



Migration and development dynamics in Behsud, Afghanistan

Behsud is a peri-urban area shaped by international mobility. Increased return migration led to major expansion. Deteriorating security and high unemployment rates mean international migration was a critical lifeline.

This snapshot from August 2021 found that most surveyed young adults (91%) consider it difficult to earn a living and feed a family.

Nearly one-third (30%) of young adults have seriously considered migrating internationally in the past year.

Due to few regular routes, irregular migration is high. Most young adults (83%) know someone who has been deported – or have themselves been deported.



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Photo: Tahmina Akakhil for MIGNEX.

Behsud is a peri-urban area on the outskirts of Nangahar city, Afghanistan. The district, which contains 40 main villages, spans both sides of the Kabul River.

Between 2009 and 2018, mass in-migration of returnees from Pakistan and internally displaced people led to urban growth, educational, and livelihood expansion. This was sustained by major reforms to social protection. Over two-fifths (41%) of surveyed young adults know of foreign development interventions in Behsud.

During MIGNEX data collection in June – July 2021, rapidly deteriorating security was a major concern. Increasingly, international out-migration was considered necessary for survival.

A lack of good job opportunities and high unemployment rates were longstanding concerns. Most young adults (91%) surveyed consider it difficult to earn a living and feed a family. Nearly three-quarters (73%) consider it very difficult to find a job in Behsud, one-quarter (25%) are engaged in casual work and one-fifth (20%) are unemployed.

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

This case study brief is based on fieldwork and survey data. The MIGNEX team also conducted research in Shahrake Mahdia and Shahrake Jabrael, and carried out a review of migration-relevant policies in Afghanistan.²

Migration from Behsud

International migration is common in Behsud. Nearly three-quarters (70%) of surveyed young adults have family or friends living abroad.

Around two-thirds (67%) of young adults surveyed know someone who has – or have themselves – been injured while migrating in the past five years. Nearly three-quarters (71%) know someone stuck in a different country

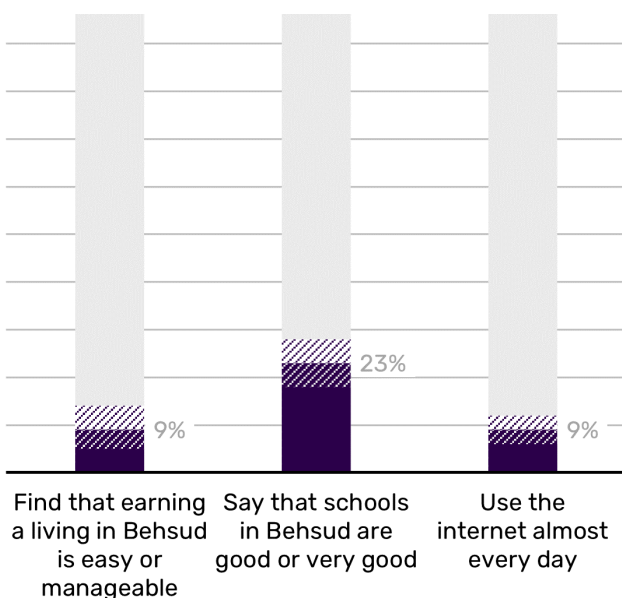


Figure 1. Indicators of development

Source: MIGNEX Survey. Hatched area: confidence interval.

