

Understanding the Life of Afghans in Pakistan

Self-perception of Refugees

Fatemeh Kamali-Chirani



SDPI
Sustainable Development Policy Institute

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Foreword

This study has been attempted at a very uncertain time in history. Recent political transition in Afghanistan has made lives for ordinary Afghans far more difficult than what they had anticipated at the time of announcement of NATO troops withdrawal. Serious balance of payments crisis, food shortages, and supply chain stoppages have led to disruptions in livelihoods.

The Afghans living in Pakistan once again find themselves at crossroads. They are unable to envision a future for themselves in their own homeland, at least not in the near future. To make matters worse, they are often not clear how much more time they will be allowed to remain as refugees or otherwise, within the boundaries of Pakistan.

The Government of Pakistan has however appealed to the international community, not to leave the new administration in Afghanistan isolated. The humanitarian assistance being promised by the development partners will not be sufficient to bring Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) back on track. Most of the large infrastructure development programmes aimed at providing an enabling business environment in leading cities of Afghanistan have also come to a halt. A sudden increase in price inflation, unemployment and underemployment could easily trigger another long duration civil war in the country besides giving rise to various other social evils with may also be potential threat to the neighbors of Afghanistan.

It is in this backdrop that this study by Dr. Fatemeh Kamali-Chirani will contribute immensely to the political economy of this subject and provide options and pathways which the Government of Pakistan and friends of Pakistan could adopt to help Afghans in this region to achieve a respectable and certain future. This research draws from recent in-depth interviews which in turn should give profound insights to the readers in to the social, psychological, and economic pressures being faced by the Afghan community in Pakistan and beyond. This study should only be seen as a start of a longer effort to bring light to the challenges faced by one of the most vulnerable community across Central and South Asia.

Vaqar Ahmad,

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Sustainable Development Policy Institute (SDPI)

November 2021

1. Introduction

“I think my life does not matter anymore. But I just wish our children get a chance to study and work here. This is my dream.”

A male Hazara Afghan, personal communication, 2021

“If there was peace in Afghanistan, we would have never left it. Life in our own country is always ideal. There is a proverb that means that ‘Living in Peace is like Paradise’. Everyone appreciates living in peace. The life we lived in Afghanistan was a very tough life. Here we are happy (we are) optimistic that in the coming future, we will be more economically empowered”.

A male Pashtun Afghan, personal communication, 2021

“I am very disturbed by the word Afghani or Kabuli because here, people use this word for us as a stereotype. Police also arrest and bother us without any reason because people perceive us here just as Afghani. I want to remove the word Afghani and fully become a Pakistani citizen”.

A male Pashtun Afghan, personal communication, 2021

Afghan refugees abiding in Pakistan deal with contradictory feelings, mismatched hopes and confused identities.

The research on displaced populations, especially Afghan refugees in Pakistan, Iran and Europe is rich. Their economic activities and livelihood options¹, their

1. Church World Services. (2013). Accessing Services in the City the Significance of Urban Refugee-Host Relations in Cameroon, Indonesia and Pakistan Church World Service February 2013 (Issue February).

socioeconomic status and demographic profile², their informal work³, self-employed and temporary employment⁴ as well as their access to education in different provinces of Pakistan⁵ are discussed in academic debates several times. Nevertheless, focusing on their personal reflections and perspectives, on their hopes and aspirations, and on their job ambitions, has been rarely scrutinized. This paper aims to fill this gap by reflecting up-front and discussing actually, the personal viewpoints of Afghan refugees.

This paper attempts to delineate the perspectives of Afghans in Pakistan regarding their lives, personal aspirations, and their relationship with Pakistani society. This is particularly important so the needs of Afghan refugees can be adequately understood and met by the Pakistani government and other international organizations.

Currently, more than 1.4 million registered and about 1.5 million unregistered Afghan refugees live in Pakistan. Many of them entered Pakistan some 40 years ago, after the Soviet invasion in 1979. In Appendix 1 the overview of Afghan refugee population in Pakistan is displayed.

After more than four decades of exile in Pakistan, it is time to move from merely supplying livelihoods, to establishing a co-existing environment that allows both Pakistanis and Afghans to actively participate in. Understanding Afghans and their self-perceptions is essential first step to this process.

For this understanding to truly prosper, the bond shared between Afghans and Pakistanis must be able to withstand all pressures and tensions. During times of political tensions or humanitarian turmoil - such as the recent Taliban takeover in Afghanistan that instigated several Afghans against Pakistan on their support for the Taliban - the relationship must be able to absorb all upheavals with no negative bearing. Scrutinizing the statements of this study's participants (even the most depressing ones) showcased that living in Pakistan is much appreciated by Afghan refugees.

Last but not the least, understanding Afghan refugees' lives in Pakistan is particularly crucial to mitigate the onset of another 'migration crises' mirroring the one that happened in 2015. In 2015 more than a million people reach Europe via the sea, the

2. Shah, N., Amjad, R., Hameed, M., & Shahzad, A. (2020). Pakistan Migration Report. <https://www.gids.org.pk/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/Migration-Report-2020-Complete-Grayscale-1.pdf>

3. Khan, A. (2017). Protracted Afghan Refugee Situation: Policy Options for Pakistan. *Institute of Strategic Studies*, 37(1), 42–65.

4. Mielke, K., Nadeem, S., Khatana, R. A., Ahmed, Z., Irshad, A., Kiran, S., Etzold, B., Asghari, S., & Javed, M. M. (2021). *Figurations of Displacement in and beyond Pakistan*. 7.

5. Khan, N. (2020). Top students in other cities, Afghan refugees not allowed secondary education in Karachi. <https://www.arabnews.pk/node/1713426/pakistan>

majority of them were Syrians fleeing their war-torn country, but also people from Iraq and Afghanistan. For controlling possible waves of refugees moving to Europe by routing them to neighbouring Pakistan, there must be substantial understanding of Afghan living in Pakistan, so new projects and policies are better able to align accordingly.

