



# Migration and development dynamics in Shahrake Jabrael, Afghanistan

Education and women's civic engagement were a source of pride in Shahrake Jabrael – an area with limited state and international support. Imminent risk to lives ahead of the fall of Kabul, longstanding discrimination and poverty meant many hoped to leave.

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This snapshot from August 2021 finds that most young adults surveyed (84%) find it difficult to earn a living and feed a family.

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Most residents moved to Shahrake Jabrael after the collapse of the Taliban in 2001. Over half (57%) of young adults are internal migrants.

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One-third (43%) of young adults prefer to leave Afghanistan within the next five years.



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Photo: Najia Alizada for MIGNEX.

Shahrake Jabrael is a peri-urban area located to the west of Herat, the third largest city of Afghanistan.

Most residents are returning migrants and internally displaced people (IDPs), the majority are of the Hazara ethnicity. Most residents moved to Shahrake Jabrael after the collapse of the Taliban in 2001. Since then, Shahrake Jabrael has seen rapid development with expansions in education, health, and residential infrastructure.

During MIGNEX fieldwork in June – July 2021, Shahrake Jabrael was a highly isolated

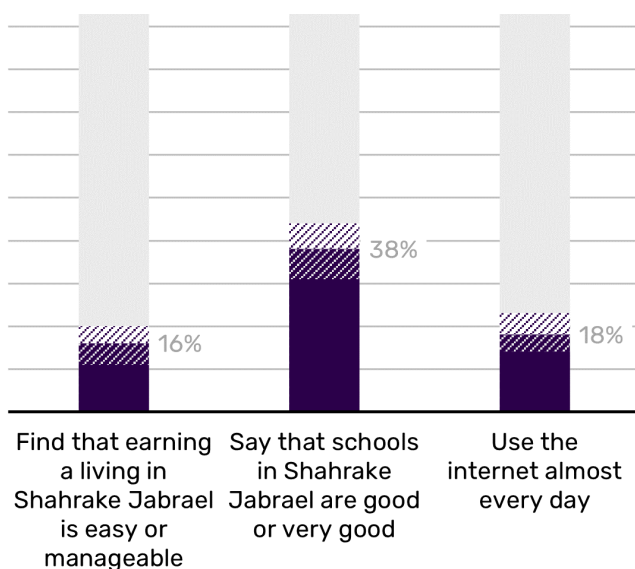
area and residents felt it was overlooked by the government. There was very little government or donor-funded support, while rates of unemployment and poverty were high. Systematic discrimination against the Hazara people was cited as a factor in this.

The majority (91%) of surveyed young adults consider it difficult, or very difficult to find a good job. Most (84%) find it difficult to earn a living and feed a family.

During the data collection in Shahrake Jabrael in July 2021, security was declining. Almost all of the province – beyond the centre of Herat – was under Taliban control and there was a high possibility of attacks on the city. Women's engagement in economic and educational activities was part of life in the township yet this was increasingly threatened by insecurity.

This brief offers an overview of migration and development dynamics in the days before the fall of the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan (GoIRA).<sup>1</sup>

It is based on fieldwork and survey data. The MIGNEX team also conducted research in Shahrake Mahdia and Behsud and carried out a review of migration-relevant policies in Afghanistan.<sup>2</sup>

