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# Gender Perspectives on Afghan Refugee Integration in India: Issues and Challenges

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## ABSTRACT

*Gender bias perpetuates inequality by limiting access to opportunities and essential services for women while imposing societal expectations and stereotypes of men. The study investigates the unique challenges faced by Afghan refugees in India, with a focus on gender dynamics during the integration process. Women often encounter barriers to accessing education and healthcare services, while men grapple with redefining their societal roles and overcoming biases associated with being refugees.*

*Through quantitative research method viz a viz Questionnaire mode, the study uncovers the distinct obstacles encountered by Afghan women and men in education, healthcare, and employment in India. Findings highlight the need for gender-sensitive policies and interventions to address these challenges and promote more inclusive integration strategies for refugees. By recognizing and addressing gender disparities, policymakers and stakeholders can contribute to fostering equitable and sustainable integration processes for Afghan refugees in India and beyond.*

**Keywords:** *Refugees, Afghan refugees, Education, Healthcare, Work prospects, social integration, gender-based violence.*

## I. INTRODUCTION

Thousands of people have been displaced as a result of the ongoing Afghan refugee crisis and are now pursuing asylum in neighbouring nations, including India. Afghan refugee arrival in India is accompanied by a multitude of obstacles pertaining to their assimilation into the local populace. Despite this, it is vital to acknowledge that the requirements and experiences of Afghan refugees differ according to their gender. The incorporation of gender perspectives is crucial for comprehending the distinct obstacles encountered by Afghan refugee girls and women throughout the process of integration. The objective of this article is to examine the gender aspects of the integration process for Afghan refugees in India. It will provide insight into the difficulties and obstacles that these individuals face, with a specific focus on socio-economic prospects, healthcare, employment and education accessibility, and the involvement

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of civil society and the government in facilitating a smooth transition. Through an examination of these concerns, this article aims to enhance comprehension regarding the intricacies at play and the imperative for gender-sensitive strategies to tackle the obstacles Afghan refugees encounter while assimilating into India.

Gender influences the experiences of Afghan refugee girls and women residing in India, presenting them with distinct obstacles in terms of socio-economic prospects, healthcare accessibility, educational opportunities, and integration assistance.<sup>3</sup> The convergence of refugee status and gender further amplifies these difficulties, resulting in occupational exclusion and heightened susceptibility.<sup>4</sup> A gender-sensitive approach is essential for tackling these issues; it necessitates a deeper comprehension of the intricacies at play and the necessity for customised assistance.<sup>5</sup>

### **(A) Research Objectives**

1. To explore the gender-specific challenges faced by Afghan refugees in India.
2. This objective aims to identify and understand the distinct barriers encountered by Afghan women and men, particularly in accessing essential services like education, healthcare, and employment opportunities.
3. To examine the impact of societal expectations and stereotypes on the integration process of Afghan refugees.
4. This objective seeks to analyze how societal norms and gender biases in India affect the roles and identities of Afghan refugees, especially men, and how these perceptions influence their integration.

### **(B) Research Methodology**

To investigate the gender-specific challenges and societal impacts on Afghan refugees in India, a convenience sample of 100 Afghan refugees (50 men and 50 women) in New Delhi was selected. The research utilized a questionnaire method to gather data, comprising both closed and open-ended questions tailored to explore the participant's access to education, healthcare, employment, and their experiences with societal expectations and stereotypes. Data analysis encompassed descriptive statistics for quantitative responses aiming for a holistic

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<sup>3</sup> Harvey, C., Garwood, R., & El-Masri, R. (2013). *Shifting Sands: Changing gender roles among refugees in Lebanon*. Oxfam International.

<sup>4</sup> Knappert, L., Kornau, A., & Figengül, M. (2018). Refugees' exclusion at work and the intersection with gender: Insights from the Turkish-Syrian border. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 105, 62-82.

<sup>5</sup> Freedman, Jane, Zeynep Kivilcim, and Nurcan Özgür Baklacioğlu, eds. *A Gendered Approach to the Syrian Refugee Crisis* (Routledge 2019).

understanding of the participant's challenges and societal influences on their integration process. Ethical considerations prioritized confidentiality and voluntary participation, with a protocol for addressing potential distress, thereby facilitating an ethical and comprehensive exploration of the integration experiences of Afghan refugees in India, to inform gender-sensitive policy and intervention development.

## II. OVERVIEW OF THE AFGHAN REFUGEE CRISIS

The Afghan refugee crisis has persisted as an incalculable number of people seek stability and protection beyond the borders of their war-ravaged native country. As a result of the Afghan refugee crisis, a considerable number of people have fled to India in search of security and stability in countries other than Afghanistan. India accommodates over 12,071 Afghan refugees, as reported by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).<sup>6</sup> However, it is important to note that this figure does not encompass the offspring of Afghan-born individuals residing in India.<sup>7</sup> The majority of these refugees escaped to India on tourist visas in search of safety after fleeing violence in their native country.<sup>8</sup>

However, due to India not being a signatory of the 1951 Refugee Convention, the legal status of Afghan refugees is ambiguous. The lack of a specific legal framework for refugees in India poses significant challenges. It often leads to uncertainty regarding the rights and protections available to refugees, leaving them vulnerable to exploitation, discrimination, and arbitrary detention.<sup>9</sup>

In India, Afghan refugees encounter a multitude of obstacles, such as restricted opportunities for employment, education, and legal safeguards. Many of them make a livelihood operating small shops, restaurants, and businesses; however, their meagre incomes make it difficult for them to provide for their children's education. The neglect of India's reaction to the Afghan refugee crisis has been pervasive, prompting scholars to contend that the nation ought to enact distinct domestic regulations pertaining to asylum seekers and refugees.<sup>10</sup> Although Indian courts have occasionally intervened in refugee protection, this cannot be a permanent solution.

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<sup>6</sup> Fact sheet available at <https://reporting.unhcr.org/india-factsheet-8210> (last visited on May 15, 2024).

<sup>7</sup> Seth, S. (2023, March 22). *Uncertain haven: Afghan refugees in India*. The Strategist. <<https://www.aspistrategist.org.au/uncertain-haven-afghan-refugees-in-india/>> (last visited on May 14, 2024).

<sup>8</sup> Shah, M. (2023, July 6). For Afghan refugees, India is far from a safe haven. Foreign Policy. <<https://foreignpolicy.com/2023/07/06/india-afghan-refugees-unhcr-modi-politics-cao/>> (last visited on May 14, 2024).

<sup>9</sup> United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), India: Legal Framework, Refworld, available at: <<https://www.refworld.org/docid/3ae6b4f71c.html>> (last visited on May 15, 2024).

