A Household-Level Investigation of Women Empowerment and Migration Intention: The Case of Afghanistan

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Research Article

ABSTRACT

This study investigates the relationship between two important concerns, namely, migration intentions of households and women empowerment, in the case of Afghanistan, where migration is a process that continues from its history to the present, and international indicators show a quite bad picture of women empowerment or gender equality. It is obvious that women in this country are vulnerable and they need to be empowered. However, it is not evident whether their empowerment is associated with the migration intention of households. Therefore, this paper questions how and in what way the empowerment of women as a vulnerable group within different segments of Afghan society influences the migration intention of households. In the empirical analysis, the variables women leader, women support, women job, and girls education are included as women empowerment measures, along with other variables. Findings show that they do not significantly influence the migration intentions of households when they exist separately. However, it significantly influences migration intentions when they are allowed to interact in the analysis. Hence, it might be said that the empowerment of women from political, social, and economic aspects that are presented by the four abovementioned measures is essential to explain potential movements of the population. Besides, there are significant regional differences that explain migration intentions. These findings are expected to be useful for policy makers on migration policies in this least developed country as classified by the UN.

Keywords: Women empowerment, migration intention, Afghanistan, Gender Equality, Household Level Data

Kadınların Güçlendirilmesi ve Göç Etme Niyeti Üzerine Hanehalkı Düzeyinde Bir Araştırma: Afganistan Örneği

ÖZ

Bu çalışma, göçün ülke tarihinden günümüze kadar devam eden bir süreç olduğu ve uluslararası göstergelerin kadınların güçlendirilmesi veya cinsiyet eşitliği konularında oldukça kötü bir tablo çizen Afganistan örneğinde, hanehalklarının göç niyetleri ve kadınların güçlendirilmesi gibi iki önemli kaygı arasındaki ilişkiyi incelemektedir. Bu ülkedeki kadınların büyük bir hassaslık arz ettiği ve güçlendirilmeleri gerektiği açıktır. Ancak, kadınların güçlenmelerinin hane halkının göç etme niyetiyle ilişkili olup olmadığı konusu o kadar da net değildir. Bu nedenle bu çalışma, Afgan toplumunun farklı kesimleri arasında hassas bir grup olan kadınların güçlendirilmesinin hane halklarının göç etme niyetini nasıl ve ne şekilde etkilediğini sorgulamaktadır. Yapılan ampirik analizde diğer değişkenlerin yanında, kadınlar_lider, kadınlar_destek, kadınlar_iş ve kızlar_eğitim değişkenleri kadının güçlendirilmesi ölçütleri olarak analize dahil edilmiştir. Bulgular kadının güçlendirilmesi ölçütlerinin ayrı ayrı var olduklarında, hanehalklarının göç etme niyetlerini önemli ölçüde etkilemediğini göstermektedir. Bununla birlikte, bu ölçütlerin yapılan analizde etkileşime girmelerine izin verildiğinde, kadının güçlendirilmesinin göç etme niyetini önemli ölçüde etkilediği görülmektedir. Dolayısıyla, bahsi geçen dört ölçüt ile temsil edilen, kadının siyasi, sosyal ve ekonomik yönden güçlendirilmesinin olası nüfus hareketlerini açıklamak açısından önemli olduğu söylenebilir. Ayrıca, göç etme niyetinin açıklanması konusunda önemli bölgesel farklılıkların varlığı söz konusudur. Elde edilen bulguların, bu BM tarafından az gelişmiş olarak sınıflanan ülkenin göç politikaları konusunda politika yapıcılar için faydalı olması beklenmektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Kadınların Güçlenmesi, Göç Niyeti, Afganistan, Toplumsal Cinsiyet Eşitliği, Hanehalkı Düzeyinde Veriler

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Introduction

The long-standing war and turmoil in Afghanistan have profoundly affected all segments of society. After the takeover of the Taliban regime, women and girls were the most affected. According to UN WOMEN (2021), Afghanistan presents a dire picture of gender inequality as it was ranked the last country on the Global Women, Peace and Security Index. More than a quarter of Afghan women are estimated to get married before 18 years old, and 60 % of girls are out of school. Several restrictions under Taliban rule have worsened conditions for women, even on access to basic human rights.

Even though there have been enormous changes in technology, science, knowledge, life expectancy, health, and political participation over the last hundred years, none has been as dramatic as women's acquisition of human rights (Loutfi, 2001). Transformation in society in terms of the roles of men and women is still in progress across the world. Those gender roles cover a wide range of areas such as workplace, education, participation in household decision-making, and household work However, it is not difficult to say that gender equality at work is probably the most discussed issue for many developed and developing countries. It should be kept in mind that this is not likely to be achieved without gaining equality at home (Loutfi, 2001).

Gender equality was determined as the 5th sustainable development goal by the UN. Gender equality does not seem only a basic human right but also a necessity for a peaceful, prosperous, and sustainable world (UN, 2022). To establish a solid society, women empowerment, which might be defined as gaining the ability to act on one's own behalf (Hussain & Amin, 2018), has become increasingly important in countries like Afghanistan. There have been considerable efforts by foreign donors and the national government to improve the lives of Afghan women over the last decade, although no improvement is reflected in the indicators (Beath et al., 2012). In a qualitative fieldwork in Kabul with 126 interviews, Rostami Povey (2003) stated that war and conflicts were experienced differently by women and men. The study highlights that there are increasing numbers of households headed by women because so many men were killed during war and conflict. Those households face exclusion, which makes them even more vulnerable. Cultural and religious factors eliminate women's access to employment and education which in turn means fewer income-generating options for women (Wilcox et al., 2015).

