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Welcoming Afghans

In their own words



**More in
Common**

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Executive summary

Over the past two years Britain has welcomed around 25,000 people from Afghanistan, of which 6,575 were still living in temporary “bridging” accommodation at the end of July 2023.¹ Despite the importance of understanding the needs of this cohort – particularly given the notices given to Afghans to leave their bridging accommodation by the end of August – to date there has been no publicly released survey of Afghan refugees in the UK.

To fill this gap, USPUK and More in Common surveyed Afghans living in hotels, to better understand their wants and needs, and how best government and civil society could help them, particularly in transitioning to permanent accommodation and securing employment. This report – following from [our last report](#) based on interviews with expert practitioners – contains the full results of that survey. From these results, several key threads emerge:

Afghans are clearly motivated to move out of hotels and find permanent accommodation. However, while almost all are actively looking for housing, they experience a clear **lack of information** about their housing options:

- 90 per cent of Afghans said that they were actively searching for housing, and only 10 per cent said they would rather not move.
- Clear majorities say they know “very little” or “nothing” about housing options such as social housing or private renting. This lack of information about their housing options has made the process of moving on from hotels much harder and slower.

This Afghan cohort often have specific housing needs, particularly because they tend to have **much larger family sizes**. This has proven a barrier in helping them transition from hotels to suitable permanent accommodation.

- The average Afghan family size is more than double that for a British family (5.6 versus 2.4) with one in five of the Afghans surveyed having a family size of eight or above.
- The approach of only looking at the nuclear family unit, and encouraging Afghans to move wherever there is available housing, poses difficulties for this cohort. Respondents with multiple children pointed out that it would be impossible for them to start their life in the UK without relatives nearby for childcare. One respondent said that their family unit contains 11 people, but that they would be happy to be housed in two separate but nearby houses. This is a pragmatic solution, but not one that is easily accessible under the current system.

There are varying needs among the existing Afghan cohort regarding employment, integration, and language support. A **significant number are highly-educated and speak**

¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/afghan-resettlement-programme-operational-data/afghan-resettlement-programme-operational-data>

English (around a third) and it is reasonable to assume that they could enter the workforce with little difficulty. However, **around half are less educated and speak little English**, with **Afghan women the most likely to lack English language skills**. A ‘one-size fits all’ approach to education and employment support would not be appropriate. Instead, parallel support programmes should focus on finding suitable employment for that first group, while also accelerating language support for the latter group.

- While a majority of Afghans surveyed reported being fluent, proficient, or conversational in English, 44 per cent reported having either only a basic proficiency or none at all, rising to 61 per cent among Afghan women.
- The Afghans surveyed are significantly more educated than the UK average (56 per cent with a degree versus 32 per cent for adult Britons). When asked about their previous profession in Afghanistan, the most common professions were in interpreting and the military, or working with the British Council, embassy, or army.
- A majority of Afghans reported that they were currently looking for employment, and the top criteria for what they look for in a new place to live was being “close to job opportunities”.

More financial support was by far the most important element in helping these families move out of hotels. While the government has been generous in the financial resources they have allocated for supporting Afghan families – particularly in that allocated to local councils to provide support - there is more work to be done in ensuring Afghans are able and know how to access it.

Overall, there is a **large amount of goodwill toward the government**, despite delays and problems over the past two years. Afghans highly rate their experience with British people (8.10 out of 10), with over half giving it a nine or a ten out of ten. They rank their trust in the UK government reasonably high (7.05 out of 10) but are much more critical of local councils (5.87 out of 10), with 52 per cent giving them a trust score of five or less. This is perhaps attributable to the fact that local councils being the first line of contact on contentious issues like benefits and housing, even if those decisions were not necessarily made by them.

Who was surveyed

USPUK and More in Common surveyed Afghan respondents in hotels, hostels and temporary accommodation across the country as part of their work supporting Afghan refugees to settle in the UK.