<sup>10</sup> Kaul, A. (2022, June 9). Afghan refugees in India highlight the need for Indian Domestic Refugee Law. Just Security. <<https://www.justsecurity.org/78586/afghan-refugees-in-india-highlight-the-need-for-indian-domestic-refugee-law/>> (last visited on May 15, 2024).

In lieu of this, India requires legislation specifically designed to address the requirements of Afghan refugees and asylum seekers.<sup>11</sup>

The global refugee crisis, a manifestation of conflicts, persecution, and environmental challenges, underscores a universal struggle for safety, rights, and integration across various displaced populations. Within this extensive crisis, the situation of Afghan refugees in India particularly highlights the critical role of gender in shaping the experiences and challenges of integration. The intersectionality of gender with refugee status deepens the complexities of displacement, where societal norms and biases distinctly impact men and women. According to Payne, migration narratives, while diverse, often intersect with issues of identity, including gender, which can profoundly affect the lived experiences of migrants and refugees.<sup>12</sup>

### III. CHALLENGES FACED BY AFGHAN REFUGEE WOMEN

Refugee women face a constellation of challenges that compound their vulnerability and hinder their access to rights and opportunities in host countries. These challenges stem from a complex interplay of gender, legal, and socio-economic factors that exacerbate their displacement experience. Predominantly, refugee women encounter barriers to education and healthcare, critical services that are foundational to personal development and well-being. The lack of access to these services is often aggravated by legal uncertainties and the absence of formal recognition in host countries, which can lead to a state of limbo, affecting their mental health and social integration.

#### 1. Limited Access to Education:

Afghan refugee women encounter significant challenges in accessing education in India, primarily rooted in deeply ingrained cultural norms and gender roles that prioritize boy's education over girls. Families often perceive investing in their daughter's education as less beneficial compared to sons, perpetuating traditional gender disparities.<sup>13</sup> Conservative attitudes towards women's roles and societal expectations further hinder girls' access to education, reinforcing gender inequalities.

Furthermore, economic constraints pose a formidable barrier to education for Afghan refugee women and their families. Limited financial resources make it challenging to cover school fees,

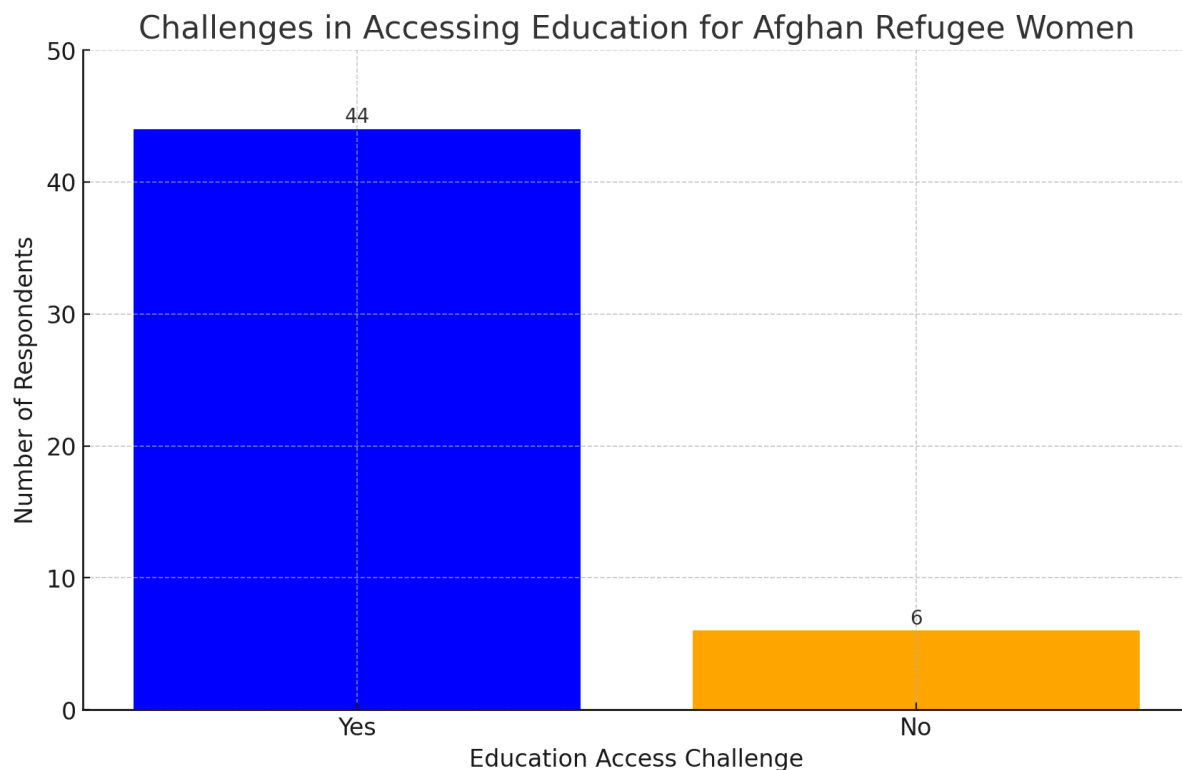
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<sup>11</sup> Majumdar, R. (2021, September 7). Why Afghan asylum-seekers are protesting in India – DW – 09/07/2021. dw.com. <<https://www.dw.com/en/why-afghan-asylum-seekers-are-protesting-in-india/a-59108980>> (last visited on May 15, 2024).

<sup>12</sup> Payne, Leigh. Migration Narratives and Identity: A Qualitative Exploration. *Journal of Refugee Studies* 10, no. 3 (2018): 305-321.

<sup>13</sup> UNHCR. (2020). Education Sector Assessment for Afghan Refugees in India. Available at: <<https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/77843.pdf>> (last visited on May 15, 2024).

transportation costs, and essential supplies, forcing many girls to forgo education to support their families financially.<sup>14</sup> This perpetuates a cycle of educational deprivation, hindering Afghan refugee women's socio-economic advancement.



