

An Overview Of The Repatriation Process Of Employees After Completing Education In Overseas: A Case Study From Afghanistan

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the reintegration of Afghans who returned to the country from abroad and who have skills, and their reintegration in the context of professional reintegration, gender differences, economic outcomes, and psychological adaptation from 2024 to 2026. Since 2021, Afghanistan has experienced an increase in return migration following a period of economic downturn, institutional weaknesses, and worsening labour-market conditions, which has posed challenges for the efficient use of returning human capital. This study uses a qualitative review methodology, using evidence from recent peer-reviewed literature, institutional reports and policy documents to identify the main structural barriers to returnees reintegration. The results suggest that a lack of institutional capacity, a failure to adhere to merit-based appointments and low recognition of foreign qualifications have substantial negative effects on access to formal employment. Underemployment and the mismatch in skills are further exacerbated by the lack of international support, less investment in the private sector, and high unemployment rates. Due to certain restrictions in education, mobility and employment, the gender gap in economic participation is much higher among returnees. Furthermore, psychological distress and job insecurity were related to a re-emergence of intentions to migrate, indicating ongoing concerns about political and economic security. The evidence broadly shows the potential benefits of brain circulation giving way to brain waste, and for skilled human capital to be underutilized. The paper makes the case for institutional reform, employment based on merit, recognition of foreign qualifications, inclusive labour markets, psychosocial support, and international engagement that is sustained to transform return migration into a means of human-capital development and economic recovery.

Keywords: Employees, Human resource, Overseas Education, Public Sector, Repatriation.

INTRODUCTION

It is estimated that since August 2021, Afghanistan has been experiencing an extensive political, economic, and social change, altering migration and return patterns (World Bank, 2024). The change of power resulted in the reorganization of institutions, the shrinkage of the economy, and massive displacement, which manifested as a major impact on outbound immigration and re-immigration (UNDP, 2023). Over the past few years, specifically between 2023 and 2026, millions of Afghans have been sent back to their homeland by the neighboring countries, including Pakistan and Iran, mostly under coercive or forceful pressure, due to new migration enactment policies (UNHCR, 2025). This massive backlash has happened in a climate of financial instability and inadequate job creation and diminishing foreign aid

(UN OCHA, 2025). In the past, the movement of educated and skilled Afghans has been viewed through the paradigm of brain circulation, where acquired knowledge in other countries could be relevant to national rebuilding and development of institutions (OECD, 2023). Nevertheless, the existing realities indicate that there is a more complicated dynamic. Professional reintegration is less likely due to poor labor market absorption, low-level activity of the private sector, and restructuring of the administration (World Bank, 2025). Meanwhile, the changing norms of governance and patterns of recruitment have an impact on the access to public sector jobs, which are typically based on political loyalty and informal circles rather than qualifications (SIGAR, 2024). Gender aspects are other factors that make the reintegration process difficult. The access of women to secondary education, higher education, and

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most of the formal job sectors has been limited to a very small range, which has limited the career opportunities of female returning workers (UN Women, 2025; UNAMA, 2025). Such structural impediments combine in the wider economic constraint, leading to high underemployment and skill mismatch between the returnees. Alongside the institutional and economic issues, a new problem of psychological reintegration has become highly important. Uncertainty and lack of social services and weak livelihood opportunities are many of the returnees' causes for long-term stability and future motives to migrate (IOM, 2024). The current research, hence, looks into the obstacles to successful repatriation of skilled Afghan returnees between 2024 and 2026 in terms of professional reintegration, gender gap, economic effects, and psychological adaptation and adjustment in the existing governance and socio-economic framework.

LITERATURE REVIEW: AFGHAN OVERSEAS-EDUCATED EMPLOYEES

1. The Crisis of Human Capital

In the past, overseas-educated Afghans returning home were regarded as one of the strategic pillars of national development, since policy makers thought that skilled returnees would reinforce governance, education and economic systems (Hashemi & Kocalar, 2025). During the year's period after the shift in the governance in Afghanistan in 2021, a significant portion of the educated Afghans having studied overseas started to think about the homecoming as part of the overall reconstruction activities (Hashemi and Kocalar, 2025). The situation of repatriation has shifted radically since late 2023, however, when both Pakistan and Iran started to institute extensive policies of repatriation and deportation, which have displaced millions of people in Afghanistan (UNHCR, 2025a; UNHCR, 2025b).

