the North also said, 'Here in England I just feel safe at home and anywhere I go I feel safe'. Others described the safe and welcoming spaces they accessed through community links and friendship groups, compared to the fear persisting in their memories: 'In Afghanistan every family used to have guns for their own safety… it was not safe even in school'. These contrasts highlight how safety in the UK, though relative, remains one of the most valued outcomes of resettlement (see also Chapter 6.3).

Feeling supported: 56% of survey participants feel 'supported' or 'very supported' by their local Council, a further 27.3% reported being somewhat supported, and only 9% feel not supported at all. Slightly more women felt 'very supported' by the council (19.3%) compared to men (20.2%). Women were also more likely to report feeling 'not sure' about council support. Younger respondents (18–24) were more likely to feel 'very supported' (27%) than older groups. Older age groups (55+) were more likely to feel 'not at all supported' or 'not sure'.

During our qualitative research, many participants expressed feeling very grateful for council-led support regarding housing. When asked to describe his experiences of finding housing, as Nemat explained, 'The process was supportive, as I am grateful that after going to a temporary place to live, support was good, and I'm grateful for it'. Similarly, Omar in the South of England emphasized responsive support in relation to domestic issues that emerged in the household, stating that: 'We reach out and receive support,' and that when they moved, 'everything was already arranged', which reflected confidence in the local housing services.

However, we also found some confusion around where support comes from, with many of the young people referring to the generic support of 'the government', rather than local authority support. An example of this was Arya, in the Northern city, who explained, 'because government, when you come here, they provide you with a case worker'.

4.3 Perception of accommodation:

Participants rated their satisfaction with their current accommodation at an average of 6.5 out of 10, in response to the question, 'How satisfied are you with your current accommodation?' The score

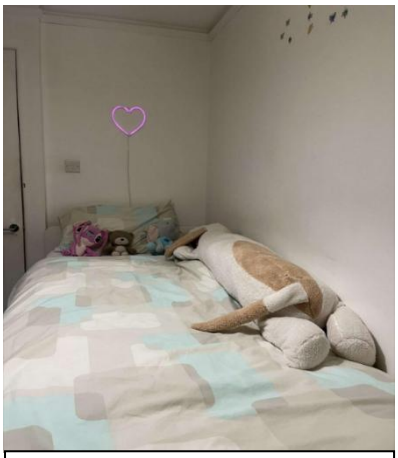
sitting above the mid-point of the scale suggests a generally positive, moderate level of satisfaction where many participants feel their housing is acceptable, but there may be some challenges. As Table 4.1. shows, there were mixed levels of satisfaction among different survey participants, where Afghans in some localities reported higher dissatisfaction, citing overcrowding or lack of outdoor space[3]. In table 4.1 we can see that women report marginally higher satisfaction than men (6.7 vs 6.3).

Table 4.1 ***Levels of satisfaction with accommodation (1-10 scale) by characteristics of accommodation and locality*** *(* statistically significant differences (p < .05))*

		N	Mean	SD
Area*	**Area 1**	158	7.4	2.63
	Area 2	172	5.6	2.77
	Area 3	140	5.9	2.92
	Area 4	119	8.0	2.00
	Area 5	200	6.2	2.66
Family split across more than one accommodation*	**Yes**	114	6.9	2.49
	No	633	6.5	2.82
Does it have outdoor space?*	**Yes**	556	6.7	2.73
	No	221	6.1	2.86
How safe do you feel in your area?*	**Not at all safe**	18	1.6	1.42
	Somewhat safe	52	4.9	2.69
	Safe	231	5.9	2.41
	Very safe	481	7.2	2.65
How easy is it to access food/products you want?*	**Not at all easy**	76	4.8	2.77
	Somewhat easy	128	5.8	2.49
	Easy	260	6.7	2.56
	Very easy	317	7.1	2.86
Are there enough cultural/religious amenities?	**No**	296	6.3	2.87
	Yes	491	6.6	2.72
Do you have relatives/acquaintances in this area?*	**None**	439	5.9	2.89
	Few	180	7.1	2.44
	Some	133	7.3	2.39
	Many	34	8.0	2.66

[3] These responses come from an open-ended question in which participants were asked to explain the reason behind their satisfaction or dissatisfaction with their accommodation.

During the qualitative research, these findings were supported. In the walking interviews we met Breshna, a young mother of two children, one of whom is disabled, who expressed that she is 'very happy' and deeply satisfied with her accommodation (see also the positive reflection on the photo of home taken by one of our younger participants, Rose, right). Wazhma, her husband, who worked for the military in Afghanistan and their young daughter, were very happy with their house in London: 'our house is very beautiful… we have a garden and there is a beautiful apple tree in the garden.' Mashal, a young person in their mid-20s, who identities as LGBTQI+ was living in a one-bedroom flat in a central London borough and reflected: 'It is a very beautiful… it's perfect… unbelievable'. Although the rent is high, Mashal has a full-time job and can afford to pay. Several male interviewees reported feeling generally satisfied with their housing, pointing out that it provided stability, safety, and privacy. Afrooz noted, 'Living in a safe environment is very important… now we feel very well here.' Aref in the South of England also stated, 'Everything about housing and services is good. They are happy with the house. The GP is nearby, and the children's school is good'.



Rose, North, 2025, 'It is a lovely home'.

However, we noted that some participants reflected on how housing in England was quite different to that which they had experienced in Afghanistan. There, residential living is predominantly house-based rather than flat-based, with purpose-built apartments historically concentrated only in a few major cities such as Kabul, Mazar-e-Sharif and Herat. In most towns and rural areas, families live in detached homes often large enough to accommodate extended relatives. This is because construction is shaped by local needs rather than strict statutory standards on room size or occupancy (UN-Habitat 2015); as housing development has been constrained by institutional and economic challenges, it is shaped by customary practice as much as formal regulation (UN-Habitat n.d.). This means that families often determine their own dwelling size and layout based on available land and household needs. Moreover, while the country's urban population has been growing rapidly, and displacement from other provinces has increased demand for urban housing, even new apartments in Afghanistan tend to be larger on average than typical small-flat stock found in high-density countries such as the UK.

Our participants reflected therefore on the consequent adjustments they made in living in smaller British houses and flats, compared to their homes in Afghanistan. Madina, a widow living in a small town in the north-west of England, told us that she had 'expected life to be more comfortable here'. Ibrahim, a young Afghan participant, told us how his family managed in a smaller house because of its proximity to the school where the children were already enrolled, but that meant: 'Like in one [bed]room, we just live with three brothers together. It's very hard for us'. Another young participant in London, Baset referred to how he is living in a London flat with his family of eight, including two little brothers and his father, a former judge who now attends college to learn English. He explained the challenges of four brothers sharing a room:

> Basically, there's one bed right there and then one here and then a double one for my other brothers. There's like three tiny spaces to walk through and sleep and that's it.

He also explained this created friction with the neighbours below, who were constantly calling both his family and the council to complain about the noise they made. He explained, 'they call to say, 'like don't even walk, because we can hear you, because we're sleeping just under'.

Arya, a young woman living in the Northern city is happy in her current house, but the family experienced regular house moves as her father tried to find good housing in the private rental sector. She reflected, 'In the second house, the walls, they were wet all the time, they used to make us so sick…we used to feel sick all the time […and] mould used to be everywhere as well.' As a result of these conditions, the family moved to another property which she described as 'so dirty, so dirty', but again 'had to move', this time, 'because the ceiling was leaking'. Every time they moved, Arya, her sisters and their mother took on the removal responsibilities, Arya taking time away from college, as her father was busy working in a takeaway.

It was apparent in the interviews that some of the mobility evidenced in the survey was because Afghans wanted to relocate to the regions where they perceived housing to be cheaper and better quality. For example, Ibrahim, currently living in London, wanted to move to the North-West because a relative had told him about cheaper housing: 'in London the rent is £2,500 for a small house but in [a Northern city] you can get three floors and seven bedrooms for £1,500'. However, these perceptions may not be based on accurate information about the reality of housing stock and costs, as noted by stakeholders (and discussed in more detail in Chapter 7).

4.4 Local area perceptions: access to amenities

Access to amenities in the local area and satisfaction with amenities is relatively high among Afghan respondents, but this varies across regions. More than two thirds (73%) said they find access to food and products they need very easy or easy, 62% felt they have sufficient cultural and religious amenities in the area. This reflects the variety of placements, from rural to urban areas, as discussed in Chapter 7.

As Table 4.1 shows (and as discussed in section 4.3), the levels of satisfaction with accommodation, measured on a 1-10 scale, vary considerably by locality. The differences were statistically significant ($p < .05$). Among the five areas, Afghan respondents in Area 4 report the highest mean satisfaction (8.0), followed by those in Area 1 (7.4), while the survey participants in Areas 2 and 3 show the lowest levels (5.9 and 5.6, respectively), indicating significant geographic disparities.

Accommodation characteristics are also associated with satisfaction, where Afghans living in properties with outdoor space score higher (6.7) compared to those in properties without (6.1). Family arrangements show only a slight difference, with households split across multiple accommodations reporting marginally higher satisfaction (6.9) than those in a single unit (6.5). Although these patterns are statistically significant ($p < .05$), the effect sizes are modest and should be interpreted as associations rather than evidence that specific accommodation characteristics directly influence satisfaction. Features such as outdoor space may also reflect broader factors (e.g., type or location of accommodation), so these differences likely capture a mix of conditions rather than the effect of any single accommodation characteristic.

Based on the survey findings, locality factors are strongly linked with the levels of satisfaction with the accommodation. Perceived safety strongly correlates with satisfaction, rising from 1.6 for those feeling 'not at all safe' to 7.2 for those feeling 'very safe.' Similarly, ease of access to food and products shows a positive correlation, from 4.8 satisfaction score for the 'not at all easy' category to 7.1 score for the 'very easy' category of response. However, availability of cultural or religious

amenities has no statistically significant association, while social connections have stronger links: satisfaction climbs from 5.9 among those with no acquaintances to 8.0 among those with many.

In the qualitative research, there was quite some reference to the character of a neighbourhood. A theme mentioned by almost all participants during the walking interviews was the proximity of halal shops. Describing her neighbourhood in London, Wazhma spontaneously mentioned there were 'a lot of halal shops'. In the Photovoice exercise, many of the young people in the Northern cities referred to how they were positively surprised to find mosques there. All the young people referred to parks as important open spaces, whether for the young men to go for a run, or young women spending time with their families (see Arya, left, North). They appreciated the freedom of open spaces and access to greenery, for some as a way of mitigating negative feelings, as Seddiqi, a young man explained in London (see photo right).

Arya, 2025, on her local park: 'I have lunch there. We just sit there in the grass and we just have lunch there and talk and these things.... especially when my mum's friends call them to come to park and they have like a small picnic there'.

During the interviews with men, participants valued peaceful streets, easy access to necessary services, and generally helpful neighbours. Positive perceptions frequently focused on feeling at home and having GP surgeries or schools close by, which made day-to-day living easier. However, some male participants noted constraints in rural areas where they live that impacted convenience, such as a lack of stores, transportation, or cultural amenities. For instance, Aref stated that while he thought the area where he lives was 'a good city,' it is far from other Afghans, so it takes him a long time to travel and attend some cultural activities. We heard many similar themes in the stakeholder commentary (see Chapter 7). This contrasts with experiences in urban areas elsewhere; for example, Baset in our photovoice work explained that he was less keen on the flat he lived in as it was too small and noisy but appreciated the area: 'We're near to the shops, supermarkets, GP, everything. The hospital there. We're really close to everything'.

Seddiqi, 2024: 'when you are thinking too much like depression, like outside you can go the park and see like the trees and you feel like happy'.

The survey asked respondents what they like and dislike about their local area. These open-ended responses were then systematically coded to identify recurring themes and patterns. What Afghans value most about their area is the sense of convenience and security it offers. Many survey respondents highlighted the ease of accessing everyday facilities (31.3%), along with the presence of cultural and religious infrastructure such as mosques and halal shops (13.6%). Safety emerged as a key theme (18.3%), often paired with appreciation for strong community ties, particularly among Afghan and Muslim networks (12.9%). Public transport links (11.4%), green spaces and parks (9.1%), and the overall quiet and peaceful atmosphere (8.5%) were also frequently mentioned as positive aspects of local life. Access to education (8.1%), polite and respectful people in the locality (7.7%) as well as cleanliness in the local area (5.6%) were also mentioned as factors that Afghans liked about the areas they lived in.

When asked about dislikes, a significant number of participants reported no particular concerns (26.1%). However, among those who did, several recurring issues stood out which would be familiar to the sorts of issues that many other families living in Britain would consider important. These included being located far from essential amenities (8.4%), problems with cleanliness such as rubbish in public spaces (5.1%), challenges related to housing affordability and condition (4.1%) and having no other Afghan or Muslim community[4] (4.1%) in the locality. Among other issues mentioned were limited job opportunities (4.2%), lack of green spaces (3%), safety (2.9%) and noise and crowdedness in the locality (2.9%). Other topics raised were access to education (2.8%), experiences of discrimination (2.8%) and concerns about crime and drug use (2.7%).

Conclusion and recommendations

The research shows that most of our survey respondents live in family units, the majority with children under 19 years. Following protracted periods in temporary hotel accommodation, most participants in the research were relieved to move into settled accommodation. However, as our survey shows, many had moved accommodation several times, so their initial years in the UK had involved transience, geographical mobility and insecurity of housing. The vast majority are in rented accommodation and while most are satisfied, it is also clear that there are differences in their experiences and expectations of British accommodation in comparison to their houses back in Afghanistan.

Having moved to their current accommodation in the recent past, most people were still getting to know their local area. Feeling safe in general, as compared to life in Afghanistan, as well as feeling safe in their new neighbourhoods emerged as important themes and will be explored in more detail in (Chapter 6, wellbeing and belonging).

Our findings have policy implications for housing. It is important the families are housed in suitable accommodation as soon as possible, and that issues around availability of housing stock are considered from the outset, to avoid the negative experiences of prolonged stays in hotels. The extent of relocations is significant, increasing the longer families are here, indicating that securing housing remains a major challenge, especially where families are financially precarious (see chapter 5, on employment). As will be discussed in Chapter 7, Local Authorities and other housing providers face challenges finding accommodation to meet all needs, especially for larger families, given the limits of UK housing stock.

[4] Wording comes from participants' open responses, referring to both 'Afghan' and 'Muslim' communities.

5 Employment, training and language skills

Introduction and key findings

In this chapter we present findings on employment patterns, English language skills and current education/ training among resettled Afghans, using evidence from the survey, and illustrative data of those patterns from qualitative research with women, men and young people. In Chapter 7, we consider what stakeholders say about this key domain.

The chapter begins by exploring the education, work and language backgrounds of our participants in Afghanistan, revealing immense diversity and segmentation and polarisation in terms of their backgrounds and starting points for employment. In analysing these data, we pay particular attention to age, gender and social class backgrounds, where we find the data suggests men prioritize immediate employment and career shifts, while women show stronger interest in skill development, higher education, and caregiving responsibilities. Our key findings are that:

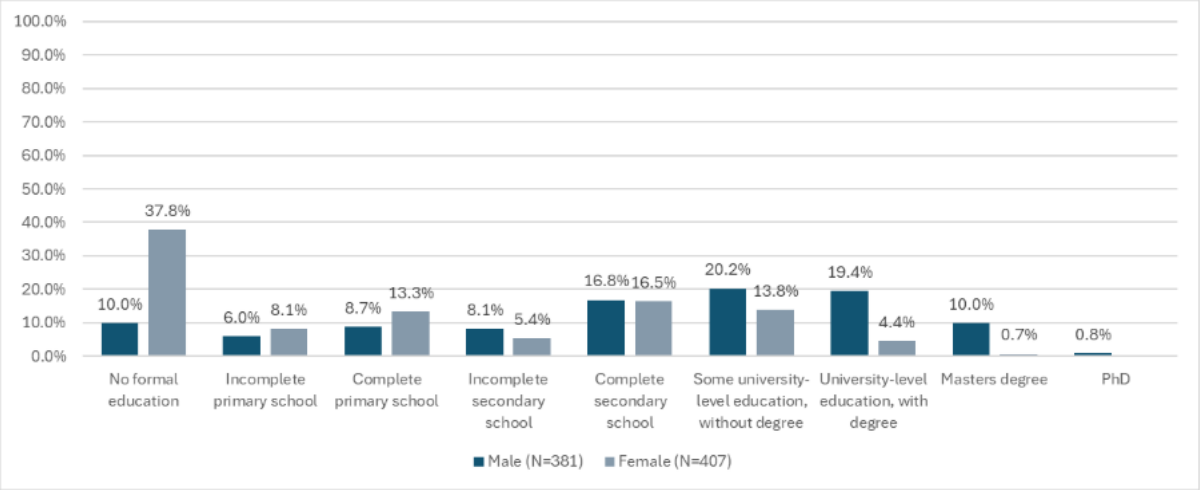
- The educational background and prior employment experiences of participants vary significantly with marked differences by gender, age and social class.
- Levels of English language proficiency vary, with around half reporting they can speak and read English confidently, with men and young people reporting the highest levels of English proficiency, and women much less.
- Better English proficiency, being male, and longer UK residence are consistently associated with higher odds of being in employment.
- Nearly half of all respondents were attending English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) classes, mostly in colleges. While some may not need classes, others are prohibited by barriers such as lack of transport and childcare. Women were more likely than men to attend local community-based language classes and learn from children in the home setting.
- English language training in the UK is associated with job-seeking efforts, especially for those improving language skills to enter the workforce. Our qualitative research indicates that vocational or other non-language training may be part of a transition phase as people may be upskilling or retraining while actively looking for work.
- Age and previous unemployment before arriving in the UK increase the odds of being in non-employed categories. Older age groups are far more likely to be out of employment and not seeking work, while younger are more often engaged in jobs, education, or training.
- Men, especially younger men, are most likely to be employed, though many men are experiencing de-skilling in contrast to their job roles in Afghanistan. It is notable that over a third of participants had professional or skilled roles before resettlement, and our research indicates many negative implications of de-skilling in terms of wellbeing and financial stability of families.
- There are differences at the locality level for employment rates, but there is little evidence for a significant association between employment status and locality; it is the differences between characteristics of the people resettled in the areas that are important and not the areas themselves.

- The data on future aspirations suggests men prioritize immediate employment and career shifts, while women show stronger interest in skill development, higher education, and caregiving responsibilities.

5.1 Prior educational attainment

Our survey data suggest that the educational attainment of Afghans before arriving to the UK ranged widely, with a notable number having no formal education (see Figure 5-1). Females were more likely to have no formal education (37.1% vs. 9.7% for males). Almost one quarter (24%) did not have formal education, with 7% having incomplete primary education and 11% completed primary education only. At the same time, a significant number had some university-level education with (12%) or without a degree (17%) before arriving, 5% had Master's degrees and 0.4% had PhDs. Afghan men had significantly higher levels of education compared to Afghan women: 19.2% of male respondents held university degrees, compared to 4.4% of females, and 10% of male respondents had Master's degrees compared to 0.7% female.

Figure 5-1 ***% Prior highest qualification levels by gender***



Of the proportion who had completed degrees, or above, 39.3% specialised in Humanities (mainly Law or English language), 20% in Business and Economics followed by 14.8% in Engineering and Technology and 10.4% in Health and Medicine. A relative minority received their qualification in Social Sciences (8.1%) or some other subject (7.4%).

5.2 English Language Knowledge

Table 5.1 summarises self-reported skills in reading and writing in English. Around 50% report limited or no ability to read and write in English. Here again we must note significant gendered patterns: 25.7% of males read English 'very well' vs. 7.9% of females and 23.9% of males wrote English 'very well' vs. 6.9% of females. The analysis also shows that English proficiency declines with age: the 18–24 age group had the highest rates of reading and writing English 'very well'. By contrast, those aged 65+ had the lowest proficiency, with over 50% unable to read or write in English at all. Although we did not ask directly about speaking ability[5], responses to the interpreter-use

[5] We did not ask participants to self-evaluate their speaking ability because such self-ratings tend to be less reliable than self-assessments of reading or writing (Ross 1998). Instead, we focused on questions about what people actually do with language, such as whether they can deal with local services, schools, training providers, or workplace contexts, as this provides a more accurate indication of functional English skills.

question show that 40% did not need an interpreter when dealing with local authorities, which may serve as a proxy for English-speaking skills.

As the survey data demonstrate, Afghan men reported significantly higher proficiency in reading (82.9%) and writing (81.1%) their mother tongue compared to Afghan women (53.4% and 48.5% respectively). Younger age groups (18–34) had higher literacy in their mother tongue than older groups.

