

**Afghanistan's Displaced People:
A Socio-Economic Profile, 2013-2014**

Key Findings from the
2013-14 Afghanistan Living Conditions Survey

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Main findings

Afghans represent the world's largest protracted refugee population, and one of the largest populations to be repatriated to their country of origin in this century. Between 2002 and 2016, over six million refugees returned to Afghanistan from neighboring countries. In 2016 alone, returnees numbered more than a million. In an already difficult context, large-scale internal displacement and return from outside have strained the delivery of public services in Afghanistan and increased competition for scarce economic opportunities, not only for the displaced, but for the population at large.

Who are Afghanistan's displaced people, and how do their living conditions, vulnerabilities, and opportunities differ from those of other Afghans? How have socio-economic conditions among the displaced evolved over time? Evidence on these questions is critical to guide policy making and program design for better socio-economic outcomes in Afghanistan.

This note aims at contributing to our understanding of displacement in Afghanistan by comparing the socio-economic profiles of three populations: (i) former refugees who returned to Afghanistan between 2002 and 2014 ("pre-2015 returnees"); (ii) internally displaced persons ("IDPs"); and (iii) non-displaced persons ("hosts"). The note captures and compares these groups' situations at a specific time-point, using data from the 2013-14 Afghanistan Living Conditions Survey (ALCS). Importantly, the results document socio-economic conditions just prior to the transfer of security responsibilities from international troops to the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) in 2014, which was associated with a subsequent decline in aid, both security and civilian, and a sharp drop in economic activity. The results presented here cover the largest return of Afghans to the country following the fall of the Taliban in 2002, but precede the more recent large-scale return of Afghan refugees from Pakistan in 2016-17. Future publications will extend the findings summarized here with analysis of new and existing data covering this recent influx.

Results show that, in 2013-14:

- *Afghanistan's returnees were more urbanized than other groups. About half of returnees lived in urban areas, compared to less than a quarter of IDPs and hosts.*
- *Among all groups, educational attainment was very low (with more than 50 percent having no formal education), and there were sharp disparities by gender and across urban and rural settings. Returnees had more exposure to formal education than internally displaced and non-displaced persons.*
- *Returnees enjoyed better dwelling characteristics and greater access to infrastructure services, in line with their higher rates of urbanization, but had lower housing ownership, relative to other groups. Non-displaced/hosts had the highest rates of ownership of dwellings and agricultural land.*

- *While labor market outcomes were very poor across all groups, IDPs had the lowest employment rates. Employment sectors varied across displacement groups. IDPs and hosts were more likely to be employed in the agriculture sector, while returnees were more likely to be employed in construction and the service sector.*
- *While rates of indebtedness were high across all groups, displaced households (returnees and IDPs) were more likely than hosts to have debt.*
- *In line with their better education, better labor market outcomes, and higher urbanization, returnees reported the highest rates of internet use and the highest rates of ownership of non-agricultural assets.*

This research is part of an ongoing effort to document population displacement challenges and solutions in Afghanistan over time. Data from ALCS 2013-14 establish baseline socio-economic profiles for returned refugees, IDPs, and non-displaced hosts. Further research and analysis now in progress will document how these conditions have changed since 2013-14, and will distill evidence for policy to improve socio-economic outcomes among Afghanistan's displaced and non-displaced people.

1. Context

Afghans represent the world's largest protracted refugee population, and one of the largest populations that have been repatriated to their country of origin since 2002. Over seven million refugees returned to Afghanistan between 2002 and 2017. Among them, over 5.2 million returned under the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees' (UNHCR) facilitated return program, the largest return operation in UNHCR history, and were assisted by UNHCR and the Government of Afghanistan with cash grants. This return population currently makes up as much as a fifth of the estimated population of the country. In 2016 alone, over one million Afghans returned from Pakistan and Iran, including over 370,000 registered refugees assisted by UNHCR. At the same time, conflict-induced population displacement within Afghanistan has sharply increased due to the escalation of internal conflict.

The scale of this new influx of returns and internally displaced persons poses stark challenges to host communities. Communities were already living under difficult economic conditions and a deteriorating security situation, with scarce human and physical capital and a demographic imbalance whereby job creation lags far behind the growth of the working age population. In 2016-17, more than a half of Afghans lived below the national poverty line, and many more are vulnerable to falling into poverty. In this context, local absorptive capacity is extremely limited. This applies to the lack of meaningful livelihoods, land, and shelter, as well as access to basic services. These factors could reinforce pre-existing causes of social conflict in the country, fueling resentment and undermining the social trust needed for socio-economic recovery to progress.

Targeting scarce humanitarian and development assistance in Afghanistan poses substantial challenges. After several waves of internal displacement and repatriation, it may be difficult for program implementers to distinguish among the different types of displaced people, and so to tailor support to needs. A clear

picture of the socio-economic conditions of displaced Afghans and host communities is required to ensure that support reaches the most vulnerable, while respecting the interests of all constituencies.

2. Study Objectives and Data Sources

There is currently no system by which displacement flows in Afghanistan can be tracked in a timely manner. Information about internal displacement, documented returns, and undocumented returns is collected by three different humanitarian agencies: the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA), UNHCR, and the International Organization of Migration (IOM). These organizations gather data at sites of displacement, encashment centers, or at the border, respectively. Despite some efforts to collect information on socio-economic characteristics, these agencies must generally focus on addressing urgent needs. As a result, little comparable information is available on socio-economic outcomes among the displaced (and the non-displaced). Ultimately, this undermines the efficiency and efficacy of humanitarian and development interventions.

This note aims at contributing to our understanding of displacement in Afghanistan by comparing socio-economic profiles among three key population groups: pre-2015 returnees (refugee returns since 2002), internally displaced persons (IDPs), and non-displaced persons (hosts), using the Afghanistan Living Conditions Survey (ALCS) of 2013-14.