\*Source: Data Collected

## 2. Economic Vulnerability

Afghan refugee women encounter substantial economic vulnerabilities that obstruct their access to education in India. The financial constraints within refugee families are substantial, posing significant barriers as they struggle to afford essential educational expenses such as school fees, transportation, and supplies.<sup>15</sup> Economic strain often compels Afghan refugee women to prioritise immediate financial needs over-investing in their education, perpetuating a cycle of poverty and educational deprivation. Moreover, the limited availability of stable employment opportunities for Afghan refugee women exacerbates their economic insecurity, as they encounter discrimination and restricted access to formal employment within the labour market.<sup>16</sup> Without sufficient financial resources and economic stability, Afghan refugee women and their families find it challenging to prioritize education as a pathway to socio-

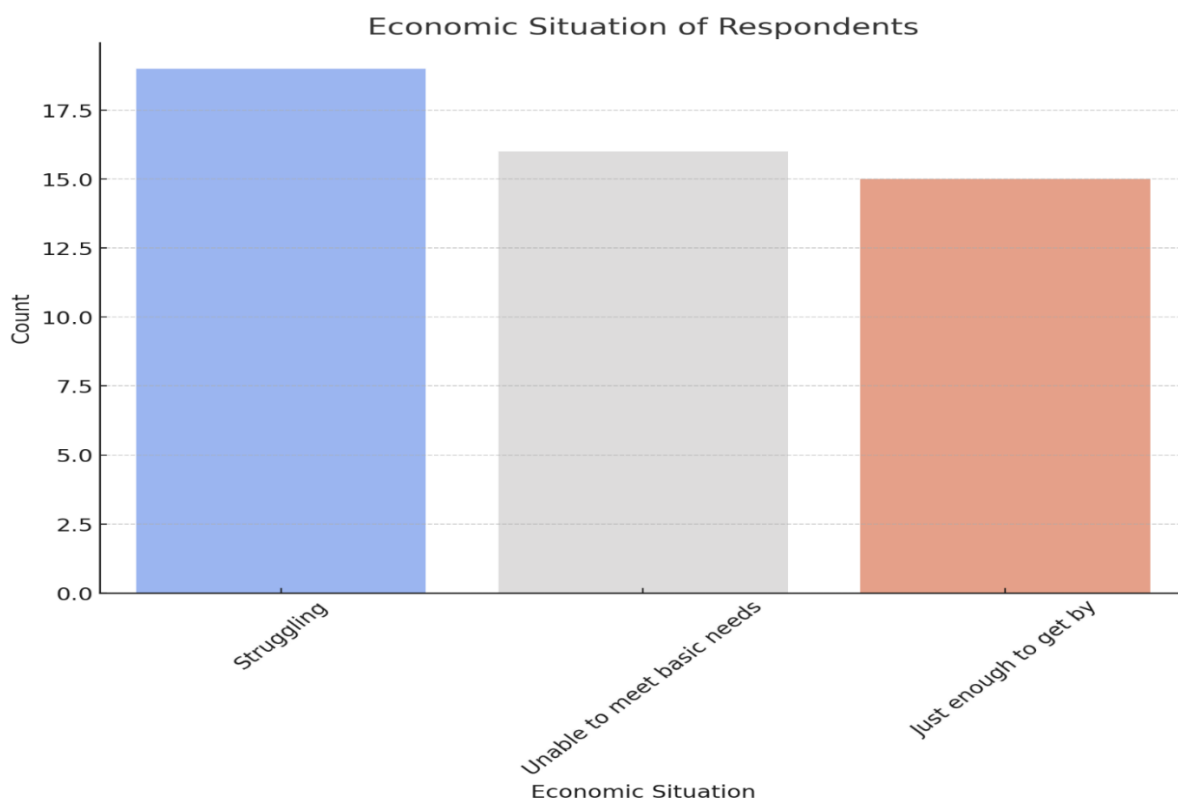
<sup>14</sup> Kaur, A., & Sharma, N. (2018). Afghan refugee women in India: Problems and prospects. *IOSR Journal of Humanities and Social Science*, 23(11), 34-39.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>16</sup> Srivastava, P., & Sasikumar, S. K. (2017). Livelihood strategies and survival strategies among Afghan refugees in India. *Indian Journal of Human Development*, 11(3), 365-378.

economic advancement, consequently hindering their prospects for a better future.

Furthermore, economic vulnerabilities intersect with socio-cultural factors to compound the challenges faced by Afghan refugee women in accessing education. Conservative attitudes towards women's roles and societal expectations regarding their domestic responsibilities often reinforce economic disparities and impede educational opportunities for Afghan refugee women.<sup>17</sup> This intersectionality of economic hardship, cultural norms, and gender discrimination creates a complex network of obstacles that Afghan refugee women must navigate in their pursuit of education and socio-economic empowerment. Addressing these economic vulnerabilities necessitates comprehensive interventions that not only tackle financial barriers but also challenge gender norms and promote women's economic empowerment within Afghan refugee communities in India.



\*Source: Data Collected

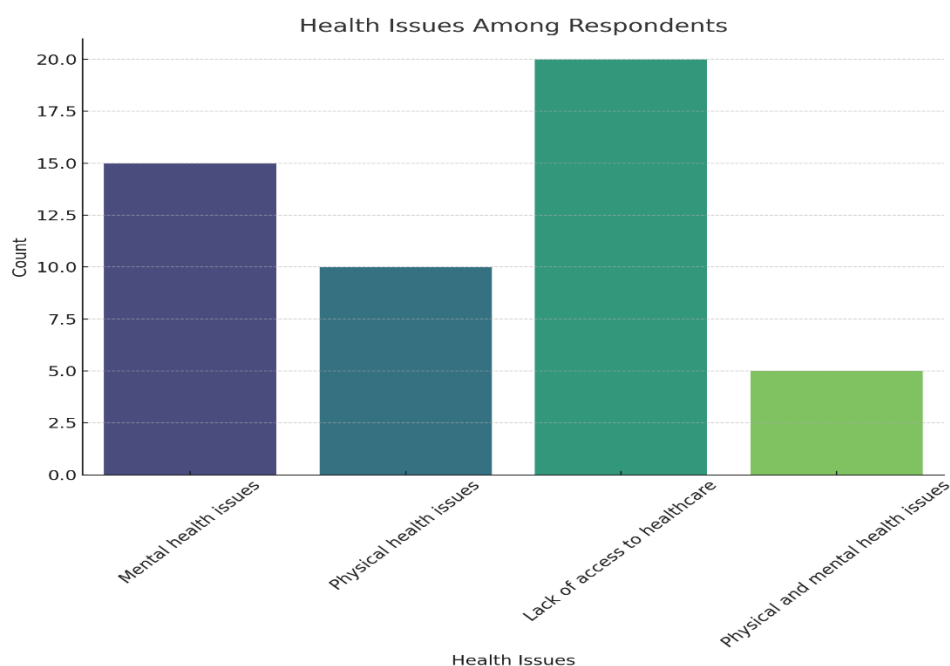
### 3. Health Risks:

Afghan refugee women in India face significant health risks, compounded by factors such as limited access to healthcare services, cultural barriers, and socioeconomic constraints. Many Afghan refugee women struggle to access reproductive healthcare services, including maternal

<sup>17</sup> Lodha, A. (2019). Afghan refugee women and healthcare rights in India. Available at: <<https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/afghan-refugee-women-healthcare-rights-india>> (last visited on May 15, 2024).

care and family planning, due to various barriers such as lack of awareness, financial constraints, and cultural taboos.<sup>18</sup> As a result, they are at heightened risk of experiencing complications during pregnancy and childbirth, as well as preventable diseases. Additionally, Afghan refugee women often face challenges in accessing mental healthcare services, despite the prevalence of mental health issues stemming from trauma, displacement, and the stressors of refugee life.<sup>19</sup> The limited availability of mental health support services and the stigma surrounding mental illness further exacerbate the mental health risks faced by Afghan refugee women in India.