Table 5.1 ***Literacy and English language knowledge by gender****. Statistically significant differences in all areas based on gender (p < .05)*

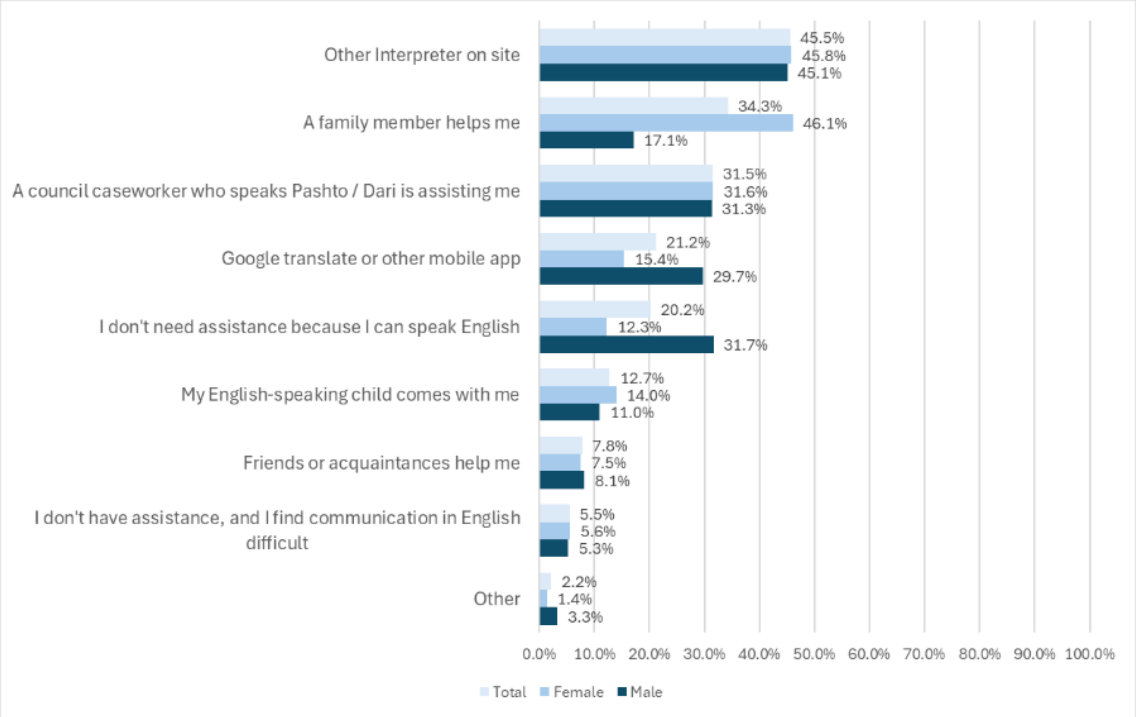
		Male		Female		Total	
		N	%	N	%	N	%
reading in the mother tongue	Not at all	12	3.1%	68	16.7%	80	**10.2%**
	Not well	13	3.4%	51	12.6%	64	**8.1%**
	Well	40	10.5%	70	17.2%	110	**14.0%**
	Very well	316	82.9%	217	53.4%	533	**67.7%**
	Total	381	100.0%	406	100.0%	787	**100.0%**
writing in the mother tongue	Not at all	13	3.4%	78	19.2%	91	**11.6%**
	Not well	18	4.7%	56	13.8%	74	**9.4%**
	Well	41	10.8%	75	18.5%	116	**14.7%**
	Very well	309	81.1%	197	48.5%	506	**64.3%**
	Total	381	100.0%	406	100.0%	787	**100.0%**
reading in English	Not at all	38	10.0%	127	31.4%	165	**21.0%**
	Not well	108	28.3%	146	36.0%	254	**32.3%**
	Well	137	36.0%	100	24.7%	237	**30.2%**
	Very well	98	25.7%	32	7.9%	130	**16.5%**
	Total	381	100.0%	405	100.0%	786	**100.0%**
writing in English	Not at all	38	10.0%	131	32.2%	169	**21.5%**
	Not well	114	30.0%	154	37.8%	268	**34.1%**
	Well	137	36.1%	94	23.1%	231	**29.4%**
	Very well	91	23.9%	28	6.9%	119	**15.1%**
	Total	**380**	**100.0%**	**407**	**100.0%**	**787**	**100.0%**

One third of the survey respondents (35%) experienced English language difficulties in education and training, 40% reported these difficulties in finding or keeping a job and half of the respondents reported English language difficulties in communicating with doctors, schools and other services. Females reported more difficulties due to English language barriers across all three main domains we explored in the survey: education/training (39.9% vs. 29.7% of males), employment (43.3% vs. 38.2%) and communication with services (63.4% vs. 37.5%). Older adults (55+) were more likely to report language-related difficulties across all domains.

In the survey, we also asked about the use of interpreters. Over half of the Afghan respondents say they need an interpreter (60%) when dealing with local authorities (see Chapter 3 on their use in schools). Out of those, 75% report that they always use an interpreter and 22% do it sometimes. Again, females were more likely to need and use interpreters (74.9% needed one vs. 43.8% of males). Older participants (55+) had the highest reliance on interpreters (85–91%). Based on all these English language-related responses[6], we created a scale that was later used in regression analysis.

[6] Reading and writing skills; use of interpreters to deal with local authorities; difficulties in education, training or in finding or keeping job; difficulties in communicating with doctors, schools and other services. The scale ranges from 0 to 10, where higher scores indicate fewer difficulties and greater self-reported proficiency in English.

Figure 5-2 ***When contacting local authorities, health services, or schools, what resources do you use in overcoming language barriers? By gender****, multiple choice, with only those who said they needed an interpreter when dealing with local authorities included.*



The Afghan survey data (see Figure 5-2) reveal diverse strategies used by those who reported needing an interpreter when dealing with local authorities for overcoming language barriers when contacting local authorities, health services, or schools. Nearly half of respondents (45.5%) rely on an interpreter on site, making this the most common form of assistance. Family support plays a significant role, especially for Afghan women—46.1% of women compared to just 17.1% of men reported a family member helping them. Professional help from council caseworkers who speak Pashto or Dari is also widely used (31.5%), with similar uptake across genders. Digital tools such as Google Translate assist 21.2% overall, but Afghan men (29.7%) rely on them almost twice as much as women (15.4%). Interestingly, a substantial proportion of men (31.7%) report no need for assistance because they speak English, compared to only 12.3% of women. Other strategies include bringing an English-speaking child (12.7%), seeking help from friends or acquaintances (7.8%), or struggling without any support (5.5%). Alternative solutions are rare, with only 2.2% citing 'other' forms of help. These patterns highlight gendered differences in reliance on family and technology when needing English language support, as well as varying levels of English proficiency.

5.3 English classes: College and community training

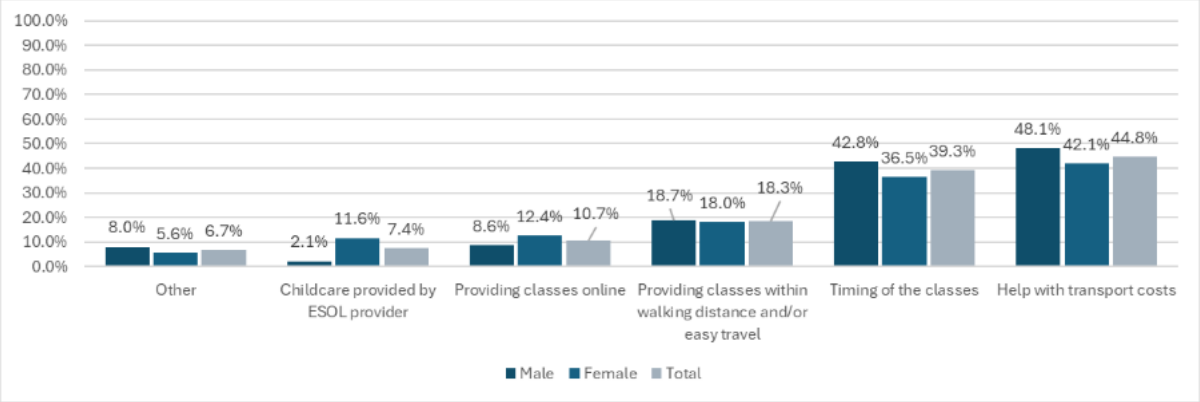
According to our survey, the most common form of language training is English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) in a college (49%) or in a community organisation (10%), but access varies by region. Both genders had similar participation in ESOL college courses (~49%), but Afghan women were more likely to attend community-based ESOL courses (12% vs 8%). During the walking interviews, Safia, a married woman with three children, showed us around the local FE college, where she attended ESOL three days per week. She was very satisfied with how the course had helped her improve her English in only two months, reporting 'It's a good college. We are studying because we need to study English more, and our teacher is very kind and a very good teacher'.

We found that while females were more likely to attend community-based ESOL and informal training than male respondents, males were more likely to pursue technical/vocational training and higher education post-arrival. Age emerged as very significant factor in the take up of ESOL. Younger participants (18–24) had the highest participation in ESOL college courses (63.2%) and our qualitative research indicates their importance. For example, Heda a Photovoice participant described the Learning Zone at her local college as the place she regularly uses to complete ESOL-related work and assignments, showing how learners spend additional time in college environments beyond scheduled classes. Older age groups (55+) had lower participation in formal education and higher rates of no training. Older adults (55–64 and 65+) were more likely to report no formal education and language-related barriers in accessing services.

Heda, young woman, North, 2025, who regularly stays longer after ESOL classes in her college learning zone.

The survey findings (see Figure 5-3) highlight the practical support learners need to access ESOL classes, an issue noted also by stakeholders in local authority resettlement teams (see Chapter 7). The most significant factor that has helped, is help with transport costs, cited by nearly half of respondents (44.8%). Timing of classes is the next most important consideration, mentioned by 39.3% overall, again with a gender difference - 42.8% of Afghan men compared to 36.5% of women. Location of the ESOL classes matters too: 18.3% of respondents prefer classes within walking distance or easy travel. Online provision appeals to 10.7% overall, but Afghan women (12.4%) are more likely to find this option helpful than men (8.6%), maybe due to childcare or other care needs.

Figure 5-3 ***% What has helped you in taking English classes in the UK?*** *(N=604) multiple choice by gender*

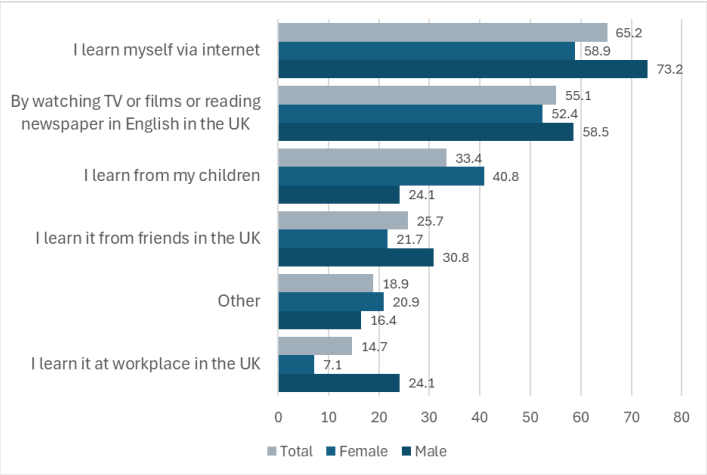


Our qualitative data reveals some of the practical implications of navigating ESOL attendance. For example, Malika, a participant in the walking interviews, is a mother of six children. She and her husband arranged to attend ESOL in different timeslots so they can share childcare responsibilities. While she attended classes by day, her husband went in the evening. Amongst survey respondents, childcare offered by ESOL providers would be a priority for 7.4% of women, compared to just 2.1% of men, underscoring a gendered need that we could see in other data. These patterns suggest that help with transport costs as well as scheduling flexibility are critical for all participation, while childcare and online options could help address barriers faced by Afghan women.

Finally, we asked in the survey how resettled Afghans develop their English, with again responses demonstrating that this significantly varies by both gender and age. Overall, the two most common

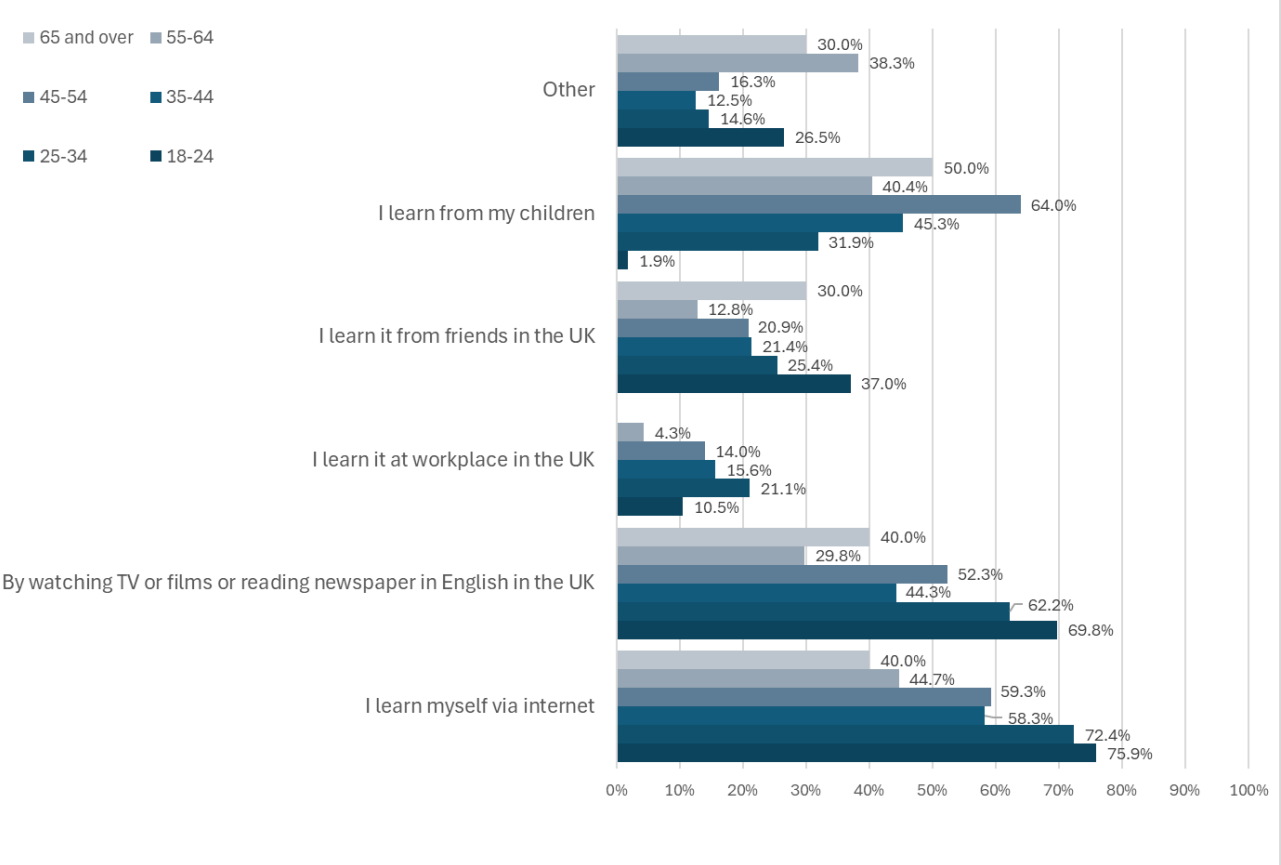
methods are learning via internet (65.2%) and watching TV, films, or reading newspapers in English, used by 55.1% of respondents. There are some gender differences for learning via watching TV, films or reading newspapers (58.5% men, 52.4% women) and a larger difference for learning via internet (73.2% men, 58.9% women). Age also shows contrasts: both approaches peak among 18–24-year-olds (75.9% and 69.8%) and 25–34-year-olds (72.4% and 62.2%) but drops with age. The differences are statistically significant.

Figure 5-4 ***How do you continue developing your English?*** *(N=682) multiple choice by gender*



Afghans learning from their own children is strongly age-related and gendered. While only 1.9% of 18–24-year-olds report this (given they are less likely to have their own children), the proportion climbs steeply with age - 31.9% for 25–34, 45.3% for 35–44, and 64% for 45–54, remaining high among older groups. Women (40.8%) are more likely than men (33.4%) to learn from their children, reflecting caregiving roles, but also reflecting their overall lesser English language knowledge. Indeed, Wazhma, a housewife and mother of three in London, with no English skills, said that her eldest child acted as an interpreter for her at school. Safia**,** a mother of three, with limited English skills, said that her eldest child attended an international school in Afghanistan and has acted as an interpreter for the whole family since they left the country: 'When we came to England, my older son translates for everyone'. In Chapter 6, we consider the implications for wellbeing.

Figure 5-5 ***How do you continue developing your English?*** *(N=682) multiple choice by age*



Hamidi, London, Football, 2025: 'Connection with friends is the best thing that helped me learn English'.

Social learning through friends is common among younger adults (37.0% for 18–24). This was reflected in the Photovoice discussions; for example, Ahmad a young man in London mentioned: 'When I first came here, I learned a lot from my friends. They were helping me understand what teachers were saying'. while another Hamidi (see photograph) noted that his football teammates were crucial because 'connection with friends is the best thing that helped me learn English'. However, this type of learning declines steadily with age, except for a spike among those 65 and over (30%). Gender differences are smaller here, though men (30.8%) report slightly higher reliance than women (21.7%).

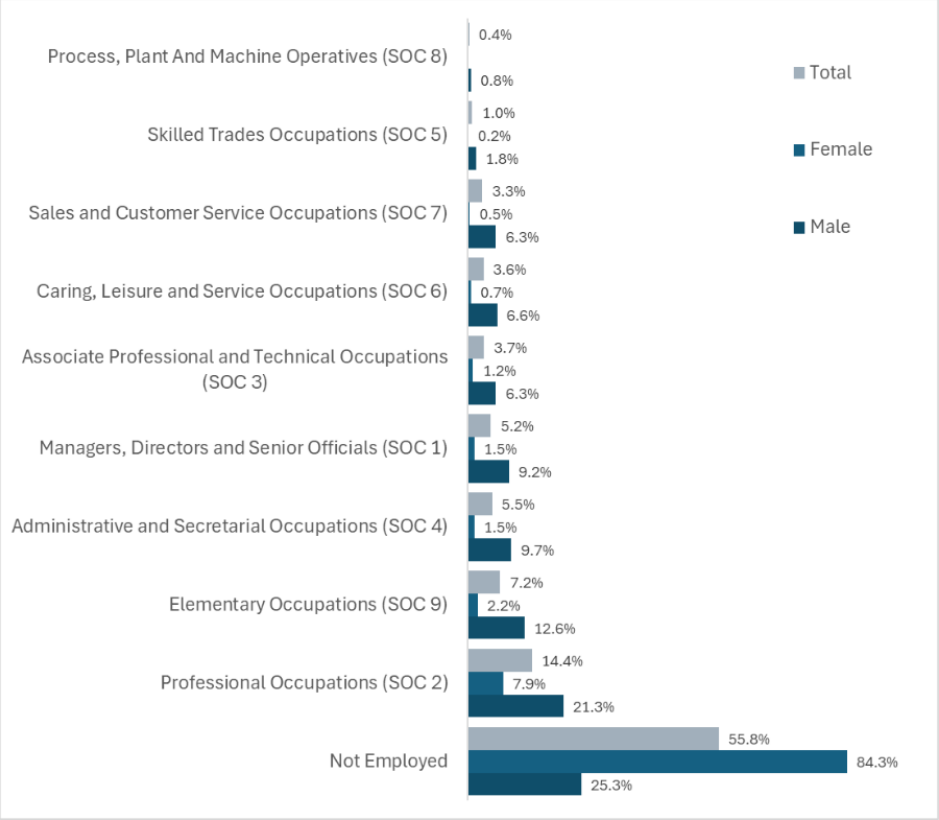
Workplace learning is most prevalent among 25–34-year-olds (21.1%), then decreases with age, and is more common for men (14.7%) than women (7.1%). Finally, other methods are most frequent among the youngest group (26.5%) and the oldest groups (38.3% for 55-64 and 30.0% for 65+). Among other methods survey respondents mainly mentioned ESOL, other courses in colleges or learning from their other family members, such as partners or siblings.

These patterns suggest that younger learners rely heavily on media and friends, while older learners increasingly depend on family, especially their children. The data also suggest that informal and family-based learning is particularly important for women, while men rely more on workplace and online resources.

5.4 Current employment patterns and financial effects

Many Afghan survey respondents had managerial, professional or associate professional (SOC 1-3, 23.3%) or skilled roles (SOC4-7, 13.3%) before arriving in the UK (see Figure 5-6). At the same time, 55.8% were not employed before coming to the UK. However, this average number hides several issues. The first is that nearly a quarter of the survey sample are young adults aged 18-24 (23.4%). Most of these would have left Afghanistan as younger teens not yet being of working age, while others in this group may have been in further or higher education when they left[7]. Secondly, the figures also hide a heavily gendered pattern with 25.3% of Afghan men not being in employment before arrival to the UK compared to 84.3% of Afghan women. Overall, employment is very gendered, reflecting other points we raised before around the low literacy and education levels among Afghan women. Finally, we could anticipate that a group of the sample who arrived after 2021 possibly report unemployment due to having been in hiding, having lost their employment after the Taliban takeover and/or having spent protracted periods in Iran or Pakistan awaiting resettlement.

*Figure 5-6: **% Employment before arrival to the UK** (men N=380; women N=407)*



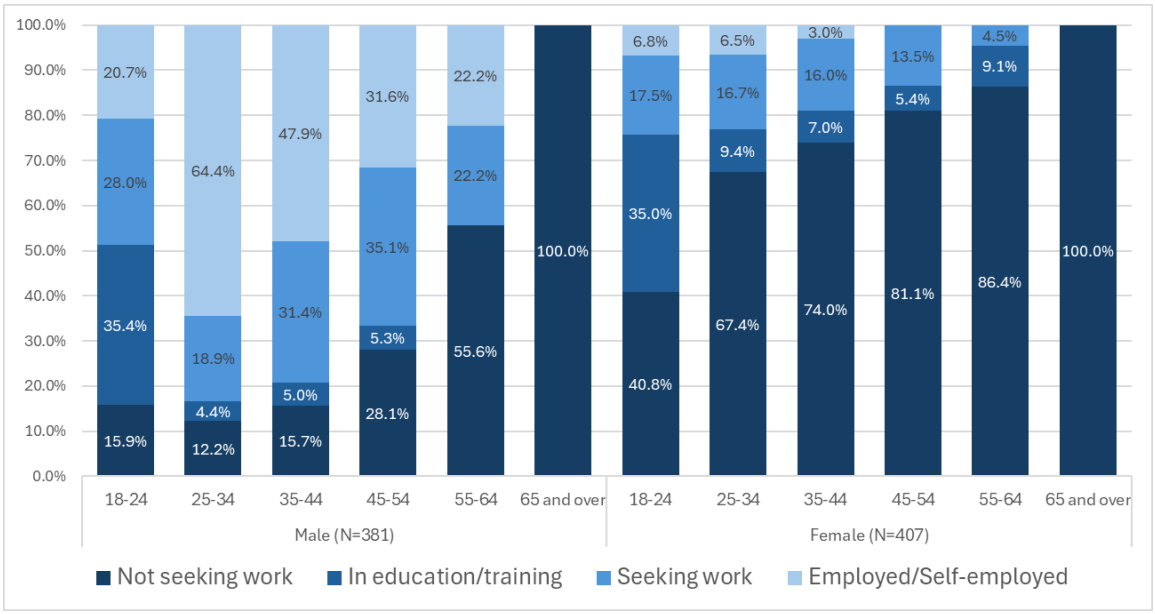
The resettlement process, as expected, has changed some of the employment patterns, although it has kept the gendered positions. A large proportion (72%) of respondents are unemployed or not working, with employment (including self-employment) rates being relatively low at 22.1%. Most earn below £1,000/month, with many survey respondents preferring not to disclose income. Education/training participation was at 12.8%. However, as explained below, all these patterns vary markedly by gender and age.