ALCS 2013-14

The ALCS, previously known as the National Risk and Vulnerability Assessment (NRVA), is conducted by the Central Statistics Organization (CSO) of Afghanistan. The survey provides results that are representative at the national and provincial level. ALCS 2013-14 covered 20,786 households and 157,262 persons across the country. The 2013-14 survey included a detailed migration module at the individual level which allows for national-level comparisons by displacement status (Box 1).

Box 1: Defining Displacement Status

The following definitions of displacement groups are used in this note. For people in all displacement categories, information about household migration status from ALCS 2013-14 Module 9 is used to supplement individual migration status data, when the latter is missing or incomplete.

Pre-2015 returnees: Individuals (aged 12 and older¹) who moved as a result of insecurity and were displaced outside Afghanistan at some point in their life,² based on information from Module 12 of ALCS 2013-14.³ A household is defined as a refugee returnee household if this household has returned from insecurity-related displacement outside of Afghanistan since 2002.

IDPs: Individuals (aged 12 and older) who have moved because of insecurity, but who never left Afghanistan at any point in time, based on Module 12 of ALCS 2013-14. A household that has returned from insecurity-related displacement within Afghanistan since 2002 is considered an IDP household. Thus, the IDP definition encompasses both past and present internally displaced persons.

Non-displaced/hosts: Individuals (aged 12 and older) whose location at any point in time is the same province, or who have moved between provinces only for reasons unrelated to security or disaster.⁴ A household is defined as a non-displaced/host household if this household is not currently displaced because of violence or insecurity in the usual place of residence, and has not returned from displacement outside or inside of Afghanistan since 2002, based on information from ALCS 2013-14, Module 9.

Selected main findings from ALCS 2013-14 are presented in the following sections. For brevity, returnees, as identified from the ALCS 2013-14, are referred to as “pre-2015 returnees,” internally displaced persons, as identified from the ALCS 2013-14, are referred to as “IDPs,” and non-displaced/hosts, as identified either in ALCS 2013-14 or NRVA 2011-12, are referred to as “hosts.”

3. Socio-Economic Profile

About 6.7 percent of the population surveyed in the ALCS 2013-14 had returned to Afghanistan after being forcibly displaced as a result of conflict and insecurity. On average, they had been back in Afghanistan for nine years.⁵ About 2.4 percent of the surveyed population were IDPs. Almost half of all pre-2015 returnees (44.8 percent) lived in urban areas, compared to less than one-quarter of IDPs and hosts (Figure 1). About 45 percent of pre-2015 returnees surveyed lived in Kabul province alone.

¹ The wording of the ALCS questionnaire requires specifying a lower age limit.

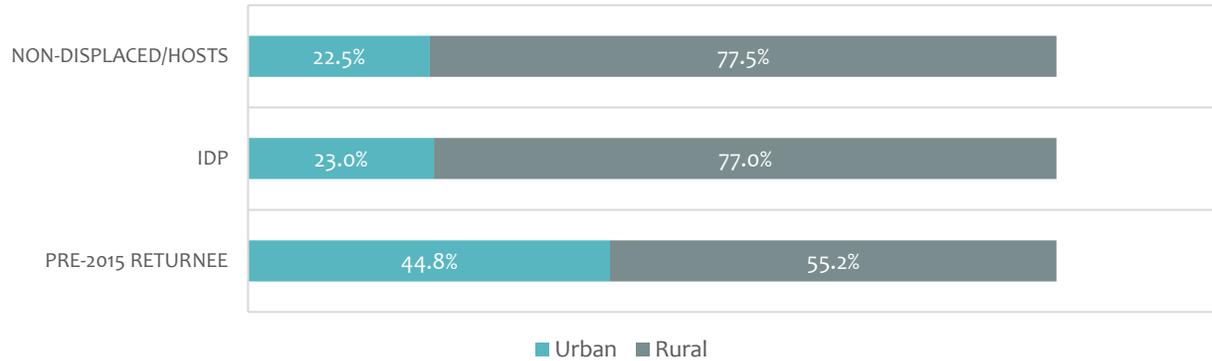
² The survey includes information on location, from which we infer displacement, at three distinct points in an individual’s lifetime: 1) location at birth; 2) location in 2002; and 3) location in 2011.

³ In the ALCS, moves that are attributable to insecurity include: returning from displacement, fleeing from violence, moving because of conflict about land or house, and displacement due to natural disaster.

⁴ In the ALCS, reasons to move that are not related to security or disaster include: moved because parents/family moved; looked for work; to get married; joined family at new place of residence; to attend education; to receive health care; and “other reason.”

⁵ This average reflects the substantial number of voluntary Afghan returnees after the fall of the Taliban in 2001.

Figure 1: Percentage of households living in urban and rural areas, by displacement group, 2013-14