The fieldwork occurred between 13th July 2023 - 13th August 2023 and was available in three languages - Dari, Pashto and English. The survey was distributed by USPUK co-ordinators and their charity partners.

Demographics

In total 286 respondents took part in the survey, of which 142 answered all questions. There were 6,575 Afghans living in bridging accommodation at the end of June 2023, and an average reported family size of 5.6, as such this survey represents a significant portion (over 10 per cent) of Afghans residing in bridging accommodation.

- The Afghan respondents lived in 27 unique locations, spread across the UK
- Two thirds (66 per cent) of the sample were men, and one third (34 per cent) were women.
- Six in ten (58 per cent) respondents were currently living in a hotel or hostel, with three in ten (29 per cent) having previously lived in one, but now living elsewhere. One in ten (11 per cent) selected 'other'.



Methodology

In constructing the survey, great care was taken to ensure it took into account the cultural sensitivities and needs of the current Afghan cohort. Questions such as ethnicity were deliberately not asked. Afghans were integrated into the process from an early stage, with one Afghan (a prior resident in bridging accommodation) a part of the core project team. In addition, a roundtable was convened of Afghans currently resident in the UK and those who work with Afghans in bridging accommodation, to finalise the question design. In order to maximise the response rate, all questions were optional, and care was taken to reduce the overall complexity and length of the survey.

There were two primary distribution mechanisms for the survey:

- **Distribution through existing Afghan networks.** Using the contacts that USPUK and More in Common had with Afghan diaspora and refugee groups, the survey was shared informally, particularly through local WhatsApp groups. Some charity partners also distributed the survey to those Afghans they worked with.
- **Visiting bridging hotels directly.** USPUK hired 11 Afghan coordinators (based in Crawley, Milton Keynes, Manchester, Watford, Swindon, Bristol, London and Northampton) currently living in bridging accommodation, and trained them on how to conduct the survey with those resident in the hotels. This included deliberately hiring Afghan women, to better reach that group.

Housing

Figure 1.1

Afghan household size

The average Afghan we surveyed was currently living in a household of 5.6 people (compared to a UK average of 2.4). This underscores the need to better understand Afghan family dynamics, to find housing suitable for larger families

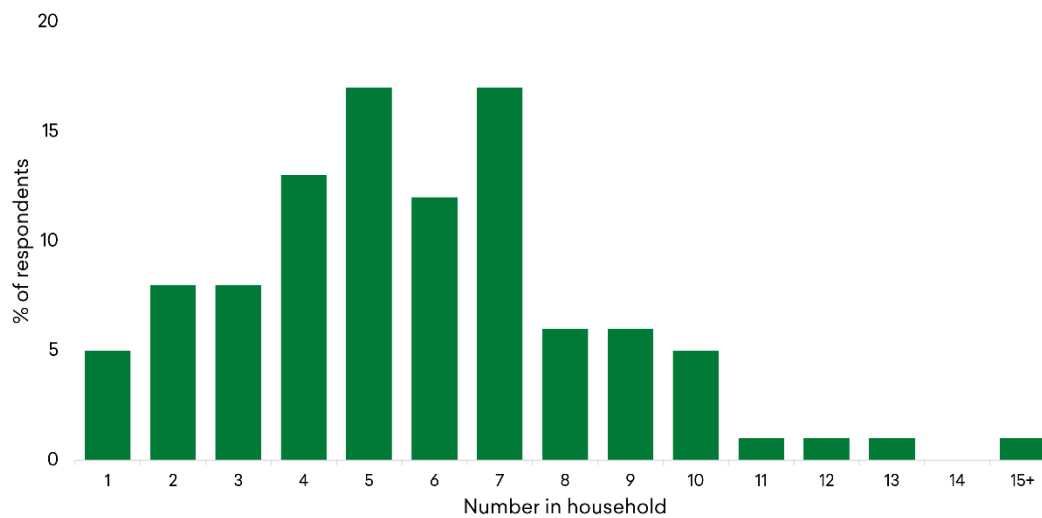


Figure 1.2

Looking for housing

90 per cent of the Afghans we surveyed say they are actively searching for housing (only 6 per cent were not). An overwhelming majority want to move, but many say they will do so “only if the new accommodation is right”