The concept of empowerment might be functional in the design of social policy tools that minimize the structured socioeconomic inequalities in which women are involved (Kalfa Topateş et al. (2022). Because women empowerment captures a multidimensional structure (Dadras, 2022), the method of empowering women may vary in the context of Afghanistan. For example, Wilcox et al. (2015) suggested a project called Women in Agriculture to empower women economically. Training by women empowers women to express their needs openly, and it also eases the interaction between trainer and trainee, which increases the effectiveness of the project. Home food production through this project strengthens the control over food security, nutrition for the family, and the opportunity to participate in the market (Wilcox et al., 2015). In another example, Hassanzadeh (2018) argues that media is a tool to empower women in Afghanistan. The media's important role in social change of encouraging equality and social inclusion was highlighted in the study. Representation of women in a positive way, such as being educated, independent, and working in high-level positions, would be expected to increase more respectful and trusting perceptions of women, while negative ways of representation, such as being uneducated, passive, dependent, etc., is likely to lower women's self-esteem and contribute to attitudes that look down on women (Hassanzadeh, 2018).

Due to long-standing war, conflicts, and environmental conditions such as severe drought, Afghanistan has faced intense migration movements. Starting from the establishment of the country in the 19th century, the overthrowing of the king and government by coups was followed by the establishment of the first Marxist regime through the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan at the end of the 1970s, which caused the first refugee outflows because of arbitrary detentions and executions by this political party (Jazayery, 2002). Internal differences in the party turned to resistance forces called *Mujahidden*, which was supported by Western powers against the Soviet Union, which resulted in the withdrawal of Soviet forces in 1989 (Jazayery, 2002). Disagreement on the composition of the government led to a civil war between 1992 and 1996 that resulted in tens of thousands of murdersand outflows of refugees, while the Taliban emerged and became recognized in 1994 (Jazayery, 2002). Ethnic cleansing under the harsh regime of the Taliban and severe drought produced new migrants fleeing these worsening conditions (van Houte et al., 2015). The Taliban was overthrown in 2002, following which voluntary and involuntary returns of Afghans from European countries began (van Houte et al., 2015). About three million Afghan refugees returned to Afghanistan between 1992 and1993 following *Mujahidden*'s capture of Kabul. After the fall of Taliban in 2002, about five million Afghans have returned, particularly from Pakistan and Iran (Koser & Martin, 2011). Nevertheless, this is not likely to mean a full return of those refugees. As mentioned by Monsutti (2008), those returnees may return to their host countries after they receive an assistance package, or they may not have a long-term plan to stay in Afghanistan. Migration seems not only to be a way to escape wars or conflicts in the country but also an economic strategy for households via remittances (Monsutti, 2008). Wickramasekara and Baruah (2013) show that based on the data of the International Fund for Agricultural Development, Afghanistan received 2.5 billion US Dollars in 2006, which is about 30 % of its total GDP that year.

About nine million people, which constitute one-third of the total population in Afghanistan, live in extreme poverty, although development and reconstruction efforts have been made since 2002 (Shahrani, 2018). Taking the conditions in Afghanistan into account, this country might be considered as a fragile country where its citizens face insecurity, and millions of them move out of their home country to Iran, Pakistan, Central Asia, Türkiye, and European countries to flee from violence, wars, and conflicts since the Soviet invasion in 1979 (İçduygu & Karadağ, 2018). Türkiye as the last point before Europe and Greece as the first point in Europe hosts considerable Afghan refugees (Kuschminder, 2018). Even though they were previously accepted to have protection under international refugee law, changing policies in several European Union countries took away their right to protection, which resulted in them being stuck in Türkiye or in Greece (Kuschminder, 2018). Therefore, it seems that the movements of these refugees are restricted and that this is likely to worsen their well-being.

Given the problems observed in gender equality in Afghanistan and the migration movements that the country has experienced in the historical process, this study investigates the effect of women's empowerment on individuals' intention to migrate. The literature provides some examples of the relationship between women's empowerment and migration. Doss et al. (2022)investigated how social position in the household is associated with male migration using both qualitative and quantitative data in the case of Nepal. Findings suggest that women in the Dalit and Janajati regions are disempowered because of poverty and social exclusion, rather than patriarchal gender norms. More importantly, the findings show that women's empowerment is affected by migrant husbands. Although they may have more work to do, they have more control over production and income, which translates into the fact that women in nuclear families are more empowered if their husband is a migrant.

In another example, Singh et al. (2013) examined how male out-migration affects women empowerment, livelihood, and rice productivity in Biha, India, which was ranked 140th among 156 countries in the Global Gender Gap Index (Kumari et al., 2022). Based on their survey of 400 households in which half of them are migrants, this study suggests that the role of women shifts from worker to manager. This shift is stronger in nuclear households with a migrant husband. Similarly, Ullah (2017) analyzed left-behind women and their financial, social, and political empowerment in five Middle Eastern and North African countries: Yemen, Jordan, Iraq, Morocco, Egypt, and Indonesia, with 53 women in total. This study shows that gender roles change following the migration of men no matter which country they are from. Spouses in such circumstances have more responsibility as they are in charge of fulfilling the welfare of the household. The author also argues that freedom in the absence of a husband enables them to enjoy decision-making, participation in political activities, and mobility.

It is hard to provide research that investigates women's empowerment and migration together in the case of Afghanistan. It is quite obvious that women in Afghanistan have been badly affected by patriarchal gender roles within society, a weak central state, and foreign interferences of the British, Soviet Union, and United States (Moravej, 2022). However, it is not obvious whether the empowerment of women can influence the migration intention of individuals in Afghanistan. Women play important roles such as the of a family and the production of new workers in the source country (Castles and Miller, 2008). This study is expected to provide some important insights. First, women empowerment in one of the worst countries in terms of gender equality deserves particular attention because of its long-standing failure, even after all the efforts made by either national or international sources. Second, in and out migration movements, which are as old as the country's history, need to be addressed in several ways, including women empowerment. The existence of an association may help to control these irregular movements and provide a fairer distribution of resources to be used for resettlements.