Source: Staff calculations based on ALCS 2013-14

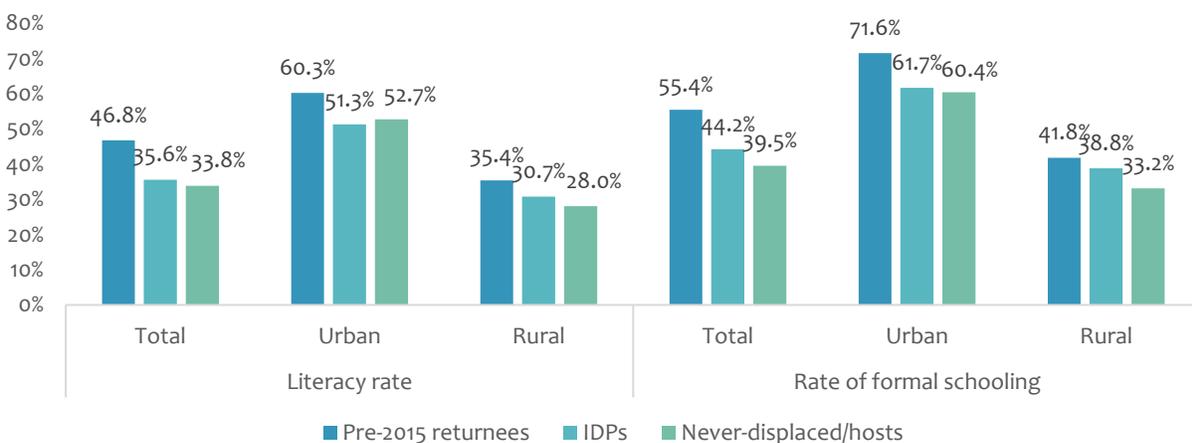
The sharp difference in rates of urbanization of pre-2015 returnees relative to other groups was associated with differences in other dimensions of socio-economic outcomes such as education, dwelling characteristics, and labor market outcomes.

Education

Educational attainment and in particular exposure to formal education were low across all groups, and characterized by sharp gender disparities and urban-rural differences. Pre-2015 returnees were distinguishably better educated than all other groups.

Only 35 percent of Afghans can read or write, and few have ever attended formal school, particularly in rural areas. Literacy rates in urban areas are almost double those in rural areas. Against this backdrop, pre-2015 returnees had substantially higher literacy rates (46.8 percent) than did IDPs (35.6 percent) and hosts (33.8 percent) (Figure 2). Returnees also had the highest rates of formal school attendance (Figure 2).

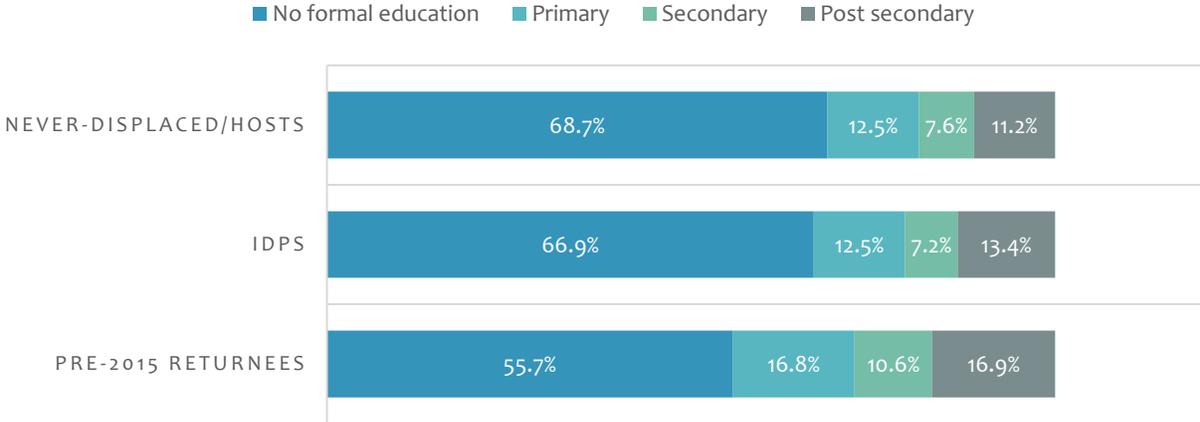
Figure 2: Literacy rates and rates of formal education among pre-2015 returnees, IDPs, and hosts, by location



Source: Staff calculations based on ALCS 2013-14

With well above 50 percent of the population in each group having no formal education, overall educational attainment was very low among all groups. Pre-2015 returnees showed the highest educational levels, with almost 45 percent reporting some form of education (Figure 3⁶). About 44 percent of returnees had accessed at least primary education, followed by 33 percent of IDPs and 31 percent of hosts. Hosts had the worst educational outcomes – almost 70 percent of all hosts had no formal education, 12.5 percent had primary, 7.6 percent secondary, and 11.2 percent post-secondary education.

Figure 3: Educational attainment among pre-2015 returnees, IDPs, and hosts

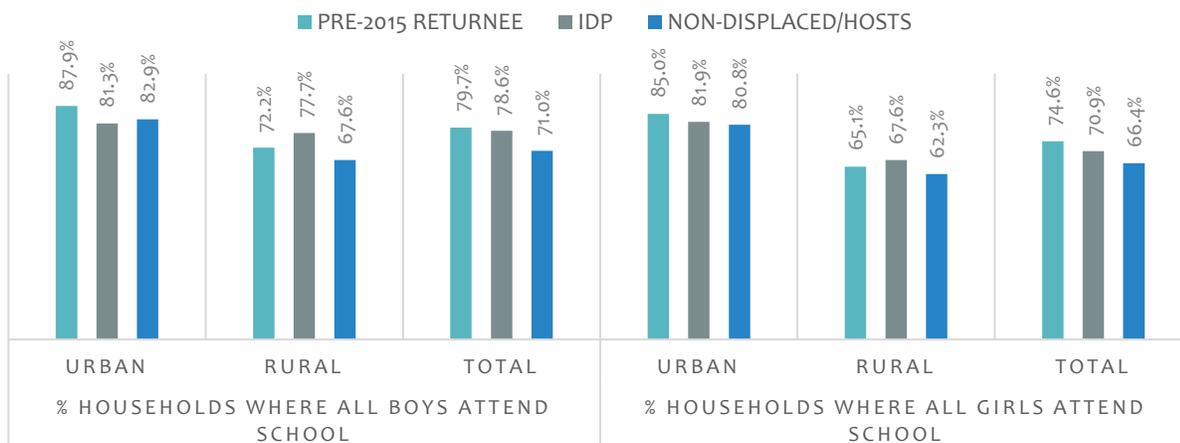


Source: Staff calculations based on ALCS 2013-14

There were significant gaps in educational attainment between urban and rural areas and between men and women. About 60 percent of pre-2015 returnees in urban areas had some formal education, compared to 50 percent of IDPs and hosts. In rural areas, roughly a third of pre-2015 returnees had formal education, compared to a fourth of hosts. In urban areas, post-secondary school completion rates for pre-2015 returnees, IDPs, and hosts were 25 percent, 20 percent, and 22 percent, respectively. Pre-2015 returnees in urban areas were also more likely to send their girls to school (Figure 4).