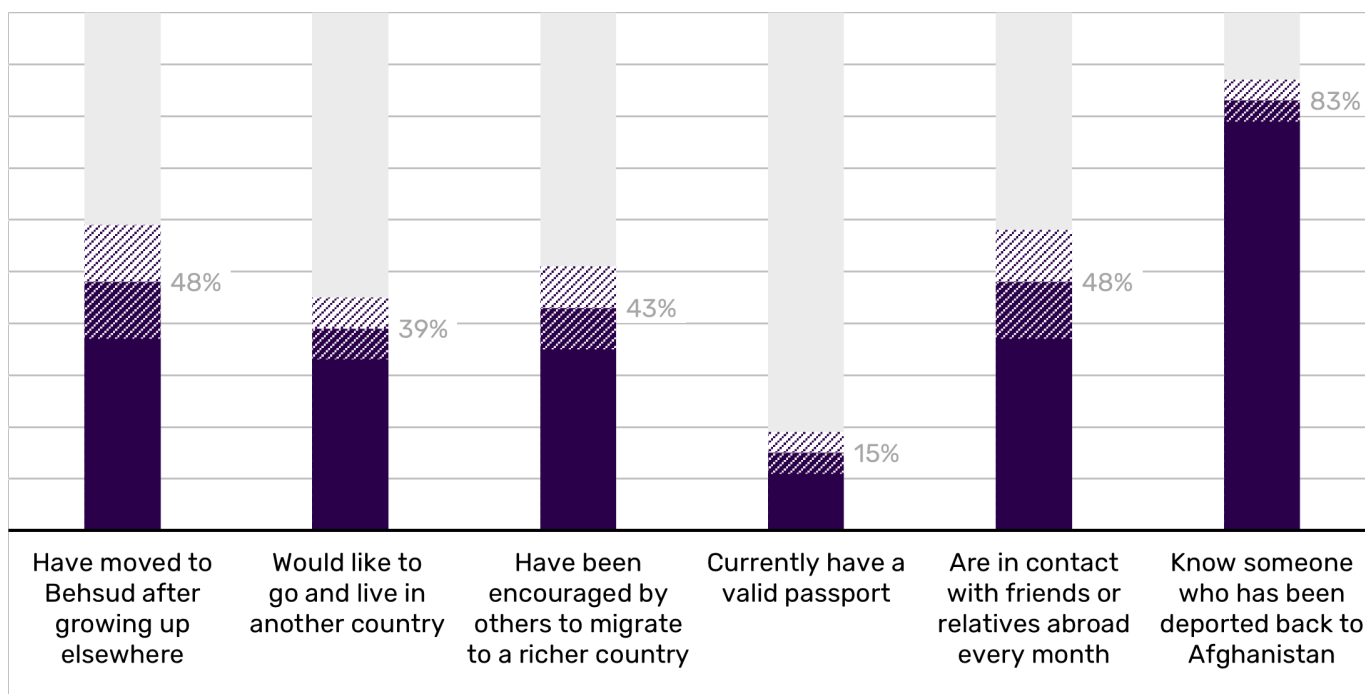


Figure 2. Indicators of migration dynamics

Source: MIGNEX survey. Hatched area: confidence interval.

than intended. Over half (55%) of surveyed young adults knew someone who has died on their journey to another country. Migration is also a major financial risk – people are required to sell their properties, cars and houses in order to travel.

However, young adults are prepared to accept the challenges, in the hope of a better life abroad: nearly one-third (30%) of young adults seriously considered migrating internationally in the past year. Over one-third (39%) of young adults prefer to leave Afghanistan in the next five years, and almost half (46%) expect to leave Afghanistan during this time.

Migration to Pakistan is most common, while those with greater financial resources migrated to Europe through Iran and Turkey – though regular migration routes are limited. Young adults reported have family and friends living in France (29%), Pakistan (24%), Turkey (24%) and Germany (22%).

Seasonal migration during the summer – mostly to other provinces in Afghanistan, sometimes to other countries – is also increasingly used as a coping strategy for extreme heat.

Migration aspirations

Overall, young adults expressed a lack of hope about their future in Behsud. Migration was viewed as necessary for survival.

Security – particularly ahead of the fall of Kabul – was a major factor. In early 2021, target killings of female midwives, journalists, vaccinators, and activists took place in Behsud. As such, the area was not considered safe for working women. Girls were also taken out of school due to these increasing security concerns.

Beyond this, migration aspirations have long been shaped by decade-long high unemployment rates and lack of good jobs, in addition to the livelihoods lost due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

International migration was a largely perceived as an unfortunate fact of life, and a

It is hard to find a job here, people are poor, security is getting worse day by day. Young people should go abroad to get higher education and return back to help develop their communities

Focus group participant

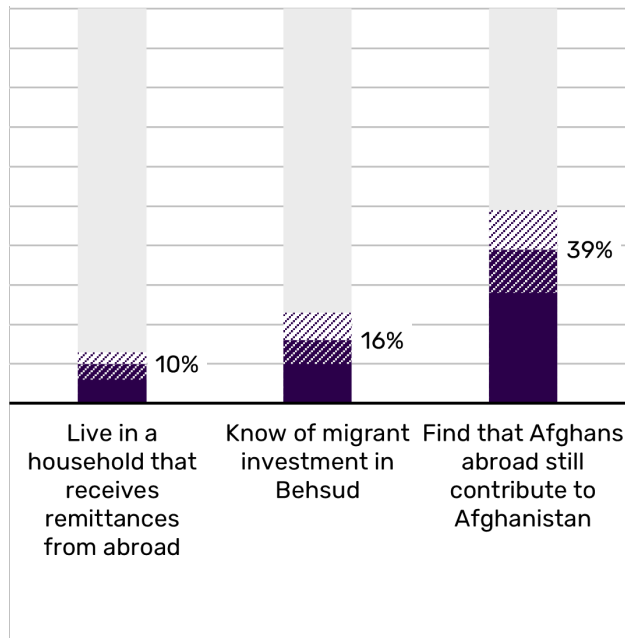


Figure 3. Migration–development interactions

Source: MIGNEX Survey. Hatched area: confidence interval.

critical lifeline for young adults, and the community.

In- and return migration

Since 2019 there has been significant internal displacement in Behsud due to conflict. Over one-quarter (26%) of young adults are internal migrants, many from the Laghman, Noristan and Kunar regions.

There is limited social protection for IDPs in Behsud, however; most live in rented houses or in tents in deserts, and many without shelter and food. This lack of livelihoods and infrastructure increases the likelihood of migration outflows.

Behsud is also host to a large population of returnees from neighbouring countries, and deportees from Turkey. Some 22% of young adults surveyed are international migrants who grew up in another country, mostly

Pakistan (99%). Most young adults (83%) know someone who had been deported – or had themselves been deported – from abroad. Returnees often live in extreme poverty and carried out the hardest jobs.

Links between migration and development

International migrants are often in contact with their families, relatives and the wider community. Nearly three-quarters (72%) of young adults have monthly contact with migrant family or friends.

Nearly one-fifth (16%) know of migrant investments, most of which came from migrants who had settled in the United States or Europe. This included investments for the development of the community, such as mosques, roads, and deep-water wells to combat drought. Of those young adult households with a migrant family member, friend or relative abroad (70%), 14% had received remittances in the past year. However, few (1%) stated that remittances were the most important source of income for the household.

Since the fall of Kabul, heightened insecurity and danger for those who remained in Behsud – and those on the move – continue to impact these transnational support networks, including inflows of remittances.

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 Tahmina Akakhil and Jawid Hussanzai in July 2021. A face-to-face survey of 500 randomly selected residents was conducted by Samuel Hall in June – July 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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