The remainder of this paper is as follows: Section 2 provides the data to be used in the empirical investigation and the methodology for the analysis of these data. Section 3 discusses the findings obtained from the empirical analysis. Finally, Section 4 concludes the paper and provides policy implications based on the investigation findings.

Data and Methodology

This study uses the Evaluation of Community-Based Protection and Solutions Programme in Priority Areas of Return and Re-integration in Afghanistan, Household Survey-December 2021 data provided by the UN (UNHCR, IMPACT, 2021) to investigate how women empowerment influences migration intention in Afghanistan. Since 2017, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) has provided solutions for returns and reintegration in priority areas of return and reintegration (PARR) via community-based protection and solutions program response. Thousands of individuals have been supported in these priority areas. More than 2,000 households in each 20 PARR locations were interviewed in 2021 on a variety of topics including livelihoods and economic outlook, household vulnerabilities, community relations and stability, community leadership inclusivity, service quality, and access.

Even though the survey covers 2,008 households originally, the number of households that are involved in the analysis is less because of the variables used in particular specifications. The final sample included 679 households. The survey asked households that *"I/members of households are thinking of moving for employment that meets needs/skills"*. This particular survey question comprises the dependent variable of the empirical analysis. Responses to this question are given on a Likert scale, and distributions across those response categories are given in Figure 1:
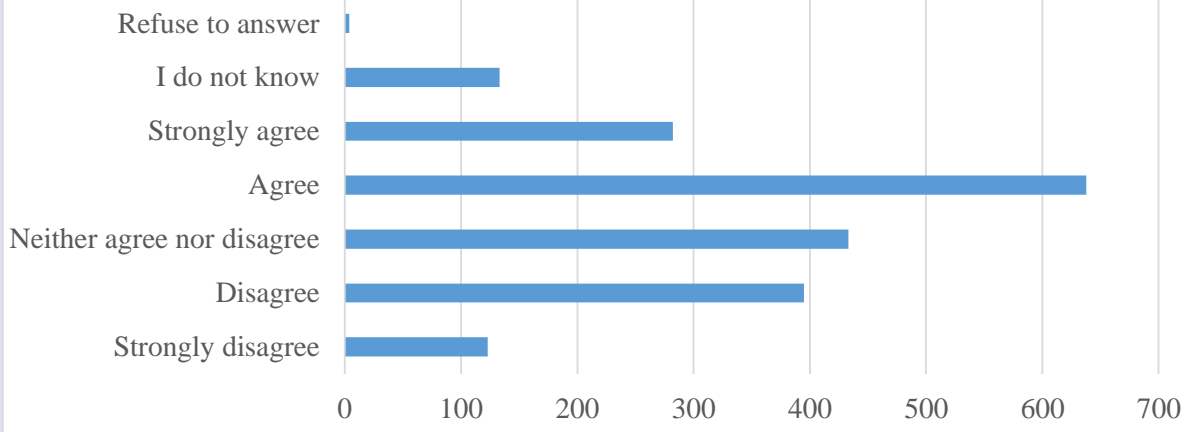
Şekil 1: Cevap kategorilerine göre hanehalkı sayıları
Figure 1: Number of households across response categories

Source: Author's illustration based on UNHCRand IMPACT data

Women Empowerment Measures

1. **Women Leader**: "A woman can be a leader in this location, just like a man can."
2. **Women's Support**: "Community leaders are playing an important role in supporting women in this location."
3. **Women Job**: "Women are being increasingly encouraged to find a job in this location."
4. **Girls' Education**: "Girls are being encouraged to receive the same level and years of education as boys in this location."

Instead of using responses to this question directly, the author prefers converting it into a binary variable that takes "1" if a survey participant responded as *Agree* or *Strongly agree*, and it takes "0" if a survey participant responded as *Disagree* or *Strongly disagree*. Therefore, the categories of *Refuse to answer*, *I do not know*, or *Neither agree nor disagree* go missing.

Within the independent variables chosen to explain migration intentions, this study pays particular attention to those related to women empowerment. There are four variables used in this respect, as summarized below.

These measures are based on the survey questions quoted above. Response scales were originally given as 0: strongly disagree, disagree; 0.5: neither agree nor disagree; and 1: agree, strongly agree. However, in the analysis, the author similarly considers "0" and "1", so, those who neither agree nor disagree go missing. Rest of the independent variables that are thought to be associated with migration intention cover improvement in the market (Improving), being a returnee (Returnee), being over 50 years old (Older), being aware of NGO's support in the location (Aware_aid), being male (Male), if household has debt (Debt), household income (Income), head of household (Head), household size (HS), and location where household lives (Locations). All missing observations in both dependent and independent variables are dropped. Summary statistics and explanations of these variables are given in Table 1

Since the dependent variable of this analysis is a binary variable, the probit model estimate is preferred to explain migration intention. The following model is used to explain this relationship if it exists:

$$Mig\_intention_h = \beta_0 + \beta_1 Women\_leader_h + \beta_2 Women\_support_h + \beta_3 Women\_job_h + \beta_4 Girls\_edu_h + \beta_5 Others_h + \varepsilon_h$$

where subscript *h* refers to household h; *Women_leader* refers to A woman can be a leader in this location; *Women_support* refers to community leaders playing an important role in supporting women in this location; *Women_job* refers to women being increasingly encouraged to find a job in this location; *Girls_edu* refers to girls being encouraged to receive the same level and years of education as boys in this location; *Others* presents other household characteristics that might affect this intention; and finally ε presents the random error term. To see how each of the women empowerment measures affects the migration intention of a household, each measure is included one by one, and then their interaction is also included to see how the effect is if all empowerment measures are in place together, as illustrated in Figure 2. Each of the specifications is weighted using the weights given in the survey.