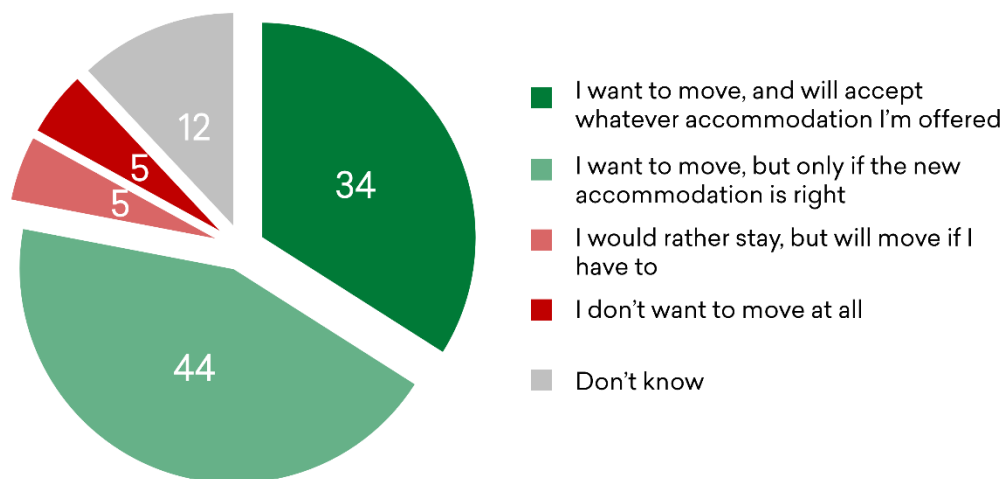


Figure 1.3

How much Afghans know about their housing options

There is an evident lack of knowledge among Afghans about their housing options. Clearly this is a larger barrier to them moving out of bridging accommodation, than lack of motivation to move more generally

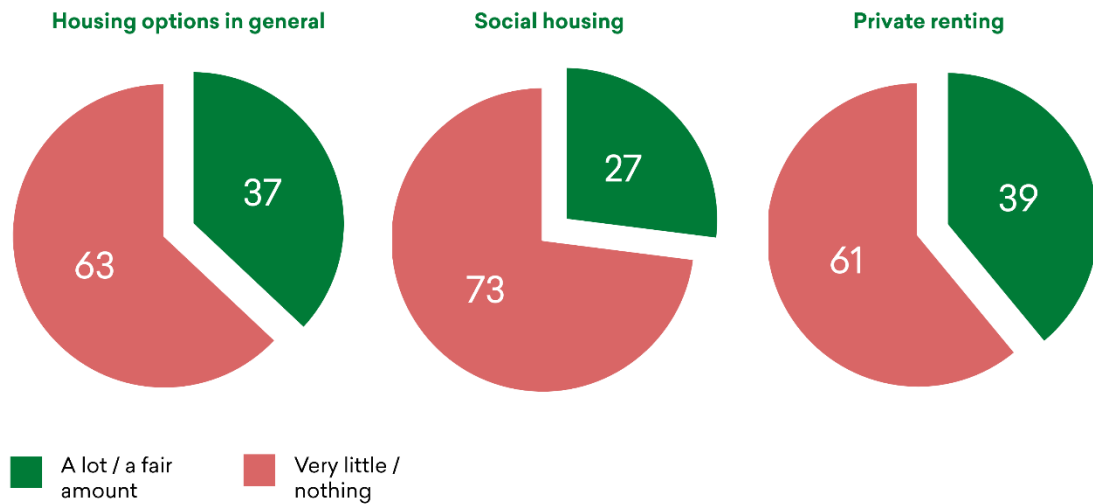


Figure 1.4

Looking for housing

'Close to job opportunities' was seen as the most important attribute for Afghans choosing a new place to live. This was closely followed by being close to other friends and family living in the UK