⁶ The rate of formal schooling in Figure 2 refers to whether an individual has “ever attended school” and can differ from the “no schooling” category in Figure 3, particularly in cases where an individual attended Islamic school (which is classified as no education in Figure 3).

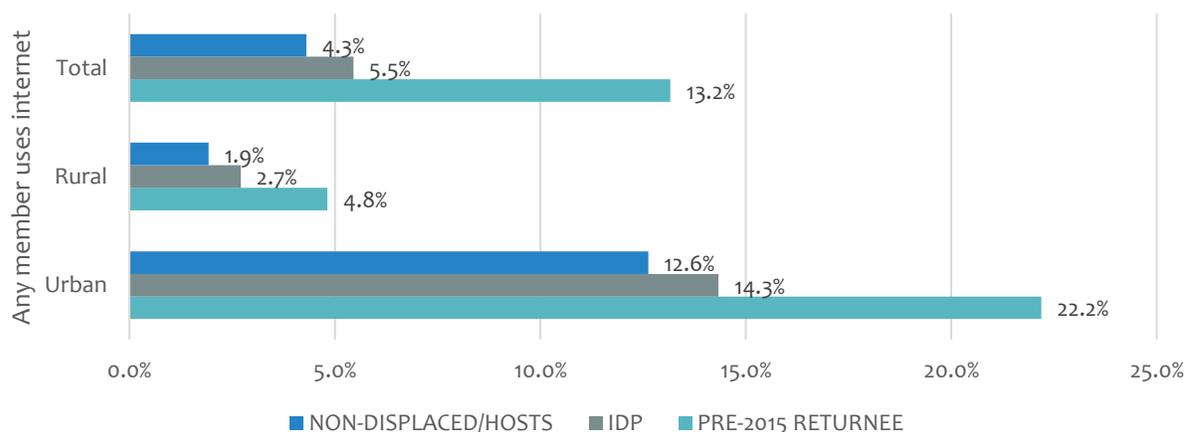
Figure 4: Percentage of households sending all boys (left panel) and all girls (right panel) to school, by urban and rural areas, 2013-14



Source: Staff calculations based on ALCS 2013-14

One of the most distinctive findings concerning the pre-2015 returnee population was their rate of Internet usage, presumably linked to their higher urbanization and educational attainment. Returnees were twice as likely to use the Internet as members of the other groups: about 13.2 percent of returnees used the Internet, compared to 5.5 percent of hosts and 4.3 percent of IDPs (Figure 5). Urban-rural disparities were again salient.

Figure 5: Household Internet usage, by displacement group, 2013-14



Source: Staff calculations based on ALCS 2013-14

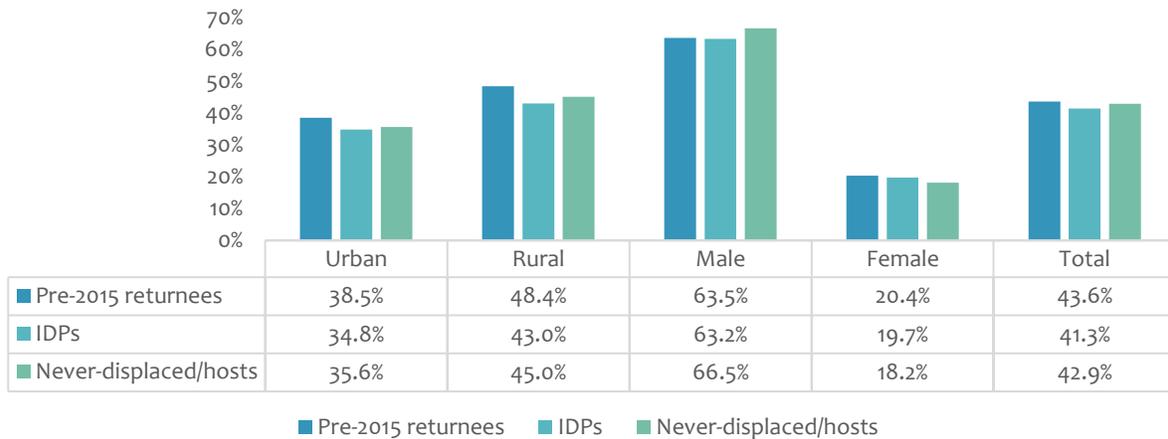
Labor market outcomes

While labor market outcomes were very poor in general, IDPs had the lowest employment rates, while pre-2015 returnees and hosts reported higher rates of employment. Employment sectors varied across displacement groups. IDPs and non-displaced persons were more likely to be employed in agriculture, while pre-2015 returnees were more likely to be employed in construction and the service sector. Pre-2015

returnees tended to hold the most secure jobs, though access to secure, salaried jobs was low across all groups.

Observed differences in labor market outcomes across hosts, IDPs, and pre-2015 returnees were consistent with the differences in their education levels and rates of urbanization. On average, pre-2015 returnees had the highest employment-to-population ratio, 43.6 percent, while IDPs had the lowest ratio, 41.3 percent. Comparatively better outcomes for returnees were driven by their higher urban employment rates (38.5 percent) and the higher employment among returnee women (20.4 percent) (Figure 6).