Çizelge 1: Özet istatistikler
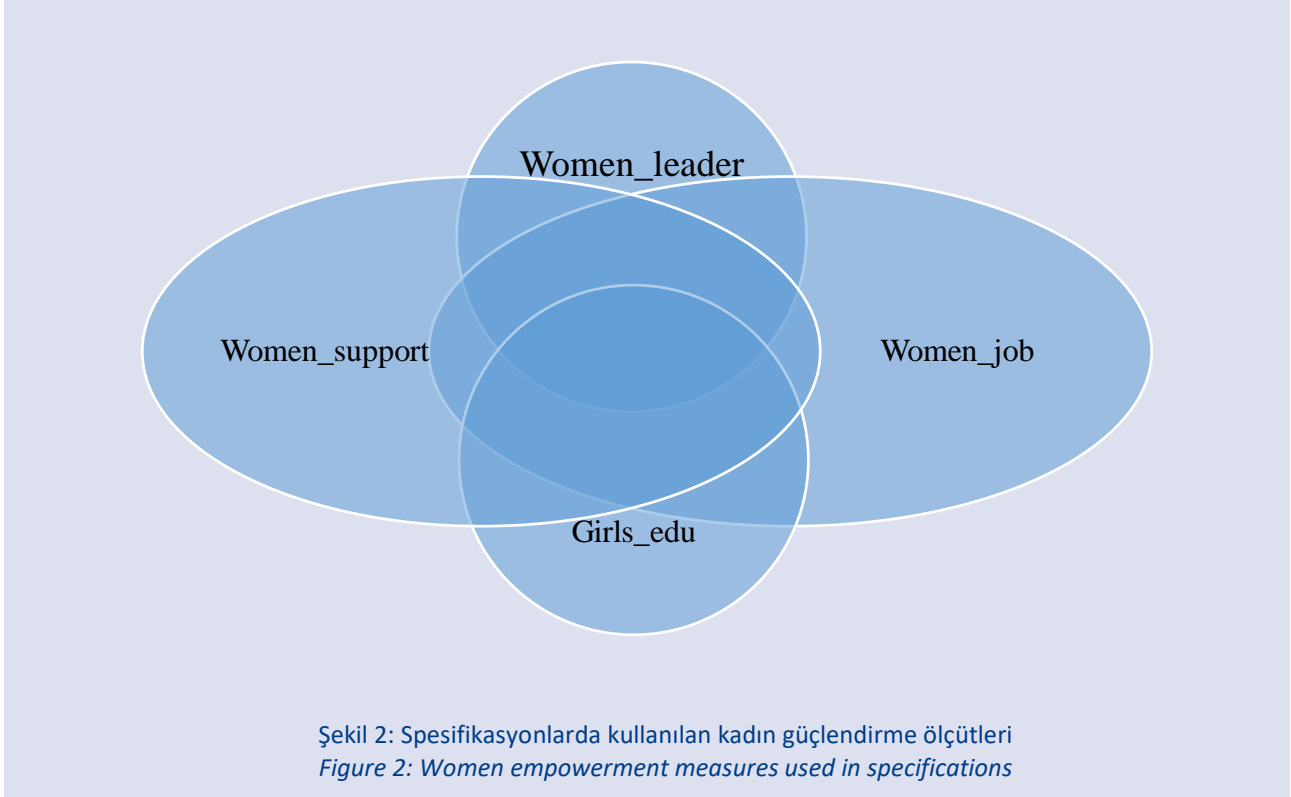*Table 1: Summary statistics*

Variables	Explanation	Responses	Frequency	Percentage
Mig_intention	I/members of household are thinking of moving for employment that meets their needs/skills	0: Disagree	300	37,97
		1: Agree	490	62,03
Women_leader	A woman can be a leader in this location, just as a man can	0: Disagree	550	69,62
		1: Agree	240	30,38
Women_support	Community leaders play an important role in supporting women in this location	0: Disagree	365	46,2
		1: Agree	425	53,8
Women_job	Women are being increasingly encouraged to find jobs in this location	0: Disagree	422	53,42
		1: Agree	368	46,58
Girls_edu	Girls are encouraged to receive the same level and years of education as boys in this location	0: Disagree	309	39,11
		1: Agree	481	60,89
Improving	Opportunities in the market are improving, with better salaries	0: Disagree	703	88,99
		1: Agree	87	11,01
Returnee	Being a returnee	0: No	601	76,08
		1: Yes	189	23,92
Older	Being over 50 years old	0: No	608	76,96
		1: Yes	182	23,04
Aware_aid	Are you aware of NGOs working in locations to support the community?	0: No	498	63,04
		1: Yes	292	36,96
Male	Gender:Male	0: No	172	21,77
		1: Yes	618	78,23
Debt	Does the household currently have debt?	0: No	216	27,34
		1: Yes	574	72,66
Head	Are you the head of the household?	0: No	92	11,65
		1: Yes	698	88,35

Çizelge 1: Devamı
Table 1: Cont.