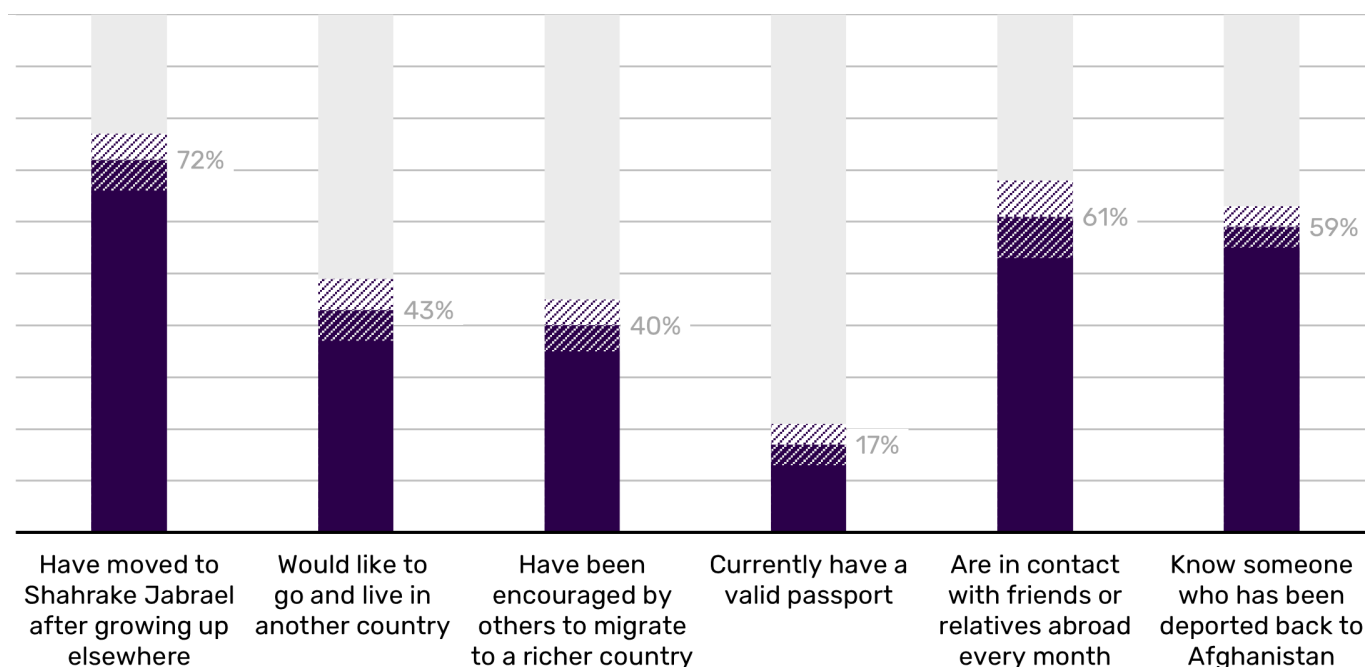


**Figure 1. Indicators of development**

Source: MIGNEX Survey. Hatched area: confidence interval.

### Migration from Shahrake Jabrael

Many surveyed young adults (71%) have family, relatives or friends living abroad,



**Figure 2. Indicators of migration dynamics**

Source: MIGNEX survey. Hatched area: confidence interval.

largely in Iran (39%), Germany (18%), Sweden (16%) and Australia (10%).

International migration is increasingly considered a survival strategy, due to the imminent fall of the GoIRA, livelihood collapse during the Covid-19 pandemic, and years of protracted stagnation. Nearly one-third of surveyed young adults (31%) have seriously considered internationally migrating in the year prior.

However, low feasibility for regular migration to Turkey or other European countries – due to restricted migration policy over recent years – mean that the risk was high. However irregular migration is common and there is widespread understanding of the dangers. Almost one-quarter (22%) of young adults know someone who has died on their way to another country. Some 27% know someone who has been detained on their journey to another country.

Despite the high risk, migration was widely understood as necessary for survival. Around two-thirds (65%) surveyed young adults think that their family would approve if they migrated to a richer country.