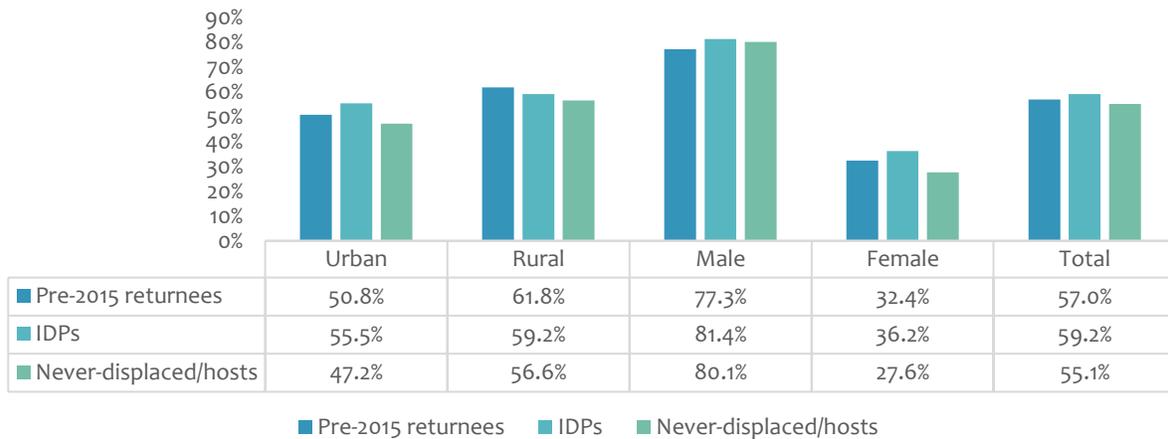
Figure 6: Employment-to-population ratios, by displacement group, sex, and location



Source: Staff calculations based on ALCS 2013-14

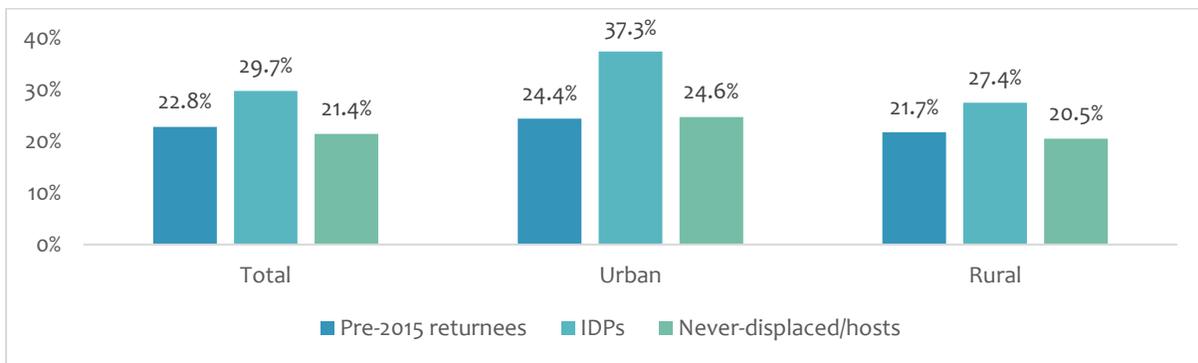
Interestingly, IDPs had the lowest employment-to-population ratios but the highest labor force participation rates (Figure 7). Higher participation in the labor force did not necessarily translate into higher employment. Indeed, 30 percent of IDPs in the labor force were unemployed (Figure 8). This was particularly stark in urban areas, where IDP unemployment stood at almost 40 percent. Displaced populations (returnees and IDPs) had higher unemployment and underemployment rates compared to hosts, an indication that finding work for displaced populations was challenging.

Figure 7: Labor force participation rates, by displacement group, sex, and location



Source: Staff calculations based on ALCS 2013-14

Figure 8: Unemployment rates, by displacement group and location



Source: Staff calculations based on ALCS 2013-14

Employment sectors varied across the three groups, driven in part by different urbanization rates. On average, while around 45 percent of IDPs and hosts were employed in the agriculture sector, the corresponding share for pre-2015 returnees was less than one-third (Figure 9). In terms of non-agricultural employment, one-quarter of pre-2015 returnees were employed in manufacturing, including construction. This sector alone accounted for between 13 and 14 percent of employment across all groups. Over 40 percent of pre-2015 returnees were employed in the service sector.