While this research does not aim to mirror the reality of the entire refugee populace based in Pakistan, given it is based on real-time experiences of a few Afghans, it can however play its part in filling the data gap on the socio-economic and cultural facets of Afghan refugee lives. It aims to bring out true lived experiences that can inform resource allocation and policy programming. For this purpose, the paper also provides an overview of the contribution of international organizations and Pakistani government, and offers a proposed way forward.

Method and Limitations

The research method employed in the study has been in-depth interviews with Afghan refugees, experts who work for the same, and other relevant stakeholders. Secondary data resources, including academic researches, reports, and project evaluations (both public and private) have been referred to.

Afghan refugees with diverse backgrounds were selected for interviews (See Table 1). Interviews were conducted in October 2021 by a team of interviewers fluent in languages of Afghan refugees - Pashtun, Dari, Urdu and English. Interview locations included Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) and Balochistan, as most Afghans live in these provinces (58 percent in KP and 22.8 percent in Balochistan)⁶; and, Islamabad as it hails Afghans abiding in refugee camps. Though it is important to mention that the housing in the refugee camps of Pakistan is in an order of village. So they are also called refugee villages.

The questionnaire format mainly included open-ended questions to assess participants' views on several issues. This format allowed for a deeper understanding by way of providing space for response. A few rating questions were used as well, to aid the researcher in better comprehension. Questions were determined in three main categories, excluding opening and closing questions. Interviewers were also given the flexibility to alter certain questions based on circumstantial requirement. The questionnaire is displayed in Appendix 2.

6. UNHCR (The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) (Feb.2021) Overview of Afghan Refugee Population – Pakistan, retrieved from: <https://reporting.unhcr.org/sites/default/files/UNHCR%20Pakistan-overview%20of%20Afghan%20refugee%20population-February%202021.pdf>

Out of the 20 participants originally planned, 12 Afghan refugees accepted to participate in the (face-to-face) interviews.

There were also 4 virtual interviews with relevant experts and stakeholders including representatives from the Pakistani government, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), Development Section of the German embassy, and Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (giz).

There was also several informal conversations and discussions with different groups of Afghans and officials (for instance project coordinators or bank officers), and have been used as a data source in this study.

Table 1. Character and number of interviewees

Character	Number	Gender	Religion	In/out of camp	Place of living	
Afghan refugees	Ethnicity Pashtun	9	M: 6	Shia: 0	In: 4	KP: 3
			F: 3	Sunni: 9	Out: 5	Balochistan: 2
					Islamabad: 4	
	Hazara	2	M: 1	Shia: 2		KP: 0
			F: 1	Sunni: 0		Balochistan: 0
					Islamabad: 2	
Tajik	1	M: 1	Shia: 0		KP: 1	
		F: 0	Sunni: 1		Balochistan: 0	
				Islamabad: 0		
					Total	12
Working in refugee field	International orgs.	3				
	Pak gov.	1				
					Total	4

As the issue of Afghan refugees is sensitive, interviewee details have been kept confidential in varying degrees. The places, religious and ethnical background, and job of the respondents have been reflected accurately. Pseudonyms such as Informant #1 or #2 are chosen.

Limitations of the study include the paucity of time and the recent Afghanistan turmoil which resulted in further displacement and ensuing volatility. As a result, the number of interviews conducted were limited. However, special importance has been attributed to ensuring a varied selection of Afghans.

Moreover, certain aspects of this research, such as being registered or not, amount of wage and owning property, were highly sensitive among Afghan refugees. Some Afghans were hesitant to talk about the frequency of visiting Afghanistan, as it contradicted the concept of being a refugee and went against their stance of deeming Afghanistan as an unsafe place. Therefore, data in this regard is incomplete. Furthermore, the issues of Afghans' relationship with Pakistani people and authorities was challenging too, as some interviewees tried to sound polite about the host country, even when they were complaining about perceived humiliations and hostilities. The fact that 5 out of 7 interviewers were Pakistani, was another possible hindrance in allowing Afghans to fully express their views and emotions.

Another limitation was language. While the interviews were conducted in Afghani languages, the transcription, which was needed for analysis, was done in English. To fill error gaps, there were several back and forth discussions with the interviewers, as well as the full availability of interviewee audio files.

2. Diversity of Afghan Refugees in Pakistan

About 3 million Afghan refugees are living in Pakistan and are characterized on diverse ethnicities, entry times into Pakistan, religion, living in or out of camp, and, employment. These categories are briefly explained here.

2.1. Ethnicity and Majority - Minority Status

Afghans living in Pakistan are from different ethnic groups. 85.1% are Pashtuns, 6% are Tajiks, Uzbeks 3%, Hazara 2%, Turkmen 1%, Baluch 1%, and other ethnicities 2%⁷.

Refugees generally represent minority population in a host country. However, amongst refugee groups themselves, there exist majority/minority categorizations. For instance, Pashtuns are the largest ethnic group not only in Afghanistan (42%), but also among Afghan refugees in Pakistan (85.1%). This is because Pashtuns form the second-largest ethnic group (15%) in Pakistan, hence Pashtun Afghans may be at an advantage as opposed to non-Pashtun Afghans. This is followed by the Hazara Ethnic group in both Afghanistan and Pakistan.

The Hazara group has been impacted by tensions in Afghanistan and the civil war, sectarian violence and targeted killings since 1991. More than 2000 have been killed between 1991 and 2017 in Pakistan⁸.

Majority of Afghans in Pakistan are Sunni Muslim in religious belief. Almost all Hazaras are Shia Muslim, with the exception of a few who are Sunni. Shia community makes up minority in both Pakistan and Afghanistan.

2.2. Diversified by Time of Arrival

Afghan refugees vary based on arrival time in Pakistan. There are at least seven significant phases. Sanaa Alimia (2016) details 5 different phases:

7. UNHCR (The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) (Aug 2020) Afghan Refugee Update – Pakistan, 1 January—31 August, 2020.

8. National Commission for Human Rights (2018), Understanding the Agonies of Ethnic Hazaras, Islamabad: Graphics Point

The first phase (1973-1978) started after the coup of Daoud Khan in Afghanistan in 1973, when a relatively small wave of refugees entered Pakistan. “The refugees were mainly Islamists who faced persecution by the new, communist-leaning government in Kabul”⁹.