In late 2025, over 5 million Afghans had come back to the country as refugees in neighbouring nations, and this overburdened the already stretched aid and social-service systems of Afghanistan (Reuters, 2026). A lot of this movement has happened reluctantly instead of being a calculated professional decision, and converted what could have been a controlled insertion of skilled labour force into a general demographic catastrophe with short-term

humanitarian influence (UNHCR, 2025a; The New Arab, 2026). Large numbers of the returnees come back with little documentation, scanty resources, and access to minimal services like housing, education, or health services, which makes returning to work and employment opportunities complex to both the skilled and non-skilled populations (The New Arab, 2026; UN Women, 2025). It has also been reported that Iranian returnees are more likely to be educated than Pakistani, also it has been noted that the overall economic prospects are low and the poverty levels are higher among the returnees (Tehran Times, 2025). The tremendous inflow is associated with a shrinkage of per-capita income, loss of remittances, and strain on the national infrastructure, showing the mismatch of the potential human capital and the national ability to uptake it (UN in Afghanistan, 2025). By the end of early 2026, the environment of returned educated Afghans is still socially and economically weak, accompanied by a lack of institutional preparation to use their skills to develop the country on a sustainable basis (Reuters, 2026).

2. Theoretical Framework: Brain Circulation vs. Brain Waste

The classical notion of brain drain has developed in the new scholarly discourse into more dynamic concept of skilled migration, especially through the concept of brain circulation, which focuses on how talent is moved across the border and how it can help in development (World Bank, 2023). The newest literature claims that, in case migrants retain transnational connections, knowledge exchange and investment flows may have a positive impact on sending nations (Mobarak et al., 2025). Nevertheless, the benefits of brain circulation are not always realized in weak states and those inclined to conflicts because of poor institutional capacity and low labor market uptake (OECD, 2024). In the context of post-2021 Afghanistan, the condition of that country has become more often referred to as brain waste by the scholars, in which case the educated people cannot apply their qualifications to productive use (UNDP, 2024).

Recent statistics of the 2024-2025 period demonstrate the increasing lack of alignment between the capabilities of the returnees and the form of the local economy (ILO, 2024). A large number of Afghans

with training in information technology, engineering, public policy, and gender studies turn back to a sector in the labor market that does not have an internationalized private sector and has significant regulatory and financial restrictions (World Bank, 2024). This structural deficiency results in what scholarly investigators refer to as a technical vacuum, wherein advanced skills cannot be successfully brought to bear (OECD, 2024). Consequently, the well-educated returning individuals often find themselves underemployed, taking up clerical, informal or temporary administrative positions that are not related to their area of specialization (ILO, 2024). Not only does underemployment decrease the income of an individual, but it also harms long-term productivity and innovation possibilities on a national level (UNDP, 2024).

Meanwhile, institutional depth of ministries and universities has decreased considerably due to the exodus of academicians, civil servants, and professionals since 2021 (World Bank, 2023). In the 2025 Afghanistan Development Update, it is pointed out that the weakened institutions of the population do not have financial resources and technical leadership that will help them to successfully integrate the returning experts (World Bank, 2025). As a result, people, despite having a higher degree and international experience, are facing a lack of policy space, limited funding, and weak governance systems (UNDP, 2024). This trend is an example of the depletion of human capital as opposed to the increase in human capital as the structural environment does not allow knowledge to be translated into developmental consequences (OECD, 2024). In that regard, the experience of Afghanistan is indicative of a transition of the idealistic promise of brain circulation to the actuality of brain waste in the conditions of the institutional insufficiency (Mobarak et al., 2025).