[7] 76.8% of males aged 18-24, and 93.2% of females aged 18-24 report not being in employment previously.

The survey data summarised in Figure 5- illustrates employment and activity status by age and gender. For males, employment is highest among those aged 25–34 (64.4%) and 35–44 (47.9%) but drops sharply for older groups—31.6% at 45–54, 22.2% at 55–64, and none at 65+. Education/training is most common among 18–24-year-old males (35.4%), while seeking work peaks at 45–54 (35.1%). Notably, 55.6% of males aged 55–64 and, as might be expected, 100% of those 65+ are not seeking work.

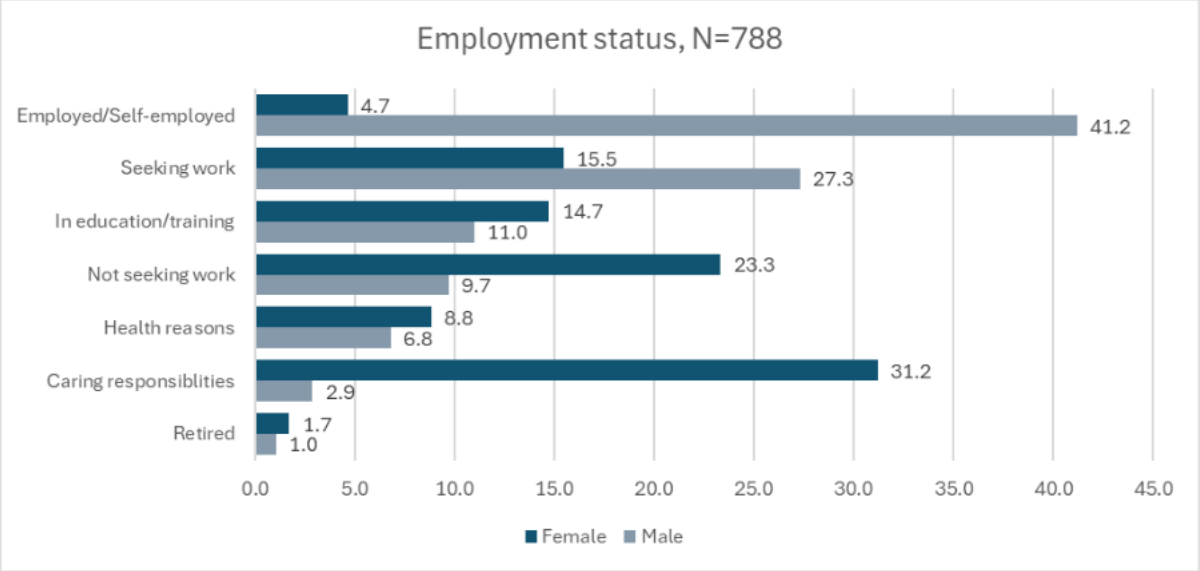
Afghan women show very high rates of not seeking work—from 40.8% for 18-24 to 86.4% at 55–64 and 100% at 65+. A relatively high proportion of young women are in education and training (35%), the same as young Afghan men in that age group. The highest rates of employment are for age groups 18-24 and 25-34, (6.8% and 6.5% respectively).

Figure 5-5 ***%, Current employment status by gender and age***



As Figure 5- shows, Afghan men are significantly more likely to be employed or self-employed compared to women (41.2% of men vs. 4.7% of women). Women are more likely to be not seeking work (65.1% vs. 20.5% of men), be in education/training (14.7% vs. 11.0% of men) or looking after family/home (31.2% vs. 2.9% of men).

Figure 5-6 ***%, Detailed current employment status by gender***



To understand the factors influencing individuals' employment status, we tested a multilevel model (see Appendix 1). By using a multilevel framework, we aimed to account for variations at both the individual level (such as age, gender, and education) and higher-level contextual factors of locality. This method provides robust estimates of predictors while considering the hierarchical structure of the data.

Although initial analysis showed differences at the locality level for employment rates, the regression model does not provide evidence for a significant association between employment status and locality. Our analysis suggests that it is the differences between characteristics of the people resettled in the areas that are important and not the areas themselves. One likely reason is that many participants had lived in the UK for a relatively short amount of time, some for less than six months, and a substantial number had moved frequently, reducing the influence of any specific local context. Of course, there may be some locality-level factors that may influence employment outcomes but are not fully captured in the Indices of Multiple Deprivation (IMD); such as local labour market dynamics, childcare availability and affordability, or transport connectivity.

Given the very small and non-significant random effects, we continued with a single-level multinomial logistic regression model (see Appendix 1). This approach allowed us to model the likelihood of being employed or self-employed compared to other possible statuses: seeking work, not seeking work, or being in education/training. The survey data suggest that employment of resettled Afghans is strongly associated with several individual characteristics. Those with better English proficiency, younger individuals and Afghan men are consistently more likely to be employed rather than be in any non-employment category (e.g. seeking work, in education/training, and not seeking work). Previous work experience and participation in UK-based training also appear to support employment, as does a longer duration of stay in the UK and having more children under 18 in the household, which increase the likelihood of being employed rather than seeking work.

In the qualitative research, employment histories of Afghan men show a clear pattern of underemployment and major deskilling, which corresponds with the survey findings. Throughout the research, we were aware of 'success stories' (for example, individuals continuing their careers as journalists and those where both men and women were working in dual-earner households). Others

reported more moderate successes in their employment, especially where some transferable skills existed. Sharif reported being involved in part-time education and employment, explaining, 'Now, I work three days a week as a tailor, and I attend college two days a week'. He considered this an achievement because it meant he was moving towards stabilizing his life. Younger participants provided stronger evidence of looking towards employment for progression; Feroz explained how he was 'actively looking for a part-time job,' even though he was studying.

For women, although most of the women taking part in the walking interviews were mothers of young children who were busy with domestic responsibilities, some were eager to restart their careers. For example, Muzhda was a highly educated professional woman who speaks fluent English and lives with her husband and four children in a small city in the north-west. She has worked full-time in administrative roles since coming to the UK. Layla, a former lawyer in Afghanistan, is now reactivating her career by studying for a master's degree at a British university. Jahida, a former midwife, is also studying to requalify in the UK.

However, among men, there were many cases of quite severe deskilling. Many highly qualified people like doctors and lawyers, who could speak good English, were unable to convert their qualifications. Sami, who used to be a judge in Afghanistan explained how he was deskilled: 'Now I am doing delivery and all that because of all the years of education I had to achieve something, and now I'm doing delivery'. Kamal, once an operations manager, took lower-skilled jobs to support his family. Participants described how work opportunities were limited by language barriers, non-recognition of prior qualifications, and limited UK work experience. These shifts carry an emotional toll, men spoke of feeling 'useless' or 'like a burden' (see also Chapter 7 on stakeholders). The stories of our Afghan male participants in these situations reveal a struggle between masculine identity and survival (see also Ryan, et al, 2025), echoing Connell's observation that masculinities are reshaped by social and economic pressures.

The effects of deskilling are not however just psychological, but there are real consequences in terms of financial wellbeing for households, generating financial precarity particularly where families are reliant on one income (see section 5.5 below). Some working families were struggling with financial precarity even while supported by in-work benefits. This was even worse for those seeking jobs. During the walking interviews, Safia, a housewife with three children, clearly articulated the financial insecurity associated with relying on benefits. She compared her life in Afghanistan, where she had been well off, living in a nice house and employing a cleaner, a childminder, and a cook. Now, her family is surviving on benefits while her husband looks for work and she attends ESOL classes. After adding up all their bills for rent, utilities, food, and children's clothes, she said that after 20 days each month, they have no money left and struggle to make it until the next payment arrives. Similarly, among our young people, there was evidence of financial precarity and young people adjusting within their family's tight budgeting system. Arya explained that her and her siblings are limited in buying things, where purchases rotate by need and by week: "We're a big family so we have like turns if we are buying something expensive… this week, I'll buy stuff… then the next week she'll buy stuff, and then the next week my brother will."

Financial pressures emerged in men's interviews too, where participants like Sharif spoke about their living on restricted incomes, the challenges of relying on benefits during their initial period of resettlement and the need to find any paid work, since welfare benefits were not enough. Aref emphasised how, 'we have economic problems', particularly when considering living costs alongside transport costs. Whereas welfare benefits were generally seen as an essential support through the period of resettlement, male participants framed benefits as temporary assistance and wished to be financially independent through the pursuit of work, as long as barriers such as language,

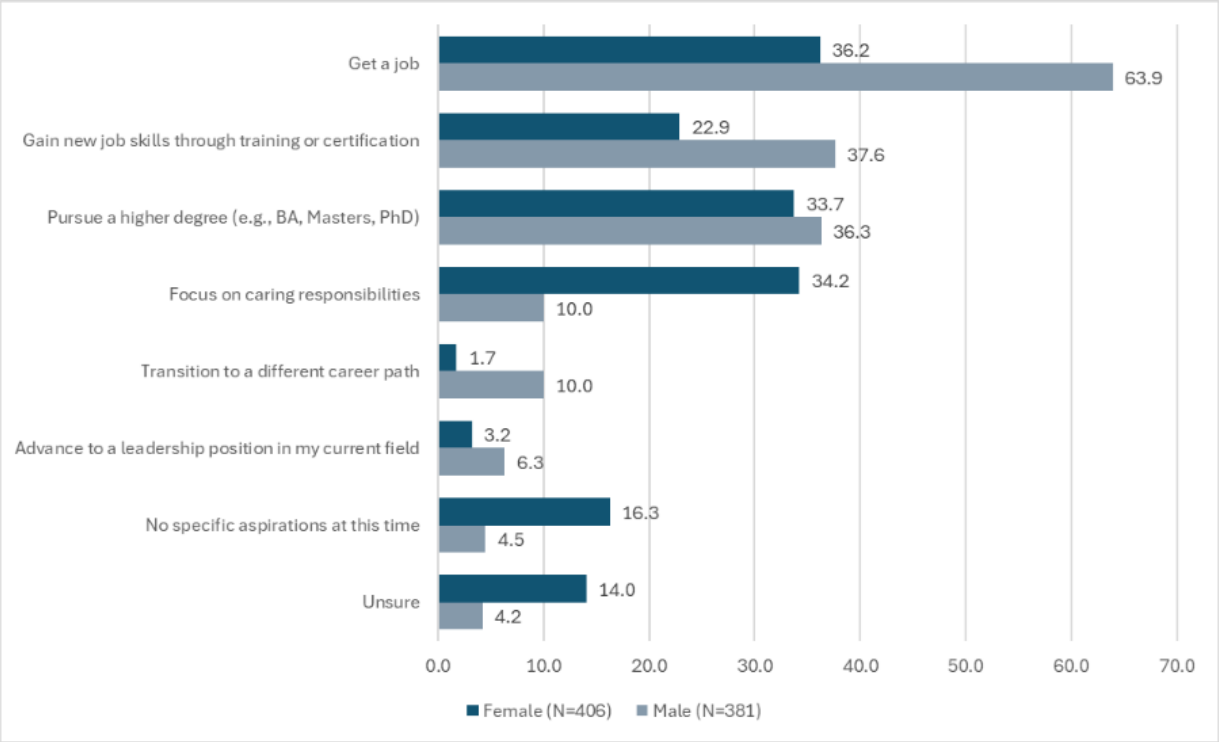
certification, or childcare could be resolved. Others also noted however some practical issues of accessing benefits.

5.5 Future aspirations

Finally, we looked at the future aspirations of resettled Afghans (see Figure 5-7) that demonstrated clear gender differences. The most common aspiration overall is getting a job, cited by 63.9% of men compared to 36.2% of women, making it the top priority for men. In contrast, women are more likely to aim for gaining new job skills through training or certification (37.6% vs. 22.9% for men) and pursuing a higher degree (36.3% vs. 33.7%). The analysis suggests that for Afghan women, future aspirations around employment, education, and caring responsibilities are almost equally important, each attracting roughly one-third of responses.

Other aspirations are less common: transitioning to a different career path is mentioned by 10% of men but only 1.7% of women, while advancing to a leadership position is cited by 6.3% of men and 3.2% of women. Interestingly, 16.3% of women report having no specific aspirations, compared to just 4.5% of men. Uncertainty about future plans is relatively low but higher among men (14%) than women (4.2%).

Figure 5-7 ***% What are your aspirations and future plans?*** *(As a multiple-response item, totals may exceed 100%).*



Overall, the data suggests men prioritize immediate employment and career shifts, while women show stronger interest in skill development, higher education, and caregiving responsibilities. Interviews with women provided some insights into these survey patterns. For example, Breshna, a young mother told us that in Afghanistan she had not expected to work, so upon moving to England, she saw looking after her children as her primary role, while the idea of getting a paid job was very unfamiliar to her. However, as noted below, these aspirations varied considerably by age, prior education and by socio-economic background.

In particular, the young women we met in the Photovoice research, like their male counterparts, described clear ambitions for their futures, often centred on education and career progression. Sadaf, 20, highlighted her commitment to entering the medical field, explaining, 'The main thing that I'm motivated and going to college… is because I want to become a good doctor. I want to study a good degree'. Heda, 17, expressed a similar trajectory, stating, 'I want to go to university first…. I want to do MBBS, Bachelor of Science and Bachelor of Medicine'.

Picture of college hallway display board for Hair and Beauty classroom, Rose, North, 2025.

Others spoke of more vocational paths, but with similar evidence of planning, consideration and research. Rose, 17, who had newly arrived with limited English, spoke with determination about her goal to study hairdressing and beauty at college, explaining, 'This is the place I want to study my college. Hairdressing and beauty salon.' She had already met staff who advised her that, 'your English needs to get better so you can easily communicate.' Rose described how she responded to this advice: 'I try a lot by myself. I watch videos and practice in my free time.' She also turned to a friend who had completed a beauty course, saying, 'I asked her about how to get into college and what I am supposed to do because I want to be ready from now.' This picture was reinforced by stakeholders in local authorities referring to the 'very determined females going to college and finding work' (described by one London based resettlement team).

Conclusion and recommendations

Our research illustrates the diversity of the resettled Afghan population, indicating marked variation and segmentation/polarisation in the sample in relation to education background, English language proficiency and employment by age and gender. Prior social class position in Afghanistan, as indicated by qualifications and professional background, are important considerations in resettlement support, alongside recognition of gendered, cultural understandings. It is apparent that resettled Afghans are not all starting from the same position; while some are highly educated professionals, others had little or no prior education.

Nonetheless, all participants encounter specific challenges and opportunities related to their backgrounds through the resettlement experience. Young people are generally engaging well in education, learning English relatively quickly and express high aspirations (see Chapter 3). Men are entering the labour market, though are often experiencing de-skilling, at least in the short run. Many women are currently prioritising childcare, although many are also attending ESOL classes and are keen to improve their English language skills. Some younger women are engaging in higher education and/or finding paid employment, including some women in professional roles.

In conducting our research across different geographical sites, we were curious about the influence of locality, but the survey analysis suggests that it is not locality-level factors captured in the IMD that matters for employment outcomes but rather the characteristics/ backgrounds of resettled persons. It is important to note that some locality-level factors affecting employment - such as labour market dynamics, childcare provision, and transport connectivity - are not fully reflected in the IMD. These limitations suggest that further research is needed to better understand how local conditions shape employment prospects.

Employment outcomes are closely linked to language skills and prior work experience. Afghans with stronger English proficiency[8] and previous employment are more likely to be in work in the UK, as are those who have participated in UK-based training or lived in the UK for longer. Age and gender also play a role: younger individuals and men show higher employment rates, while older groups and women are more often outside the labour market. These findings highlight the importance of language support, skills development, and targeted interventions based on these characteristics. It is also important to acknowledge the possibility that training itself may not be the direct causal factor in securing employment. Instead, those who choose to participate in training may already possess characteristics, such as confidence or labour-market readiness, that make them more likely to find employment.

Our findings have policy implications in terms of employment and ESOL support. First, there is need for continued funding for ESOL, including advanced and specifically tailored language learning opportunities for different needs (e.g. see the Learning and Work Institute on ESOL and Employment commissioned by South East SMP). This might, for some, need to last beyond the current 3-year funding provision, through pooling of existing resources, as seen in some councils.

Second, while recognising that any job can be supportive as a first step to improve household financial stability, there is equally a need to avoid long term de-skilling. Rather than being in work being seen as 'the' solution, this needs to be considered *vis a vis* the entrenchment of financial insecurity from low paid work and negative psychological impacts (see Chapter 6). Targeted training programmes, or where LAs bring in specialist employment support to work in a bespoke manner, can help to ensure that highly skilled men and women are able to convert and/ or acquire qualifications and find better paid jobs.

[8] Measured as a scale reported in section 5.2.

6 Wellbeing, connections and local belonging

Introduction and key findings

This chapter examines how Afghans are faring in terms of wellbeing, relating to their physical and mental health, social networks and connections as well as feelings of safety and belonging. Resettlement creates a profound shift, offering relief from life-threatening risks, but introduces new challenges of rebuilding lives in an entirely foreign setting. Our research demonstrates that Afghans feel safer and more stable in the UK, which improves their core wellbeing. Some face significant challenges related to family separation, limited local networks, struggles with language and employment, as well as financial and practical challenges of adjustment. Our findings again highlight the significant variations in experience across gender, age, and geographic location. Our key findings are:

- Participants frequently emphasised their feelings of increased safety and stability after their resettlement in the UK as a significant factor in their well-being. Many expressed a high degree of fortitude, where the sense of safety and security they experience following resettlement drives a determination to succeed.
- There was a substantial variation in individuals' sense of belonging to their local area, where 64.2% feel a connection to their local area, whereas 35.8% do not feel they belong at all. This suggests differing levels of attachment and community integration. The feeling of belonging was somewhat weaker for middle-aged respondents, Afghan men and those who reside in areas without cultural amenities.
- Most Afghan participants report being in good general health. However, there are differences between men and women, with men reporting better health than women, and between younger and older people, where health is getting worse with age. However, over a quarter of respondents also reported having a long-term health condition.
- Mental health issues, especially stress, anxiety, and depression, are common long term health conditions for Afghans. Our qualitative research suggests they arise not only due to strains of displacement, but often due to family separation and fears for family members left behind, which has been exacerbated by the data breach (see Chapter 1).
- However, mental health issues can be left untreated because of cultural stigma and a reluctance to seek professional help, especially among men.
- Where health issues exist within family groups, we find evidence that young people are bearing additional caring or administrative responsibilities within households. In addition to being language brokers and cultural intermediaries, some are becoming informal young carers for their parents, albeit this reflects Afghan cultural norms of familial interdependence.
- Social isolation is widespread, with a high level of Afghan participants lacking confidants, connections, and family or friends outside the home at this stage of resettlement. People living in rural areas face unique difficulties such as isolation, a lack of transportation, as well as limited access to cultural facilities such as mosques, ethnic stores and less expensive food shops.

- Location is important in accounting for variation in wellbeing. Social belonging is the most robust predictor of wellbeing, and statistical analyses indicated that a sense of belonging, general health status, discrimination experiences, proficiency in English, and marital status are linked to wellbeing.
- Although few respondents reported discrimination in the survey, it disproportionately affects certain groups, particularly older women over 65, young adult females, and younger males, highlighting the need for targeted inclusion and support strategies.

6.1 Safety and sense of belonging

All participants in the qualitative research frequently emphasised their feelings of increased generalised safety and stability after their resettlement in the UK as a significant factor in their well-being. Resonating with findings in Chapter 4, section 3, many indicated that having safe housing and access to education for their children has reduced stress and uncertainty for their families. For example, Najib stated that he and his family can now live in the UK and felt 'relaxed, without fear of security problem[s]'. Several male participants reported that arriving in the UK brought immediate psychological calm, with one man, Haroon, describing that after hiding for years in Afghanistan, 'when we arrived in the UK, I felt real peace.' Many of the younger male participants like Faroz similarly expressed that the UK offers 'peace… the education is good… everything is good here,' linking safety directly to their ability to study and rebuild their lives.

Most women in the qualitative research also perceived England as a safe place relative to Afghanistan. During their walking interviews, many of our female participants talked about how safe and comfortable they felt in their pleasant neighbourhoods. Tamana, who lives in central London with her husband and newborn baby, said that her neighbourhood had plenty of shops, parks, and playgrounds for children. She feels comfortable and safe there and wants to stay. Wazhman lived in an MoD property close to London with her husband and children. It was in an area populated by Afghan and non-Afghan families, whom she found to be 'kind and supportive'. The property was also very close to shops and schools. 'It's the neighbours and the facilities here that matter. Everything is very close by: the shops, the supermarket, the school — everything.'