The second phase (1978-1979) occurred following the activities of the Communist People Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA), which rendered political instability in the country. Thereafter, more Afghans moved to Pakistan. By the end of 1979 there were over 400,000 Afghans in Pakistan.

The third phase (1979-1988) happened after the PDPA requested support from the Soviet Union to crush the resistance they faced by Afghans. The Soviet Union started a war in Afghanistan by sending troops into the country. A massive humanitarian crisis followed and by the end of the war in 1988, some four to five million Afghans had sought refuge in Pakistan.

During this period, four to five million Afghans took refuge in Pakistan (settled in 334 refugee camps).

The fourth phase (1988-1992), started after the withdrawal of the Soviet Union and the outbreak of civil war in Afghanistan. In this period, some Afghan refugees returned to Afghanistan to join Mujahideen groups. Some (re)migrated to Pakistan because of political instability in Afghanistan.

The fifth phase (1992-2001) was marked by increased interference from outside forces in the Afghan civil war - in particular Iran, Saudi Arabia, and Pakistan - and the Taliban’s eventual rise to power in 1996. However, increasing poverty, severe cases of drought, and limited international support in Afghanistan also played a role. During this period, Afghan Hazaras were also targeted by the Taliban and fled in large numbers to Pakistan. According to Alimia¹⁰ almost 6 to 7 million Afghans lived in Pakistan during this period, and mainstream public opinion within Pakistan became increasingly strained towards Afghans.

The fifth phase (2001-2015) happened in the post U.S.-led NATO invasion and occupation of Afghanistan, and the subsequent fall of Taliban. Alimia categorized this period from 2001-2019. But owing to the characteristics of the year 2016, this paper divides it from 2001-2015. During this period, many Afghans were encouraged to return to Afghanistan on the premise of improved safety and better functioning. As a result, 3.9 million Afghans repatriated to Afghanistan between

9. Alimia, Sanaa (2019) Afghan Refugees in Pakistan, Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung, P. 2, retrieved from: <https://www.bpb.de/gesellschaft/migration/laenderprofile/english-version-country-profiles/292271/afghan-refugees-in-pakistan>

10. Ibid.

2001 and 2015. The Taliban's attack on an army school in Peshawar in December 2014 and Afghanistan-India agreements (2015-2016), led the push towards this repatriation.

The sixth phase (2015-2021) has been a solution-oriented period. This period was characterized by the illegal stay or migration by Afghans to Pakistan and European countries. Officially, however, migration to Pakistan as well as European countries was discouraged under the pretext of Afghanistan being a 'safe country'. Nonetheless, 2015 saw the peak of Afghan arrival in European countries through illegal methods. Number of Asylum seekers from Afghanistan to Europe multiplied manifold - from 23,000 in 2013, to 193,000 in 2015¹¹. Afghan applications for Europe were at their highest till September 2016¹². In 2020 Afghans ranked the second most common group to claim asylum in Europe (28,145 first-time claims), after Syrians (43,135 first-time claims)¹³.

The seventh phase (2021 till now) commenced with the American withdrawal from Afghanistan, and the Taliban takeover. This created another wave of refugees to neighbouring countries. Even though, officially, Afghan refugees are not allowed to enter Pakistani territory, they have continued to do so through different roads, mainly from Torkham (KP) and Chaman (Balochistan) borders. Estimating the number of Afghans escaping their country is difficult. Many details of this phase remain unclear. Estimations suggest that about 122,300 people have been evacuated from the end of July to the end of August 2021¹⁴. Many Afghans, including those who work with international organizations, and did not have opportunity to be evacuated by airplane, entered Pakistan since the fall of Taliban. Some of them managed to obtain a visa and leave for a third country. Some of them still are living in Pakistan awaiting a positive answer. There is information indicating that over 9,000 Afghan refugees have entered Pakistan since the fall of the Afghan government (August till end of September 2021)¹⁵.

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11. Pew Research Center, 2.Aug.2016, Number of Refugees to Europe Surges to Record 1.3 Million in 2015, official website of Pew, retrieved from: <https://www.pewresearch.org/global/2016/08/02/number-of-refugees-to-europe-surges-to-record-1-3-million-in-2015/>
 12. EASO, Aug 2021, Latest Asylum Trends - Latest asylum trends – August 2021 – retrieved from: <https://www.easo.europa.eu/latest-asylum-trends>
 13. UNHCR (The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) (Nov. 2020) UNHCR STATISTICAL FACTSHEET, Onward Movements of Afghan Refugees, retrieved from: <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/UNHCR%20Nov%202020%20Statistical%20Factsheet%20Onward%20movements%20of%20Afghan%20refugees%20External.pdf>
 14. Macias, Amanda (30.Aug.2021), U.S. winds down Kabul mission after helping evacuate 116,000 people in just over 2 weeks, retrieved from: <https://www.cnn.com/2021/08/30/afghanistan-update-us-winds-down-mission-over-116000-people-evacuated-since-aug-14.html>
 15. Notezai, Muhammad Akbar (26. Sep.2021) Exit Afghanistan, Dawn Newspaper, retrieved from: <https://www.dawn.com/news/1648533>

2.3. Diversified by Registered or Unregistered Status

There are three basic categories of Afghans who live in Pakistan. The first category, recognized by the UNHCR as well as the Pakistani government, refers to those who hold a Proof of Registration Card (POR). The number of POR holders is around 1.4 million¹⁶.

The second category, introduced in 2016, relates to unregistered Afghans who received an Afghan Citizenship Card (ACC) - a temporary document offering proof of identity. The total number of ACC holders is around 800,000.

The third category, unregistered, refers to those who have no POR and ACC, but might possess some proof of identity. Some Afghans, particularly Hazaras residing in Quetta, have a Tazkira (Afghan identity document) or Afghan passport. This category also includes Afghans who have, 1) just a Tazkira 2) expired POR; and, 3) no passport or a passport with an expired or no visa¹⁷.