Furthermore, Afghan refugee women are vulnerable to various health risks associated with their living conditions in refugee settlements. Overcrowded and unsanitary living conditions increase the risk of infectious diseases, such as respiratory infections, diarrheal diseases, and vector-borne illnesses.<sup>20</sup> Limited access to clean water, sanitation facilities, and proper hygiene practices further exacerbate these health risks, posing significant threats to the well-being of Afghan refugee women and their families. Addressing these health risks requires comprehensive interventions that prioritize access to quality healthcare services, promote health education and awareness, and improve living conditions in refugee settlements.



<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>19</sup> Kakuma, R., et al. (2018). Mental health and psychosocial support for refugees, asylum seekers and migrants on the move in Europe: A rapid review of the literature. Available at: <[https://www.euro.who.int/\\_\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0007/386563/mental-health-psycho-social-support-refugees-migrants-evidence-annex-en.pdf](https://www.euro.who.int/__data/assets/pdf_file/0007/386563/mental-health-psycho-social-support-refugees-migrants-evidence-annex-en.pdf)> (last visited on May 15, 2024).

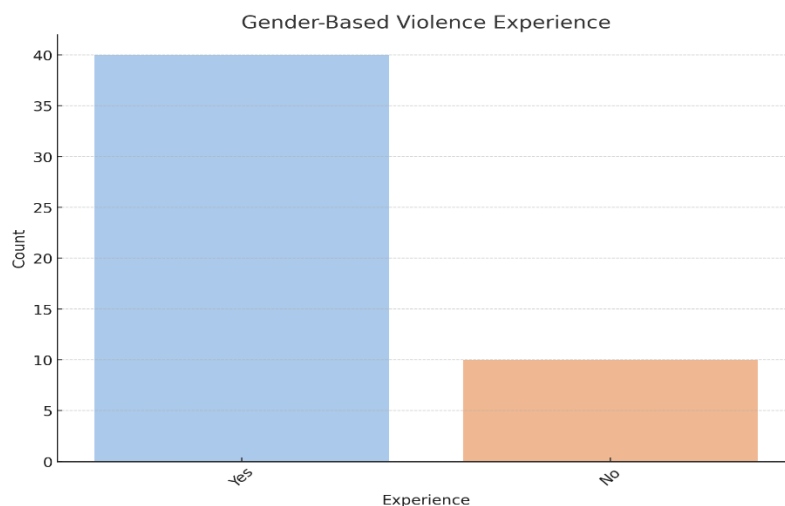
<sup>20</sup> UNHCR. (2020). Education Sector Assessment for Afghan Refugees in India. Retrieved from <<https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/77843.pdf>> (Last visited on May 15, 2024).



#### 4. Gender Based Violence (GBV)

Gender-based violence (GBV) poses a pervasive threat to Afghan refugee women residing in India, manifesting in various forms such as domestic abuse, sexual harassment, and exploitation. The precarious living conditions in refugee settlements exacerbate the vulnerability of Afghan refugee women to GBV, as overcrowding, lack of privacy, and limited access to support services create an environment ripe for abuse.<sup>21</sup> Moreover, conservative attitudes towards women's roles and societal norms that condone violence against women further perpetuate GBV, with Afghan refugee women facing significant barriers to seeking help or legal recourse. Fear of reprisal, social stigma, and lack of awareness about their rights exacerbate the challenges faced by survivors of GBV, leaving many Afghan refugee women trapped in abusive situations without access to protection or support services.<sup>22</sup>

The intersection of gender, displacement, and socio-economic vulnerability exacerbates the risk of GBV for Afghan refugee women in India. Economic dependence on male family members and limited opportunities for employment outside the home further perpetuate power imbalances and increase the likelihood of GBV.<sup>23</sup> Additionally, the lack of legal recognition of Afghan refugee women's status and limited access to justice systems further compound their vulnerability to GBV, as perpetrators often act with impunity. Addressing GBV among Afghan refugee women in India requires a comprehensive approach that includes legal reforms, provision of support services, community outreach, and empowerment initiatives aimed at challenging gender norms and promoting gender equality.



<sup>21</sup> Amnesty International. (2020). India: Afghan refugees face uncertainty and exploitation. Available at: <<https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2020/02/india-afghan-refugees-face-uncertainty-and-exploitation/>> (last visited on May 15, 2024).

<sup>22</sup> Human Rights Watch. (2021). World Report 2021: Afghanistan. Available at: <<https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2021/country-chapters/afghanistan>> (last visited on May 15, 2024).

<sup>23</sup> *Supra* note 14.

\*Source: Data Collected

#### **IV. CHALLENGES FACED BY AFGHAN REFUGEE MEN**

While much attention is often focused on the vulnerabilities of women and children among refugee populations, the challenges faced by Afghan refugee men in India are equally significant yet often overlooked. This paper aims to provide a comprehensive analysis of the hurdles encountered by Afghan refugee men, highlighting their struggles in accessing employment, maintaining mental well-being, navigating protection risks, and integrating into the host society.

##### **1. Employment discrimination**

Employment discrimination is a significant barrier faced by Afghan refugee men in India, hindering their integration into the labor market and perpetuating socio-economic marginalization. Discrimination based on refugee status and nationality limits their access to job opportunities, with many employers preferring to hire Indian nationals over refugees.<sup>24</sup> Additionally, language barriers further compound these challenges, as Afghan refugee men may struggle with proficiency in the local language, hindering effective communication during job interviews and daily work interactions.<sup>25</sup>

Moreover, the lack of legal recognition and documentation poses a significant hurdle to formal employment for Afghan refugee men, often relegating them to informal labour sectors characterized by exploitation and substandard working conditions. Without the necessary paperwork and permits, they face limited options for securing sustainable work (Refugee International, 2020). Addressing these barriers requires comprehensive measures, including awareness campaigns, vocational training programs, and language courses to enhance employability and integration into the labour market (World Bank, 2020). Advocacy efforts aimed at challenging stereotypes and prejudices among employers are also crucial in promoting equal opportunities for Afghan refugee men and fostering a more inclusive and equitable labour market environment.