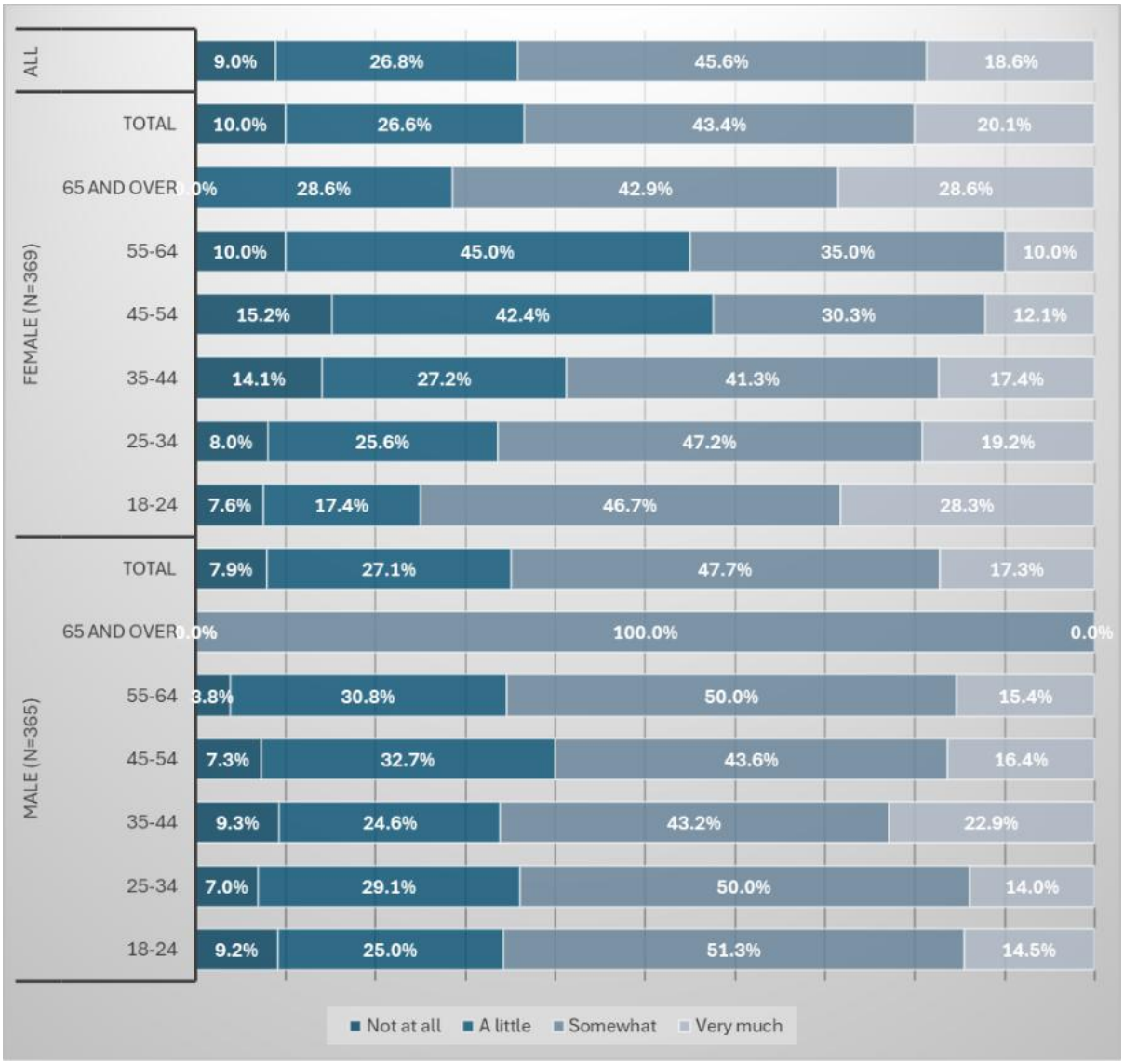
However, the walking interviews revealed important nuances and continued safety concerns that affected women's daily lives and opportunities. In a quiet suburb of Birmingham, sisters Farida, Shabnam and Masooma lived with their mother Zainab, in a cul-de-sac located down an isolated lane. There was no lighting on the lane, so visibility was limited. When we walked around with two of the sisters, they told us that they avoid going out after dark and make sure they are back from college before dusk. This also impacts their ability to find part-time jobs as they do not want to work evening shifts.

Respondents' sense of belonging to the area in our survey shows considerable variety; some feel integrated, while others feel isolated or unsure. Overall, most respondents reported a moderate sense of belonging to their area, with 45.6% feeling 'Somewhat' connected and 18.6% feeling 'Very much' connected. A smaller proportion expressed weak attachment, with 26.8% saying 'A little' and 9% 'Not at all'. While minor gender differences appeared in the distribution of belonging scores, these were not statistically significant and thus cannot be interpreted as reliable group differences. Males were slightly more likely to report 'somewhat' belonging (47.7%) compared to females (43.4%), while females were more likely to feel 'Very much' connected (20.1% vs. 17.3% of males).

Age patterns (see Figure 6-1) reveal that young adults (18–24 and 25–34) tend to feel slightly stronger belonging. This likely reflects their engagement with education and opportunities to build

social networks as noted in the last chapter, and perhaps greater adaptability to new cultural contexts. Middle-aged groups (45–54 and 55–64) lean toward weaker attachment, particularly among females aged 55–64, where 45% reported 'A little.' This group may face challenges, including limited employment opportunities and language barriers compared to younger people in education. However, as these differences did not reach statistical significance, they should be seen as descriptive of this sample rather than reliable indicators of broader age-related trends in the wider population of resettled Afghans.

Figure 6-1 ***% Do you feel that you belong in your area?*** *By gender and age*



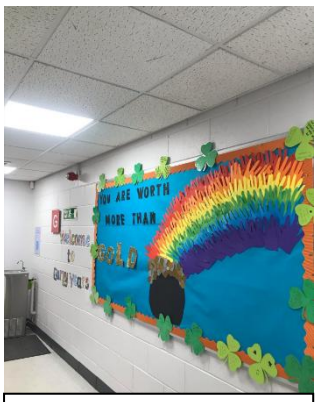
A deeper sense of belonging was often limited by the issues we consider later in this chapter, related to displacement, family separation and weak community ties in the UK. For instance, one of the participants, Aref, explained that 'we don't have any Afghan community nearby'. Several of the men described relying primarily on family or a small circle of contacts, and spoke about feelings of loneliness, lack of connections, and the need for broader networks. For instance, Nemat stated that although his family could count on each other, their social networks were quite limited, 'we normally solve our own problems as a family'. He added that it would be very useful to be around other families from Afghanistan to overcome loneliness.

However, this is not straightforward, since walking interviews with women revealed that, while some wanted to be close to other Afghans, others wanted to avoid them — especially those who chose to defy cultural and religious norms. Paymana, a young single woman who does not wear the hijab, said that she felt happier in the small, largely white British town in the south-east than in the London borough where she visits relatives. Although she had the option to live with relatives in that borough, she declined.

As discussed in Chapter 5, language barriers also prevented many of the more recently arrived Afghans from engaging with wider individuals and communities beyond their immediate networks. Rose's experience arriving as a young teenager captures this linguistic isolation: 'When I arrived here, I just knew how to say 'Hi' and 'Thank you'. When people were talking, I could not understand a word.' Many of our female participants also talked about having to rebuild their lives from scratch in completely new environments (reflecting similar narratives among the young people, see Chapter 3). Gulshan described the effort required to adapt to a system so different from that in Afghanistan: 'The house is different; the people are different. The rule, everything is different'. Marya, a young student living in North London, told us as we walked around that she had 'no idea how to live here' and was 'starting my life from zero'.

Participants' feelings of belonging were also influenced by their access to cultural amenities, and religious places of worship (see also Chapter 4, section 4). During Photovoice for instance, young people were quick to stress how positively surprised they were to discover the Northern city in which they were housed had mosques (see photo, right, by Rayhan). As Safia said, 'We feel safe here and [...] prefer to be around mosque and Muslim community'. Having said that, they also expressed appreciation for a wider level of interest and understanding of their religion in the general population, as well as the diversity of being around others who understood experiences of migration and displacement (see Chapter 3 and photo below).

Rayhan, North, 2025 referring to feeling safe.



Rose, North, 2025 'Diversity in the area and college'.

Especially important was being able to access food that was appropriate for their cultural preferences. Many claimed that everyday life was more difficult and unfamiliar due to the absence of ethnic food shops: 'We don't have a halal shop in our city... we have to go to another city, about an hour by bus'. Families in smaller towns or rural areas felt less at ease, because of difficulties reaching culturally appropriate services. The proximity of halal shops was a recurring theme mentioned by almost all participants during the walking interviews. When describing her neighbourhood in London, for example, Wazhma spontaneously mentioned 'a lot of halal shops'. In Birmingham, Jaheda and Sadia said that they preferred the city to the rural area where their hotel had been located, because there were shops selling 'halal meat' and 'Islamic clothing'.

The availability of these cultural amenities emerged as a critical factor not just for practical daily needs, but as markers of belonging, representing spaces where participants felt recognized and could maintain cultural and religious practices. Nevertheless, demonstrating the financial pressures the households were under, participants are forging new shopping habits, which mean that in addition to halal shops, budget supermarkets, such as Aldi, Lidl

and Iceland, emerge also as a marker of locality. In other words, the availability of these amenities marked an area as affordable and desirable for our participants. This indicated that while they had achieved some degree of psychological security, at this point they had not achieved financial security (as noted in Chapter 5): Nazanin told us, 'My problem is shops, expensive, no halal shops...no Aldi or Lidl'.

6.2 Health experiences and outcomes

6.2.1 Physical health

More than two-thirds (76%) of Afghans who participated in the survey report good, very good or excellent health. However, as with other areas of the research, significant disparities exist across gender and age group. Afghan men had better self-reported health than women: 34.4% said their health was 'Excellent' compared to 25.6% of women. Women were more likely to report 'Fair' or 'Poor' health. Age-related disparities are particularly stark. Among young Afghan adults aged 18 to 24, just over half (51.9%) described their health as excellent. In contrast, older adults aged 65 and above reported much poorer health: none in this age group considered their health to be excellent, rather 63.6% rated their health as poor.

Around 30% of all respondents did not answer a question about whether they experience a long-term health condition affecting their ability to work or their everyday living. Of those who did answer, slightly more than one-quarter (28.1%) responded that they did (thus this figure reflects the proportion of those providing a response, not the full survey sample). The most common conditions mentioned among the group reporting long term health conditions were leg/foot issues (43.9%), mental health (29.7%), back/neck pain (27.7%), diabetes (14.8%), and heart problems (17.4%) also were notable. Prevalence of long-term health conditions increases dramatically with age, rising from just 7.9% among those aged (18–24) to 81.8% among those aged (65+). However, even among this group of respondents with long term health conditions, 17% still reported that their general state of health is very good or good.

Overall, respondents expressed moderate satisfaction with health services since moving to the UK. These figures need to be contextualised with reference to the wider UK population, who report low satisfaction: 6 in 10 people (59%) in the UK said they were 'very' or 'quite' dissatisfied with the NHS in 2024 (Taylor et al 2025). For the Afghans in the survey, this was better, with most (43%) reporting being fairly satisfied, and 16% very satisfied. Dissatisfaction was lower, with 13% very dissatisfied and 10% somewhat dissatisfied. Gender differences were minimal, though women were slightly more likely to feel neutral.

Age patterns show that younger adults (18–24) and middle-aged groups (45–54) were most positive, whereas dissatisfaction increased for 25-34 age group and among older respondents (55+), particularly those aged 65 and over. This variation in satisfaction with health services across age groups likely reflects differences in healthcare needs, expectations, and accessibility. Older respondents, who typically require more frequent and specialised care, may be more critical of service gaps, while younger individuals—often with fewer health demands—tend to report higher satisfaction.

In comparison, satisfaction with dental care was significantly lower among the resettled Afghans. Fewer than 5% of respondents were very satisfied, and nearly one-quarter (25%) were very dissatisfied. Neutral responses were common (21%), and almost 20% indicated that dental services

were not applicable, suggesting limited access or use. Dissatisfaction was highest among those aged 35–44, while younger adults (18–24) were more likely to report neutrality or non-use.

6.2.2 Mental health difficulties

Of the one-quarter (28.1%) of Afghan survey participants experiencing long-term health conditions, among those who disclosed such conditions, 29.7% reported mental health issues. This represents 8.3% of all survey respondents. However, in our qualitative research, mental health issues were more strongly evident across the range of participants, from young to old. Many of the young people often referred to parents' anxiety issues as well as their own (while also referring to how this was somewhat hidden, as we explore below). Several male participants in the qualitative research specifically referred to stress, anxiety, or depression following resettlement, related to various reasons we explore further.

Displacement itself led to some mental health issues; men like Kamal reflected upon their emotional states of sadness related to forced migration, conflict and uncertainty in his native country. Nemat however highlighted that, although 'leaving your homeland makes you feel frustrated, disappointed at first,' his feelings of wellbeing did improve over a period of adjustment to living in the UK. Some male participants identified emotional hardship as being related to loss of professional identity and a lack of certainty, as well as difficulties addressing the practical issues covered earlier in the report, such as housing problems, financial strain, and language barriers. As Sami noted, 'This causes depression' particularly where many well-educated men feel the need to work in occupations that are significantly lower than their level of education.

Mental health challenges were described as emerging due to the increased responsibilities that men have taken on. In previous chapters we discussed the linguistic and logistical challenges families face, and this has led to some men's household roles changing after resettlement. Without support from extended family, they have been sharing or taking on tasks that 'traditionally' women handled in Afghanistan. Kenan pointed out that he is 'husband, father ...everything come on my shoulders' in the UK. He added that 'here, sometimes she [his wife] goes shopping, sometimes I do...We share these responsibilities more now'. Feroz, felt safer, but nevertheless talked about how he was trying to address gaps in his education, while juggling this with care of his elderly father and mother. Other men described learning to do the shopping, school runs, and paperwork themselves. In the absence of the multigenerational support common in Afghanistan, men often took on both practical and emotional caregiving, especially when their wives were stressed or had health problems.

Another significant source of anxiety (for all participants) was concern about family members still in Afghanistan, where family separation and related homesickness create persistent psychological burdens. Though some had been reunited by the Separated Families Pathway, other close family members remain. Kaveh's words capture this ongoing anguish: 'It does not feel good at all... my mother is very ill in Afghanistan.' Afrooz also spoke of stress caused by the separation from siblings, 'we have some stress about my three brothers who are in Afghanistan.' Baset, one of our younger participants, also referred to his mother's sadness that his older brothers, now in their early twenties, were refused evacuation at the airport due to their age, but remain in danger:

> The one day that we came here, they [Taliban] came to knock on our door and they said like where is your dad? They ask for our dad, and my brothers got to scare them and they [brothers] just moved their house, and like went to another city. They keep changing the house right now […] My mum is like always thinking about them, stressing about them. She's really like worried about them all the time.

Concern about family members have also been intensified by the high-profile data breaches affecting Afghan applicants to ARAP and related schemes as well as confusing and tightening rules around family reunion. As we set out in our evidence to the Defence Committee (Oliver et al 2025), many Afghans were already experiencing significant stress, anxiety and 'survivor guilt' linked to relatives still in hiding or living in fear in Afghanistan. The news that personal details may have been exposed has further undermined feelings of safety and trust in UK institutions, with participants expressing deep worry that their own or their relatives' information could be accessed by the Taliban or other actors. Even where formal reassurances have been issued about the scope of the breach, confidence is low, and this additional layer of uncertainty has become a continuing background stressor in everyday life.

Despite men suffering from mental health issues, we also found that they avoided seeking professional mental-health support because of stigma, fear, or cultural norms (see also Chapter 7, stakeholders). Omid explained that although he experienced months of depression, he refused help and initially coped alone before later speaking to his GP. Others like Kaveh, preferred to manage emotional pressure privately, often speaking only with family members rather than professionals; The desire to keep struggles private often impacted the whole family, and particularly the young people. For example, Ahmad in the Photovoice research reported his experiencing coping with his father's terminal illness and later death:

> My father told me that I shouldn't speak to other guys like Afghanis because he didn't want anyone to have pity for him. It was something like between my family. And even my youngest sister didn't know […] I didn't get any understanding from any kind of like community; it was me against life and against the pressure, and instead I need to look after persons like my sisters, younger sisters, my mum and keep their mood up.

Although mental health issues seemed a particular challenge for men, it was evident that this was also experienced by other groups. During the walking interviews, Sarah, a young student who lives in a rural village with her family, told us about her mother's struggle with depression: 'it's very lonely. My mum is facing depression. Because no one is here, no relatives, no Afghan families, not even other Muslim families.' Our research reveals that young people were also vulnerable to mental health challenges, especially through taking on additional responsibilities for family wellbeing while also dealing with their own experiences of identity formation, loss, and displacement. Young men like Ahmad (above) took on major caregiving responsibilities, becoming young carers for his parents, who were dealing with physical or mental health issues. Another example is Rose, a 17-year-old in the North, who explained her familial obligations (see picture, left): 'My parents have health issues. My dad has mental health problems, and my mum has physical pain. I need to book appointments for them and take them to their hospital appointments.' Rose pointed out that this compounded her own initial negative experiences and bullying around her hotel accommodation (see Chapter 3) and leading to changes in her personality. She explained:

Rose, North, 2025 with her father.

> the depressing times made me so introverted. I no longer enjoy busy places or meeting new people. I do not enjoy talking with other people as much. I even call less often to my siblings like every other month or two sometimes. I am too busy to keep my network.

While family bonds were maintained in acts of family care, this reliance on family intimacies nevertheless limited pathways to forming new friendships, particularly for those arriving late in their

education, such as some of our young female participants who arrived at age later than 18. Sadaf openly acknowledged, 'Honestly, I don't have any friends, close friends', and she relied on family intimacy as a protective space.

In addition to providing practical care, then young people frequently acted as linguistic and cultural intermediaries for their families, helping them navigate systems that their parents were unable to access on their own. For many this led to what some of them, such as Ahmad self-reported as 'depression' themselves.

At the same time, these pressures could also be transformative, and this was expressed in a narrative of fortitude that we found among many of the young people who described how they were 'stepping up' into new roles. Arash explained how the challenges of resettlement changed his sense of self and responsibilities: 'Before I was a child and became a man... when you're immigrant to another country that's lots of pressure [...] I had the responsibility because I was the only boy in the family.'

6.3 Connections in local areas

Most survey respondents reported extremely limited local family ties beyond their immediate households, with 55.9% having no relatives or acquaintances nearby and only 4.3% having many (see Table 6.1). This absence of extended family networks represents a profound shift in daily life and community structure, since in the qualitative research, participants referred to the loss of extended family networks that in Afghanistan would typically provide crucial practical, emotional and social support. Lack of local family ties outside the immediate household is common across all age groups, but it is most pronounced among older adults. While around half of younger respondents (51.1% of 18–24 and 53.7% of 25–34) reported having no relatives and acquaintances nearby, this rises to 81.8% among those aged 65 and over[9].

Similarly, forming new **social connections** appears modest: 24.2% made some new acquaintances, 69.8% had made only a few or no new acquaintances in their locality while just 6% reported making many. Women were slightly more likely to report having made many new acquaintances (7.1% vs. 4.7%). Men were more likely to report none (15% vs. 22.2%)[10].

[9] This difference did not reach statistical significance. One likely contributing factor is the substantially smaller number of respondents in the older age groups, which reduces the statistical power to detect meaningful differences.

[10] The observed difference met the criterion for statistical significance ($p>0.05$) based on gender in response to the question: 'Have you made new acquaintances in the area?'

Table 6.1 ***Social connections and support in locality by gender***

		Male		Female		Total	
		N	%	N	%	N	%
Do you have relatives/acquaintances in this area?	None	210	55.3%	229	56.5%	439	55.9%
	Few	94	24.7%	85	21.0%	179	22.8%
	Some	66	17.4%	67	16.5%	133	16.9%
	Many	10	2.6%	24	5.9%	34	4.3%
Have you made new acquaintances in this area?	None	57	15.0%	90	22.2%	147	18.7%
	Few	197	51.8%	205	50.5%	402	51.1%
	Some	108	28.4%	82	20.2%	190	24.2%
	Many	18	4.7%	29	7.1%	47	6.0%
How many people do you have to share your deepest feelings with?	None	61	16.1%	45	11.1%	106	13.5%
	One	145	38.2%	180	44.2%	325	41.3%
	Two	70	18.4%	67	16.5%	137	17.4%
	Three	40	10.5%	51	12.5%	91	11.6%
	More than three	64	16.8%	64	15.7%	128	16.3%
How many people can you easily ask for help with everyday tasks?	None	51	13.5%	41	10.1%	92	11.7%
	One	168	44.3%	188	46.2%	356	45.3%
	Two	70	18.5%	84	20.6%	154	19.6%
	Three	44	11.6%	41	10.1%	85	10.8%
	More than three	46	12.1%	53	13.0%	99	12.6%

When it comes to the third question, on emotional support, the majority have at least one person to confide in, but this varies: 41.3% have one person, and 16.3% have more than three, while 13.5% have no one to share their deepest feelings with. Women had slightly more emotional support but given that the gender-based differences here did not reach statistical significance, they should be interpreted as sample-specific observations rather than generalisable gender-related trends. Patterns regarding emotional support vary significantly by age and this difference reached statistical significance ($p < .05$). Interestingly, those aged 65+ show relatively strong networks, with 36.4% having more than three confidants, though this group is small and that most probably come from their extended family with children and grandchildren. Middle-aged groups (35–44) tend to rely on one person (46.2%).

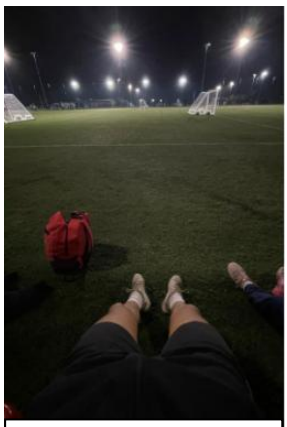
Finally, practical support for everyday tasks shows a similar pattern. While 11.7% have no one to rely on, most respondents can count on at least one person (45.3% have one, 19.6% have two, and 12.6% have more than three). The analysis indicated a statistically significant association between age and practical support among resettled Afghans. Older adults (65+) appear better supported for practical help, with 27.3% having more than three people to rely on, compared to only 7.9% in the 25–34 group. Younger adults (18–24) again report relatively strong networks (15.8% with more than three helpers), while middle-aged groups lean toward having just one person (49.5% in 35–44).

Our qualitative research suggests a broader picture of social isolation. Across the men interviewed, local connections varied considerably depending on where they were living, but many had only small networks beyond their immediate Afghan contacts. Several men said they mainly relied on nearby Afghan families for practical or emotional support, but where these were lacking, others struggled. Aref recalled, 'I didn't know anyone for a long time… then I met a few people,' who helped him look for work. Some participants pointed out there were no Afghans around in rural or small-town areas: Robin mentioned, 'There is no Afghan community nearby… except one Afghan family as a neighbour.' Some mentioned more structured local support, provided by churches or community groups, but this varied.

Among women, we found similar stories of social isolation, which were particularly acute when families were housed in rural areas. The experiences of Sarah demonstrate the impacts of the extreme seclusion that can occur in these cases. Sarah was a young woman relocated with her family to a tiny village with few transportation options. To get to the closest secondary school, her younger brother had to walk for nearly an hour. Sarah had to carefully coordinate travel plans with the bus schedule because the bus to the city, where she attends college, only runs once every hour. As Sarah talked about how lonely and isolated she felt, she started to show signs of distress; despite her fluency in English, the lack of amenities in the village prevented her from meeting new people or making friends.