The total number of Afghans covering all three categories, comes to over three million.

The distribution of documented and undocumented Afghan refugees is mixed. According to Abbas Khan, the Commissioner of Afghan Refugees in KP, documented and undocumented refugees may or may not live together¹⁸. Families may have mixed composition with regards to the above categories.

2.4. Diversified by Living in or out of Refugee Camps

About 30% of all Afghan refugees live in camps, established by international organizations, mainly UNHCR and Pakistani Commission of Afghan Refugees. The camps are equipped with basic education (primary) and basic health facilities (e.g. basic health units, mother and child centres, related trainings, cash assistance during the corona pandemic etc.), provided free of cost to the refugees.

The remaining Afghans live outside of the camps. They are partly supported by government agencies (through provision of public services), and the private sector. However, the most of these Afghans live by their own. Although there is no study

16. UNHCR (The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) (Feb.2021).

17. DTM (The Displacement Tracking Matrix) (2018) PAKISTAN 2018 - FLOW MONITORING OF UNDOCUMENTED AFGHAN MIGRANTS, Displace Tracking Matrix of IOM, Co-funded by the European Union, P. 3, retrieved from: https://www.iom.int/sites/g/files/tmzbdl486/files/dtm/pakistan_dtm_2018.pdf#page=3&zoom=auto,-99,218

18. Abbas Khan, personal communication, October 2021.

giving information of economic situation of all Afghans living in Pakistan it has been acknowledged by Pakistani authorities, international organizations officers and the Afghan interviewees that the poverty rate among Afghan refugees is very high, making them more vulnerable as compared to those living in camps. While there are examples of these Afghans being successful in building lives and businesses, they are nonetheless, like a 'drop in the ocean'.

2.5. Diversified by Job Status

In Pakistan, Afghan refugees and asylum seekers hold no official status and cannot work legally, because Pakistan is not a signatory to the 1951 Refugee Convention and has no national refugee legislation. However, where there's a will, there's a way, and Afghan refugees end up finding alternate ways to work and earn (for further details on these methods, please see section 3.2).

In KP, the major fields of occupation that Afghans are engaged in include, trading and retailing agro- commodities and clothes, livestock trading and transport goods, and daily wage labour in different fields (e.g. agriculture and construction industry, vegetable farming, cloth trading, retailing). In Balochistan, Afghans work in similar fields, with the addition of the mining sector¹⁹.

The daily wage nature of these occupations render Afghans unemployed at different times in the year. Some Afghans residing outside camps are unable to find jobs at all. As a result, they turn to inedible and unhygienic sources of food, or resort to begging.

19. UNHCR and ILO (2018) Market Systems Analysis - Market Systems Analysis for Afghan Refugees in Pakistan, International Labourer Organization, P. 7, retrieved from: https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_emp/documents/genericdocument/wcms_636574.pdf

3. Perspectives on Life and Self-Perceptions of Afghans

This chapter details Afghans' views on life in areas of social, economic, and culture and relationships.

3.1. Social Perspective

The volatile security situation in Afghanistan prompted Afghans to seek refuge in Pakistan. Their priority remains to stay settled in Pakistan for good, along with ensuring quality education for their children, especially male. These priorities vary based on their living localities, gender, education and economic background.

Staying in Pakistan: A Dream

Afghans who were interviewed showed keen interest in remaining settled in Pakistan, given they had spent most or all of their life in the country. Moreover, with their immediate family also settled in Pakistan, they harbour no desire to return to Afghanistan. They believe Pakistan offers them "a peaceful environment", and despite their meagre earnings, they are attributed respect. There are also those who are better off financially and are happy to be "independent". Meanwhile, those who are struggling to make ends meet, are happy to live in "a safe place" and just "pass the life". A female Afghan, who is a single mother of five children, says:

"Our life is good here. We (are) safe and get food. This is our good life. Time is going. I am sewing clothes as a tailor. I work and get money to pass my life"²⁰.

When the interviewees are asked to compare their life in Pakistan with a possible life in Afghanistan, they reply that they cannot imagine living a life without war, tension and peace in Afghanistan. A male Afghan, living in a camp in Balochistan says:

"I don't know what I would have been doing, but if Afghanistan was peaceful, we would definitely have a much better life there. Unfortunately, Afghanistan has not seen peace for decades and

20. Informant #01, personal communication, October 2021

as I said before, we would have died if we had not moved to Pakistan”²¹.

He perceives Pakistan as the country of his children:

“If one day Afghanistan is peaceful again, I personally would love to go back but I don’t think it is the right decision for my children, since they belong here now”.

For some Afghans, especially the Hazara community, living in Afghanistan is a “no go” zone. Despite facing discrimination in the country, especially in Quetta, living in Pakistan is still a better option for the Hazara community, post the Taliban takeover in Afghanistan. Same is the case for Afghans. The pressures of 2015 and 2016, and the re-emergence of the Taliban in the political landscape of Afghanistan, play a significant role in their aspirations of “staying in Pakistan”.

For some Afghans, acquiring Pakistani nationality is a big issue, despite their utmost desire to do so, given its beneficial impacts for their children’s education and career.

Wishes for a Proper Education for Children

Education of children emerged as a main priority for the Afghans, as it holds the keys to lead a “dignified life”. A male Afghan from the Hazara community, working for a Pakistani employer in Islamabad explains:

“My children should get education. They must be hardworking in their studies. Education is very important. I myself studied till grade 11. I could not continue thereafter because of Afghanistan’s bad situation. Still, I carry this feeling of being incomplete. Something is missing. If my son studies, he will be something. In my entire life, I took a 6 months course in English. When the shop owner tested me in my English skills to ascertain whether I could handle foreign customers, he was very impressed. That 6 months course did help me. It promoted me from being a simple worker, to becoming the manager of a floor. That is why I believe education is important as it can help one build a bright future for themselves”²².