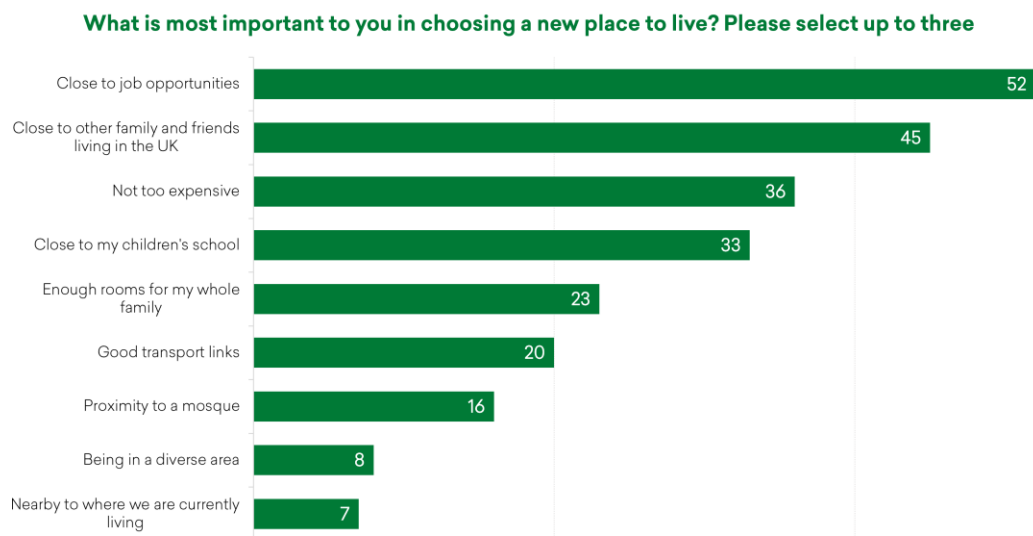


Figure 1.5

Help them move out of hotel

Financial support was the overwhelmingly top-selected option, for what would most help Afghans move out of hotels



Quotes on housing

There are 11 of us in the family, me and my children and my parents and sister. We need two different houses but near to each other, so we can give each other support in terms of work, health and childcare

Desperately seeking a guarantor! Caught in a vicious cycle of rejection: no home without income, no job without a home.

During mid-2022 we were offered a council house which was close enough to my studies and my wife's relatives. However, after accepting the offer the LA didn't accept us, mainly due to a miscommunication between the LA and HO, however, we have heard from unofficial sources that 2 bedrooms weren't enough to accommodate my family. As a result, we had faced high levels of anxiety and depression while our hopes vanished and had to stay another year in a small hotel room with little children

I have 5 children. I would like to live somewhere near to my relatives as sometimes I might need to leave children with family. I won't be able to afford babysitters

I searched nearly 6 months for accommodation for myself and my family. I viewed more than 35 houses and filled nearly 30 application forms for them and almost every one of them got rejected

I viewed and filled applications for more than 20 houses. None of the landlords agreed to give me their house because I don't have the background of renting a house in UK. Even though I have a good job and the council office is paying the 6 months' rent upfront, that is not important for the landlords

Employment

Figure 2.1

English proficiency

A majority of the Afghans we surveyed are conversational, proficient or fluent in English. However 44 per cent either have basic proficiency in English or none at all, this rising to 61 per cent among Afghan women