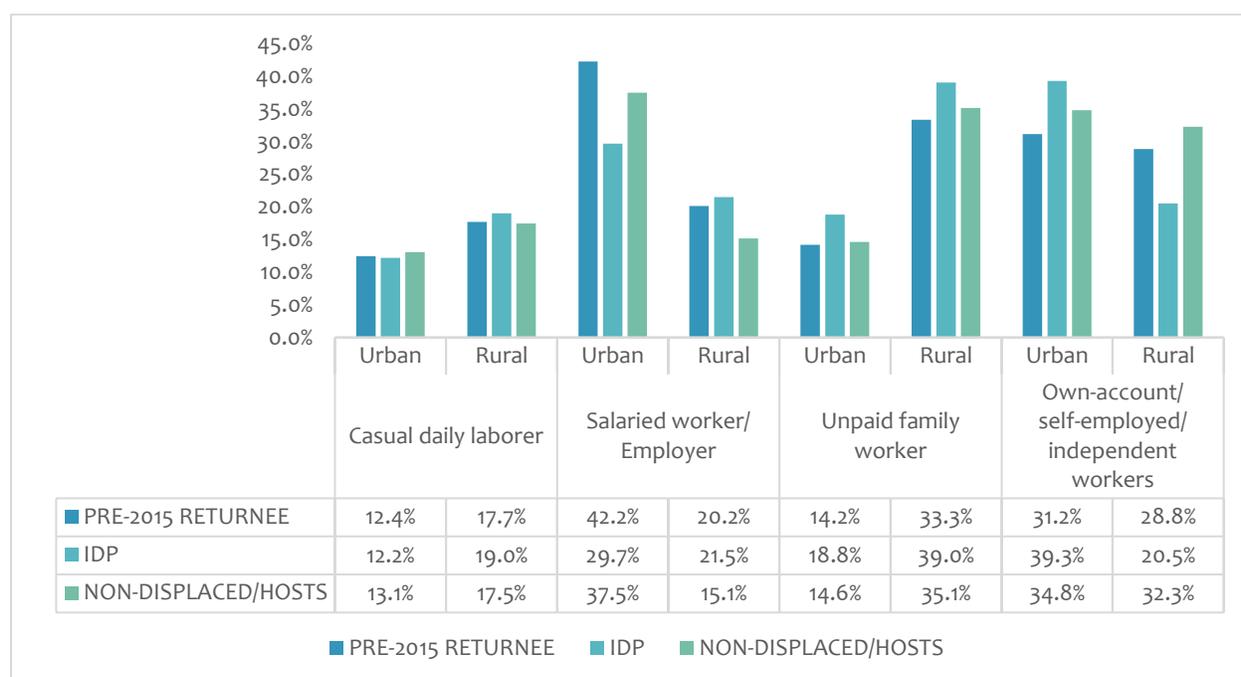
Figure 9: Sectors of employment, by displacement group and location



Source: Staff calculations based on ALCS 2013-14

In general, access to secure, salaried jobs was low across all groups. The highest rates, around 30 percent, were among pre-2015 returnees, compared to 23 percent among IDPs and 19 percent among hosts. IDPs had the most insecure jobs: 18 percent worked as casual daily labor and 35 percent as unpaid family workers. In contrast, among pre-2015 returnees, casual labor accounted for 16 percent of jobs, self-employment for 30 percent, and unpaid family work for 26 percent. The elevated overall prevalence of unpaid family work across the three groups was primarily driven by high rates of such work in rural areas. Among urban populations, pre-2015 returnees had a higher rate of employment as salaried workers or employers (about 42 percent) than did urban IDPs (30 percent) and urban hosts (38 percent) (Figure 10). On the other hand, urban IDPs had the highest rate of employment as own-account, self-employed, and independent workers.

Figure 10: Employment types, by displacement group and location



Source: Staff calculations based on ALCS 2013-14

Living conditions

Pre-2015 returnees had better dwelling characteristics and higher access to infrastructure services relative to other groups, in line with their higher urbanization rates. However, rates of home ownership were lower among returnees. Non-displaced/hosts had the highest rates of ownership of dwellings and agricultural land.

Access to basic services

In general, pre-2015 returnees were better off than IDPs and hosts on a range of indicators on access to infrastructure services (Table 1). For example, over 60 percent of pre-2015 returnees had access to improved sanitation, compared to 50 percent of IDPs and less than 40 percent of hosts. Almost 82 percent of pre-2015 returnees had access to safe drinking water, compared to only 50 percent of IDPs and 62 percent of hosts. On average, IDPs (especially IDPs in rural areas) faced the most severe problems accessing safe drinking water. Only about 11 percent of IDPs had piped drinking water, compared to about 14 percent of hosts and 21 percent of pre-2015 returnees. Access to grid electricity was rather low across all groups, but pre-2015 returnees' rate of connection to the grid was twice as high as that of IDPs and hosts (Table 1).

Table 1: Access to services, by displacement group and location

	PRE-2015 RETURNEE			IDP			NON-DISPLACED/HOSTS		
	Urban	Rural	Total	Urban	Rural	Total	Urban	Rural	Total
MAIN SOURCE OF DRINKING WATER -PIPED WATER	38.7%	5.5%	21.4%	31.8%	4.9%	11.2%	37.7%	6.6%	13.5%
TOILET TYPE -FLUSH/IMPROVED	47.2%	5.7%	25.6%	29.5%	2.7%	9.0%	37.2%	3.7%	11.1%

% ACCESS TO IMPROVED SANITATION	90.4%	38.3%	63.3%	74.1%	42.9. 7%	50.3%	74.5%	25.7%	36.5%
% ACCESS TO SAFE DRINKING WATER	94.7%	69.8%	81.8%	74.1%	42.2%	49.7%	91.1%	53.3%	61.7%
% ACCESS TO GRID ELECTRICITY	93.8%	16.1%	53.4%	84.7%	9.0%	26.9%	88.1%	10.7%	27.9%

Source: Staff calculations based on ALCS 2013-14

Pre-2015 returnees not only had greater access to safe drinking water, but the distance they traveled to obtain safe drinking water was much shorter than for IDPs and hosts, on average. 63.4 percent of all returnees reported having safe drinking water at their home, compared to 35.2 and 40.4 percent for IDPs and hosts, respectively. Only about a third of returnees had to walk to a safe drinking water source, with about 28 percent having safe drinking water within 15 minutes' walking distance and fewer than 10 percent having to walk more than 15 minutes to reach a safe water source. Again, there was a large urban/rural divide, with people residing in rural areas having to negotiate much longer distances to obtain safe drinking water.