Variables	Explanation	Responses	Frequency	Percentage
Locations	Which location is this settlement?	Shahrak-e-Amir Shansab	15	1,9
		Aroki Sofla	36	4,56
		Asadabad	15	1,9
		Baghak	56	7,09
		Bolan	54	6,84
		Damqul	46	5,82
		District 2&3	53	6,71
		Districts 2, 5, and 6	69	8,73
		Guzara	37	4,68
		Kama	19	2,41
		Khairo Kariz	49	6,2
		Mahajerabad	10	1,27
		Mihterlam	40	5,06
		Panjwai Center	50	6,33
		Qala-e-Abdul Ali	23	2,91
		Qalamwal Mina	21	2,66

			Obs	Mean	S. D.	Min	Max
	Shahrk Mohajreen	10	1,27				
	Shamal Darya	85	10,76				
	Surkhrod	85	10,76				
	Tapa Wahdat	17	2,15				
Income	What was the total cash income from all sources for households in the last 30 days?	Continuous	790	7050,76	5968,97	0	80000
HS	Household size	Continuous	790	8,50	4,48	1	14

Şekil 2: Spesifikasyonlarda kullanılan kadın güçlendirme ölçütleri
Figure 2: Women empowerment measures used in specifications

Hence, the specifications used in this investigation are made up as follows:

Specification 1: Only **Women_leader** among women empowerment measures is included, along with other independent variables

Specification 2: Only **Women_leader** and **Women_support** among women empowerment measures are included, along with other independent variables

Specification 3: Only **Women_job** among women empowerment measures is included, along with other independent variables

Specification 4: **Women_leader, Women_support,** and **Women_job** among women empowerment measures are included, along with other independent variables

Specification 5: Only **Girls_edu** among women empowerment measures is included, along with other independent variables

Specification 6: All of the women empowerment measures that are **Women_leader, Women_support,** and **Women_job** are included, along with other independent variables

Specification 7: Interactions among **Women_leader, Women_support, Women_job,** and **Girls_edu** are allowed, along with other independent variables

Findings

This section provides the findings of the profit estimates. Each of the specifications is given in columns with their specific number (e.g., Specification 1 is given in column 1). In the profit estimates, coefficients are not directly interpretable in terms of the size of the effect. This necessitates the calculation of marginal effect for each coefficient. However, the aim of this study was to determine the significance of each variable included in the analysis. Therefore, only profit estimates are presented, rather than marginal effects.

In column 1, where only Women_leader is included as a women empowerment measure, the sign of Women_leader is negative, which means that the probability of migration intentions decreases in locations where women can be leaders. However, this is not statistically significant. Among other independent variables, older, male, and head had statistically

significant coefficients. Accordingly, being older and being the head of a household decreases the probability of migration intentions, while being male increases that probability. The sign and significance of these three variables are consistent across seven specifications.

Specification 2, where Women_support is also included, reveals similar outcomes. The effects of Women_leader and Women_support are negative, but statistically not significant. Specification 3, where only Women_job is included, reveals a positive relationship that means the probability of migration intentions increases in locations where women are encouraged to find a job. However, this relationship is also statistically not significant. Besides, the coefficient of Improving becomes significant though only marginally. This means that improvements in the market decrease the probability of migration intentions, as might be expected. Findings in column 4, where Women_leader, Women_support, and Women_job are included separately, are similar to the previous specifications. In Specification 5, the coefficient of Girls_edu is negative, which means that the probability of migration intentions decreases in locations where girls are encouraged to get the same education as boys, although it is not statistically significant. Variable Improving is again negative and statistically significant at the 10% significance level. Specification 6 includes each of the women empowerment variables, but none of them is significant.

Finally, Specification 7 includes all of the women empowerment measures and allows interactions between those measures. Rather than presenting all, only those with statistically significant coefficients are presented in this table to save space. Accordingly, in this specification, Women_job is positive and statistically significant at the 5% significance level. This means that households in locations where women are encouraged to find a job are more likely to think of moving somewhere else. This might be due to higher competition for jobs in such locations. When Women_leader interacts with Women_job, the sign of the coefficient becomes negative and statically significant at the 10% level. This finding implies that in communities where women can be leaders and are encouraged to find a job, households are less likely to move somewhere else. The relationship is similar to the interaction between Women_support and Women_job. However, when Girls_edu is included, the interaction coefficient becomes positive and statistically significant at the 5% significance level. This interaction refers to a fairer environment in terms of gender equality. Households in regions where women are supported by the community, women are encouraged to find a job, and girls are encouraged to get the same level of education as boys are more likely to migrate elsewhere for employment that meets their needs or skills. This might be due to a higher completion rate for jobs in such locations. Overall, these women empowerment measures do not significantly influence the migration intentions of households when they exist separately. However, it significantly influences migration intentions when they exist together.

Çizelge 3: Probit tahminlerinin bulguları
Table 3: Findings of the probit estimates

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Women_leader	-0,088	-0,021		-0,053		-0,050	0,274
	(0,190)	(0,206)		(0,216)		(0,221)	(0,688)
Women_support		-0,171		-0,231		-0,227	-0,246
		(0,222)		(0,248)		(0,256)	(0,364)
Women_job			0,009	0,149		0,155	**1,220****
			(0,176)	(0,212)		(0,214)	**(0,554)**
Women_leader# Women_job							**-1,891***
							(1,050)
Women_support # Women_job							**-1,230***
							(0,746)
Girls_edu					-0,060	-0,019	0,270
					(0,179)	(0,218)	(0,295)
Women_support # Women_job #Girls_edu							**2,341****
							(0,924)
Improving	-0,460	-0,443	-0,472*	-0,446	-0,465*	-0,445	-0,426
	(0,282)	(0,286)	(0,279)	(0,285)	(0,280)	(0,285)	(0,293)
Returnee	0,249	0,253	0,246	0,259	0,247	0,260	0,262
	(0,167)	(0,169)	(0,168)	(0,170)	(0,166)	(0,169)	(0,163)
Older	-0,501***	-0,509***	-0,502***	-0,522***	-0,499***	-0,521***	-0,544***
	(0,183)	(0,183)	(0,182)	(0,186)	(0,182)	(0,187)	(0,191)