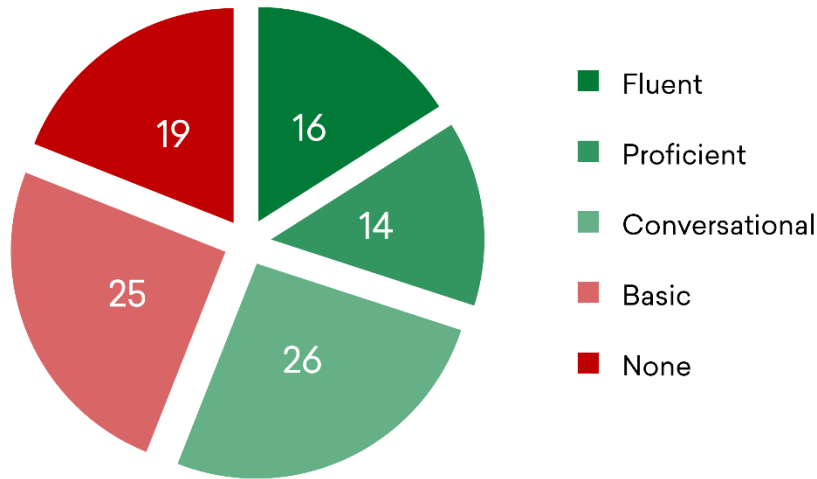


Figure 2.2

Highest level of education

The Afghans we surveyed are significantly more educated than the UK average (56 per cent with a degree versus 32 per cent for adult Britons). When asked their previous profession in Afghanistan, the most numerous responses were jobs relating to interpreting, the military, and working with the British Council, embassy, or army.

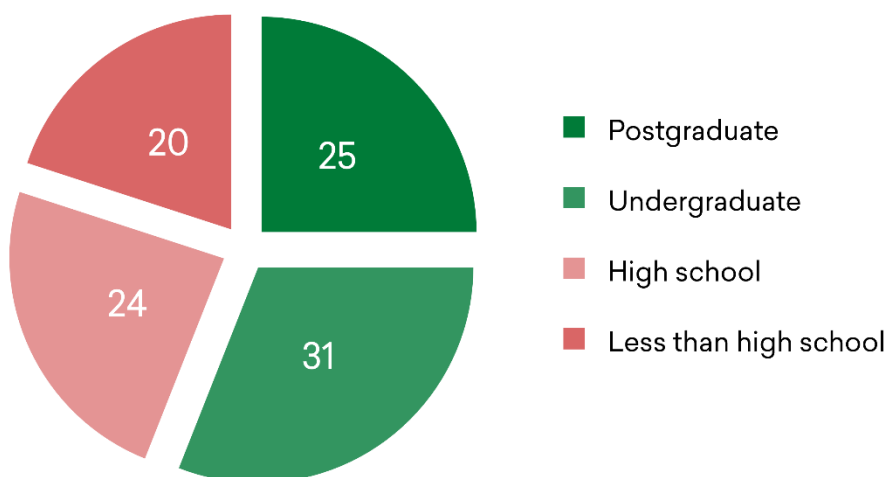


Figure 2.3

Integration needs

There are different needs among the existing Afghan cohort. While a significant number are highly-educated and already speak English, many have little English and little education, with this much more prominent among Afghan women. It is likely that those who left the hotels earlier (who we did not survey) primarily belong to the prior group