Table 2: Distance to safe drinking water, by displacement group and location

	AT HOME			<15 MINUTES WALK			≥15 MINUTES WALK		
	Urban	Rural	Total	Urban	Rural	Total	Urban	Rural	Total
PRE-2015 RETURNEE	84.4%	43.9%	63.4%	12.9%	42.8%	28.4%	2.7%	13.3%	8.2%
IDP	65.4%	25.8%	35.2%	22.6%	52.3%	45.3%	12.0%	21.9%	19.6%
NON-DISPLACED/HOSTS	77.6%	29.7%	40.4%	18.2%	47.9%	41.3%	4.2%	22.4%	18.3%

Source: Staff calculations based on ALCS 2013-14

Dwelling characteristics

One indicator on which pre-2015 returnees lagged behind IDPs and hosts was dwelling ownership. About 91 percent of hosts owned their dwelling, compared to 86 percent of IDPs and 80 percent of pre-2015 returnees (Table 3). On the other hand, returnees had the highest share of single-family homes or part of shared houses, and their dwellings tended to be newer. Nearly 38 percent of returnees' dwellings had been constructed within the past ten years.

Table 3: Dwelling characteristics, by displacement group and location

	PRE-2015 RETURNEE			IDP			NON-DISPLACED/HOSTS		
	Urban	Rural	Total	Urban	Rural	Total	Urban	Rural	Total
% DWELLINGS OWNED	68.3%	90.9%	80.0%	72.6%	89.8%	85.8%	77.1%	94.6%	90.7%
SINGLE FAMILY HOUSE/PART OF SHARED HOUSE	95.4%	94.0%	94.7%	84.9%	84.6%	84.7%	95.1%	91.9%	92.6%
DWELLING CONSTRUCTED <10 YEARS AGO	38.8%	37.0%	37.8%	38.7%	31.1%	32.7%	35.6%	32.5%	33.2%
MAIN CONSTRUCTION MATERIAL OF WALL - FIRED BRICK/STONE/CONCRETE	35.6%	7.9%	21.2%	29.9%	4.2%	10.3%	34.1%	3.2%	10.1%
MAIN SOURCE OF COOKING FUEL - GAS/ELECTRICITY	87.2%	20.7%	52.6%	68.5%	10.7%	24.4%	72.8%	8.5%	22.8%
MAIN SOURCE OF HEATING - GAS/COAL/FIREWOOD/CHARCOAL	93.1%	51.0%	71.2%	88.0%	45.5%	55.6%	88.5%	39.4%	50.3%

Source: Staff calculations based on ALCS 2013-14

While their home ownership rates were lower, pre-2015 returnees lived in dwellings of better quality in terms of construction materials. About one-fifth of returnees lived in houses with durable wall materials, compared to 10 percent of IDPs and hosts.

Compared to other groups, urban returnees enjoyed superior access on many additional indicators, such as main source of cooking fuel, heating, drinking water, and type of toilet. For instance, 87.2 percent of urban pre-2015 returnees had gas or electricity as their main source of cooking fuel, compared to 68.5 percent of urban IDPs and 72.8 percent of urban hosts. In rural settings, the corresponding numbers dropped to 20.7 percent for pre-2015 returnees, 10.7 percent for IDPs, and 8.5 percent for hosts.

Land ownership

Land ownership tended to be low overall. Fewer than half of Afghans own or have access to agricultural land. In rural areas, on ALCS 2013-14, hosts reported the highest rate of ownership/access to agricultural land (59.9 percent). Among displaced households, a larger share of rural pre-2015 returnees than of rural IDPs reported owning or having access to agricultural land, including irrigated land. Conditional on ownership, rural pre-2015 returnees had larger plots of irrigated land, on average, than did either IDPs or hosts in rural settings (Table 4).

Table 4: Ownership of land, irrigated land, and jeribs of irrigated land, by displacement group and location

	OWN OR HAVE ACCESS TO AGRICULTURAL LAND			OWN IRRIGATED LAND			AVERAGE JERIBS OF IRRIGATED LAND		
	Urban	Rural	Total	Urban	Rural	Total	Urban	Rural	Total
PRE-2015 RETURNEE	18.9%	58.2%	39.3%	18.2%	45.0%	32.1%	0.85	2.91	1.92
IDP	21.1%	54.8%	46.9%	15.6%	39.0%	33.5%	3.30	2.00	2.31
NON-DISPLACED/HOSTS	17.4%	59.9%	50.4%	14.8%	43.4%	37.0%	1.82	2.37	2.25

Source: Staff calculations based on ALCS 2013-14

Indebtedness and asset ownership

While rates of indebtedness were high across all groups, displaced households (returnees and IDPs) were more likely than hosts to have debt. In line with their better education, labor market outcomes, and higher urbanization, pre-2015 returnees reported the highest rates of ownership of non-agricultural assets.

About 64.2 and 68.8 percent of pre-2015 returnee and IDP households, respectively, had outstanding debt, while less than 60 percent of host households were indebted (Table 5). Conditional on having some debt, urban returnees had the highest debt and debt per capita, while rural IDPs had the lowest outstanding debt. Overall, the incidence of indebtedness was very high.