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Aware_aid	-0,114	-0,116	-0,114	-0,112	-0,115	-0,112	-0,107
	(0,155)	(0,156)	(0,155)	(0,156)	(0,154)	(0,156)	(0,152)
Male	0,884***	0,876***	0,888***	0,844***	0,893***	0,845***	0,825***
	(0,228)	(0,227)	(0,230)	(0,232)	(0,228)	(0,232)	(0,236)
Debt	0,226	0,218	0,225	0,214	0,220	0,213	0,177
	(0,188)	(0,190)	(0,188)	(0,190)	(0,192)	(0,194)	(0,202)
Income	0,000	0,000	0,000	0,000	0,000	0,000	0,000
	(0,000)	(0,000)	(0,000)	(0,000)	(0,000)	(0,000)	(0,000)
Head	-1,293***	-1,251***	-1,301***	-1,236***	-1,289***	-1,233***	-1,196***
	(0,400)	(0,399)	(0,402)	(0,399)	(0,408)	(0,405)	(0,409)
HS	-0,002	-0,001	-0,002	-0,001	-0,002	-0,001	-0,002
	(0,020)	(0,020)	(0,020)	(0,020)	(0,020)	(0,020)	(0,020)

Çizelge 3: Devamı
Table 3: Cont.

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Locations							
Aroki Sofla	0,062	0,029	0,016	0,026	0,018	0,024	-0,047
	(0,492)	(0,494)	(0,485)	(0,495)	(0,484)	(0,495)	(0,513)
Asadabad	0,899**	0,859**	0,889**	0,840**	0,868**	0,833**	0,719
	(0,404)	(0,403)	(0,406)	(0,406)	(0,405)	(0,408)	(0,438)
Bolan	1,338***	1,238***	1,345***	1,279***	1,311***	1,275***	1,275***
	(0,416)	(0,427)	(0,426)	(0,431)	(0,425)	(0,433)	(0,448)
Districts 2 and 3	1,763***	1,719***	1,715***	1,727***	1,709***	1,724***	1,653***
	(0,482)	(0,484)	(0,476)	(0,484)	(0,476)	(0,486)	(0,503)
Districts 2, 5, and 6	-1,467***	-1,557***	-1,458***	-1,525***	-1,491***	-1,529***	-1,527***
	(0,500)	(0,495)	(0,495)	(0,493)	(0,479)	(0,482)	(0,490)
Guzara	0,311	0,282	0,283	0,284	0,276	0,280	0,301
	(0,406)	(0,404)	(0,402)	(0,405)	(0,400)	(0,406)	(0,424)
Kama	1,135**	1,159**	1,130**	1,145**	1,135**	1,145**	1,150**
	(0,490)	(0,493)	(0,487)	(0,493)	(0,487)	(0,493)	(0,498)
Khairo Kariz	1,068**	0,974**	1,091**	1,019**	1,038**	1,010**	1,010**
	(0,421)	(0,433)	(0,433)	(0,438)	(0,443)	(0,448)	(0,468)
Panjwai Center	0,798**	0,685*	0,815**	0,737*	0,759*	0,728*	0,722
	(0,394)	(0,415)	(0,409)	(0,421)	(0,416)	(0,430)	(0,444)
Qala-e-Abdul Ali	0,031	0,052	0,044	0,049	0,050	0,051	-0,030
	(0,428)	(0,426)	(0,429)	(0,426)	(0,429)	(0,427)	(0,437)
Qalamwal Mina	-1,282**	-1,295**	-1,261**	-1,232**	-1,252**	-1,223**	-1,269**
	(0,514)	(0,508)	(0,524)	(0,523)	(0,512)	(0,528)	(0,557)
Shahrk Mohajreen	-0,275	-0,284	-0,292	-0,264	-0,279	-0,260	-0,332
	(0,568)	(0,563)	(0,570)	(0,562)	(0,570)	(0,563)	(0,566)
Shamal Darya	0,669*	0,550	0,689*	0,569	0,654*	0,565	0,642
	(0,371)	(0,403)	(0,381)	(0,405)	(0,382)	(0,406)	(0,432)
Surkhrod	2,488***	2,477***	2,423***	2,470***	2,434***	2,468***	2,401***
	(0,468)	(0,466)	(0,470)	(0,468)	(0,466)	(0,468)	(0,477)
Tapa Wahdat	-1,113*	-1,190*	-1,111*	-1,204*	-1,093*	-1,195*	-1,142
	(0,640)	(0,653)	(0,638)	(0,661)	(0,645)	(0,688)	(0,730)
Observations	679	679	679	679	679	679	676
Pseudo-R2	0,505	0,506	0,505	0,506	0,505	0,506	0,515

Robust standard errors in parentheses
*** p<0,01, ** p<0,05, * p<0,1

From a regional differences perspective, it is seen that some locations have positive and some others have negative associations with the migration intentions of households. In general, these relationships are consistent across specifications. Considering the last specification (i.e., Specification 7), households in Bolan, Districts 2 and 3, Kama, Khairo Kariz, and Surkhrod are more likely to intend migration, whereas households located in Districts 2, 5, and 6 and Qalamwal Mina are less likely. This provides evidence of regional disparities in Afghanistan.

Concluding Remarks

This study investigates the relationship between two important concerns, migration intentions of individuals and women's empowerment, in the case of Afghanistan, where migration is a process that continues from its history to the present, and international indicators show a quite bad picture of women's empowerment or gender equality. Long-standing wars, conflicts, and environmental conditions make this country vulnerable from economic, social, and political perspectives. Afghan women seem to be the worst affected group within different segments of society. Therefore, this paper questions how and in which way the empowerment of this vulnerable group influences migration intention, which is expected to provide an important source of guidance to be used in the country's migration policies.