Sarah's story related to similar experiences found in the walking interviews, where we met Madina, a widow, in her 40s, rehoused with her children in a small town in the north of England. She did not speak English and was unable to communicate with her neighbours. She missed the companionship of fellow Afghans and said, 'there is no other Afghan family around'. Unable to settle in the town, she was keen to move to a city in the South West where she had some distant relatives. Although she did not know them well, she believed that living near other Afghans would improve her mental health. Similarly, in Birmingham, we met Zainab a widow in her late 60s. Whilst her four daughters attend college every day, she is alone in the house. She does not speak English and feels she is too old to start learning. Unable to communicate with her neighbours, she is very isolated and lonely.

Reflecting findings elsewhere about experiences of support, some of our interlocutors in the qualitative research reported feeling supported through case-worker contact from LA resettlement services and also shared their reflections of helpful inputs from voluntary sector organisations. Some also referred to the actions of supportive neighbours which at times created 'a family-like feeling' in their local area, as Omar explained. Wazhma, a housewife and mother of three who took part in a walking interview in London, mentioned that she had started volunteering with a local Afghan organisation: 'I teach Dari for Afghan kids… I want my own children to learn Dari so I volunteer and provide a service for other families.' Another woman talked about the benefits of having volunteer befrienders: Madina, a widow and mother of three young children, described how two women of Pakistani background visit her and speak to her in Urdu: 'Also they brought some jackets and second-hand clothes for my kids.' In other examples, we found that caseworkers and workers in the voluntary sector were doing important work in translating and mediating different ideas about sociability (see example in Chapter 7).



Yousuf, North, 2025, football training.

Our survey findings indicate that younger people are more likely to report having a wider emotional support network[11], and this seemed consistent with the qualitative research. There, the youth participants (aged 16-19) suggested that schools and sports activities were influential. As Hamidi, in London, emphasized: 'Connections are the best thing that helped me… having relationships with people, teachers, and friends.' Ahmad, also in London, noted: 'We made friends with other refugees… they know the feeling, they help us.' The young

Khalid, London, 2025, football training.

[11] In the survey, we found that younger respondents (18–24) were more likely to report having a wider emotional support network, with 23.2% reporting more than three confidants, compared to only 8.8% in the 25–34 group (this difference being statistically significant).

men in the Photovoice exercise referred to sports clubs (from football, to boxing to cricket) as vital spaces to both forge new connections beyond their Afghan friendship groups, as well as to respond to mental health challenges.

6.4 Discrimination and racism

Overall, in the survey, 6.7% of respondents reported experiencing discrimination or racism. The prevalence is relatively low, with some variations across gender and age groups; however, they are based on a small sample size for the age and gender specific groups and no statistically significant differences were found'.

In the qualitative research, all adult male participants emphasized that they had not encountered overt racism and often indicated the opposite: courteous neighbours, teachers and useful community interactions. For the young people in the Photovoice research, however, some reported incidences of hostility when appearing a visible minority in the street, e.g. walking to mosque. There were signs of this racism being normalised in young people's responses as something to shrug off, but also religious orientation helped to manage the negativity. Shahzada, a young man explained about being verbally assaulted on the way to prayers wearing religious clothing, 'the good answer is always forgiveness'. During the walking interviews, some women mentioned specific incidents involving racist or Islamophobic encounters. In most cases, the participants described these as isolated incidents involving unpleasant individuals rather than systemic hostility. Gulshan, a mother of four living in a suburb of Birmingham, described how a woman in a supermarket had verbally abused her simply because she was wearing a headscarf, a reminder, as is the case for Shahzada above and Rose and Sadaf below, that visible markers of Muslim identity may trigger hostility in certain contexts.

During the autumn 2024 walking interviews, several women also referenced the riots that had occurred the previous summer. For example, Layla, a former activist from Afghanistan, said: 'we were all afraid'. She described seeing 'some people ... they have some signs...using bad words to refugees'. Similarly, Hasina took a bus into her local town and saw a crowd of people gathered in the town centre, with banners. She immediately caught a bus back home. Some women mentioned that they were afraid to go outside, like Sadia who explained: 'more than one week I stay at the house... I feel maybe someone attack me'.

Among younger women in our Photovoice exercise, Sadaf and Rose both experienced hostility. Sadaf was travelling in a bus in another less diverse area outside of the safety of the Northern city. Travelling to hospital with her sister, she was racially abused and targeted for being Muslim. Rose's experience nearby her hotel in the East of England is similar; without their own transport, her family had no other option but to walk to the Juma prayer once a week, but 'people were stopping us and saying very harsh words about why we are dressing that way'. For young people already navigating linguistic and cultural transitions, such experiences impact wellbeing and sense of safety.

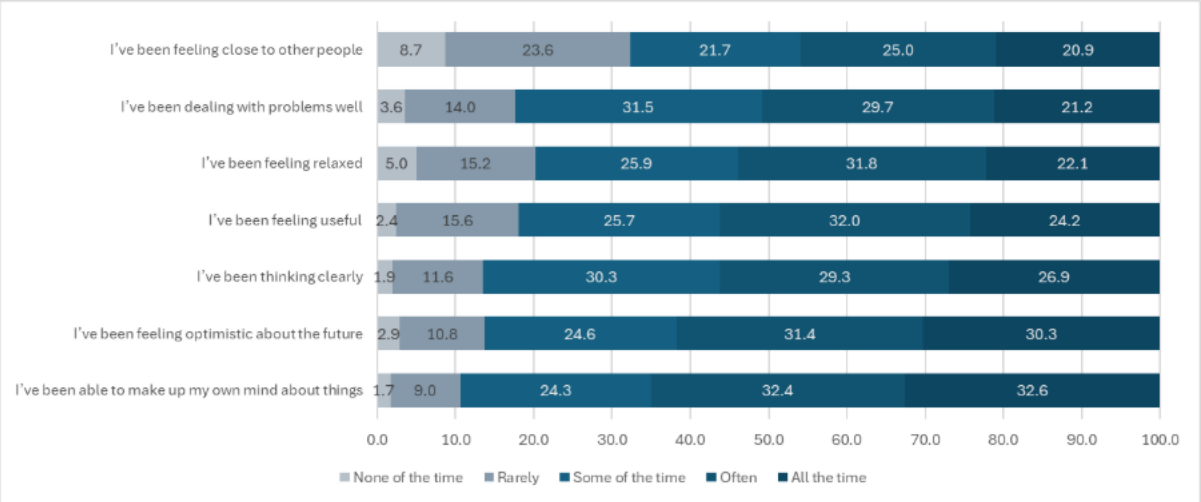
6.5 General wellbeing

In this final section, we reflect on findings around general wellbeing, since wellbeing is a key indicator of integration and quality of life, influencing outcomes such as employment, education, and social participation. Here we draw on survey data from Afghan respondents around their overall sense of psychological functioning and life satisfaction, responding to a General Wellbeing measure we included in the survey. Here we used the short 7-item version of the well-established and validated Edinburgh and Warwick wellbeing scale (WEMWBS; see Tennant et al 2007) which

captures an overall sense of psychological functioning and feelings of life satisfaction. The WEMWBS provides a scale that has been validated across Europe, Asia, and within ethnic minority communities in the UK; albeit of course it is not a full cross-cultural validation. It is recognised as psychometrically robust, while the commonly used shortened version with 7 positively worded questions about how often people experience particular feelings over the past few weeks, reduced respondent burden without compromising measurement quality.

Figure 6-3 provides a summary of the responses by the Afghan survey participants for each item. The data overall demonstrates that resettled Afghans have a largely positive outlook. Over a period of the past few weeks, 30.3% reported feeling optimistic about the future all the time and 32.6% reported feeling they could make up their own mind 'all the time'. The following stress indicators should however also be noted: only 22.1% reported feeling relaxed 'all the time' and 21.2% feeling they were dealing with problems well 'all the time'. Finally, 32.3% rarely or none of the time have been feeling close to other people. This relates to the earlier discussion, where we noted a relatively high proportion of Afghan respondents reported not having broad social and emotional support networks.

Figure 6-3 Over the past few weeks, how often have you experienced the following? (N=789)



The multilevel model (see Appendix 2) examined demographic, social, and locality factors associated with the general wellbeing of resettled Afghans and considered the role of locality for the resettled Afghans' general wellbeing. While locality accounts for a meaningful proportion of the variation in general wellbeing (around 23%), this effect is not statistically significant at the conventional threshold ($p < .05$). The findings indicate that the most consistent and influential factors for the wellbeing of the resettled Afghans are individual-level variables. One likely explanation is that a considerable number of survey participants had moved frequently, limiting the extent to which any specific local context could contribute to their wellbeing.

Our findings from regression analysis suggest that wellbeing is most strongly associated with higher social belonging, better self-reported general health, and no experiences of discrimination or racism since arriving in the UK. There are also additional contributions from higher English language proficiency and perceived safety as well as marital status (being widowed linked to lower wellbeing) to general wellbeing of the resettled Afghans. These findings underscore the importance of fostering inclusion and social relationships, addressing discrimination, and supporting health and language development to enhance wellbeing of resettled Afghans. In contrast, gender, age group,

employment status, length of time in country and number of children in the household were not-significant predictors of wellbeing, indicating these factors do not independently link with wellbeing in this model from the survey data. This does not imply they are unimportant; rather that these factors may operate indirectly through other significant aspects of life. For example, employment may shape wellbeing by fostering social belonging and local embedding, rather than through income or occupational status alone.

Conclusion and recommendations

Resettlement has led to significant improvements in the safety and stability of participants' lives, which they consistently describe as transformative for their wellbeing. Although locality accounts for some variation in wellbeing, this effect is not statistically significant, reinforcing that the most consistent drivers of wellbeing for resettled Afghans relate to personal connections, health, and lived experiences of inclusion or exclusion.

Many Afghans are arriving with generally good health, albeit around a third self-reported experiencing long term health conditions, with mental health conditions being frequently reported. Our qualitative research confirms this, where mental health challenges compound as a result of displacement trauma, practical concerns around housing and finances, impacts of diminished status through deskilling in the labour market, increased responsibilities for family wellbeing, and concerns about family members and family separation (especially considering the data breach). Men seem particularly vulnerable to mental health challenges through having responsibilities for financial security and employment, while taking on heavier familial responsibilities and being socially isolated. Yet much of their distress is kept to themselves, which was also revealed among the young men in the Photovoice research.

Our study highlights in particular how Afghan people are so far making only limited local connections since arriving, and some are feeling socially isolated. Such challenges are especially true for people who have been relocated to rural areas with limited access to facilities and cultural amenities, or places where there are few connections with other Afghans. Young people are faring better in making relationships but are also somewhat vulnerable where they are taking on significant caregiving duties while coping with their own displacement experiences. Self-reported experiences of discrimination and racism were relatively limited in the survey responses but experienced by some who took part in the qualitative research, where particularly young people shared accounts of some hostile encounters.

Finally, our analysis suggests that Afghans' wellbeing is most strongly associated with higher social belonging, better self-reported health, and no experiences of discrimination or racism since arriving in the UK. We also find smaller but meaningful contributions from English language proficiency, feelings of safety, and marital status.

Our findings have policy implications for health and wellbeing services. First, proactive community-building programs that promote ties among other Afghans and with others in society are necessary to combat social isolation. Second, to get past stigma barriers, mental health support needs to be actively promoted and should be culturally aware – as we explore further in Chapter 7. Third, evidence regarding what facilitates successful embedding should inform resettlement placement decisions. Here, we suggest avoiding dispersal of Afghans into isolated, rural areas. This puts many burdens on families to manage crucial logistics of employment and education, without social support and in some cases, access to transport. Lastly, discrimination has significant negative effects and needs ongoing attention through inclusion strategies and community education; even though it is

reported by a relatively small percentage of people and in some cases normalised, its impacts are damaging.

7 Stakeholder perspectives

Introduction and Key findings

In the final part of the report, we turn to key findings from stakeholders. This includes data from qualitative semi-structured interviews with 43 stakeholders, including individuals from resettlement teams from 7 local authorities, Strategic Migration Partnerships (SMPs) (some) relevant government departments, organisations involved in evacuation and resettlement such as UNHCR, civil society commissioned service providers, other voluntary organisations and educational and health stakeholders. In the interviews, we asked these people broadly about their professional involvement in the schemes, their opinions of how they worked, and to describe their experiences of their work, encouraging stakeholders to talk about areas that mattered to them around the Afghan schemes.

Our analysis here also uses analysis of data generated through 3 half-day regional roundtable exercises with 45 individuals from 30 local authorities from across London and the South East, Midlands and North West (from July 2025 to September 2025). We sought specific consent from all individuals attending to use the audio recorded discussions for research purposes. In the final sessions, participants reflected on a presentation of our emerging findings (Chapters 3-6) as well as talked of their own experiences with the schemes.

Including these stakeholder perspectives in dialogue with our earlier findings with Afghans, is vital to enable us to consider the structural provision of support, as well as understand more about local variation and challenges experienced, to inform the implementation of the ongoing ARP. Our key findings are that:

- Stakeholders involved in the schemes regard them as well-funded, flexible and necessary, with important moral and practical imperatives. However, teams have experienced the evolution and development of their support infrastructures from being 'reactive' in initially chaotic times, and some were critical of the arbitrary nature of support the schemes provide compared to others arriving via the asylum route.

- Implementation has required coordination of multiple inputs across diverse stakeholder groups, including from personnel who have had hitherto little experience of resettlement.

- Stakeholders were critical about the speed of policy change and point to limited and delayed communications and funding, a lack of visibility to the wider public of the Afghan schemes. Some stakeholders noted weaknesses in triage information around families, which can be too limited and late, creating longer term problems.

- Some stakeholders drew attention to what they see as effective financial cuts under ARP (see introduction). Although the tariff had gone up overall, the specific flexible, homelessness and ESOL funding has been reduced. The erosion of integration budgets would exacerbate challenges faced by families.

- In relation to **education**, LAs confirmed that some young people had faced periods of disrupted education, and access to school places varied regionally. The interaction of schooling placement with housing, family size and employment is important to consider, where these stakeholder views would support the notion that placements of Afghans work best in urban, geographically well-connected areas.

- **Housing** is *the* most pressing concern, with structural and regional variation in housing provision and affordability. Stakeholders report that some Afghans need high levels of support to navigate local housing costs and availability, align expectations with practical realities and avoid homelessness (reinforcing findings from Chapter 4 with Afghans, that showed that they rely on support from local authorities to navigate housing).

- Regarding **employment**, stakeholders also report Afghans are often at very different starting points in finding work. Some individuals are meeting success, but others, especially mothers, are not in employment and report facing long term challenges in ESOL.

- Financial precarity for Afghan families is a concern for stakeholders; they suggest that families need to have support in understanding how employment and welfare benefits intersect.

- Where local authority and commissioned organisations had employed Afghans themselves, this was experienced very positively. It was reported as a 'win-win', in both providing employment to some, but also ensuring effective mediation and communication of messages to others.

- In relation to **belonging and cohesion**, stakeholders involved were attentive to avoiding and mitigating local hostility, noting a need for effective communications to all parties. Some workers are fearful in the current climate and about the future of their work.

- Overall, the findings indicate the **compounding nature of strains** faced by some Afghan households. Housing isolation can exacerbate employment and limit social networks, juggling different educational placements can do the same. A holistic approach is needed to support families.

To preserve participants' confidentiality (which was especially important for recruiting participants and enable them to speak candidly) we use only loose descriptors of stakeholders in this chapter.

7.1 Scheme funding and coordination

Many stakeholders referred to the necessity of the schemes and the **moral and practical imperatives of resettlement.** A stakeholder who had been deployed to Afghanistan himself in an earlier part of his career noted, 'most of us of that vintage will have those stories of that time that Afghans saved our lives'. In addition to the moral imperative of resettlement for Afghans, they emphasised the practical, operational justification, where any future operation around the world would be reliant on host nation support. They reflected 'the only way we guarantee our licence to operate in the future is if the world sees very visibly that we will stand with those who stood with us'.

Staff members working within resettlement teams and civil society groups were however generally **positive** about the schemes. They commended the 3-year organised framework of support around specific people and families, with members of one LA team referring in a group interview to them as having been 'funded relatively appropriately' and another stakeholder referring to how 'it works' to have a condensed amount of funding for 3 years. Another LA team explained in a group interview

that this meant that they were able to offer many types of 'broad and holistic' support, from helping with school admissions, housing, ESOL, employment, GP and dental registration and more, which was vital in supporting newcomers to find their way. This was contrasted with the much poorer financial provision for asylum support. Indeed, some stakeholders working closely with other migrant groups were critical of the **effect of resettlement on other Afghans arriving under asylum routes** and other groups. Some were critical of the schemes also effectively replacing the UKRS, and others were critical of the arbitrary nature of support offered to Afghans based on route of arrival alone (see also Ryan et al 2024).

LA and civil society stakeholders referred to implementation difficulties **managing the scale, pace and unexpected needs** of Afghans' movement into and around the country. The emergency nature of the initial evacuation meant that teams and other actors in civil society were 'reactive' rather than proactive. For instance, those in one local authority referred to 'the sheer pace that bridging hit,' and the 'pretty mad times' when several hundred people began arriving to quarantine hotels. They explained that as many Afghans arrived with only the clothes they were wearing, they were having to clothe them, while healthcare providers explained, 'the absolute chaos' they encountered in the hotels, working without even being commissioned at that point since it was 'a humanitarian need [...] on our doorstep'. This was also the same among education stakeholders, who reported going into the hotels and not believing what they saw. Another in the military acknowledged that the schemes were 'not as you would design them'.

As such, a common theme among resettlement workers working on the schemes was that they were 'unsettling', because, as one team leader expressed, 'it has been subject to so much bolt on and change […] everything just takes such a long time to catch up'. Another referred to challenges around 'the speed you're expected to mobilise'. Responding was easier for some LAs more than others, based on their structures, team size and their experience.

Not only did this scale and pace of resettlement create practical problems, but it exacerbated some inequities and challenges for Afghans. For example, the instruction from the Home Office that hotels were designed as temporary but involved prolonged stays that created inequities within the population. LAs reported that those Afghans who were fluent in English, highly skilled and connected were able to get on by themselves, self-referring to schools and GPs, but others were unable to do so, relying on local support services. A council resettlement worker explained that those in hotels, were 'sitting in limbo for a couple of years' and this has led to some unhelpful dependencies for support.

Teams also reported coordination issues, citing examples where they faced long waits for funding instructions from the Home Office that came long after the work was being undertaken. This caused nervousness particularly in teams commissioning out services to those in civil society organisations. One team referred to how they'd been 'doing TSFA [Temporary Service Families Accommodation] for almost 12 months before we were able to claim any funding'. Council teams also struggled with vagueness in the funding instructions, and though, some appreciated the fact the programme was 'not very prescriptive', they also reported that they would benefit from 'having a little bit more guidance […] to bounce off from'.

Resettlement teams also struggled with incomplete information provided to them about families arriving. One team reports **triage information** received from the MOD as 'very vague' and 'next to nothing' and another called the triage forms, 'really very thin in terms of information, accuracy'. The consequences of these could be damaging for families. One team reported, 'the family turn up and

there's really significant issues. And they've been placed in a property that's not suitable or the area is not suitable because of the transport reasons, health etc.'

Nevertheless, despite the challenges, we found much evidence of those involved in supporting the resettlement operations **learning, evolving and developing**. Moving on from the chaotic inception, one team reflected, 'whereas now, everyone's quite well versed in it, we can put in those interventions now'. Some referred to how the experience has enabled their teams to locate more affordable and sustainable housing, through building relationships and negotiating with private landlords to secure rates more in line with Local Housing Allowance rates. This was a key issue affecting private tenants, where there is a maximum amount of housing support set for private tenants receiving Universal Credit or Housing Benefit, that varies by region and housing size. We suggest that many of the participants were not fully aware of this, as seen in Chapter 4 with participants' referring to their aspiration to move across the country, without reference to the likely reduced funds they would also be subject to.

Our research also finds evidence of positive **collaboration and communication** between different agencies and authorities and learning of supportive practices and interventions for Afghans. One of the positives of the schemes, according to one government department stakeholder, has been the way that 'all the key stakeholders aligned and [are] working together in common to achieve success'. Nevertheless, they did also indicate that Afghans have been subject to some 'work in progress' as multiple stakeholders working across different sites under different contracts have overcome challenges of coordination. Several people we spoke with acknowledged that some workers and teams started with relatively little experience; one healthcare provider referred to how they 'sort of cringe at some of the things you did or didn't do' but explained how 'training has caught up and people have just learned through exposure'. Particularly the inclusion of military personnel in supporting resettlement was an unexpected feature of this work; as one reflected, 'with my military background, I never guessed that I'd be doing this sort of thing'.

Going forward, now local authorities are taking over earlier stages of reception of Afghans under the ARP (see Introduction), they can capitalise on experience. In contrast to the earlier experiences, they now 'know those risks [and] ask all the right questions,' and explained 'You've got a plan, you know how that's going to work'. Nevertheless, they were critical of what they saw as **effective funding cuts** under ARP (see introduction) where, although the tariff had gone up overall, the specific flexible, homelessness and ESOL funding has been reduced. Some teams were fearful that these cuts and the erosion of integration budgets would exacerbate challenges faced by families. At the time of our research in early to mid-2025, there was also concern about how the funding would work in practice, effectively being shared across authorities when housing was found.

7.2 Families and schooling

In relation to families and schooling, some of the resettlement teams and other stakeholders observed how the schemes' operation in **resettling *families*** rather than *individuals* (see Chapter 4) **enabled stronger inclusion**, since they attended schools, accessed childcare, public spaces, and work, and were supported by a combined funding package. One highly experienced LA team explained that this provided their families an 'instant integration offer,' since where 'people have children, it's just that immediate starting point where the children enter the school, the families engage in society, they engage with the school. It just works much better'. Healthcare stakeholders referred to Afghans' arrival in family units also as offering a 'massive protective factor' to mitigate the trauma they had experienced.

Stakeholders in education referred to many examples of great **success** they experienced with their Afghan children, noting the **pride** that teachers felt witnessing their academic and social progress, for instance when they go to their first prom. However, many of the stakeholders also confirmed that the time spent in bridging hotels and TSFAs had **disrupted** the newly arriving children's education (see Chapter 3). Since these were only expected to be temporary, educational interventions in the bridging hotels had focused more on informal tutoring and activities to prepare children for school and educational routines, explaining the disciplines of 'queuing up, you know, sitting down at your desk being quiet'. More recently, practice has changed as teams look to register children in school straight away, even if they move on shortly afterwards. Some teams also introduced trauma-informed approaches to build confidence and emotional wellbeing.