For some Afghans who live out of camps, education affordability is a major concern. A male Afghan from the Tajik community, working in Peshawar as rice seller on footpath, states that education, whether in public or private schools, is not possible for his children:

21. Informant #02, personal communication, October 2021

22. Informant #03, personal communication, October 2021

“I would like to send my children to school but they are expensive. Private institutions for education and health are good, but are costly. There are also government (public/free) options. But then they don’t treat us and our children equal to Pakistanis. We are subjected to verbal abuses and general unpleasant attitudes”²³.

Being a single mother makes it even more challenging to send children to school. A female Afghan refugee, single mother to 5 sons, lives in a camp in Balochistan. Even after 10 years of living in Pakistan, she has been unable to send her children to school:

“I do wish that at least one of my children acquires education so as to improve his life. I wish to enrol him in a school, which seems very difficult right now. If my husband was alive, we would have enrolled all of them in a school”²⁴.

Some Afghans who suffer from personal dissatisfactions owing to a lack of achievements, desire to see their children prosper and believe education is the only formula to attain this prosperity. A male Afghan who sells rice in the Bari Imam area, a neighbourhood of Islamabad, reflects on his dreams:

“I want to educate my children. For my son, I would like to see him in the field of business, and for my daughters, I have a dream to educate them and make them doctors. They must do better than me”²⁵.

Some Afghans accentuate the necessity of education for their children because that will be a way to keep them away from drug and criminality. A male Afghan refugee living in a camp in the KP warns:

“Our children should acquire education. This will enable them to remain protected from drug addiction and other bad people. Nowadays drug addiction is very common in areas that Afghans live. The children begin on minor amounts, and gradually consume more. Then their life is gone. Parents must keep a check on their children. Only earning is not enough. Children must acquire education to be able to truly prosper.”

Afghan refugees’ dream of a proper education for their children is gender biased. They express desire to educate their sons (for further details, refer to the next section).

23. Informant #04, personal communication, October 2021

24. Informant #05, personal communication, October, 2021

25. Informant #06, personal communication, October, 2021

Gender Biased Views

Gender attitudes are positional and complex. Many Afghan refugees have inherent gender biased norms prevalent in their families. While this study does not aim to analyze these, it will look at how gender perspectives of Afghan refugees have been influenced living in Pakistan. Responses delineated 3 major views: conservative, developing and progressive.

In some interviews, conservative views were extremely stark, where male respondents prioritized school for their male children. Their justification called for women “belonging at home” as the main pretext for not allowing girls to go to school. They were, however, in favour of allowing girls to acquire Quran education. A male Afghan interviewee, living in a camp in KP explains:

“Education is necessary for boys and girls, but women are not required to work outside the home. Hence, Quran education is sufficient for them”²⁶.

For some Afghans, culture is often employed as an excuse in not allowing women to work. A male Afghan who works as daily labourer in the Bari Imam area, despite facing extreme economic difficulty, does not allow his wife to work and add a supporting income:

“One day there was a wedding party in house of the landlord of Bari Imam. The female members of the landlord’s family came to me and asked to send my wife to their house to clean the dishes. They said they would pay her in exchange. I refused and told them that we don’t allow our women to work because their place is in the house and men have to work outside. This is our Pashtun tradition²⁷”.

Attributing conservative views regarding women to Pashtun culture is not entirely correct, based upon responses received from some other Pashtun Afghans, especially those living in cities.

There are 2 opposite sides of the spectrum whereby, one is where women are strictly kept inside the house, and the other is where they run successful small-scale businesses and trading ventures. An Afghan female trader who was interviewed, explained how there was no other option to earn livelihood except to work, following the death of her husband. Prior to his death, she says, she wasn’t allowed to work outside the house”²⁸.

26. Informant #07, personal communication, October 2021

27. Informant #08, personal communication, October 2021

28. Informant #01, personal communication, October 2021

Some female Afghan refugees hold more liberal views, in being optimistic towards girls' education attainment. In the mind of a Pashtun female Afghan, while earning money is not an expectation from female members, however, being educated is better than the opposite²⁹. Another Afghan interviewee from the Pashtun community, living in Islamabad and managing a carpet shop, personally preferred his daughters to acquire Quran education. However, his wife yearned that they study science, and so, in respecting her views, he allowed his daughters to study in a university. One of them is preparing for medical science exam³⁰.

There were also some Afghan refugees who hailed progressive views in supporting equal rights for women and men in terms of education and job opportunities. Some of the interviewed Afghans wished to see their daughters as engineers and doctors³¹. One female Hazara Afghan believes this must be shown in spirit and practice, and not just in letter and thought. She feels it is unfair to disallow girls to make no use of their education by restricting them to take up a career. She feels:

“The situation should be normal. Women are contributing just like men. After girls acquire education, they are made to go and sit at home or marry. Paying back to the society is important. A single woman can offer tremendous benefits to the community and economy. I am not against the institution of family and marriage. I myself have a family and two children. But we should try and work towards making a difference and progressing forward”³².

Views on Ethnicity

Afghan refugees perceive themselves as one big community inhabiting the same destiny. Returning to Afghanistan is not a preferred choice for anyone.

A few Hazara and Tajik Afghan refugees expressed that while Afghan refugees are not legally allowed to own property, some from the Pashtun community have managed to buy properties and assets such as motorcycles, cars, shops and houses. They further explained that since Afghan Pashtuns consider Pakistani Pashtuns as partners, they make internal arrangements for such deeds. Hence, Tajik and Hazara Afghans at times, feel discriminated within in the community of Afghan refugees.

Property ownership is more so a legal limitation as opposed to a matter of ethnicity. A Hazara Afghan explains that ownership of property happens rarely, but not

29. Informant #09, personal communication, October 2021

30. Informant #10, personal communication, October 2021

31. Informants #02 and #6, personal communication, October 2021

32. Informant #11, personal communication, October 2021

exclusively for Pashtuns³³. A Pashtun Afghan, interviewed in this study, highlighted that the Hazara Afghans are more powerful owing to their consistent hard work, and their strong support to their community. He exemplified how there are a few Hazara Afghans in Quetta who are running successful gold and jewelry businesses³⁴.