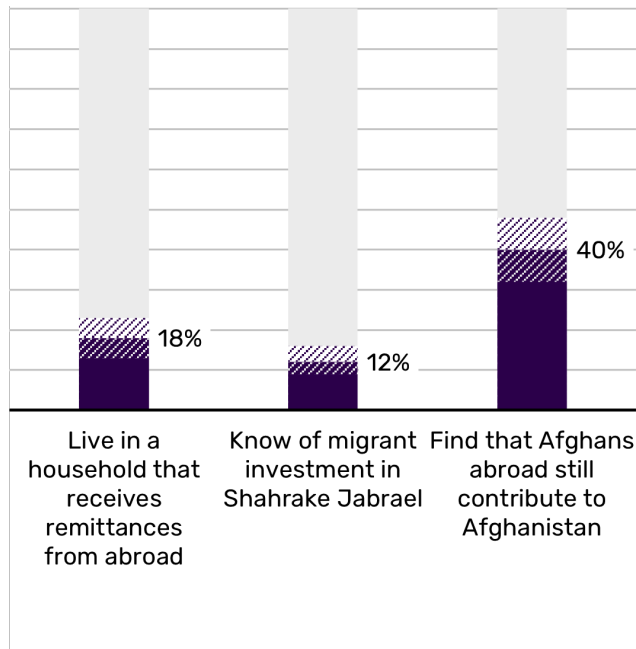
### Migration aspirations

The imminent risk to lives means that migration aspirations are particularly high. Beyond this, the lack of opportunities and reported systematic discrimination of the Hazara community has long influenced the migration hopes of young adults. Education, while a source of joy and pride in the town, is now a way for young adults to increase their chances of moving abroad.

Almost half (43%) of young adults would prefer to leave Afghanistan in the next five years. Aspirations are much higher for regular migration: if given the necessary papers, over two-thirds of young men (66%) and young women (63%) would migrate to a richer country.

*I don't like migration if our country is secure, there are job opportunities, and we are at peace. But if you ask me about the current situation, yes, I would say we should migrate and it is good to move.*

Focus group participant



**Figure 3. Migration–development interactions**

Source: MIGNEX Survey. Hatched area: confidence interval.

### In- and return migration

Over half (57%) of young adults are internal migrants, while 15% grew up in another country. Many are returned migrants from neighbouring countries and almost one-third (32%) of young adults surveyed have returnee-migrant family and friends. Many were returned to Afghanistan from Iran, as part of a repatriation programme organised by the United Nations (UN) over the past two past decades.

Deportations from Iran, Turkey and the European Union (EU) are also common. Over half (59%) of young adults know of someone who has been deported – or have themselves been deported – from abroad.

Other in-migrants are IDPs, mostly of the ethnic Hazara minority from neighbouring provinces: Ghor, Uruzgan, Daikundi, Ghazni

and other central provinces. These residents were displaced between 2001 and 2021, for the most part due to poverty and conflict.

While networks still exist with their original areas, ongoing conflict prevents these migrants from returning. As such, many feel a sense of despair: trapped in a situation beyond their control.

### Links between migration and development

In addition to limited state support, there are few international development interventions – beyond a World Bank Citizen Charter for roads and water canalization. As such, many are living in extreme poverty, with a lack of potable water, housing, social protection and livelihood options. This is a major factor for out-migration.

Afghan migrants abroad and diaspora constitute a lifeline for residents in Shahrake Jabrael. Of those young adults with a migrant family member, relative or friend (71%), the majority (78%) had been in contact during the past year. Around one-quarter of young adults' households (25%) had received remittances in the past year.

However, since August 2021, the Afghan financial system has been in crisis. US sanctions have posed significant fiscal limits. This is impacting remittance flows to those who remain in this self-contained area.

### Notes

1. This data was collected before the fall of Kabul in August 2021. It is a baseline of the situation before the fall and remains a key contextual and historical element of understanding of two decades of humanitarian assistance and Afghans' own investments in the development of their communities.
2. Fieldwork consisting of key informant interviews, focus group discussions and observations was carried out by Najia Alizada in July 2021. A face-to-face survey of 500 randomly selected residents (aged 18–39 years) was conducted by Samuel Hall in July–August 2021.

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MIGNEX – Aligning Migration Management and the Migration–Development Nexus – is a five-year research project (2018–2023) with the core ambition of creating new knowledge on migration, development and policy. It is carried out by a consortium of nine partners: The Peace Research Institute Oslo (coordinator), Danube University Krems, the University of Ghana, Koç University, Lahore University of Management Sciences, Maastricht University, ODI, the University of Oxford and Samuel Hall.

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