Stakeholders also reported **regional differences in schools' ability to take in Afghan pupils**. London schools managed large numbers quickly and well: since the young people came with funding and schools were highly experienced with ESOL, they were very willing to be involved, with teachers reflecting sadness and regret when many of their young people moved away. In other areas, such as the Midlands and the North West, we found that LAs reported that access was hindered by schools being **oversubscribed** or in the South East, where schools were **initially uncertain** around the funding that came with the pupils. In some cases, this left children, and especially those with SEND, waiting months for places. They also reported how large families often faced difficulties as siblings were placed in different schools due to limited places in the same school, creating **logistical challenges** for parents without cars and reliant on infrequent public transport to manage school routines.

Some teams also came across families refusing school places, since they did **not understand rules around schooling** (for instance that a school within a 3-mile radius is considered 'local' and does not come with public transport assistance, see also Chapter 3). Resettlement teams acknowledged the **strain caused for families without access to their own transport** but also recognised how this is compounded by **lack of social connections** (see Chapter 6). One LA worker reflected, 'they're not the same as us where you've always got a friend or a relative can just give us a lift with the school run'. Others explained how education and housing placement intersected practically, hindering employment opportunities, confirming the findings we observed through working with isolated Afghans themselves (see Chapters 3,4 and 5):

> Yeah, because it could be just a drive, a 10-minute drive down the road. But if you've got to wait for a bus and the bus is only once an hour and it goes through three villages first, that 10-minute drive then becomes a 2-hour journey and you don't know what time you're going to be able to come back. And actually, you've got to be back in time to get your kids from school, so actually you can't work in that town now.

Moreover, LA stakeholders reported schools varying in how well prepared they were. Some teams reported that some of their rural schools expressed an 'initial reluctance', due to lack of experience, but ironically could be experienced as the most welcoming:

> because they've [only] got these two children and they're going to look after them with bubble-wraps. Whereas if they go to big urban schools, then we see the opposite problem around integration that the Afghan children tend to stick together into their groups.

Finally, again, participants also raised concerns about funding under the ARP, particularly when children moved schools after their stays in transitional accommodation. Uncertainty about how

much of the initial educational allocation remained for receiving schools created anxiety for local authorities trying to plan support.

7.3 Housing

Stakeholders across the range of local authorities referred to housing as remaining *the* central challenge of the Afghan resettlement experience; one stakeholder summarised, 'everything comes down to housing'; another explained, 'it's the major, major issue across the board: housing'.

First, councils faced difficulties in finding suitable and **affordable accommodation** for Afghan families to rent in the private rental sector, or when they were able to procure housing under ring-fenced funding for housing (e.g. LAHF). This was amid existing and emerging housing crises, where multiple groups are 'fighting for the same homes' (LA resettlement worker). One of the largest concerns was around the ability of families to sustain accommodation costs in expensive areas e.g. when tenancies have ended in the private rental sector or Ministry of Defence accommodation. A key issue has been a gap between housing benefit provision (through local housing allowance rates) and more expensive local rental rates (see also insights from families in Chapter 4).

Our stakeholders reported that **specialist housing provision** (including 'buy-back', the Local Authority Housing Funds (LAHF) and the Flexible Housing Funds, as explained in Chapter 1) was vital in ameliorating the challenge of inadequate affordable housing availability. It enabled Afghans to rent housing at affordable rates, with more security, while also helping in cases where families have been split across accommodations to be close to each other. Nevertheless, confirming findings among Afghans (see Chapter 4), councils have found difficulty finding larger houses that families can afford. As resettlement teams explained, national regulations oblige councils to avoid overcrowding through housing larger family members together, requiring some families to be split across more than one property. However, they acknowledged that to manage caring responsibilities, in their experience, many Afghans prefer to live together, and 'shuttle' between smaller houses, such that, 'even if they've got two houses, they create one' (see Chapter 4).

Further problems were raised around what some stakeholders referred to as the '**lack of understanding**' of the housing market in the UK among Afghans. This meant that 'the find your own' route was, as one LA reported almost like 'setting families up to fail', especially where people had turned down their one-time offer. Another LA spokesperson referred to how 'it takes specific level of knowledge and understanding of the language to find your own accommodation and to do that move independently' (the example of Arya's family in Chapter 4, who had moved four times in the PRS exemplifies this challenge). Another LA resettlement worker explained that in the bridging hotels period, 'nobody's finding their own: the hotels were finding it for them'.

Stakeholders also referred to how some Afghans had certain **expectations**, informed by their social media networks with each other, that suitable and affordable houses would be made available in other areas of the country and assumed they would be able to get the same level of support (e.g. top up funding). There can be a perception that housing is much cheaper 'up North', but **housing benefit thresholds** (local housing allowances, LHA) are different and lower. This created problems as Afghans might wish to move to areas where they saw houses with cheaper rents, not understanding that their levels of support would fall due to LHA caps. In some cases, stakeholders referred to families moving to urban areas in the North due to family connections, but finding it unaffordable to live there and falling into arrears.

Some of the teams noted there were structural **inequities** due to the **variety of housing experiences,** since those housed in LAHF properties were more likely to have durable and affordable

tenancies compared to others in PRS or MOD properties. Some PRS options were reported as expensive and overcrowded, where prices that were charged inflated and distorted local housing markets and some 'profiteering' from landlords. This was particularly an issue when bridging hotels were closed suddenly, which created an incentive for landlords. However, tenancies in the PRS also come with impossible conditions for Afghan tenants to meet, such as naming guarantors. A member of a resettlement team explained,

> We've had families where the landlord has said no, you need £60,000 income. But that's a lot of money. And yeah, the chap goes well, 'I work at the local pizza place doing deliveries'. He's working. He's, you know, he's integrating, he's doing great with the children in schools, but that's not enough.

Decision-making and control of housing varied also among LA resettlement teams, especially in non-unitary councils, where county-level teams manage strategic contracts and funding for resettlement, while district councils make the decisions around housing. This could lead to the types of **unsuitable placements**, discussed by Afghans in the previous chapters (see Chapter 6, especially). Where general housing teams' might view 'nice, leafy suburbs' or rural homes as ideal without understanding the context, specialist resettlement teams have more informed understandings of Afghan families' needs, corroborating our findings among Afghans (see Chapters 4 and 6).

Finally, local authorities reported significant **homelessness risks** in areas of high housing pressure (this was not found overtly among our qualitative sample, but in Chapter 4, we identify a high degree of faith placed in authorities for housing, indicating perhaps that families were not aware of risks they faced). Indeed, council teams referred to cases where people had exited the scheme without understanding its implications or where the 3-year tenancies for MOD service family accommodation were expiring. Other risks were exposed where households relied on only one income in the household but faced unaffordable private rents. Staff in a local authority where housing was very expensive described the problems experienced with one of their working families, when their tenancy came to an end:

> They were no way near prepared and got eviction notices, etc. [...] That was really, really difficult for [name removed] our [civil society] support provider... because the families weren't ready. You know, maybe you've got dad, who's a taxi driver who's got some income. You've got your benefits. That's working […] And then when you then go, 'you're at the end of the tenancy, you're now on your own….'

Additional pressures arose from family reunion cases, where sudden arrivals of additional family members created overcrowding, requiring larger housing units. In other cases, families had gone into arrears from the outset because of delays in accessing welfare supports before rents were charged. Other cases of homelessness were referred to in the case of difficult 'complex' families, for example households with children with SEND where children were long-term out of school, making employment difficult in the household. One LA team reported:

> it's usually vulnerable cases, so people who can't work, or people who... with complex disabilities, complex needs with a lot of family members, a lot of children... So they would present as homeless.

In other cases, homelessness arose when people turn down their one-time offer of matched accommodation, especially since some people do not understand the implications of rejecting the one-time offer (see Chapter 1). We heard of a young woman in her early twenties living in a TSFA (MOD temporary accommodation) with her elderly dependent mother. They spent most of their

time in another city with her older brother and their wider family, as a way of sharing the caring responsibilities. The woman was issued a one-time offer of a property hundreds of miles away, but she had rejected it since managing the caring responsibilities for her mother alone would have stopped her being able to attend college. However, this left her in a grave situation of facing only 28 days to try and find other accommodation and likely presenting as 'intentionally homeless'. Since many of the households have children, they would have to be supported with emergency homelessness placement, but stakeholders noted that these are often highly unsuitable. Moreover, homelessness placements can be long term when housing teams are working in areas of high market demand; one resettlement team member observed 'they sometimes cannot magic up a property that isn't there'.

7.4 Employment, skills and ESOL

Teams recognise the significant variety within the resettled Afghan population shown in the research and referred to their own mixed outcomes in employment locally. Some of their families achieved independence quickly, flipping quickly off the programme, nevertheless, others struggled and continue to do so. This raises questions about whether three years of integration support is sufficient.

Many LA stakeholders **positively compared their experience** with working on those arriving under the Afghan resettlement schemes to Syrians arriving under previous resettlement arrangements (see Chapter 1) reporting that many arrived 'in a much better position language, English language wise'. They found many Afghans to be highly motivated, with strong work ethics, and 'the right skills and behaviours'. Albeit most noted again the significant diversity and support that others needed.

Several resettlement teams and some healthcare **stakeholders employed Afghans with lived experience** themselves due to their capabilities. They referred to this as 'win-win', since by providing accessible job pathways to some individuals, resettlement teams were also able provide information and support to their service-users in home languages and culturally sensitive ways. One healthcare interviewee in the South-East referred to Omid, an Afghan employee in their team, as 'a massive asset'.

As we found in the research with Afghans, stakeholders noted that despite many arriving with strong skillsets and high expectations, there were **barriers to their employment.** Stakeholders referred to significant gaps among even highly skilled Afghans around the contextual knowledge needed about how to apply for jobs in the British context. Some LA stakeholders were also critical of the support via DWP two-weekly mandatory appointments at the Job Centres, referring to them as 'deeply uncomfortable' for many of these highly skilled people, formerly working as High court judges etc. One explained, 'you know, like they do want to find a job, they're looking for job,' but that was little help 'if there's not really much there…' Some noted for example how skilled military personnel are unable to work in the British army, since they need to wait 5 years to apply for British citizenship.

In one area, a resettlement team noted that for all their families living in the private rental sector, there had been 'huge success' in employment, yet those men were working in a range of jobs from security to retail to restaurant work and research. They acknowledged there were 'quite a lot of Uber drivers or delivery, you know, Uber eat sort of delivery drivers, retail food services'. Therefore, while providing further evidence of the **deskilling** we found (see Chapter 4), our research found that the employment support provided by councils generally encouraged Afghans to take on work beneath the level of previous employment as a first step, since it enabled them to gain UK work experience and avoid reliance on benefits. However, it was widely recognised among resettlement

teams that such low paid jobs could also become a dead-end and result in limited financial independence for families, as well as having psychological impacts. One of our local authority stakeholders spoke about how, 'one person was saying that 'you know, maybe I should go back because [...] I want to do what I'm good at it. And I can't do it'.

Local authority resettlement teams stressed how much of their work was aimed at communicating with families how **employment was essential for overcoming the benefit cap**. This cap restricts the total amount of household benefits (such as Universal Credit and Housing Benefit) but can be lifted where people are working enough to qualify for Working Tax Credit or earn at least the equivalent of 16 hours at minimum wage. This is therefore, as one LA resettlement worker observed, 'a huge driver to go and get employment', since it enables them to afford the rent, especially in expensive areas. However, families often misunderstood how employment interacts with benefits, fearing they would be worse off, which led councils to call for tailored advice and DWP-led sessions to explain calculations and encourage formal, declared work.

Confirming the findings from both the survey and qualitative data noted in Chapter 5, stakeholders told us that while men gradually entered employment, most Afghan women did not. Councils noted that **dual-earner households are the norm in the UK**, but this **model was unfamiliar** to some Afghan families. This was observed in our walking interviews (for example in Chapter 4, see example of Breshna) and reflected in the survey data, where women are more likely to look after family/home (31.2% vs. 2.9% of men) and transitioning to a different career path is mentioned by 10% of men but only 1.7% of women. According to one Afghan man working in healthcare, the different expectations for women to contribute financially increased stress and frustration, when culturally in Afghanistan, 'the wife was a housewife over there'. Stakeholders observed that limited female participation in employment consequently placed families under financial strain (see Chapter 5) and slowed their embedding. Stakeholders expressed concern in some cases that extended motherhood (where women were having more children after arrival) further meant that their time for learning English or preparing for work was even more constrained.

In relation to **ESOL**, although Afghans were entitled to eight hours of ESOL weekly, many LAs struggled to meet this requirement. They reported that colleges often tended to offer only six hours but there were also challenges in areas where, due to limited experiences of resettlement, provision had not previously existed at the scale needed. Delays in attendance also occurred when Afghans arrived outside term start dates, or where people chose not to go as they already had other family members speaking English. Our findings also suggest a need for quite diversified ESOL provision. One civil society organisation worker told us how some:

> don't need ESOL. They just need a very specific type of language provision, which is more about accents. But we didn't know until they got here because we were all under the impression that they were interpreters and all that.

In other cases, the challenge was around confidence and basic skills, particularly for women in homemaker roles, who may have been coming from low starting points (for example being illiterate in their own language). The NGO worker above referred to how some needed to learn very basic skills like 'holding a pen for the first time in their life'. We found that resettlement services experimented with creative solutions to improve ESOL engagement, including community-based classes with creches, one-to-one support, and activity-based learning such as shopping trips or cooking sessions.

7.5 Wellbeing, belonging and cohesion

The final area of discussion with stakeholders was around wellbeing, local belonging, safety and community cohesion. Many of the teams recognised not only the challenges of displacement and leaving former lives and family members behind, but the practical and emotional challenges Afghans were navigating in juggling multiple stresses across housing, schools and work that added up to huge pressures (see Chapter 6). Nevertheless, they were also often impressed at the **resilience** and **fortitude** demonstrated; one of the healthcare providers explained to us, 'well-meaning people can sort of think, 'oh, they need everything. Oh, you know, poor them' And then actually they're confronted with people who are actually quite resilient and well educated'.

Stakeholders working in healthcare raised the issues that while lots of Afghans were not arriving with physical effects of actual war, many were living with longer term effects of bombing and conflict, and most were at risk from **displacement traumas**. One team working in the South East referred to their experiences with a mother, experiencing constant headaches. Over time, medical professionals slowly teased out that these were likely explained by the fact that one of their children had been left behind in Afghanistan.

Many stakeholders referred to stresses arising from **difficulties understanding systems and cultural sensibilities**. One Afghan man working in a healthcare team in a role where he mediated between resettled Afghans and healthcare services, pointed out how much of his work was addressing not only language challenges such as his clients being unable to read medical appointment notes, but cultural issues of understanding too. For instance, he referred to how in Afghanistan, you might see only one GP, whereas in England, one might expect to see multiple GPs over time. He explained further difficulties even accessing appointments: 'you have to have that level of English to book an appointment online, or to have a phone call and a conversation with somebody and then convince them to give you [an appointment]'.

This spoke to a need for more support around adapting to cultural change. Another worker in a civil society organisation explained that in one service-user consultation, they had asked the Afghans present, what was the highest priority areas they needed help with. The response was 'medical registrations' and 'emotional support with the cultural change […]' leading the stakeholder to reflect, 'And that's very interesting coming from the men. So, it's mental health, but they wouldn't dare call it that, right?' This speaks to the observation of **stigma** noted in Chapter 6. They further noted examples of 'huge gaps' in misunderstanding of cultural mores, relationships and friendships. He explained how a former judge, now working as a delivery driver, had felt sad when he was not invited to the wedding of a work-friend's daughter. The stakeholder had to clarify, 'I was like, we don't do that here. Yeah, you're a *work* friend'.

Finally, in relation to **community cohesion**, across our conversations, we noted that LAs were attentive to the impacts of their decisions around housing for people's experiences of safety, and keen to mitigate local hostility in the current climate. In more diverse areas, such as London, resettlement teams reflected that they felt Afghans' embedding was relatively smooth. They referred to how Afghans were able to blend into the highly diverse cultural landscapes that included South Asian and Middle Eastern groups. One resettlement team member told us, 'So when they go out, they fit in. You wouldn't say, 'oh, that's a newly arrived Afghan refugee at all it,' you know, everyone just fits in quite easily'.

There were however, some exceptions in our research, such as in one case where Afghan households had been placed together in one block of housing, procured and developed under the

buy-back scheme/LAHF funding. Despite attracting only minimal complaint locally, this was noted by the resettlement team as something to avoid in the future. Other London based LAs noted instead positive outcomes of housing Afghans in mixed housing blocks alongside other cohorts including Ukrainian, and general needs tenants. They reported this as leading to cross-cultural participation in shared celebrations, social activities (such as a sewing club) and informal support. One resettlement caseworker explained:

> I see like one of the Afghan mums walking to collect the child with one of the Ukrainian mums or they go to ESOL together or a single dad with two kids from general needs taking one of the Afghan single mum's child to school and stuff. So they're mixing as well, which is really nice. And all supporting each other generally.

We were aware that in other cases, teams had to be **highly alert** to negative responses among receiving communities. In one example in the North West, a bridging hotel had to be closed quickly after hotel locations had been shared on social media. This followed right wing 'migrant hotel auditors' entering the hotel, filming Afghans, including children, prompting urgent relocations (see Channel 4 report by Jenne 2025). LAs across the country reported adopting low-profile approaches to avoid drawing attention to transitional accommodation, particularly amid protests and misinformation.

In some of the military sites, **community liaison** was an important aspect to consider, where stakeholders told us, 'little things' such as 'bin etiquette, fly tipping and recycling' become a big thing', and there needed to be education to support both Afghans and receiving communities. To overcome tensions, community liaison staff reported providing community litter picks, compiling a 'welcoming new neighbours' booklet, and activities like going into a local school to explain to the school community about ARP and how that lived experience might be. These interventions, they believed would 'allow the community to maybe understand that [...] they're on the ARP scheme and supported our armed forces during the Afghan conflict'.

Similarly, other teams referred to being 'discreet about the work we do', especially as much of resettlement teams' work can overlap with asylum, which was linked to the riots in Summer 2024, as well as ongoing protests outside asylum hotels, and increasing public anti-immigrant hostility. They referred to having to close their offices in a central location and referred to how, 'we have had it where people have made approaches to our transitional hotels for Afghans believing it's the same cohorts that might be in asylum contingency hotels'. Some of the LA teams also told us about the high demands on their time in responding to 'freedom of information' requests around migrant populations. While recognising that most of the public did not know the difference between resettlement and asylum, teams were resistant to pitching narratives that oppose the two, considering this to be divisive.

Finally, in supporting Afghans in local area activities, some of the LA participants noted difficulties in **engaging Afghan families** in community activities, contrasting them to other groups (e.g. Syrians or Ukrainians) and noting that sometimes the Afghans preferred not to come together collectively. This speaks to some of the issues noted elsewhere of the ethnic, political and social class differences within the Afghan resettled population. In areas without a history of Afghans, such as one of the more rural counties we worked with, one of the service providers noted they had 'some very good communities building'. However, they also noted the risk of assuming that Afghans wanted to be housed or socialise together, explaining, 'we've had people literally in the same house next door and they're farmers, so are just like, no. The children are doing great and they're integrating but, parents, it's different backgrounds, different hierarchies'. Again, this underscores the benefits of

employing Afghans; one of the healthcare providers noted, ‘there will be diversity within, which we might not necessarily recognise, but Omid [Afghan employee] will’.

Conclusion and recommendations

Our work with stakeholders reveals much commitment and coordination across multiple organisations, departments and agencies to support the Afghan resettlement process. The stakeholders themselves, variously working in LA teams, civil society and government departments, fielded multiple challenges, especially relating to housing. We suggest there is a complementarity in findings across groups, where similar issues were raised by stakeholders as raised by Afghans in this research in previous chapters. This includes similarities in observations across several domains relating to housing and homelessness challenges, employment, education and wellbeing, triangulating findings across data strands.

What is most striking from our research with stakeholders however, is their understanding of the **compounding** nature of strains faced by Afghan households. It became clear how housing isolation can create difficulties in employment and for forging social networks, or that juggling different educational placements can make work itself impossible, and that little misunderstood social behaviours (e.g. around ‘bin-etiquette’) can add up to become much bigger challenges. This reinforces the care and expertise that is needed within locally led resettlement teams and other providers to understand fully the nature of these challenges. Where Afghans are included within their teams, this is vital to give insight and help to smooth embedding processes.

8 Conclusions and recommendations

Approaching five years since the rapid and unplanned evacuation in Afghanistan, this research presents a detailed examination of Afghans' experiences of relocation and resettlement in England. The participants in this research were at risk either due to their work alongside British forces, or through their work related to the state-building exercise and have undergone a life-altering experience of resettlement. While attention has been paid to the processes and policy of the schemes, there is a gap in understanding how this has been experienced by those undertaking the process and how they are faring as they settle into localities across the country. As the UK government currently grapples with its own responsibilities for humanitarian migration, this research provides vital insight.

We conclude the report with overall findings from the project, which suggest that:

Afghans are deeply appreciative of the safety provided through the Afghan resettlement schemes

Since 2021, over 37,000 Afghans have experienced the Afghan resettlement schemes. Our findings from survey research across 7 LAs and qualitative research within different cities, towns and villages across England, suggest that participants were profoundly appreciative of the support that they and their families have received. All groups in the qualitative research, from women, to men to young people, expressed deep gratitude for the passage to safety that the schemes provided to them. Many contrasted this safety to the daily instabilities and life-threatening risks they had faced, or would have faced, if remaining in Afghanistan. They describe experiencing relative safety in their local communities, with 90% reporting feeling safe in their localities. Young people in the qualitative research especially expressed appreciation for the greater freedom they have as a result. This newfound sense of safety and security underpins a high degree of fortitude among resettled Afghans, which is especially evident in the young people's ambitions.