Living a multi-dimensional identity as Afghan Refugees

The Afghans interviewed offered reflections on identity. On one end, are Afghans struggling to be recognized as humans, while on the other, are those who live between two borders. They feel they own two identities: Afghani and Pakistani.

A male Pashtun Afghan refugee, abiding in Bari Imam and working as rice seller says:

“...my dream is to live in Pakistan (permanently). If the government of Pakistan does not give me facilities and nationality, then I wish they (authorities) send me to a country other than Afghanistan. But my dream is to live in Pakistan. I really want to have my own home and land. I would like to own a business and for my children to complete their education in Pakistan”³⁵.

A male Pashtun Afghan, living in Islamabad and working as carpet shop manager states:

“We hail from the Afghanistan border tribal areas adjacent to Chaman, Balochistan. I see myself living a similar life in both Pakistan and Afghanistan. However, in family, marriage and culture, we are Pashtun”³⁶.

Apart from identity confusions, Afghans also face dubiety in their linguistic, ethnical and business identity. Nevertheless, Afghanistan for them is more an imagined space, while Pakistan is a tangible community.

Afghan refugee traders and merchants often travel to Afghanistan to visit relatives, purchase and sell articles, marry or select a spouse for their children, and miscellaneous business purposes. However, since Afghanistan is not a safe place to live, they prefer to live in Pakistan. For this group of Afghans “mobility is a way of life and for survival”³⁷.

33. Informant #03, personal communication, October 2021

34. Informant #10, personal communication, October 2021

35. Informant #06, personal communication, October 2021

36. Informant #10, personal communication, October 2021

37. Hakim, Hamid, and Zalmi Nishat (2021) Pakistan-Afghanistan Relations: Emergence of New Nation States and the Search for Identity. In Pakistan-Afghanistan Relations: Pitfalls and the Way Forward. H.B.a.N. Wasi, ed. P: 11. Islamabad: Friedrich Ebert Stiftung - Office Pakistan.

Language might be a serious challenge for many refugees globally. That is not the case for Afghan refugees in Pakistan. The interviewed Afghans do not feel isolated based on language limitations. Many Afghans from Pashtun ethnicity, especially in KP and Balochistan, speak Pashtu, just like most Pakistanis in the region. *Dari*, the other native language of Afghanistan, has lots in common with Urdu, the main language in Pakistan. Speaking other Pakistani languages like Sindhi and Punjabi might be a challenge for Afghans, but the population of Afghans in those provinces is insignificant. Almost no Afghan refugees have taken an Urdu language course. With nearly four decades in the country, and second and third generation Afghans born here, the barrier of Urdu as a foreign language has withered away. Hence, in a market in Peshawar or Islamabad, one cannot distinguish between Afghans or Pakistanis simply on the basis of physical appearance³⁸.

The historical memory of Pashtunistan still shapes strongly the identity of some Pashtun Afghan refugees. Pashtunistan is a geographic historical region inhabited by Pashtuns of Afghanistan and Pakistan. It has borders with Iran to the west, Turkmenistan to the north, Kashmir to the northeast, Punjab to the east, and Balochistan to the south (Figure 1). There have been tensions between Afghanistan and Pakistan over the issue of Pashtunistan which resulted in a negative vote of Afghanistan for Pakistan's membership into the UN in 1947³⁹.

Figure 1. Map of Pashtun areas in Pakistan and Afghanistan



Source: *The Heritage Foundation, 2010 (Terms Punjab and Baluchistan added by the researcher)*

Some Afghans perceive Pakistan as a safer place for trade, as opposed to Afghanistan, and several other countries. For instance, an interviewed Pashtun Afghan started his business in 1983 in Quetta. He then moved to Islamabad in 1987. Later, he made a break and shifted to Dubai in 1990, where he established his carpet business which flourished. In the year 2000, he moved to Karachi. Post 9/11, tensions in Karachi pushed him to move to Islamabad, where he has been since. His decision to shift from Dubai to Pakistan was the feeling of being unhappy and restricted in dealings with “Arabs”:

38. An exception might be the Hazara community, who have particular facial appearances.

39. Hakim & Nishat, 2021: 7 and 8

“In Dubai I had a shop, you know it was like a prison for me. The market is busier but working in Arabic countries is not easy. It is like the old labour. They (people of Dubai) expect migrants to come and work, and render benefits to their economy. In Dubai, every person behaves like a king. In Islamabad, you are free. You can go out and communicate with people. But there (Dubai) you have visa problems, and have to be mindful towards savings and expenditures. There are some people who work there and make more profit. But I feel freer in Islamabad. Here I go to my business and then go home. I have no problem”⁴⁰.

Some refugee families retain their old traditional habits and beliefs. They resort to bigamy and polygamy for economic security. In some refugee families, the practice of exchange marriages exists. This is a form of marriage involving an arranged and reciprocal exchange of spouses between two groups. A female refugee who participated in this study, experienced this type of marriage⁴¹. She became the second wife a man, double her age. Her husband passed away 10 years after the marriage, following which, she had to solely bear the livelihood burden for her 5 children. Bride price is another practice, in which money is paid by the groom’s family in exchange for the bride.

On the gender gap index, Pakistan ranks 153rd and Afghanistan 156th, out of 156 countries on gender inequality⁴². This is an area which needs more work.

World Views

For most Afghan refugees, life and living conditions have considerably improved in Pakistan. Almost all prefer living in Pakistan as opposed to Afghanistan. Nevertheless, they all yearn for a better life. The media has played a significant role in keeping Afghan refugees informed of the security situation in Afghanistan. The media has also exposed Afghan refugees to life in other countries, but they know that there are significant risks involved in migrations.