3. Barriers to Effective Repatriation (2024–2026)

This is due to the fact that since August 2021, the environment of Afghan returnees in the period 2024–2026 has been defined by the profound political, economic, and social changes (World Bank, 2024). The lack of international legitimacy of the de facto authorities has curtailed the international interaction of Afghanistan and lowered access to international

financial networks, which has a direct impact on institutional coordination and professional accreditation procedures (International Crisis Group, 2023). The lack of regulatory systems and partnerships with other universities and professional organizations make the verification and accreditation of foreign degrees problematic (UNESCO, 2023). The fragility of these institutions also makes international-trained Afghans difficult to reintegrate into the local system by making it hard to recognize their qualifications (World Bank, 2025).

Another limitation to successful repatriation during the current time is economic barriers (UNDP, 2024). Since 2021, the economy of Afghanistan shrank drastically, and despite the fact that some slight stabilization process was observed, the job creation is very minimal (World Bank, 2024). According to a 2025 development update, youth unemployment is still at an extremely high level, with the incapability of almost a quarter of the young Afghans to find stable employment (World Bank, 2025). Returnees thus fight over a dwindling number of jobs especially in non-governmental organizations and the shrunk civil service sector (ILO, 2024). It has also caused the shutdown of numerous humanitarian initiatives due to the decreased funding of international aid since 2023, which additionally reduces the number of jobs available to skilled professionals (UN OCHA, 2025). The income earned by the majority of rural returnees is in most cases based on agriculture or informal jobs, and in most cases, they are not close to comparable qualifications (FAO, 2024). Most returnees also face legal and documentation issues, particularly those returning under the Illegal foreigners Repatriation plan by Pakistan that was launched in late 2023 (Human Rights Watch, 2024). Several Afghans have come back in large numbers in a sudden manner, most without savings, property, and full documentation of education or employment records (Relief Web, 2025). Loss of documents is an additional problem since it makes the access to public services, banking, and formal employment registration within Afghanistan more complicated (UNHCR, 2025). Secondly, poor administrative institutions within the nation slow down the identity checking and credentialing systems (UNDP, 2024).

One of the greatest structural barriers that deter successful reintegration is still gender-based (UN

Women, 2025). Despite the results of the public surveys that state that a solid majority of the Afghans still support the access of girls to education, the limitations of the female secondary and further education persist up to 2026 (UNAMA, 2025). Most of the public institutions and some parts of the private economy also do not allow women to work, except in some of the few sectors including health (UN Women, 2025). These measures present a professional dead-end to the female returnees who received higher education in foreign countries and cannot practice in their professions when returning home (Human Rights Watch, 2024). Male chauvinistic cultural expectations also limit the movement of women and their free economic involvement in various provinces (UNAMA, 2025). The successful repatriation in Afghanistan is further limited by the changing employment standards in the government institutions. Since 2021, people who took part in the armed struggle in the last 20 years tend to have priority in governmental recruitment even in cases when they lack formal education or technical skills specializing in the job (International Crisis Group, 2023). This trend changes the hiring system based on merit and constrained the potential of professionally trained returning nationals. Meanwhile, those who served in the past government are often not applied to work in the government because of the distrust in politics and background checks (UNAMA, 2025). Personal networks, word of mouth, and relationships based on loyalty have grown in the importance of recruitment processes making the hiring process less transparent (SIGAR, 2024). In some industries, the displayed familiarity with Islamic jurisprudence and connection to the current religious interpretation are also regarded as significant factors of employment, specifically in the administrative and judicial organizations (USIP, 2023). Collectively, these issues make it difficult to reintegrate professionals fairly. Combined, these institutional, economic, legal, and gender-based restrictions show that repatriation in Afghanistan between 2024 and 2026 would take place on a platform of structural weakness instead of systematic reintegration preparation (World Bank, 2025).

4. Psychological Reintegration and the "Double Shock"

The psychological reintegration has emerged in the form of a most multivariate aspect of the concept of

return to Afghanistan post-2021, especially when it comes to the criteria of forced or pressured repatriation (International Organization for Migration [IOM], 2024). The previous migration literature characterized the reverse culture shock as the adjustment hardship that happens when people go back home and have problems returning to the rules and expectations in the neighbourhood (OECD, 2023). Nevertheless, this process has today become what scholars are increasingly defining as a so-called double shock, which is both the shock of leaving and the structural reality of returning (Mixed Migration Centre, 2025).