Resettlement comes at a cost, but there has been important institutional learning

Our evidence shows that the schemes have not been without practical, operational and financial challenges. The recent NAO analysis (2026) showed the financial costs have been high and remain so. As we also find in this research, a lack of joined up government processes have created significant challenges for both practitioners and those resettled, especially in relation to housing in the contexts of national housing crises. However, though the conditions of initial evacuation in 2021 were far from ideal, services have been on a steep learning curve to arrive where they are now. We find that coordinated work between local authorities, civil society organisations, Strategic Migration Partnerships, in collaboration with government departments and other agencies has had important benefits, especially through offering Afghans local place-based knowledge and caseworkers to support placements. Most of the Afghans express satisfaction with the support they receive from local councils; only 9% do not feel supported. Qualitative research indicates that employing Afghans within those teams can help with mutual communication and understanding.

Many young Afghan people are faring well due to inclusion in education and leisure spaces

Another important finding from the research is that young people seem to be faring well in embedding within localities; indeed, some are thriving. Insights from the Photovoice research exercise indicate how educational spaces, over time, have become particularly important sites for inclusion; as one of the young participants, Arya described, college was 'her happy place'. For young participants, college offered relief from the domestic adjustments and strains their families were navigating. Young people described how they benefited from both academic and social learning in

school and college, where schools and colleges were experienced as places for gaining confidence, building social connections and skills, as well as spending time outside the home.

It is possible that the young people who the research team worked with intensely in the qualitative were more likely to have positive and determined outlooks. We were pleasantly surprised that attrition over the 10 weeks of working together with each group was limited (only one participant did not come after the third session). However, the young participants were quite diverse, coming from a range of educational backgrounds and with different academic and linguistic capabilities, so were not a select group. All showed commitment to learning English, often by informal means such as watching films and where they could, they were helping parents with their English language too. Learning English was understood as vital to enhance their prospects, in a range of planned careers from beauty to medicine. Moreover, stakeholders in interviews, both in schools and LAs, described how Afghan pupils were enriching school communities. Although this can't be assumed to be the case across all settings without further research, the research does draw attention to the potential of schools as places where much more than just academic learning occurs. Schools might also be utilised as sites where misinformation about Afghans among the wider school population and their families could be addressed.

In addition to schools and colleges, the research also indicates the importance to the young people of 'third spaces' beyond school and home. In the Photovoice research, the young men in particular, referred to how they benefited from sports clubs and skills-enhancing internships, which provided them vital respite, social opportunities, informal mentoring and occasions to practice English. However, these were also more easily accessed by the young men than young women, especially since sports like football and cricket were already familiar for the young men in Afghanistan.

Young Afghans have faced disrupted educational trajectories; parents are willing but not always equipped to help

Afghan participants' experiences of schools and college were initially disrupted and sometimes challenging. Photovoice young participants had faced delays in school placements, through living in bridging hotels or other 'temporary' accommodation. The research indicates that newly arriving resettled young people should be facilitated to attend school sites as soon as possible to avoid the lost learning experienced by Afghan young people while placed in temporary accommodation.

Some of young people in the qualitative research had also experienced individual bullying, described negative perceptions of Afghans as a group at school, or had experienced insults when travelling wearing hijabs or religious dress. In some cases, for various reasons, young people were not appropriately placed in the correct year group. We observed that those who had arrived at or were approaching significant educational transition points, particularly those approaching GCSE or A-level examination years, had felt particularly vulnerable. Across the research sites, there was variation in availability of 'catch up' input; such findings indicate that the DfE, working with schools and colleges should facilitate specialist teaching input and careers advice for resettled persons arriving at significant transition points to bring them up to standard (e.g. approaching GCSE examinations).

Some of the parents felt ill-equipped to help with such issues. There is evidently deep commitment among families to their children's success, for example with two-thirds of Afghan parents with children attending nursery, primary and secondary schools reporting from the survey that they participate in parents' meetings. However, like many other families in the UK, there were some who had difficulties understanding school systems, who could not advise their children on educational decisions and who did not know the appropriate systems and places to get help. Almost 50% of Afghans with children responding to the survey report not understanding the UK educational system

well, or not well at all, albeit men consistently report higher confidence in their knowledge and understanding. Moreover, qualitative research with parents and stakeholders drew attention to how those living in isolated placements may struggle to manage the logistics of school pick-ups, especially where parents do not have social networks to call upon to help.

Afghans live within families, but their family roles are evolving

Our research indicates that the demographic profile of sampled resettled Afghans is distinctive; they are living predominantly in families, sometimes large, with only 12% of respondents living alone. This family composition can offer a 'protective factor' and, according to stakeholders, creates conditions that enhance Afghans' experiences of embedding, creating more opportunities for meeting new people for example, or as the research indicates, young people are helping parents with understanding English. For some, however their family composition, combined with lack of available housing, meant they were living across split households, as was the case for 15% of survey participants and some of the young people in the qualitative research. Arriving in families also meant that some may be relying mainly on their family members for support.

There are also strong indications from the range of qualitative research that resettlement has led to shifts in familial responsibilities, where men, women and young people in the research were stepping into unfamiliar realms. Women in the walking interviews, for instance, described finding themselves solely responsible for domestic work when previously they may have been living in larger family arrangements or supported by paid, domestic help. Men and young people in the qualitative research described how too they were taking on new responsibilities. Issues around schooling, healthcare and liaison with services became their concern, since they were most fluent in English. Many young people in the Photovoice research explained how they combined their school learning with shouldering additional responsibilities at home, e.g. accompanying parents on visits to college and GPs, helping their parents with English language or picking up younger siblings from school. As a result, the research indicates that some young people were adopting roles more akin to 'young carers', albeit this was also understood within families as compatible with Afghan cultural norms.

Afghans are subject to risks of housing instability and logistical challenges from their placements

Central government supported the housing of resettled Afghans through ring-fenced housing support, which has been a crucial measure that has avoided placing competing demands on existing social housing lists. Many Afghans in the qualitative research indicated how important living in their own houses and flats was, with many again, expressing profound gratitude. As for many other families in social housing and private rental, some found problems, including damp and overcrowding. There was some adjustment required to adapt to quite different house sizes and styles, compared to their experiences of housing in Afghanistan.

Amongst the institutional learning noted, stakeholders in councils pointed out how they have developed important intermediary roles in liaising with landlords to develop more secure tenancies in the private rental sector. However, housing stability and housing costs remain a concern for families and stakeholders responsible for housing. Many Afghan families have experienced significant transience, mobility and uncertainty through the initial reception period; over one third of survey respondents reported moving at least 3 times since their arrivals from 2021. As households move beyond the three-year period where integration funding is provided, a minority of families are at risk of keeping up with rental costs. This is especially so where households are relying on only one income, and when families are living in expensive areas. Additional challenges, such as being able to

meet rental conditions (e.g. providing guarantors and deposits) among other reasons (considered in Chapter 7) indicates potentially higher risks of homelessness for Afghan households.

Location affects the experience of resettlement

The research indicates how locality matters. It influences the availability, type and affordability of housing as well as shapes access to and accessibility of school places, employment opportunities, social networks and cultural amenities.

In relation to experiences of housing, the survey shows geographic disparities in levels of satisfaction with where they lived. We found that across the qualitative research strands, newly arriving Afghans reported feeling more comfortable in diverse, urban well-connected areas. This relates to issues of both safety and convenience, such as the closeness of facilities and the availability of public transport. Other placements can generate logistical challenges. Families located in rural areas may have to travel far for employment, education, ESOL and/or to find cheaper or culturally appropriate (halal) shops. The qualitative research indicated that some families were juggling multiple demands for family care, work and study. This could be very difficult if people were reliant on infrequent public transport and when, as the research also shows, many have not got access to wider social support. Participants in the walking interviews and stakeholders referred to the very challenging practical and emotional implications of isolated rural placements.

Our research across seven local authorities also indicates that there is variation in places available at schools and colleges and different practices around inclusion across localities. At the two sites where we worked in more depth in Photovoice exercises, availability of school places varied, with one London school taking in high numbers mid-year, but the other site facing some schools not having enough school places. There was also variation in relation to access to leisure and extra-curricular opportunities like internships and work-placements. Differences were also apparent in the approaches of resettlement teams across localities, where, as was also the case in schools/colleges, teams came with different levels of experience supporting resettled persons. Scale also affected the provision in different sites, where supporting larger numbers of families together brought more opportunities to pool resources.

In relation to employment, although the survey data suggest that although there are differences in rates across localities, further analysis suggests that the employment of resettled Afghans depends more on individual characteristics than the areas themselves. Those able to speak good English, young and male are more likely to be in employment than any other non-employment group (e.g. seeking work, in education/training, and not seeking work).

Resettled Afghans come from highly diverse starting points; many are experiencing deskilling in the labour market and there are strong gendered differences

Our findings indicate that resettled Afghans are highly diverse and are not starting from the same position. There is great diversity in their education and employment histories, English language proficiency and cultural know how. A notable proportion are well educated professionals coming with degrees and higher degrees, including some women formerly working as activists or journalists. Some are immensely highly skilled and have been able to ‘fly’ upon arrival. However, many others have met downward mobility and deskilling to keep their families financially afloat, where in the qualitative research, participants included judges who have become delivery drivers, or where those formerly holding high positions in the military are working as security guards.

Other Afghans are arriving with low levels of education and are non-literate in home languages, particularly women. This has ramifications in employment, for understanding life in Britain, and for

communicating in other domains like healthcare and education. Similar variation in backgrounds was also found among the young people in the qualitative research sample, which included some young men coming from international schools, as well as some young women who had been out of school for years. Stakeholders in one school reported how this involved investment in understanding the prior knowledge of the children, because they are so diverse.

Both the survey and qualitative research reveal strongly gendered patterns, which would be expected to some degree, given the barriers to women's education in Afghanistan. However, this demonstrates strongly how Afghan women, some of whom have had little to no education, are most in need of continuing and tailored ESOL classes to avoid long-term exclusion, and careful attention to enable they are supported to achieve at school and college. This needs more than simply providing more services, but attention rather around how best to engage women, build their confidence and overcome the logistical and practical difficulties in attending classes.

Resettled Afghans are negotiating cultural adjustments

Across the qualitative research, we found many Afghans describing an experience of 'resettlement shock', in confronting the bewildering realities of building a new life, and rapidly adjusting to different types of housing, work and education in the UK. The young people in the Photovoice research commonly described the initial embarrassment and fear they felt in not being able to communicate with others or understand how simple things were done. The adults' narratives and stakeholder reports suggested too that men and women also face a steep learning curve in understanding cultural expectations and institutional policies around housing markets, work, healthcare, education and social life. This is especially difficult where their language skills are limited.

The qualitative research shows that in addition to the practical issues, families are managing the emotional effects of displacement, including for some participants, the pain of separation from close family members living in Afghanistan or other countries. Our findings from across the quantitative and qualitative research indicate that resettled Afghans face *compounding* strains from practical challenges of maintaining housing and financial stability following initial transience, juggling the strains of logistics, meeting the responsibilities of family life and experiencing displacement trauma.

Our analysis suggests that Afghans' wellbeing is most strongly associated with higher social belonging, better self-reported health, and no experiences of discrimination or racism since arriving in the UK, as well as higher English language proficiency, perceived safety and marital status.

Resettled Afghans can be socially isolated

Finally, the research provides evidence that so far, Afghans participating in the survey were making only limited local connections since arriving: Nearly 70% had made only a few or no new acquaintances in their locality, and just 6% reported making many. Women were slightly more likely to report having made many new acquaintances, and men more likely to report none. This was corroborated by the men in the qualitative research, who shared their experiences of social isolation.

In relation to reception by existing communities, the stakeholders suggested that more could have been done to address public understanding of the schemes, where limited messaging and misinformation has impacted on community cohesion in some cases.

Conclusion

Overall, findings from the project indicate the importance of resettlement for people identified as experiencing life-threatening risks, in finding safety and stability. Afghans in this research showed

they were profoundly appreciative of resettlement, and our findings indicate that many are making important steps for embedding locally, particularly young people. The distinctive strengths of this form of organised resettlement have been its provision of long-term integration assistance and the fostering of autonomy through enabling families to live independently together in housing. The schemes also aided many people at scale, including immediate family members.

There is certainly much that could have been improved about the schemes; the initial experiences were chaotic and were not well coordinated. Gaps in information-sharing about families remain a problem. Clearly many Afghans are currently being employed well below their skill level. Housing, especially in the context of broader national housing crises is challenging. Addressing individual needs is also a challenge due to the heterogeneity of the population, where Afghans range from those arriving with doctorates and others, particularly women, who are non-literate after having very limited or no formal education in Afghanistan. Nevertheless, there has been a great deal of institutional learning to address these issues, and the development of positive ways of working developed across multiple partners should not be lost.

The report is based on the findings from a cross-sectional sample, accurate in terms of assessing where Afghans, arriving as newcomers, were at that moment in time (2024-2025). Many of the aspects that we have reported on we would expect to see change over time, especially in terms of employment and social connections. Further longitudinal research to explore how this population navigate changes over a longer term would be beneficial. This might usefully explore how highly educated Afghan professionals are able to transition from immediate work placements to sustained careers, and how that could be supported by tailored ESOL.

8.1 Policy and practice recommendations

1: Recognise the benefits of resettlement and stable onward settlement pathways

The Home Office should commit to providing a clear vision for resettlement for wider populations as a durable solution. This vision should continue to offer safe, organised passage for those identified under clear eligibility criteria, with funded integration support beyond time-limited, nationality specific schemes, providing stable pathways to settlement and naturalisation. While community sponsorship is currently the preferred framework (Home Office 2025b), the Home Office should also recognise the unique values of organised government-led resettlement schemes alongside these, particularly in being able to deliver emergency support *at scale* and applying to those most vulnerable.

The current uncertainty from the government around its plans for pathways to settlement seems undermining of affective integration for those people already in the UK. The Home Office should learn lessons from the research, especially where Afghans, some of whom have benefited from having clear pathways to settlement and naturalisation, experience gratitude, feel safe, feel that they belong and that they can make positive long-term plans for themselves and their families. This research has drawn attention to the vulnerable mental health of some individuals experiencing resettlement; making their leave temporary, while extending and making conditional their pathways to settlement (Home Office 2025b) seems counterproductive.

2: Improve parents' understanding and knowledge about schooling

The DfE must coordinate resources for strengthening resettled persons' knowledge about schooling, through accessible and multi-lingual communication, interpretation, information and targeted guidance around admissions, transitions and post-16 routes. This should include, if possible,

employing resettled persons themselves to reach parents – especially mothers with lower levels of English and literacy. It should also include provision for intensive work with young people approaching critical educational points, such as GCSE and post-16 periods.

3: Expand access to 'third spaces' beyond school and college for young people

The government's National Youth Strategy (DCMS 2025) that aims to provide more youth facilities and integrated youth support outside school is welcome. However, it is important to ensure that this delivers in practice diverse opportunities to those with migrant backgrounds, especially to young women and girls. These should expand beyond sports opportunities, since this research suggests that they can be more easily accessed by young men than young women.

4: Ensure housing is stable and appropriate

Government departments should aim to limit the use of temporary and transient accommodation, as well as avoiding mobility between sites and accommodating people for protracted periods. In moving on to settled accommodation, care should be taken to avoid dispersing households to isolated, rural areas, since this places strain on families managing logistics of employment and education, without social support and far from cultural amenities.

Housing teams should avoid housing resettled persons exclusively together e.g. in housing blocks. While there are benefits of living with similar others, it can generate discomfort for some residents due to ethnic differences and divergent values and lifestyles. There are also benefits of social mixing experienced in housing blocks where Afghans are mixed with other residents.

5: Ensure better coordination and data sharing to enable planning for housing needs

Resettlement programming across government departments should aim to limit ad hoc policy changes and aim for more clarity and consistency in funding instructions. Government departments (HO, MOD) should also work to ensure that there is more precise triage information and better data sharing between stakeholders, including to LAs. This would mean that specific requirements can be understood at the point of trying to source appropriate housing, and LA teams can better plan.

6: Develop more individualised employment advice

DWP, in conjunction with the DfE, Department for Business and Trade and employers, could work to provide culturally specific training programmes around particular careers to ensure that resettled persons can convert and/or acquire qualifications and achieve jobs appropriate to their experience. The department could aim to provide more precise and accessible advice on the intersections of in-work benefits and employment. This would help with both increasing employment and building long-term financial security for resettled persons.

7. Reinstate ESOL funding and provide more differentiated ESOL services

Funding should be reinstated to previous levels to enable continuous ESOL teaching. The ARP funding (that provides a single funding stream from MOD Transitional Accommodation to settled accommodation) no longer has specific funding per adult for ESOL. This is counter-productive, given the high need evidenced in the report, especially for women.

ESOL providers should be encouraged to innovate and provide differentiated support. This should range from encouraging very basic skills, to include advanced and tailored language learning opportunities for specific purposes, e.g. business and medical careers. Where necessary, ESOL should be provided beyond the 3-year integration period, especially to avoid women becoming marginalised and excluded.

8. Develop more culturally aware services, especially through employing resettled persons in services

Employing Afghans themselves in designing employment and health support services should become usual practice and be expanded. Across the research with stakeholders and with Afghans, we found that where resettled persons work within resettlement, education or healthcare teams, this is effective in addressing inclusion, solving problems and addressing misunderstandings. A key area of improvement for health and resettlement services is around providing culturally aware emotional support to help people adapt to the intense cultural change they have experienced. This requires locally led work with Afghans to overcome the stigma of mental health, particularly among those reluctant to seek help. This research with Afghans suggests that cultural knowledge, including insight into the relevance of prior social class position in Afghanistan (indicated by qualifications and professional background) ethnicity, and gender, should inform resettlement support.

9. Engage in communications around the scheme

Government departments must work with LAs to improve communications around the schemes. This includes delivering information to existing populations around the experiences of Afghans and why they have been resettled. This may ease tensions (evident in this research in cases where schools, MOD sites and local communities have worked to 'myth-bust' and correct misunderstandings). It also refers to better communications with Afghans, where there is a need for more cultural orientation prior to, and upon arrival by relevant agencies to give resettling persons adequate understanding and realistic expectations of what life in the UK will be. Messaging should communicate what resettlement will be and provide more information about different areas of the country, housing types and the education system. Considering the damage caused by the data breaches, there is also a need for the government to acknowledge the damage and rebuild trust with Afghans by clarifying what responsibility the MOD holds towards individuals whose data was exposed.

10. Engage in reflection, learning and sharing of practice around supporting resettled persons

The government and its responsible departments (including Home Office, MOD, MHCLG) should engage in cross-government reflection around the planning, coordination and experience of the schemes. This should aim to build in means of better understanding how relocation and resettlement have been experienced by Afghans themselves, working in partnership with researchers.

Local authorities should be facilitated by such cross-departmental work to engage in skill-sharing and sharing examples of good practice around resettlement. This would help recognise the expertise of some teams and build confidence in others less so. It should aim at identifying strategies to increase engagement with ESOL, address knowledge gaps and overcome stigma among vulnerable resettled persons, such as women with limited language proficiency or men experiencing mental health difficulties. Also, some LAs have used integration funding to source their own specialists to help with employment. The DfE could also work to support the sharing of existing good practice between schools with high levels of experience with resettlement populations and those less confident, with specific strategies designed to assist resettled pupils and identify their vulnerabilities. This could address some of the fears reported by LAs in rural schools about how best to welcome pupils.

In designing resettlement, the government should therefore preserve, capitalise and build on the immense learning and evolution in services provided by local government, commissioned services and other partners, that scaffolds newcomers to succeed and become members of British society.

9 References

Alexander, C. (2000). *The Asian Gang: Ethnicity, Identity, Masculinity*. Oxford: Berg.

Alraie, M., Collins, H., & Rigon, A. (2018). *A comparison of community sponsorship and government-led resettlement of refugees in the UK: Key findings*. University College London, Development Planning Unit. Accessed at: [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/364382643_A_comparison_of_community_sponsorship_and_government-led_resettlement_of_refugees_in_the_UK_Key_Findings

Benson, M., Sigona, N. and Zambelli, E. (2024). The UK's 'Safe and Legal' Humanitarian Routes: From Colonial Ties to Privatising Protection. *The Political Quarterly* 95(2): 263–271.

Berg, M. L., & Zschomler, S. (2025). Superdiversity, the "new bespokism", and hierarchies of belonging: the Homes for Ukraine scheme in the UK. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, *48*(9), 1804–1822. https://doi.org/10.1080/01419870.2025.2461252

British Red Cross, Jesuit Refugee Service, Oxfam & Refugee Council (2022) Refugee sector voices grave concerns over Afghan Citizens Resettlement Scheme (ACRS). 31st March 2022. Accessed online 15th October at [https://reliefweb.int/report/united-kingdom-great-britain-and-northern-ireland/refugee-sector-voices-grave-concerns-over]

British Sociological Association. (2017). *BSA Statement of Ethical Practice*. https://www.britsoc.co.uk/media/24310/bsa_statement_of_ethical_practice

Cheung, S. Y., & Phillimore, J. (2014). Refugees, social capital and labour market integration in the UK. *Sociology, 48*(3), 518–536. https://doi.org/10.1177/0038038513491467

Coll, S. (2004). *Ghost wars: The secret history of the CIA, Afghanistan, and Bin Laden, from the Soviet invasion to September 10, 2001*. Penguin Press.

Connaught Law. (2025). *Afghan Resettlement UK 2025: ARAP & ACRS schemes closed – complete guide*. Connaught Law. https://connaughtlaw.com/afghan-resettlement-uk-schemes-closed-guide/

D'Avino. G. (2022). Framing Community Sponsorship in the context of the UK's hostile environment. *Critical Social Policy* 42 (2): 327-39.

de Vroome, T. M., & van Tubergen, F. A. (2010). The employment experience of refugees in the Netherlands. *International Migration Review, 44*(2), 376–403. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1747-7379.2010.00810.x

Defence Select Committee (2018) *Lost in Translation? Afghan Interpreters and Other Locally Employed Civilians.* Parliament publications and records. Accessed online [https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201719/cmselect/cmdfence/572/57204.htm#_idTextAnchor001]

De Jong, S. (2022) Segregated brotherhood: the military masculinities of Afghan interpreters and other locally employed civilians. *International Feminist Journal of Politics,* 24(2): 243-263.