Findings show that women empowerment measures, that is, *Women_leader, Women_support, Women_job,* and *Girls_edu*, do not significantly influence the migration intentions of households when they exist separately. However, it significantly influences migration intentions when they are allowed to interact. Accordingly, individuals in communities where a woman can be a leader in this location, just like a man can, and where women are encouraged to get a job are less likely to think of migration. Similarly, individuals in communities where community leaders play an important role in supporting women and women who are encouraged to get a job are less likely to think of migration. However, individuals in communities where community leaders play an important role in supporting women, women are encouraged to get a job, and girls are being encouraged to receive the same level and years of education as boys are more likely to think of migration. This might be due to the fact that gender equality in access to education, along with support for women and fairer conditions in labor competition in the market, may lead to higher pressure over scarce jobs. Eventually, this higher level of competition may generate outflows of labor seeking a job elsewhere. Therefore, one can say that based on the findings of this study, empowerment of women from political, social, and economic aspects that are presented by the four abovementioned measures is important to explain potential movements of the population. It is also worth mentioning that there are significant regional differences that explain migration intentions. From a policy point of view, it might be suggested that if women were empowered and job opportunities were created, migration movements that might be regional or international would be lessened. In addition, the elimination of regional differences would also slow down migration movements.

Extended Abstract

The long-standing war and turmoil in Afghanistan have deeply affected all segments of society. After the takeover of the Taliban regime, women and girls were the most affected. According to UN WOMEN (2021), Afghanistan presents a very bad picture of gender inequality as it was ranked the last country on the Global Women, Peace and Security Index. More than a quarter of Afghan women are estimated to get married before 18 years old, and 60 % of girls are out of school. Several restrictions under Taliban rule have worsened conditions for women, even on access to basic human rights.

Gender equality was determined as the fifth sustainable development goal by the UN. This does not seem only a basic human right but also a necessity for a peaceful, prosperous, and sustainable world (UN, 2022). To establish a solid society, women empowerment, which might be defined as gaining the ability to act on one's own behalf (Hussain & Amin, 2018), has become increasingly important in countries like Afghanistan. There have been considerable efforts by the foreign donors and the national government to improve life of Afghan women over the last decade, although no improvement is reflected in the indicators (Beath et al., 2012). In a qualitative fieldwork in Kabul with 126 interviews, Rostami Povey (2003) stated that war and conflicts were experienced differently by women and men. The study highlights that there are increasing numbers of households headed by women because so many men were killed during war and conflict. Those households face exclusion, which makes them even more vulnerable. In addition, cultural and religious factors eliminate access to employment and education for women, which in turn means fewer income-generating options for women (Wilcox et al., 2015).

Due to long-standing war, conflicts, and environmental conditions such as severe drought, Afghanistan has faced intense migration movements. Starting from the establishment of the country in the 19th century, the overthrowing of the king and government by coups was followed by the establishment of the first Marxist regime through the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan at the end of the 1970s, which caused the first refugee outflows because of arbitrary detentions and executions by this political party (Jazayery, 2002). Internal differences in the party turned to resistance forces called Mujahidden, which was supported by Western powers against the Soviet Union, which resulted in the withdrawal of Soviet forces in 1989 (Jazayery, 2002). Disagreement on the composition of the government led to a civil war between 1992 and 1996 that resulted in tens of thousands of murdersand outflows of refugees, while the Taliban emerged and became recognized in 1994 (Jazayery, 2002). Ethnic cleansing under the harsh regime of the Taliban and severe drought produced new migrants fleeing these worsening conditions (van Houte et al., 2015). The Taliban was overthrown in 2002, following whichvoluntary and involuntary returns of Afghans from European countries began (van Houte et al., 2015). About three million Afghan refugees returned to Afghanistan between 1992 and1993 following Mujahidden's capture of Kabul. After the fall of Taliban in 2002, about five million Afghans have returned, particularly from Pakistan and Iran (Koser & Martin, 2011). Nevertheless, this is not likely to mean a full return of

those refugees. As mentioned by Monsutti (2008), those returnees may return to their host countries after they receive an assistance package, or they may not have a long-term plan to stay in Afghanistan. Migration seems not only to be a way to escape wars or conflicts in the country but also an economic strategy for households via remittances (Monsutti, 2008). Wickramasekara and Baruah (2013) show that based on the data of the International Fund for Agricultural Development, Afghanistan received 2.5 billion US Dollars in 2006, which is about 30 % of its total GDP that year.

About nine million people, which constitute one-third of the total population in Afghanistan, live in extreme poverty, although development and reconstruction efforts have been made since 2002 (Shahrani, 2018). Considering the conditions in Afghanistan, this country might be considered a fragile country where its citizens face insecurity and millions of them move out of their home country to Iran, Pakistan, Central Asia, Türkiye, and European countries to flee from violence, wars, and conflicts since the Soviet invasion in 1979 (İçduygu & Karadağ, 2018).

Given the problems observed in gender equality in Afghanistan and the migration movements that the country has experienced in the historical process, this study investigates the effect of women's empowerment on individuals' intention to migrate. The literature provides some examples of the relationship between women's empowerment and migration. Doss et al. (2022) investigated how social position in the household is associated with male migration using both qualitative and quantitative data in the case of Nepal. Findings suggest that women in the Dalit and Janajati regions are disempowered because of poverty and social exclusion, rather than patriarchal gender norms. More importantly, the findings show that women's empowerment is affected by migrant husbands. Although they may have more work to do, they have more control over production and income, which translates into the fact that women in nuclear families are more empowered if their husband is a migrant.