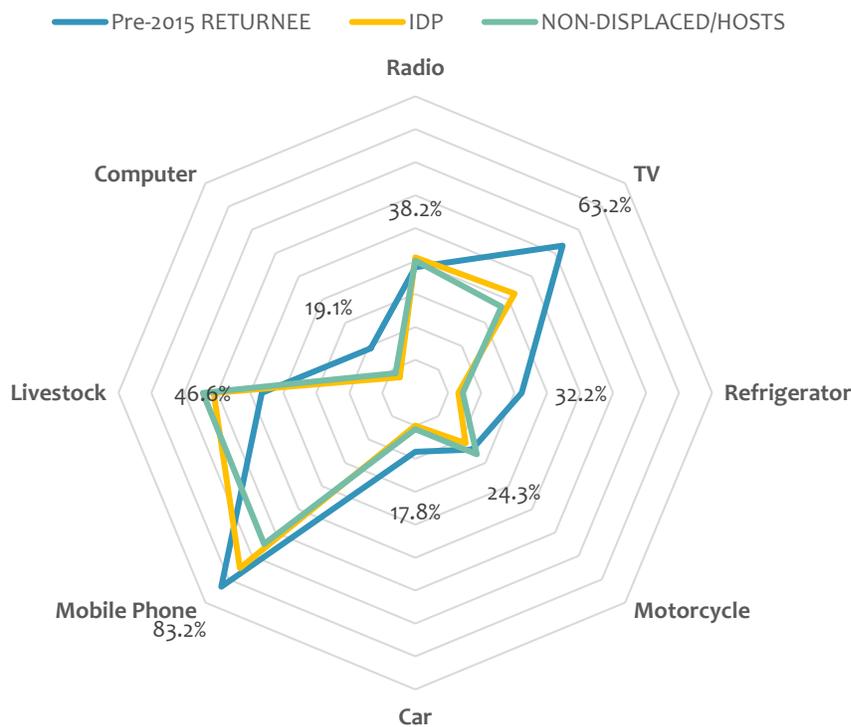
Table 5: Debt, by displacement group

	HH HAS OUTSTANDING DEBT			VALUE OF HH OUTSTANDING DEBT (IN AFS)			DEBT PER CAPITA		
	Urban	Rural	Total	Urban	Rural	Total	Urban	Rural	Total
PRE-2015 RETURNEE	65.1%	63.3%	64.2%	121,286	59,048	88,920	20,353	8,509	14,194
IDP	69.1%	68.7%	68.8%	93,148	45,485	56,674	14,046	6,960	8,624
NON-DISPLACED/HOSTS	57.7%	60.5%	59.9%	97,349	51,525	61,702	14,893	7,405	9,068

Source: Staff calculations based on ALCS 2013-14. HH = household.

Clear differences separated the displacement groups in terms of asset ownership. This applies especially to non-agricultural assets, which were more prevalent among pre-2015 returnees, particularly relative to hosts. Returnee households were more likely to own computers, TVs, refrigerators, mobile phones, and cars (Figure 11).

Figure 11: Asset ownership, by displacement group



Source: Staff calculations based on ALCS 2013-14

4. Conclusions

- Afghanistan confronts one of the world’s most protracted and complex population displacement challenges. Millions of Afghans have returned from neighboring countries since 2002, and growing numbers of Afghan people are internally displaced.
- Amidst deepening insecurity and economic fragility, refugee returns and internal displacement strain public services in Afghanistan and intensify competition for scarce economic opportunities. This affects not only displaced people, but all Afghans.
- Effective management of the displacement challenge will be critical for Afghanistan’s economic and political future. A robust policy response requires understanding the specific socio-economic conditions and needs of displaced people and of the non-displaced.
- Reliable socio-economic data on displacement in Afghanistan have been difficult to obtain. The nationally and provincially representative Afghanistan Living Conditions Survey (ALCS) is a valuable source of evidence for policy. This note has presented socio-economic profiles of returned refugees, IDPs, and non-displaced hosts in Afghanistan, based on the findings of the ALCS 2013-14.

- The survey's most salient finding was of widespread socio-economic hardship affecting most segments of Afghan society at the time of ALCS 2013-14. Results show that low educational attainment, poor living conditions, limited coverage of basic services, high household debt levels, and inadequate access to stable employment were prevalent across the Afghan population.
- ALCS 2013-14 also revealed meaningful differences among population groups. On most socio-economic variables, sharp urban/rural and gender disparities were found. Additionally, the survey showed substantial and sometimes surprising differences in socio-economic outcomes among returned refugees, IDPs, and Afghans who had not been displaced.
- Returnees were more urbanized than IDPs and hosts, and their higher urbanization was associated with relatively better outcomes on a range of socio-economic measures. For example, returnees had more exposure to formal education. They enjoyed better dwelling characteristics and greater access to infrastructure services than the other displacement groups, on average. Returnees also had the highest employment-to-population ratio among the three groups. On the other hand, returnees suffered higher indebtedness, on average, and were less likely to own their own homes, particularly in comparison to hosts.
- Among the three displacement groups, IDPs experienced the least favorable outcomes on many measures. For example, they reported the highest unemployment rates and the lowest rates of access to many infrastructural services, including piped water and improved sanitation. Relative to returnee and host households, a higher proportion of IDP households had debt. However, IDPs' debt per capita was lower than that of the other groups.
- The finding that returning former refugees demonstrated superior outcomes on a range of socio-economic indicators, compared with IDPs and the non-displaced, may be surprising. The factors influencing returnees' better outcomes need to be better understood. Higher urbanization in itself may confer advantages, relative to the population at large. However, even when we compare only urban populations, returnees still reported, on average, unusually positive outcomes. The group of returnees considered here were part of a largely voluntary return after the fall of the Taliban, and their characteristics and outcomes may differ markedly from subsequent returns. Repeat studies will be crucial to determine whether this pattern persists with more recent waves of returns, and to consider implications.
- In general, over time, analysis of ALCS data may be useful in identifying examples of "positive deviance" in Afghanistan's socio-economic landscape: that is, groups that have performed unusually well, despite adversity, and whose success may hold lessons for others.
- Results from the 2013-14 ALCS provide a valuable picture of socio-economic conditions among Afghanistan's displaced and non-displaced people at a specific time-point. These data will yield their full benefit when they can be compared in series with findings from subsequent iterations of the survey, giving a sense of how socio-economic outcomes are evolving.
- The findings summarized in this note establish a baseline against which future iterations of the ALCS and other studies can measure changes both among and within displacement groups. Monitoring such changes over time and understanding their causes will be critical to shape policies that can benefit all Afghans, while addressing the specific needs of vulnerable constituencies.