The initial stage, as it is sometimes termed as a return shock, is akin to the emotional shock of immediate departure of the host countries like Pakistan and Iran (Human Rights Watch, 2024). Frequently, Afghans have returned either due to policies of deportation or high pressure by the law, abandoning jobs, schooling, and social reflections created in years (UNHCR, 2025). Such a sudden displacement creates anxiety, uncertainty, and loss of feelings particularly among educated youth that had professional ambitions in other countries (IOM, 2024). There are no reintegration services available and there is a lack of psychosocial support within Afghanistan because of inadequate funding and institutional limitations (World Health Organization [WHO], 2023). The second wave of the so-called double shock manifests itself following arrival in the case of the returnees, who face systemic economic disadvantage and social limitations (Mixed Migration Centre, 2025). To the female returnees, this shock is further compounded by what UN Women (2025) termed as a crystallizing system of constraints that restricts the involvement of women in secondary education, higher education, and most types of formal employment. Despite the surveys that showed that most communities still appreciate the importance of educating girls, the national policies have limited women in terms of movement and openness in most sectors (UNAMA, 2025). Consequently, the female counterparts studying in foreign countries tend to be hit by a short term loss of professional identity and scope of opportunity on reentry (UN Women, 2025).

According to recent studies conducted by the Mixed Migration Centre (2025), most of the returnees have said that they feel physically secure in the

neighbourhoods where they live, but only a small number of them, especially women, are sure about their future. Low chances of getting a job, social distancing, and rights ambiguity are additional factors that lead to a high degree of psychological strain (IOM, 2024). There is a lack of mental health care, and Afghanistan has both the lack of experts and access to counselling services (WHO, 2023). In this regard, numerous educated return migrants report that they would love to have further migration, considering re-migration as the sole source of professional and personal stability (Mixed Migration Centre, 2025).

5. Organizational Gaps and "Engine for Regeneration"

As of 2021, the work of the United Nations agencies and humanitarian organizations was trying to act as short-term shock absorbers to Afghan returning by providing emergency cash aid and basic reintegration aid (UNHCR, 2024). Nevertheless, in 2024/2025, due to drastic global funding cuts, the value and coverage of such cash grants were considerably reduced, and the initiative could not effectively promote sustainable reintegration (UN OCHA, 2025). Repeatedly, humanitarian plans on responding to Afghanistan have recorded significant gaps in funding which have compelled agencies to reduce livelihood, shelter, and protection services to returning people (UN OCHA, 2025). Consequently, the cash aid that was used to stabilize the families during several months, currently tends to meet only the immediate needs of food and transport (World Food Programme [WFP], 2024).

Even in the wake of emergency responses, there is no established professional reintegration system in Afghanistan that can align the skills that are acquired abroad with the local labor market (World Bank, 2024). Programs that encourage the establishment of small businesses, job placement, or vocation training have also been cut or halted because of decreasing donor pledges and operational limitations (UNDP, 2024). This source of funding disparity sabotages the potential of turning the returnees into catalysts of local economic revitalization (World Bank, 2024). Moreover, a significant portion of the returnees rely on incomplete or untrue data on the situation at jobs and policy limitations within Afghanistan to make a

decision on returning home (Mixed Migration Centre [MMC], 2024). The polls have indicated that false information regarding the employment opportunities and social liberties often results in a regrettable situation and a new wave of economic oppression in the nearest future (MMC, 2024). This information poverty also undermines the reintegration outcomes and amplifies the plans to continue migration (IOM, 2024).

6. Research Methodology

A qualitative review approach employed in this research to help to synthesize the various sources of data, considering the limited number of peer-reviewed academic journals in the country of Afghanistan since 2021. The methodology has been designed in a way that it gets to intersect the employee repatriation, the human capital theory and the present humanitarian crisis. The search strategy was developed in three broad levels of information in order to cover the current developments comprehensively. To begin with, the keywords search was conducted on academic databases (Google Scholar, Research Gate, and JSTOR) through keywords such as Repatriation Afghanistan 2025, Brain Waste Afghan Returnees, Socio-economic reintegration of overseas graduates and Post-2021 labour market Afghanistan. Second, institutional and grey literature since 2024 to 2026 were also consulted which constitutes reports by UNHCR (Post-Return Monitoring Surveys), the World Bank (Afghanistan Development Updates), the IMF, and UN Women that offers recent quantitative data on returnee demographics, employment practices, and gender constraints. Third, the current policy and legal frameworks, including de facto authority edicts like the August 2024 Law on Promotion of Virtue, were considered to evaluate their effect on the professional agency and the possibility to reintegrate the returnees.