In another example, Singh et al. (2013) examined how male out-migration affects women's empowerment, livelihood, and rice productivity in Biha, India, which was ranked 140th among 156 countries in the Global Gender Gap Index (Kumari et al., 2022). Based on their survey of 400 households in which half of them are migrants, this study suggests that the role of women shifts from worker to manager. This shift is stronger in nuclear households with a migrant husband. Similarly, Ullah (2017) analyzed left-behind women and their financial, social, and political empowerment in five Middle Eastern and North African countries: Yemen, Jordan, Iraq, Morocco, Egypt, and Indonesia, with 53 women in total. This study shows that gender roles change following the migration of men no matter which country they are from. Spouses in such circumstances have more responsibility as they are in charge of fulfilling the welfare of the household. The author also argues that freedom in the absence of a husband enables them to enjoy decision-making, participation in political activities, and mobility.

It is hard to provide research that investigates women's empowerment and migration together in the case of Afghanistan. It is quite obvious that women in Afghanistan have been badly affected by patriarchal gender roles within society, a weak central state, and foreign interferences of the British, Soviet Union, and United States (Moravej, 2022). However, it is not obvious whether the empowerment of women can influence the migration intention of individuals in Afghanistan. This study is expected to provide some important insights. First, women's empowerment in one of the worst countries in terms of gender equality deserves particular attention because of its long-standing failure, even after all the efforts made by either national or international sources. Second, in-and-out migration movements, which are as old as the country's history, need to be addressed in several ways, including women's empowerment. The existence of an association may help to control these irregular movements and provide a fairer distribution of resources to be used for resettlements.

This study uses the Evaluation of Community-Based Protection and Solutions Programme in Priority Areas of Return and Re-integration in Afghanistan, Household Survey-December 2021 data provided by the UN (UNHCR, IMPACT, 2021) to investigate how women empowerment influences migration intention in Afghanistan. Even though the survey covers 2,008 households originally, the number of households that are involved in the analysis is less because of the variables used in particular specifications. The survey asked households that "I/members of households are thinking of moving for employment that meets needs/skills". This particular survey question comprises the dependent variable of the empirical analysis. Instead of using responses to this question directly, the author prefers converting it into a binary variable that takes "1" if a survey participant responded as Agree or Strongly agree, and it takes "0" if a survey participant responded as Disagree or Strongly disagree.

Within the independent variables that are chosen to explain migration intentions, this study pays particular attention to those that are related to women's empowerment, which are binary variables taking 1 if agreed and 0 if disagreed. There are four variables used in this respect

1. Women's Leader: "A woman can be a leader in this location, just like a man can."
2. Women's Support: "Community leaders are playing an important role in supporting women in this location."
3. Women's Job: "Women are being increasingly encouraged to find a job in this location."
4. Girls' Education: "Girls are being encouraged to receive the same level and years of education as boys in this location."

Seven different specifications are utilized to explain households' migration intention in which both women empowerment measures are involved separately and together within interactions to see how those particular variables influence the dependent variable.

Findings show that women empowerment measures, that is, Women_leader, Women_support, Women_job, and Girls_edu, do not significantly influence the migration intentions of households when they exist separately. However, it significantly influences migration intentions when they are allowed to interact. Accordingly, individuals in communities where a woman can be a leader in this location, just like a man can, and where women are encouraged to get a job are less likely to think of migration. Similarly, individuals in communities where community leaders play an important role in supporting women and women are encouraged to get a job are less likely to think of migration. However, individuals in communities where community leaders play an important role in supporting women, women who are encouraged to get a job, and girls are being encouraged to receive the same level and years of education as boys are more likely to think of migration. This might be due to the fact that gender equality in access to education, along with support for women and fairer conditions in labor competition in the market, may lead to higher pressure over scarce jobs. Eventually, this higher level of competition may generate outflows of labor seeking a job elsewhere. Therefore, one can say that the empowerment of women from political, social, and economic aspects that are presented by the four abovementioned measures is important to explain potential movements of the population. It is also worth mentioning that there are significant regional differences that explain migration intentions. From a policy point of view, it might be suggested that if women were empowered and job opportunities were created, migration movements that might be regional or international would be lessened. In addition, the elimination of regional differences would also slow down migration movements.

Katkı Oranları ve Çıkar Çatışması / Contrıbutıon Rates and Conflicts of Interest

Etik Beyan	Bu çalışmanın hazırlanma sürecinde bilimsel ve etik ilkelere uyulduğu ve yararlanılan tüm çalışmaların kaynakçada belirtildiği beyan olunur.	**Ethical Statement**	It is declared that scientific and ethical principles have been followed while carrying out and writing this study and that all the sources used have been properly cited
Yazar Katkıları	Çalışmanın Tasarlanması: EKK (%100) Veri Toplanması: EKK (%100) Veri Analizi: EKK (%100) Makalenin Yazımı: EKK (%100) Makale Gönderimi ve Revizyonu: EKK (%100)	**Author Contributions**	Research Design: EKK (%100) Data Collection: EKK (%100) Data Analysis: EKK (%100) Writing the Article: EKK (%100) Article Submission and Revision: EKK (%100)
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Çıkar Çatışması	Çıkar çatışması beyan edilmemiştir.	**Conflicts of Interest**	The author(s) has no conflict of interest to declare.
Finansman	Bu araştırmayı desteklemek için dış fon kullanılmamıştır.	**Grant Support**	The author(s) acknowledge that they received no external funding in support of this research.
Telif Hakkı & Lisans	Yazarlar dergide yayınlanan çalışmalarının telif hakkına sahiptirler ve çalışmaları CC BY-NC 4.0 lisansı altında yayımlanmaktadır.	**Copyright & License**	Authors publishing with the journal retain the copyright to their work licensed under the CC BY-NC 4.0.

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