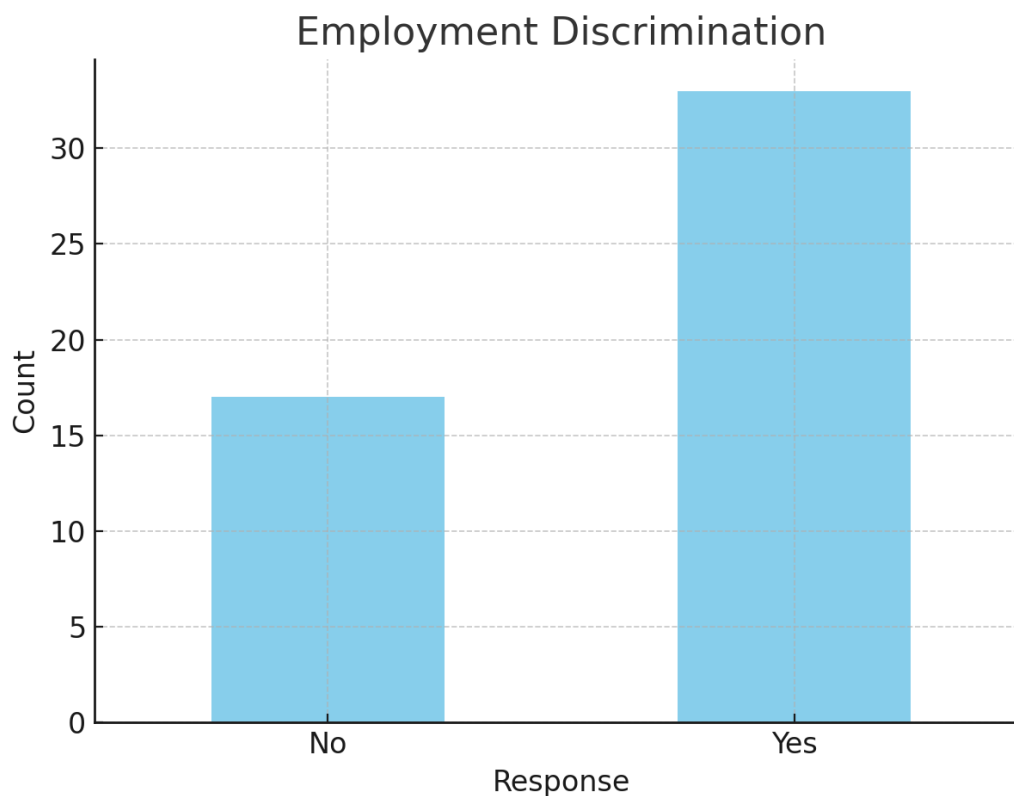
Collaborative initiatives involving the Indian government, international agencies, and local organizations are essential in establishing inclusive workplaces that value diversity and provide

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<sup>24</sup> United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. (2020). Afghanistan Situation: UNHCR Regional Bureau for Asia and the Pacific. Available at: <<https://www.unhcr.org/asia-and-the-pacific.html>> (last visited on May 15, 2024).

<sup>25</sup> International Labour Organization. (2020). Afghan Labour Market Assessment. Available at: <[https://www.ilo.org/asia/areas/migration-employment/labour-/WCMS\\_812764/lang--en/index.htm](https://www.ilo.org/asia/areas/migration-employment/labour-/WCMS_812764/lang--en/index.htm)> (last visited on May 15, 2024).

equal opportunities for all individuals. By providing language and skill development programs and advocating for policies that safeguard the rights of refugee workers, stakeholders can help Afghan refugee men overcome employment barriers and achieve socio-economic stability and self-reliance.<sup>26</sup> Through concerted efforts, sustainable solutions can be developed to facilitate their meaningful integration into the workforce and foster economic empowerment in India.



\*Source: Data Collected

## 2. Mental Health Struggles

Mental health struggles represent a significant and often overlooked challenge faced by Afghan refugee men in India, stemming from the trauma of displacement, conflict experiences, and the stressors of refugee life. Many Afghan refugee men grapple with symptoms of depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), yet stigma surrounding mental illness and limited access to mental health support services exacerbate their struggles.<sup>27</sup> The lack of culturally sensitive and linguistically appropriate mental health services further compounds the challenges faced by Afghan refugee men, leaving many without access to adequate support.

Moreover, the precarious living conditions in refugee settlements contribute to the deterioration

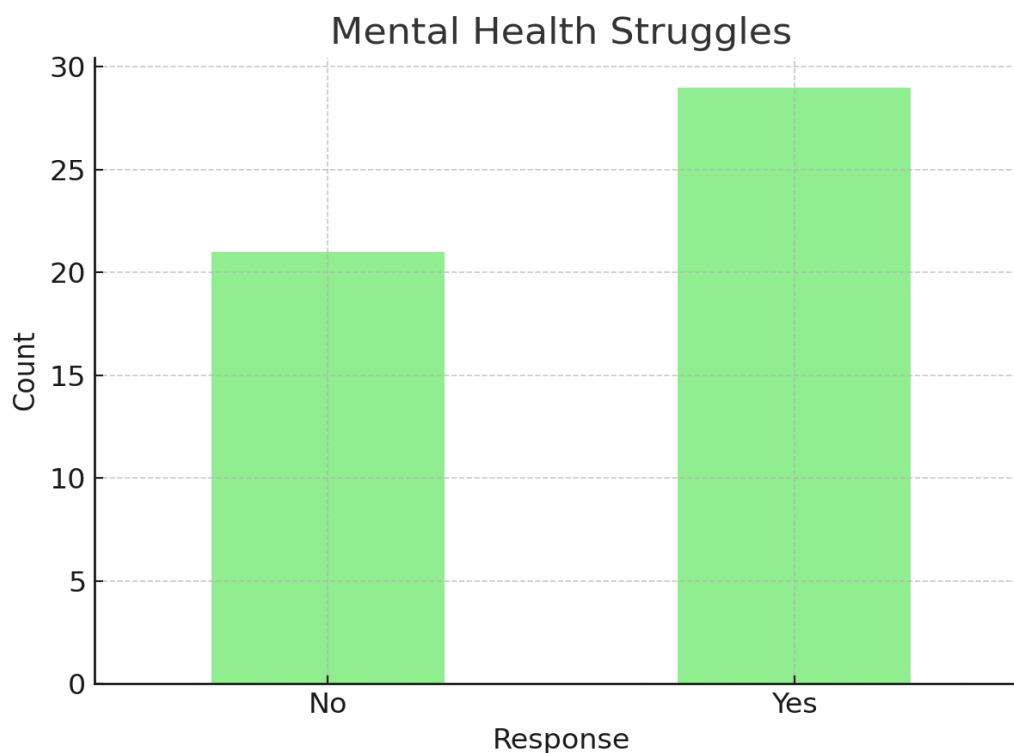
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<sup>26</sup> *Supra* note 24.