Some Afghans prefer to live in Pakistan as they have adapted to its culture, language and circumstances. The mother of a Hazara female Afghan, interviewed in this study, moved to New Zealand 10 years ago. She explains that her mother is not happy in New Zealand and misses Pakistan:

40. Informant #10, personal communication, October 2021

41. Informant #01, personal communication, October 2021

42. World Economic Forum, 2021, Global Gender Gap Report 2021 - I N S I G H T R E P O R T (M A R C H 2 0 2 1), P: 10, retrieved from: https://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_GGGR_2021.pdf

“Neither my mother, nor we are happy now. She moved to New Zealand in old age and is a patient of depression now. She still mentally lives in the streets of Quetta. And says New Zealand has nothing for her. Quetta was everything for her, because she was respected there. The people around her, knew her. In New Zealand everyone labels her as a terrorist owing to being a Muslim. She does not know about the places in the new country. So she is insecure here”⁴³.

3.2. Economic Perspective

Economic stability is a major challenge for Afghan refugees. There are severe discrepancies in incomes. According to estimations based on interviews, incomes range from PKR 6,000 a month (lowest) to PKR 125,000 per month (highest), depending upon nature of work, location and skill set. That means that the income is approximately between 30 € and 626 € based on exchange rate of 2021. Some Afghan refugees have no regular source of income and were jobless at the time of interview. They survive the day rummaging through trash cans in hopes of finding food.

For those who don't live in camps, renting a room or flat is a big challenge, as the rent exceeds their average income. Renting a flat with two rooms starts from PKR 30,000 (about 150€) about in Islamabad. Some address this challenge through collective living, whereby four or five families live in the same apartment, and share the rent.

Having a job is of immense importance for Afghans, not just in terms of financial security, but also as a mark of respect and dignity. Working is better than “begging in the street” and “being dependent to others”, some of the participants commented.

Afghan refugees are legally not allowed to work in Pakistan, despite flexibilities being granted at several times by the Pakistan authorities. Afghans desiring identity cards or Pakistani nationality, do so with the hopes that this might enable them in securing formal and long-term employment.

Career Trajectory

When working informally, Afghans find it difficult to understand the local job scenario. They are, nevertheless, optimistic that the following factors can help in locating suitable job opportunities:

43. Informant #11, personal communication, October 2021

1. Motivated to learn: Acquiring education is considered as a step towards securing a good job, hence Afghans are eager to learn. Skilled labour will result in a chance for better earnings.
2. The role of good luck
3. Hard work and consistency
4. Building trust: Showing honesty and dedication is important to develop a relationship of trust with the employer.
5. Business know-how: Having a sense of demand and supply is essential.
6. Pak-Afghan business partnerships

An example of a successful Pak-Afghan business is Kabul Restaurant in Islamabad. The owners of the business are one Pakistani and four Afghan refugees (two from the Hazara community), who migrated to Pakistan nearly forty years ago. They started working as tea sellers. Gradually, they grew their business and bought premises in sector F7 in Islamabad, in partnership with a Pakistani. They started by baking bread and offering Kebab (grilled meat). This was the beginning of Kabul Restaurant, now a flourishing eatery. The current manager of the restaurant is also an Afghan, who was originally hired as a book keeper, but kept up his studies and was eventually promoted to managerial level.

Remaining Job Challenges for Refugees

The most challenging aspect of doing business in Pakistan for Afghan refugees is lack of reliable financial or bank facilities for saving, withdrawing, purchasing or selling.

The POR card offers a certain time period of stay in Pakistan. It enables the refugees to obtain a driver license, purchase mobile SIM cards, and open a bank account. The bank cards allotted to Afghans have plenty of limitations. For instance, they expire at almost the same time the POR is scheduled to expire, internet banking is not available, and applying for the bank card is also a difficult process as it requires a Pakistani guarantor. While Afghans are not allowed to hold bank accounts, banks themselves are also reluctant in this regard. Although legally Afghans are allowed to open account in each bank, many banks do not show an interest to open bank accounts for them.⁴⁴

To tackle these issues, several Afghans use Pakistani proxies or goldsmith mediators to open a bank account, or register a business, or rent a space for business activity. This increases their vulnerability as there are no contractual bounds in such cases.

44. Refer to Appendix 3 for a list of documents required to open a bank account, in the case of Afghan refugees.

There have been several instances where goldsmith mediators or Pakistani proxies run away, or deny having any contact with the Afghan partners.

“Political issues” also present a hindrance in finding and sustaining jobs. Being previously labelled as proxies/spies of India and “Son of Hindu”⁴⁵, Afghans are met with much scepticism. One of those interviewed advised:

“I believe if an Afghan keeps to his/her work, nobody will disturb him. But if one wastes time and does not work, then he is likely to face issues”⁴⁶.

He further elaborated:

“...I see some Afghans are positive about India. I tell them you are earning your money from here (Pakistan) but then you think about India. This is not fair. This is even dangerous. You make the agencies suspicious”⁴⁷.

Local Business Places of Afghans

Afghans are spread out in different places across Pakistan. Some locations offer better prospects for work as opposed to others. In interview with Afghans in this study a few of these many places are highlighted. Here they are briefly listed:

1. Bari Imam, Islamabad: Located around the shrine of a Sufi ascetic, this place houses shops and homes, with Afghans living nearby in a slum. Afghans work in the markets within the area or in the nearby areas, or in other odd jobs such as collecting garbage, washing cars etc.
2. Itwar Bazar [Sunday Market], Islamabad: Located in the H9 sector, this market is open thrice a week and offers a variety of items from second hand items and groceries, to garments, electronics and antiques. Many Afghans work in the bazar as day labourers, either helping sellers or in the transportation section. There are many Afghan boys (5-15 year old) or very old men, within and around the bazar, working to assist customers in carrying their groceries

45. The Afghanistan-India friendship exaggerated the difficulty of the situation of Afghans in Pakistan. For instance, after the inauguration of Salma Dam, a hydro-power station in Herat province of Afghanistan, by Ghani and Modi in June 2016, some Pakistanis started calling Afghans “Son of Hindus”. See: Human Rights Watch (14.Sep.2016) Pakistan: Coerced Refugee Return Endangers Thousands - Abuses, Harassment Force Afghans Home to Danger, retrieved from: <https://www.hrw.org/news/2016/09/15/pakistan-coerced-refugee-return-endangers-thousands> And see: Human Rights Watch (18.Nov.2015) What Are You Doing Here? Police Abuses Against Afghans in Pakistan, retrieved from: <https://www.hrw.org/report/2015/11/18/what-are-you-doing-here/police-abuses-against-afghans-pakistan>

46. Informant #03, personal communication, October 2021

47. Informant #10, personal communication, October 2021

to their cars. There are also several female Afghan refugees sitting nearby the bazaar, to gather donated food.