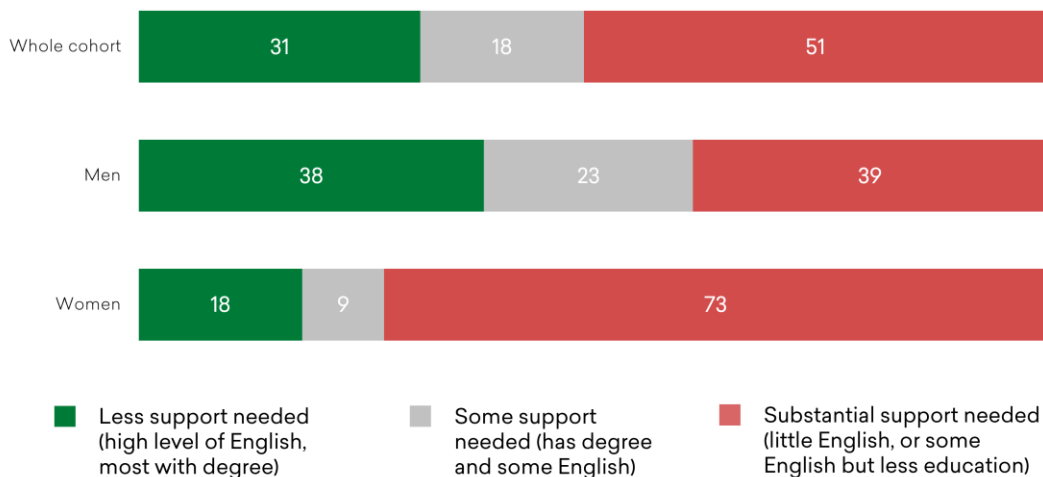
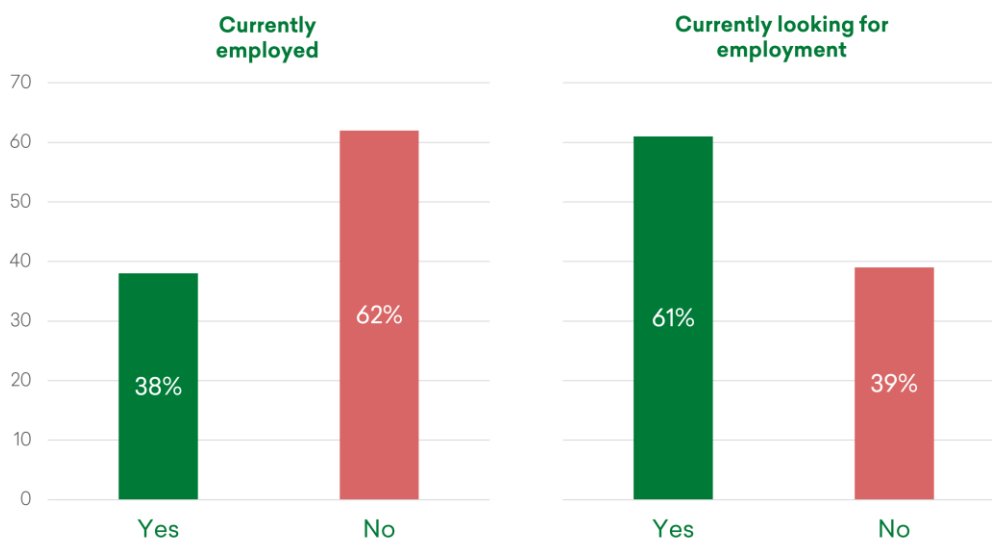


Figure 2.4

Looking for employment

There is a large gap in the number of Afghans currently employed and the number actively looking for work. However a majority of Afghan women (51 per cent) said they were not looking for work



Support from government

Figure 3.1

Levels of trust

Afghans highly rate their experience with British people, over half giving it a nine or a ten out of ten. They rank their trust in the UK government reasonably high, but are much more critical of local councils, with 52 per cent giving them a trust score of five or less. This is perhaps due to local councils being the first line of contact, on issues like benefits and housing