Department of Culture, Society & Media (2025). *Youth Matters: Your National Youth Strategy*. Policy paper. Accessed online [https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/your-national-youth-strategy]
Fasani, F., Frattini, T., & Minale, L. (2022). (The struggle for) refugee integration into the labour market: Evidence from Europe. *Journal of Economic Geography, 22*(2), 351–393. https://doi.org/10.1093/jeg/lbab011

Forster, A.G. and van de Werfhorst, H.G. (2020). Navigating Institutions: Parents' Knowledge of the Educational System and Students' Success in Education, *European Sociological Review*, 36(1): 48–64, https://doi.org/10.1093/esr/jcz049

Gilodi, A., Ryan, L., & Aydar, Z. (2025). Peer Research in a Multi-National Project with Migrant Youth: Re-Thinking Vulnerability and Participatory Approaches. *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung Forum: Qualitative Social Research*, *26*(2). https://doi.org/10.17169/fqs-26.2.4276

Gil, E., Gedik, Ş and Ginanto, D.E (2023) International Parents Navigating Parental Involvement in a U.S. School: A Call for Intentionally Responsive Schools. *Journal of Multilingual Education Research*: 12 (3). Available at: [https://research.library.fordham.edu/jmer/vol12/iss1/3]

Giustozzi, A. (2008). *Koran, Kalashnikov, and laptop: The neo-Taliban insurgency in Afghanistan*. Columbia University Press.

Goodhand, J., & Sedra, M. (2010). Who owns the peace? Aid, reconstruction, and peacebuilding in Afghanistan. *Disasters.* 34 (S1), S78–S102.

Gower, M. (2023) *Accommodation and integration support for resettled Afghans.* London: House of Commons library research briefing. Available at: [https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/cbp-9804/]

Hassan S, Phillimore J, D'Avino G. (2024) You Are Safe Here: Community Sponsorship Policy and Refugee Integration in the UK. *Social Policy and Society*. Online first. doi:10.1017/S1474746424000241

Home Office (2025a). *Restoring Order and Control: A statement on the government's asylum and returns policy.* Policy Paper. Accessed online [https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/asylum-and-returns-policy-statement/restoring-order-and-control-a-statement-on-the-governments-asylum-and-returns-policy#foreword-from-the-prime-minister]

Home Office (2025b). *Immigration system statistics: How many cases are in the UK asylum system?* (Year ending June 2025) https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/immigration-system-statistics-year-ending-june-2025/how-many-cases-are-in-the-uk-asylum-system

Home Office – gov.uk (2026). *Afghan resettlement programme: Operational data* (26 February) Available at: [https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/afghan-resettlement-programme-operational-data/afghan-resettlement-programme-operational-data]

Human Rights Watch (2022a). Joint UK Parliamentary Briefing on Afghanistan'. Accessed online 30th November 2025 at [https://www.hrw.org/news/2022/08/17/joint-uk-parliamentary-briefing-afghanistan]

Human Rights Watch. (2022b). *UK: Afghan women evacuees in limbo. May 12th* 2022. Accessed online 1st December 2025 at [https://www.hrw.org/news/2022/05/12/uk-afghan-women-evacuees-limbo]

Impressions Gallery. (2024). *We are here, because you were there*. https://www.impressions-gallery.com/event/we-are-here-because-you-were-there/

The Independent (2025). They fought with Britain and US in Afghanistan – now Taliban are taking their revenge. October 15th 2025. Accessed online 20th October at [https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/taliban-afghanistan-special-forces-uk-data-breach-b2845838.html]

Independent Chief Inspector of Borders. An inspection of the Home Office's Afghan resettlement schemes (October 2022 – April 2023).

Jalali, A. A. (2023). Reflections on the fateful collapse of the Afghan national defense and security forces. In *The Great Power Competition Volume 4: Lessons learned in Afghanistan: America's longest war* (pp. 169–184). Reflections on the Fateful Collapse of the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces | SpringerLink

Jenne, A. (2025) Inside the lucrative industry of online 'auditors' targeting migrant hotels in the UK. Channel 4 news. Available at [https://www.channel4.com/news/inside-the-lucrative-industry-of-online-auditors-targeting-migrant-hotels-in-the-uk]

Kone, Z., Ruiz, I., & Vargas-Silva, C. (2019). Refugees and the UK labour market. *Centre on Migration Policy and Society: University of Oxford.* Available at: Microsoft Word - Refugees and the UK Labour Market text

Lawton, K. and Thompson, S. (2013) *Tackling in-work poverty by supporting dual-earning families.* York: Joseph Rowntree Foundation.

Leon, L. (2025). *Improving Education Outcomes for Displaced 16-19 year olds in Oxfordshire. Rapid Evidence Review. https://www.compas.ox.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2025-Rapid-Evidence-Review.pdf*

Local Government Association. (2023). *Bridging hotels and homelessness for Afghan households: Research report*. https://www.local.gov.uk/sites/default/files/documents/Bridging%20Hotels%20and%20Homelessness%20for%20Afghan%20Households%20-%20Research%20Report.pdf

Maley, W., & Jamal, A. S. (2022). Diplomacy of disaster: The Afghanistan 'peace process' and the Taliban occupation of Kabul. *The Hague Journal of Diplomacy, 17*(1), 32–63.

Migration Observatory. (2025, September 29). *Afghan asylum seekers and refugees in the UK*. Accessed online 15th October at [https://migrationobservatory.ox.ac.uk/resources/briefings/afghan-asylum-seekers-and-refugees-in-the-uk/]

Ministry of Defence, gov.uk (2025). *Afghanistan response route* (10 November). https://www.gov.uk/guidance/afghanistan-response-route

Mulholland, J., & Ryan, L. (2023). Advancing the embedding framework: using longitudinal methods to revisit French highly skilled migrants in the context of Brexit. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, *49*(3), 601–617.

Mulvey, G. (2018). Social Citizenship, Social Policy and Refugee Integration: a Case of Policy Divergence in Scotland? *Journal of Social Policy* 47(1), pp. 161–178.

National Audit Office (2025). *The Afghanistan Response Route.* Report - Value for Money. https://www.nao.org.uk/reports/the-afghanistan-response-route/?nab=0

National Audit Office (2026). Investigation into the Afghan resettlement schemes. Report – Value for Money. https://www.nao.org.uk/reports/investigation-into-the-afghan-resettlement-schemes/

Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. (2022). *Afghanistan: Humanitarian needs overview 2022*. United Nations afghanistan-humanitarian-needs-overview-2022_0.pdf

Oliver, C., & Singal, N. (2017). Migration, disability and education: reflections from a special school in the east of England. *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, *38*(8), 1217–1229. https://doi.org/10.1080/01425692.2016.1273757

Oliver, C., & Hughes, V. (2018). Bordering education: migrants' entitlements to post-compulsory education in the United Kingdom. *International Studies in Sociology of Education*, *27*(2–3), 128–144. https://doi.org/10.1080/09620214.2018.1426997

Oliver, C., Geuijen, K., Dekker, R., & Broadhead, J. (2020). Innovative strategies for the reception of asylum seekers and refugees in European cities: multi-level governance, multi-sector urban networks and local engagement. *Comparative Migration Studies, 8*(30), 1–14. https://doi.org/10.1186/s40878-020-00189-y

Oliver, C., Geuijen, K. and Dekker, R. (2023) 'Challenging the 'Youth Gaze': Building Diversity into Refugee and Asylum Reception and Integration Programmes'. *Journal of Refugee Studies*.

Oliver, C., Ryan, L., Cara, O., López, M., Rasa, M. Raheal, M.M. and Yilmaz Keles, J. 2025. 'Submission of written evidence to the Defence Committee Inquiry on the Afghan Data Breach and Resettlement Schemes'. Afghan Data Breach and Resettlement Schemes Inquiry. Defence Committee: https://committees.parliament.uk/work/9327/afghan-data-breach-and-resettlement-schemes/publications/written-evidence/

Orellana, M. F., & Phoenix, A. (2017). Re-interpreting: Narratives of childhood language brokering over time. *Childhood*, *24*(2), 183-196. https://doi.org/10.1177/0907568216671178

Phillimore, J., D'Avino, G., Strain-Fajth, V., Papoutsi, A. and Ziss, P. (2023) 'Family reunion policy for resettled refugees: Governance, challenges and impacts', Frontiers in Human Dynamics, 5. https://doi.org/10.3389/fhumd.2023.1075306

Patel, I. S. (2021). *We're here because you were there: Immigration and the end of empire*. London: Verso.

Ross, S. (1998). Self-assessment in second language testing: A meta-analysis and analysis of experiential factors. *Language Testing* 15(1), 1–20.

Ruiz, I., & Vargas-Silva, C. (2018). Differences in labour market outcomes between natives, refugees and other migrants in the UK. *Journal of Economic Geography, 18*(4), 855–885. https://doi.org/10.1093/jeg/lby025

Ryan, L., Kofman, E., & Aaron, P. (2011). Insiders and outsiders: working with peer researchers in researching Muslim communities. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, *14*(1), 49–60. https://doi.org/10.1080/13645579.2010.481835

Ryan, L., Mulholland, J. (2015). Embedding in Motion: Analysing Relational, Spatial and Temporal Dynamics among Highly Skilled Migrants. In: Ryan, L., Erel, U., D'Angelo, A. (eds) Migrant Capital. Migration, Diasporas and Citizenship. Palgrave Macmillan, London. https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137348807_9

Ryan, L., Kilkey, M., Lőrinc, M., & Tawodzera, O. (2021). Analysing migrants' ageing in place as embodied practices of embedding through time: 'Kilburn is not Kilburn anymore'. *Population, Space and Place*, *27*(3), e2420.

Ryan, L. (2023). *Social networks and migration: Relocations, relationships and resources*. Policy Press.

Ryan, L. López, M., & Dalceggio, A. (2024). Encountering the hostile environment: Recently arrived Afghan migrants in London. *Critical Social Policy*, *44*(2), 242-262-262. https://doi.org/10.1177/02610183231194876

Ryan, L., López, M., Dalceggio, A., & Adell, F. (2025). 'You need a network': How highly skilled refugees build social networks to convert cultural capital and reclaim professional identities. *Sociology*. https://doi.org/10.1177/00380385251363897

Ryan, L., López, M., & Rasa, M. (2026). Walking with Afghan women: using mobile methods to understand differentiated embedding within different places across England. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 1-19. https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/1369183X.2026.2626207

Scalettaris, G., Monsutti, A. & Donini, A. (2021) Young Afghans at the doorsteps of Europe: the difficult art of being a successful migrant, Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies, 47:3, 519-535, DOI: 10.1080/1369183X.2019.161825

Taylor, B., Lobont, C., Dayan, M., Merry, L., Jefferies, D. Wellings, D. (2025) *Public Satisfaction with the NHS and social care in 2024. Results from the British Social Attitudes survey.* Kings Fund and Nuffield Trust. Available at [https://www.kingsfund.org.uk/insight-and-analysis/reports/public-satisfaction-nhs-social-care-in-2024-bsa]

UN-Habitat (2015) *State of Afghan Cities Report 2015 (Volume I)*. United Nations Human Settlements Programme. Available at: State of Afghan Cities report 2015 (Volume-I English) | UN-Habitat

UN-Habitat (n.d.) *Afghanistan Housing Profile*. United Nations Human Settlements Programme. Available at: Afghanistan Housing Profile | UN-Habitat

UNHCR. (2021). *Afghanistan responding to urgent needs supplementary appeal.* July - December 2021. Accessed online October 15th 2025 at [https://www.unhcr.org/sites/default/files/2021-12/Afghanistan%2520appeal.pdf]

UNHCR. (2023). *Global trends: Forced displacement in 2023*. Accessed online 30th November 2025 at: [https://www.unhcr.org/media/global-trends-report-2023]

Wang, C., & Burris, M. A. (1997). Photovoice: Concept, methodology, and use for participatory needs assessment. *Health education & behavior*, *24*(3), 369-387.

Women and Equalities Commission (2023) *Equality and the UK asylum process – Report Summary.* House of Commons Committee report. https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm5803/cmselect/cmwomeq/93/summary.html

10 Appendices

Appendix 1: Employment status models

A multilevel multinomial model was initially estimated to assess whether employment outcomes varied meaningfully across areas. The random intercept variances for the three non-reference categories (seeking work, in education/training, and not seeking work) were small and statistically non-significant, indicating limited between-area heterogeneity. Specifically, area-level variances were 0.315 (SE = 0.299, 95% CI [0.049, 2.023], p = .292) for seeking work, 0.943 (SE = 0.702, 95% CI [0.219, 4.057], p = .179) for education/training, and only 0.054 (SE = 0.059, 95% CI [0.006, 0.460], p = .360) for not seeking work. These values suggest that most variation in employment status occurs at the individual level rather than being structured by area. Given the very small and non-significant random effects, retaining a multilevel specification would increase model complexity and reduce statistical power without offering meaningful explanatory gain. For this reason and to maximise statistical power, model stability, and interpretability, a single-level model was judged to be the more appropriate analytic approach**.**

A multinomial logistic regression model was then used because the outcome variable consists of four unordered employment categories, and the goal was to compare each category to a common reference group – employed/self-employed. This approach allows all categories to be analysed simultaneously within one model, rather than running multiple binary regressions.

In the multinomial logistic regression, Exp(B) values represent the odds ratio associated with a one-unit change in each predictor, comparing each outcome category with the reference category (employed/self-employed). For example, English knowledge significantly predicted membership in the 'seeking work' category, Exp(B) = 0.72, p < .001. This indicates that higher English proficiency reduces the odds for resettled Afghans of being in the seeking-work group by approximately 28%, relative to being employed or self-employed. Thus, English proficiency appears to be linked to Afghans' employment status.

Another example is the consideration of time spent in the UK. Time spent in the UK was negatively associated with the likelihood of seeking work compared with being employed or self-employed. The odds ratio of 0.96 indicates that each additional month in the UK was associated with a 4% increase in the odds of being in employment rather than seeking work. Although modest, this effect suggests that longer residence is linked to slightly greater employment odds. Over 12 months, an odds ratio of 0.96 per month compounds to approximately 0.62, meaning the odds of being employed are about 61% higher after one year.

Table 1. Relative Risk Ratios for Seeking Work vs. Employed/Self-Employed. *Multinomial logistic regression results (N=762)*

	B	SE	p-value	Exp(B)	95% Confidence Interval for Exp(B)		
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound	Odds
Intercept	3.85	0.94	0.000				
N of children U18 in the household	-0.19	0.08	0.015	0.83	0.71	0.96	4.8
Highest educational qualification	-0.01	0.06	0.923	0.99	0.89	1.11	179.3

English knowledge	-0.32	0.06	0.000	0.72	0.65	0.81	2.6
Social Support Networks	-0.03	0.06	0.604	0.97	0.86	1.09	30.6
Self-reported general health	0.01	0.12	0.951	1.01	0.80	1.27	-140.0
Time in the UK (in months)	-0.04	0.01	0.000	0.96	0.95	0.98	26.2
Male (ref: female)	-1.36	0.36	0.000	0.26	0.13	0.51	0.3
Age. Ref: 18-24							
65+	-0.43	0.00		0.65	0.65	0.65	1.9
55-64	0.03	0.83	0.976	1.03	0.20	5.21	-40.1
45-54	0.66	0.65	0.304	1.94	0.55	6.91	-2.1
35-44	0.52	0.57	0.368	1.68	0.54	5.17	-2.5
25-34	-0.37	0.49	0.447	0.69	0.26	1.80	2.2
Marital Status. Ref: Married							
Other (widowed, separated, divorced)	0.11	1.32	0.936	1.11	0.08	14.72	-9.9
Never married	0.65	0.45	0.150	1.91	0.79	4.59	-2.1
Unemployed before arrival in the UK	0.25	0.39	0.530	1.28	0.59	2.75	-4.6
Vocational training in the UK	0.42	0.35	0.234	1.52	0.76	3.03	-2.9

Table 2. Relative Risk Ratios for Not Seeking Work vs. Employed/Self-Employed. *Multinomial logistic regression results (N=762)*

	B	**SE**	**p-value**	**Exp(B)**	**95% Confidence Interval for Exp(B)**		
					Lower Bound	**Upper Bound**	**Odds**
Intercept	3.56	0.93	0.000				
N of children U18 in the household	-0.03	0.07	0.689	0.97	0.84	1.12	32.9
Highest educational qualification	-0.14	0.06	0.012	0.87	0.78	0.97	6.6
English knowledge	-0.23	0.06	0.000	0.79	0.71	0.89	3.9
Social Support Networks	0.08	0.06	0.164	1.09	0.97	1.23	-12.3
Self-reported general health	0.43	0.11	0.000	1.53	1.23	1.90	-2.9
Time in the UK (in months)	-0.03	0.01	0.002	0.97	0.96	0.99	38.5
Male (ref: female)	-2.69	0.35	0.000	0.07	0.03	0.13	0.1
Age. Ref: 18-24							
65+	Values not reported due to small group size						
55-64	0.66	0.78	0.396	1.94	0.42	9.01	-2.1
45-54	0.17	0.66	0.800	1.18	0.33	4.28	-6.5
35-44	-0.22	0.59	0.705	0.80	0.25	2.53	4.0
25-34	-0.37	0.49	0.447	0.69	0.26	1.81	2.2
Marital Status. Ref: Married							

Other (widowed, separated, divorced)	-0.12	1.30	0.929	0.89	0.07	11.30	8.1
Never married	-0.22	0.46	0.627	0.80	0.33	1.96	4.0
Unemployed before arrival in the UK	0.78	0.38	0.043	2.18	1.03	4.63	-1.8
Vocational training in the UK	0.14	0.34	0.677	1.15	0.59	2.26	-7.5

Table 3. Relative Risk Ratios for In Education/training vs. Employed/Self-Employed. *Multinomial logistic regression results* (N=762)

	B	**SE**	**p-value**	**Exp(B)**	**95% Confidence Interval for Exp(B)**		**Odds**
					Lower Bound	**Upper Bound**	
Intercept	1.34	1.07	0.210				0.0
N of children U18 in the household	0.03	0.10	0.774	1.03	0.84	1.26	-34.4
Highest educational qualification	-0.13	0.07	0.055	0.88	0.77	1.00	7.3
English knowledge	-0.18	0.07	0.009	0.84	0.73	0.96	5.2
Social Support Networks	0.08	0.07	0.230	1.09	0.95	1.24	-12.5
Self-reported general health	0.31	0.14	0.026	1.36	1.04	1.78	-3.8
Time in the UK (in months)	-0.02	0.01	0.022	0.98	0.96	1.00	41.9
Male (ref: female)	-1.91	0.39	0.000	0.15	0.07	0.32	0.2
Age. Ref: 18-24							
65+	0.56	0.00		1.74	1.74	1.74	-2.3
55-64	-0.42	1.06	0.690	0.65	0.08	5.27	1.9
45-54	-0.38	0.83	0.645	0.68	0.13	3.47	2.1
35-44	-0.62	0.70	0.376	0.54	0.14	2.13	1.2
25-34	-1.10	0.54	0.041	0.33	0.11	0.96	0.5
Marital Status. Ref: Married							
Other (widowed, separated, divorced)	Values not reported due to small group size						
Never married	1.83	0.54	0.001	6.23	2.17	17.93	-1.2
Unemployed before arrival in the UK	1.06	0.45	0.020	2.88	1.19	7.00	-1.5
Vocational training in the UK	0.27	0.41	0.509	1.31	0.59	2.94	-4.2

Appendix 2: General wellbeing models

A two-level linear mixed-effects model was estimated to examine predictors of General Wellbeing (GWB), measured by the 7-item Warwick–Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale (short version). The model accounted for clustering of individuals within local areas (Level 2), while individual demographic, socioeconomic, psychosocial, and contextual characteristics were entered as Level 1 predictors. Random intercepts were specified at the area level to capture between-area variation in average wellbeing.

The multilevel model showed that differences between areas contributed meaningfully to variation in the wellbeing among the resettled Afghans. The area-level intercept variance was 5.71 (SE = 3.25, 95% CI [1.87, 17.41]), indicating moderate between-area variability, although this effect was only marginally significant (p = .079). In contrast, the residual variance was large and highly significant (19.24, SE = 1.04, 95% CI [17.30, 21.38], p < .001), suggesting substantial individual-level differences within areas. The intraclass correlation coefficient (ICC = 0.23) shows that 23% of the total variance is attributable to area-level factors, supporting the use of a multilevel modelling approach.

Table 1. Fixed Effects from the Multilevel Regression Predicting General Wellbeing (N = 668)

	Estimate	SE	t	p	CI Lower	CI Upper
Intercept	13.15	1.77	7.436	0.000	9.63	16.66
Male (ref: Female)	-0.36	0.42	-0.864	0.388	-1.19	0.46
Age. Ref: 18-24						
65+	2.47	1.65	1.498	0.135	-0.77	5.70
55-64	1.71	0.96	1.790	0.074	-0.17	3.59
45-54	-0.31	0.80	-0.388	0.698	-1.89	1.27
35-44	0.20	0.71	0.281	0.779	-1.19	1.59
25-34	0.25	0.62	0.401	0.689	-0.97	1.47
Employment status. Ref: seeking work						
Not seeking work	0.05	0.50	0.097	0.923	-0.94	1.04
Employed/self employed	0.36	0.57	0.634	0.526	-0.75	1.47
In education/training	0.83	0.65	1.264	0.207	-0.46	2.11
Marital status. Ref: married						
Never married	0.94	0.62	1.508	0.132	-0.28	2.15
Separated	2.20	2.25	0.978	0.328	-2.22	6.62
Widowed	-2.52	1.09	-2.312	0.021	-4.67	-0.38
Number of children under 18	-0.02	0.10	-0.169	0.866	-0.21	0.18
English Knowledge	0.20	0.07	2.952	0.003	0.07	0.33
Sense of Belonging	0.48	0.07	6.482	0.000	0.34	0.63
Self-reported general health	-1.72	0.16	-10.850	0.000	-2.04	-1.41
Self-reported safety. Ref: Very safe						
Not sure	-2.07	2.80	-0.738	0.461	-7.56	3.43
Very safe	3.49	1.16	3.021	0.003	1.22	5.77
Safe	1.20	1.14	1.051	0.294	-1.04	3.45
Somewhat safe	2.26	1.28	1.769	0.077	-0.25	4.76

No discrimination experience	3.12	0.72	4.352	0.000	1.71	4.53

Table 2. Random Effects, Variance Components, and ICC

Parameter	Estimate	SE	Wald Z	p	95% CI
Area-level intercept variance	5.71	3.25	1.757	0.079	[1.87,17.41]
Residual variance	19.24	1.04	18.490	0.000	[17.30,21.38]
ICC	0.23				