6.1. Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

The sources that were reviewed in this paper specifically look at the experiences of skilled or educated Afghan returnees and how they experience reintegration. Only reports and studies published since 2020 to 2026 were taken into account to make sure that the results indicate the recent changes in politics, economy, and society. Reports on the Illegal Foreigners Repatriation Plan (IFRP) and its impact on

human capital and employment as well as professional opportunities were given special attention. The articles were filtered out when they prioritized on the short-term refugee transit or emergency displacement without the outcomes of long-term reintegration. Moreover, the articles that were published prior to 2015 were excluded as they do not represent the present political situation and the system of governance in Afghanistan.

6.2. Synthesis and Analysis

The review uses a thematic analysis method to systematize and interpret the results in a systematic manner. Using this approach, this study will be able to detect similar patterns and categorize them into four primary pillars. The former pillar looks at issues of professional reintegration such as barriers to employment, recognition of credential, and institutional limitations. The second pillar is on the aspect of gender disparity in repatriation and how the limitations and cultural beliefs dissimilarly impact on the male and female repatriates. The third pillar examines the overall economic implications especially the effects on the GDP, labor markets, and unemployment among the youth. The fourth pillar looks at psychological adjustment such as reverse culture shock and emotional stress upon return.

FINDINGS

The results show that structural, institutional, economic, and social obstacles to effective repatriation of skilled and educated Afghans between 2024 and 2026 exists. To begin with, professional reintegration is still poor because there is low institutional capacity, absence of clear hiring procedures, and appreciation of foreign qualifications. Hiring and promotion in state institutions is usually based on political favours and informal connections, and the preference of those related to the last 20 years of armed conflict instead of the merit principles. Formers who served the former government do not have a higher chance to resume their services in the government. Secondly, there is a very poor economic absorption capacity. The low level of employment among young people, reduced foreign assistance and shrinkage of the private sector restricts job opportunities to the returnees, which leads to unemployment underemployment and skill gap. Third, restrictions on females are a major setback to

female returnees. Social barriers such as restriction of women in education, employment and mobility denies potential women in employing their careers due to the structural barriers. Lastly, psychological reintegration is weak. Most of the returnees are left with uncertainties in the future and have plans of further migration because of the lack of stability, opportunities as well as the institutional assistance. In general, the statistics indicate that there is a change in the possible brain circulation to the situation akin to the so-called brain waste where human capital is not used to its full power in a weak governmental system.

CONCLUSION

This paper concludes that reintegration of skilled and overseas-trained afghan returns in 2024-2026 is highly hampered by structural challenges. Despite the surge in the number of return migration, the national environment is not that strong institutionally, economically, and politically to absorb the professional talent. Political loyalty, informal networks, and change in governance norms affect employment systems and decrease opportunities of qualified returnees on merit. Meanwhile, unsustainable job creation is curtailed by high unemployment rates, reduced international aid, and a poor domestic industry. The issue of gender restrictions also adds to inequality making sure that many educated women cannot play an active role in a professional life. Long-term outlooks are also undermined due to psychological stress and the lack of confidence in the future which bolsters the intention to continue migration. In general, brain circulation or human capital gain should be replaced by the tendency towards brain drain since nowadays, in Afghanistan, potential skills are not fully utilized because of structural vulnerability and the inability to work under adverse conditions. It would be necessary to reform the institutions, revitalize the economy, have inclusive employment policies, and have long term international interaction in order to sustain reintegration.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The author states that there exists no conflict of interest as far as the publication of this study is concerned. It is an independent study, and there was no financial, institutional, or personal association that addressed the design, analysis, or interpretation of the results.

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