<sup>27</sup> *Supra* note 19.

of mental health among Afghan refugee men. Overcrowded and unsanitary living conditions, coupled with limited access to basic necessities and social support networks, exacerbate feelings of isolation, hopelessness, and despair.<sup>28</sup> Additionally, the uncertainty about their future and the challenges of socio-economic integration further contribute to the psychological distress experienced by Afghan refugee men in India.

Addressing mental health struggles among Afghan refugee men requires comprehensive interventions that prioritize access to culturally sensitive and linguistically appropriate mental health services. Efforts to destigmatize mental illness, raise awareness about available support services, and provide psychosocial support and counselling can help alleviate the burden of mental health issues among Afghan refugee men.<sup>29</sup> Furthermore, community-based approaches, peer support networks, and empowerment initiatives aimed at promoting resilience and coping strategies can contribute to improving the mental well-being of Afghan refugee men in India.



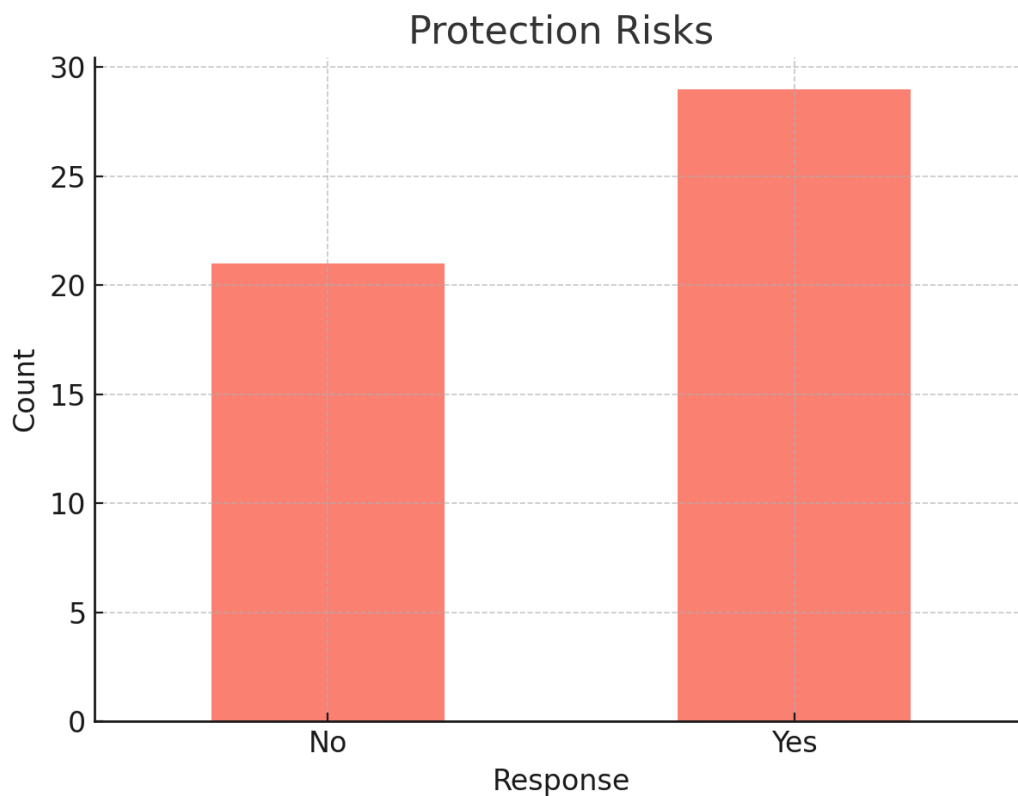
### 3. Protection Risks:

Afghan refugee men in India face a myriad of protection risks, stemming from their precarious

<sup>28</sup> Refugee International. (2020). *Afghan Refugees: The Forgotten Crisis*. Available at: <<https://www.refugeesinternational.org/reports/afghan-refugees-the-forgotten-crisis>> (last visited on May 15, 2024).

<sup>29</sup> UNICEF. (2020). *Situation Analysis of Children and Women in Afghanistan*. Available at <<https://www.unicef.org/afghanistan/situation-analysis>> (last visited on May 15, 2024).

legal status and lack of recognition as refugees. These vulnerabilities expose them to various forms of exploitation, including labour exploitation, human trafficking, and forced recruitment into criminal activities.<sup>30</sup> Additionally, Afghan refugee men are at risk of arbitrary detention by law enforcement authorities, who often target refugees based on their nationality or perceived immigration status.<sup>31</sup> Furthermore, the threat of deportation looms large over Afghan refugee men, as they lack legal protections and may be subjected to forced return to Afghanistan, where they face risks to their safety and well-being.<sup>32</sup>



#### 4. Social Integration Challenges:

Integration into the host society presents significant hurdles for Afghan refugee men, who often grapple with feelings of isolation, alienation, and identity loss. Cultural differences between Afghanistan and India, coupled with language barriers, hinder their ability to establish meaningful connections and participate fully in social activities.<sup>33</sup> Moreover, the lack of social networks and support systems exacerbates their sense of isolation and marginalization, leaving many Afghan refugee men feeling disconnected from their communities. Additionally,