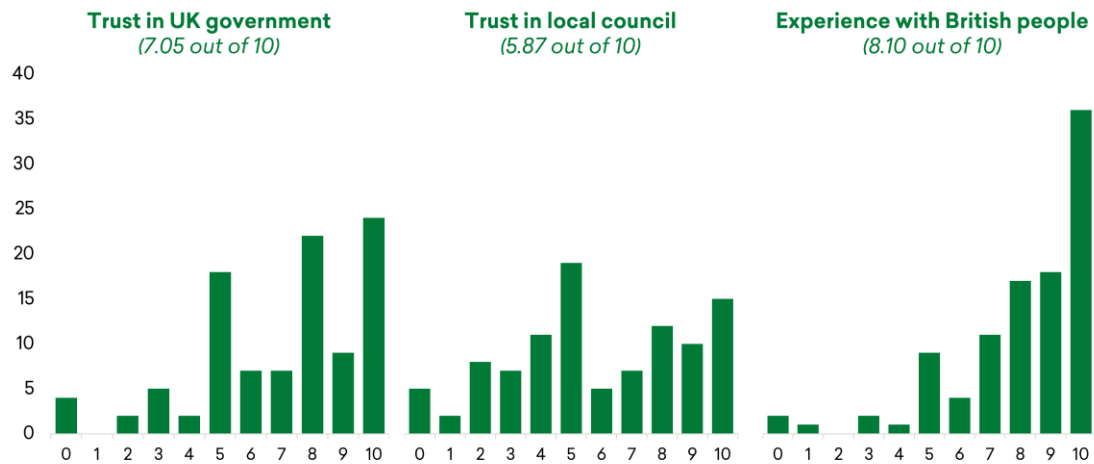
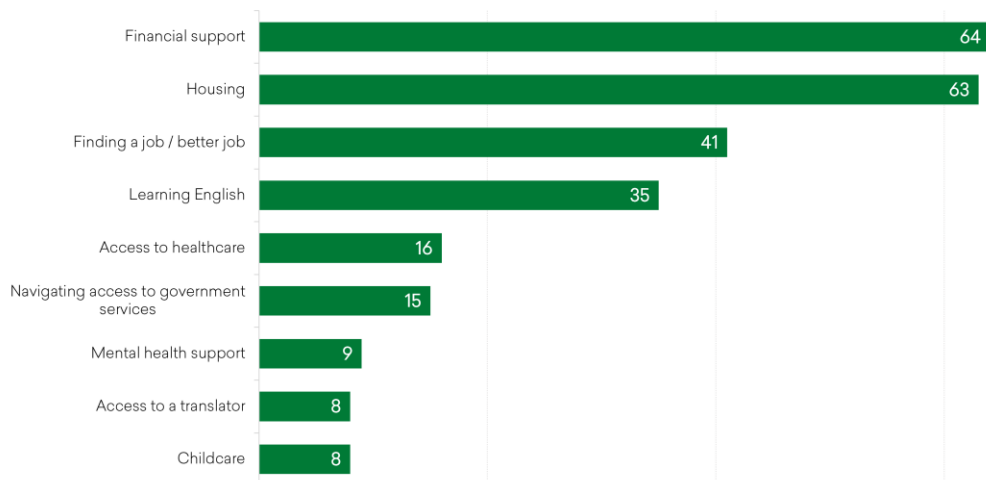


Figure 3.2

Extra support

Financial support was again chosen as the area Afghans would most like extra support, closely followed by housing

Regarding your life in the UK, which of the following areas would you most like extra support with for you and your family? Select up to three



What do you most wish the UK government would understand about your experience?

I wish that the UK government would understand that living or staying at the hotel is very hard for people.

I wish the government considered our long-term joint activities as important and at least gave priority to families with the most vulnerability. Many families who had not worked with British people in Afghanistan or had a British passport received house offers. But I, who worked with the British Government for about 14 years have not yet received any help and support with the housing issue.

The deadline for quitting the hotels is getting closer and we are worried about what will happen to our situation after the deadline. It has caused us to be very stressed and this situation has had a negative impact on our family, children and even on our relationships. We are hopeful to be accommodated in permanent housing as soon as possible to continue our normal life in the UK.

We had to leave our own country and all families in an unexpected migration journey. We all in our family have been mentally affected and it takes time for us to build up our new life in the UK. In order to avoid further mental health problems and get support from some relatives and family member already living in the UK, our priority for moving to our new home is to be close to my close relatives in the UK

I am in a full-time job with a relatively good salary, but I failed to secure a property in the private sector. The government just recently offered me an affordable house near my relatives and friends but it took almost two years



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