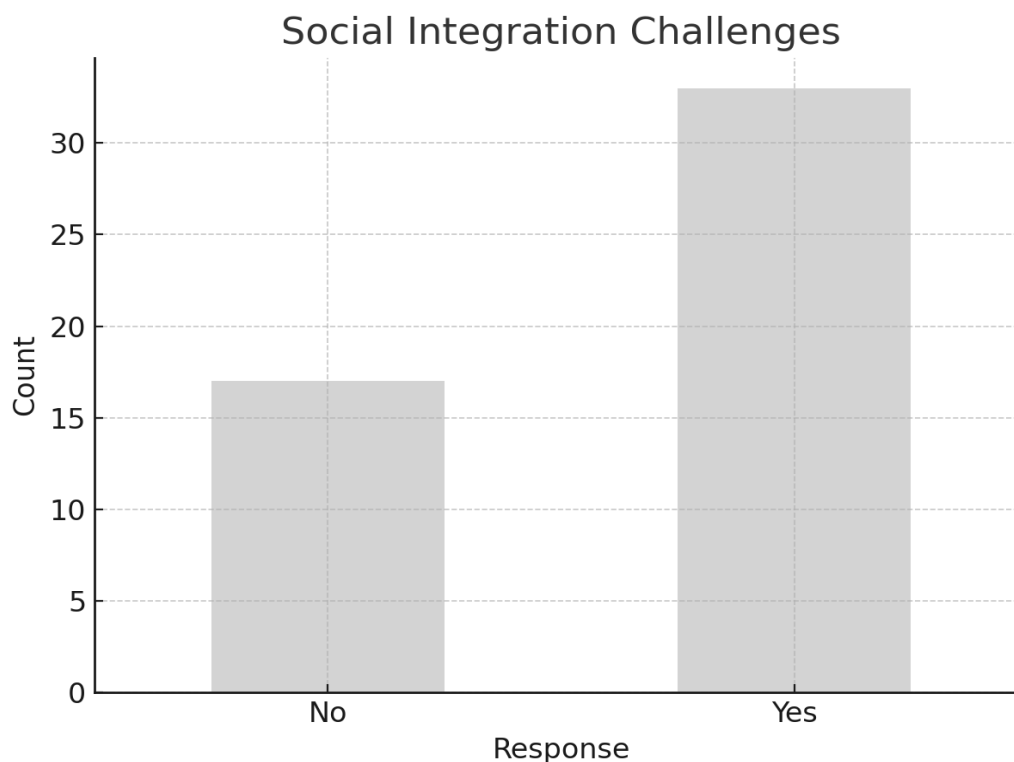
<sup>30</sup> Supra note 21.

<sup>31</sup> Supra note 28.

<sup>32</sup> Supra note 24.

<sup>33</sup> World Bank. (2020). Afghanistan Economic Update. Available at: <<https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/afghanistan/publication/economic-update-october-2020>> (last visited on May 15, 2024).

discriminatory attitudes and xenophobia prevalent in the host community further impede their social integration efforts, perpetuating their exclusion and marginalization.<sup>34</sup>



**In addition** to gender-specific challenges, Afghan refugees in India face common barriers that affect both men and women, hindering their ability to integrate into society and access essential services. One such barrier is the lack of legal recognition and documentation. Many Afghan refugees, regardless of gender, encounter difficulties in obtaining legal status and documentation in India. Without proper documentation, they are often unable to access critical services such as education, healthcare, and formal employment opportunities.<sup>35</sup> This lack of legal recognition not only limits their access to basic rights but also exposes them to exploitation and abuse, as they may be unable to assert their legal protections.

Furthermore, language barriers pose a significant obstacle for Afghan refugees of both genders in India. Many refugees struggle with proficiency in the local language, hindering their ability to communicate effectively, access services, and engage in socio-economic activities.<sup>36</sup> The inability to effectively communicate in the local language can lead to isolation, limited job opportunities, and difficulties in navigating daily life in India. Overcoming language barriers is essential for the successful integration of Afghan refugees, as it enables them to access

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<sup>34</sup> *Supra* note 22.

<sup>35</sup> *Supra* note 24.

<sup>36</sup> *Supra* note 25.

essential services, participate in the labour market, and engage with the host community.

Moreover, social integration challenges impact both Afghan refugee men and women in India. Cultural differences, coupled with discriminatory attitudes and xenophobia prevalent in the host community, hinder their ability to establish meaningful connections and participate fully in social activities.<sup>37</sup> Feelings of isolation, alienation, and marginalization are common experiences among Afghan refugees, irrespective of gender, as they struggle to adapt to a new environment and build social networks. Addressing these social integration challenges requires concerted efforts to promote social cohesion, combat discrimination, and create inclusive spaces where Afghan refugees can feel welcomed and valued in Indian society.

Additionally, housing difficulties in Indian cities pose a significant challenge for Afghan refugees, impacting their security and well-being. Lack of affordable housing options, discrimination in housing access, and inadequate living conditions further compound their challenges.<sup>38</sup> Advocating for affordable housing initiatives, anti-discrimination policies, and inclusive housing programs tailored to the needs of refugee communities is crucial in addressing these difficulties. Collaborating with local authorities, housing agencies, and non-governmental organizations can offer support in navigating the housing market, accessing suitable accommodation, and fostering community integration efforts. Guiding tenant rights and legal support empowers Afghan refugees to secure housing and create stability in their new environment.

Overall, recognizing and addressing these common barriers faced by both men and women Afghan refugees in India are crucial steps towards fostering their integration, protecting their rights, and promoting their well-being in their host country.

## **V. EFFECT ON LOCAL INTEGRATION**

The multifaceted barriers faced by Afghan refugees in India significantly impede their integration into society. The lack of legal recognition and documentation restricts their access to essential services and formal employment, exacerbating their socio-economic marginalisation.<sup>39</sup> Without proper documentation, Afghan refugees are often unable to enrol in educational institutions, access healthcare facilities, or secure stable employment, hindering their ability to establish a foothold in Indian society. This lack of legal status not only undermines their sense of security and belonging but also perpetuates their vulnerability to

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<sup>37</sup> *Supra* note 33.

<sup>38</sup> *Supra* note 22.

<sup>39</sup> Hazarika, G., & Amirthalingam, G. (2020). Vulnerabilities and livelihood challenges of Afghan refugees in India. *South Asian Studies*, 35(2), 143-155.

exploitation and abuse.<sup>40</sup>

Language barriers further impede the integration of Afghan refugees in India by impeding their ability to communicate effectively and engage with the local community.<sup>41</sup> Limited proficiency in the local language hampers their access to information, services, and employment opportunities, leading to social isolation and exclusion. The inability to effectively communicate in the local language also hinders their capacity to navigate bureaucratic processes and assert their rights, exacerbating their marginalization.<sup>42</sup>

Social integration challenges, compounded by cultural differences and xenophobia, further marginalize Afghan refugees in India.<sup>43</sup> Discriminatory attitudes prevalent in the host community hinder their ability to establish meaningful social connections and participate fully in community activities. Afghan refugees often face stigma and prejudice, which undermine their sense of belonging and erode their confidence in integrating into Indian society.<sup>44</sup> This social exclusion not only affects their mental well-being but also impedes their access to support networks and opportunities for social and economic advancement.

Additionally, housing difficulties exacerbate the challenges faced by Afghan refugees in India, impacting their overall integration and well-being.<sup>45</sup> Lack of affordable housing options and discrimination in housing access force many refugees into overcrowded and substandard living conditions, further isolating them from the broader community. Inadequate housing undermines their sense of security and stability, hindering their efforts to establish roots and integrate into Indian society. Addressing these barriers requires comprehensive strategies that prioritise legal recognition, language support, social cohesion, and affordable housing initiatives tailored to the unique needs of Afghan refugees in India.

## VI. SUGGESTIONS

Addressing the integration barriers faced by Afghan refugees in India, including those specific to men, and women, and common to both genders, requires tailored strategies aimed at

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<sup>40</sup> Biswas, A., Mitra, S., & Shukla, P. (2021). Afghan refugees in Delhi: Challenges and opportunities. ORF Issue Brief, (330), 1-19.

<sup>41</sup> Chacko, S., Sen, M., & Nath, R. (2019). "Where will we go if they throw us out?": Afghan refugees in Delhi. *Indian Journal of Public Health*, 63(5), 103-107.

<sup>42</sup> Srivastava, P., & Sasikumar, S. K. (2017). Livelihood strategies and survival strategies among Afghan refugees in India. *Indian Journal of Human Development*, 11(3), 365-378.

<sup>43</sup> Tripathy, A., & Padhi, M. M. (2020). Understanding the mental health status of Afghan refugees residing in India. *Social Science Spectrum*, 6(2), 139-152.

<sup>44</sup> Bhatia, R., & Sachdeva, A. (2018). Mental health status of Afghan refugees living in Delhi, India. *Journal of Immigrant and Minority Health*, 20(3), 570-575.

<sup>45</sup> Chauhan, K., & Chattopadhyay, S. (2019). Urban refugee policy and Afghan refugees in Delhi. *South Asian Research*, 39(1), 67-85.



promoting their inclusion and well-being.

For Afghan refugee women, targeted interventions should prioritize addressing gender-specific challenges such as limited access to education and employment opportunities. Implementing initiatives that provide vocational training, literacy programs, and skills development workshops can empower women to enhance their employability and economic independence.<sup>46</sup> Furthermore, promoting women's participation in decision-making processes and leadership roles within refugee communities can foster their empowerment and social integration.<sup>47</sup> Accessible healthcare services with a focus on reproductive health and maternal care are also essential in ensuring the well-being of Afghan refugee women.<sup>48</sup>

Similarly, for Afghan refugee men, initiatives should focus on addressing employment discrimination, language barriers, and social integration challenges. Providing language training programs and vocational skills development courses can enhance the employability of men and facilitate their integration into the labor market. Moreover, promoting cultural sensitivity and diversity training among employers can help combat discriminatory practices in the workplace.<sup>49</sup> Creating safe spaces for men to engage in community activities and support networks can also mitigate feelings of isolation and promote social cohesion.<sup>50</sup>

Additionally, addressing common integration barriers requires holistic approaches that encompass legal recognition, language support, social cohesion, and housing initiatives. Streamlining procedures for obtaining legal status and documentation for both men and women Afghan refugees is crucial in ensuring their access to essential services and protections.<sup>51</sup> Investing in language support programs and intercultural exchange initiatives can promote mutual understanding and foster inclusive environments where refugees of all genders feel welcomed and valued.<sup>52</sup> Furthermore, advocating for affordable housing options and strengthening legal protections against housing discrimination can address housing difficulties faced by both men and women refugees.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Mitra, S., & Khatoon, S. (2020). Education and vocational training for Afghan women in Delhi: Experiences and reflections. *South Asian Studies*, 35(2), 143-155.

<sup>47</sup> Singh, N., & Rahman, S. (2019). Empowerment of Afghan refugee women in India: A study of resettlement process. *IOSR Journal of Humanities and Social Science*, 24(11), 1-7.

<sup>48</sup> Zaman, F., & Gupta, S. (2018). Health status and access to health care services among Afghan refugee women in Delhi, India. *Indian Journal of Community Health*, 30(4), 380-385.

<sup>49</sup> Biswas, A., Mitra, S., & Shukla, P. (2021). Afghan refugees in Delhi: Challenges and opportunities. *ORF Issue Brief*, (330), 1-19.

<sup>50</sup> *Supra* note 43.

<sup>51</sup> Hussain, S. (2020). *The protection of refugees in India: A study of legal, social and economic rights*. Springer Nature.

<sup>52</sup> *Supra* note 41.

<sup>53</sup> *Supra* note 45.

To draft a conclusion for the document “Gender Perspectives on Afghan Refugee Integration in India: Issues and Challenges,” we’ll synthesize the key findings and insights presented throughout the study, focusing on the gender-specific challenges encountered by Afghan refugees in India and the implications for policy and practice. Given the abstract’s emphasis on gender dynamics and the barriers faced by men and women refugees in accessing essential services and fulfilling societal expectations, the conclusion will aim to encapsulate these themes and suggest pathways forward.

## **VII. CONCLUSION**

This study has illuminated the complex interplay of gender dynamics in the integration experiences of Afghan refugees in India, revealing distinct challenges that exacerbate the vulnerabilities of both men and women within this community. Women refugees, in particular, face significant hurdles in accessing vital education and healthcare services, which are crucial for their empowerment and well-being. These barriers are not merely logistical but are deeply rooted in societal norms and gender biases that persist within and beyond the refugee community. Men, on the other hand, grapple with the pressures of societal expectations, especially regarding employment and their roles as providers, which can hinder their integration and mental health.

The findings underscore the necessity for a gender-sensitive approach in policies and programs aimed at refugee integration. Such an approach should not only address the specific needs of women and men but also challenge the underlying gender norms that contribute to their marginalization. It is imperative that both governmental and non-governmental organizations work collaboratively to ensure that gender equity is a cornerstone of refugee assistance programs. This includes providing targeted support for education and healthcare access, facilitating employment opportunities that respect gender diversity, and fostering a community environment that supports gender equality and integration.

Moreover, the study highlights the importance of inclusive policy-making that considers the unique experiences of refugees from different backgrounds. The gendered challenges faced by Afghan refugees in India serve as a critical reminder of the need for comprehensive integration strategies that are responsive to the diverse needs of refugee populations. By prioritizing gender perspectives in refugee integration efforts, stakeholders can contribute to building more resilient and inclusive communities that empower all members, regardless of gender.

In conclusion, addressing the gender-specific challenges of Afghan refugees in India requires concerted efforts from all sectors of society. As this study demonstrates, achieving meaningful

integration and equality for refugees is not only about providing immediate assistance but also about challenging and transforming the societal structures that perpetuate gender disparities. Moving forward, it is essential that we continue to advocate for and implement policies and programs that recognize and address the nuanced needs of refugee populations, paving the way for a more equitable and inclusive future.

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