3. Board Bazar (Market), Peshawar: Thousands of Afghan traders run stalls at Board Bazar, also called Mini Kabul. Housing over 5,000 shops run and owned by Afghan refugees, this bazar is said to be the largest refugee market in Pakistan. From food items to ready-made outfits from Afghanistan, this market sells a variety of Afghanistan based goods. The bazar also has sign boards in Afghan language spread throughout⁴⁸.

In the province of Balochistan, several areas offer great working potential for Afghans, including Hazara ganji, Chaman border, "Pashtun Abad Bazar" and, the construction sector of Quetta (Uzbeks work and live there).

Economic Contribution of Afghans

Owing to a lack of data on Afghans' contribution to the economy, several Afghans feel that they are victims of underappreciation despite working hard and adding to the economy. This lack of acknowledgement has impacted Afghans' self-confidence negatively.

Apart from available data, there are two sources that delineate their contribution.

The first of these is an unpublished report by the World Bank, which shows that 13-17% of the economy of Peshawar is dependent upon the work of Afghan refugees⁴⁹.

Second, a study published in 2018 on the topic of Market Systems Analysis for Afghan Refugees in Pakistan, highlighted that "...impending Afghan refugee repatriation had a broad negative impact in Pakistani economies. Industry insiders and informed value chain actors have professed that if the repatriation does take place in the future, the construction industry of Balochistan and Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa will suffer a major setback which may last for at least ten years"⁵⁰.

3.3. Cultural Relations Perspectives

Being so absorbed in their own struggles, Afghan refugees do not have the time or energy to pay unnecessary attention to the level of communication they share

48. Farooq, Umer (4. Aug. 2019), Divided by a border, united by the flourishing Board Bazaar, Tribune, retrieved from: <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2027631/swat-valley-divided-border-united-flourishing-board-bazaar>

49. Informant #13, personal communication, October 2021

50. UNHCR & ILO, 2018: 43.

with other communities. Their perspective regarding the Pak-Afghan relationship is mainly divided into two categories: people-to-people (Afghan people to Pakistani people), and people-to-government (Afghan people to Pakistani government). While there were some complaints regarding Pakistanis, most resentment was towards the government. General opinion was that Pakistanis have always been very warm towards the Afghans. A Pashtun female refugee living in a camp in KP explains:

“Before we migrated, we were afraid of how life would be in Pakistan. Upon arriving here, exhausted after walking for seven days in the harsh mountainous terrains, we were welcomed with food and shelter. It was difficult to leave our home and adjust. The welcoming behaviour of Pakistanis helped us adjust and be happy. Pakistani people treat us like their own and consider us their brothers and sisters. People of both countries are Muslims and speak the same language, therefore, we are able to interact and foster good relationships. We do follow our traditions and are never forbidden to follow our culture and norms”⁵¹.

Some Afghan refugees express feeling inferior in the relationship. A Pashtun female refugee, living outside of camp in Peshawar city, describes her involvement with Pakistanis, highlighting both the positives and negatives:

“We have good relations with Pakistani people. We help each other and live together like brothers and sisters. We have no problem with language. We are with Pakistanis at any occasion such as death, marriage, Eids (Muslim festive occasion), or any others festivals. Mostly, our customs are the same. Pakistani people however, at times express unpleasant opinions regarding Afghanistan, which we do not like. They also attribute inflation and security issues to us. They think we use their assets. “Go back to Afghanistan” is the most common phrase in our conversations with them. So, there are times where they make us seem inferior to them”⁵².

Some Afghans expressed disappointment at still being referred to as “refugees”, despite living in Pakistan for nearly four decades now. Part of this problem roots from policies, while part of it is owing to the feeling of superiority that Pakistanis at times display, and don’t consider us as one of their own. They do this through labelling us as “Afghani” or “Kabuli”, instead of using our names. A male Pashtun

51. Informant #09, personal communication, October 2021

52. Informant #01, personal communication, October 2021

refugee, working as a rice seller in Bari Imam explains:

“I am very disturbed by the word Afghani or Kabuli because it is used for us as a stereotype. Police also arrest and bother us without any reason because we are perceived here as just being ‘Afghani’. I want to remove the word Afghani and fully become a Pakistani citizen. My relationship with Pakistan is very good. On one hand, we hold no regular employment, while on the other, we are unnecessarily bothered and harassed by the police. We are very disturbed by this word”⁵³.

Another Afghan expresses having experienced discrimination on account of being addressed as “Afghani”:

“Some people tease us because we are Afghani and I feel very embarrassed at that time. I personally think that I am Pakistani and want to do something good for my country, but we face many problems and are discriminated because of our refugee card”⁵⁴.

Hazara Afghans feel they are not protected by Pakistani society and government. The reasons for persecution of the Hazara community are not limited to sectarian issues (between Hazara and Sunni community in Balochistan), and tribal affairs (terrorists infiltrating from Afghanistan and involved in Hazara killings). The National Commission for Human Rights of Pakistan also relates it to the “socio-economic prosperity” of the community. There is a general perception that, “Hazaras have built shops, markets, buildings and shopping malls in the hub of the city and also progressed rapidly in Balochistan, in all spheres of life including economy, trade, education, sports etc as compared to other native communities. That is why the land mafia could be involved in their killing, forcing them to abandon their running businesses and prime properties, fleeing Quetta for other parts of the country. However, among non-Hazara respondents, no one identified the involvement of land mafia in the killings of Hazaras in Quetta”⁵⁵.

Hazaras also sometimes become the subject of mockery and tragedy for the community. In April 2020, a WhatsApp conversation went viral claiming that Hazaras were the reason why COVID-19 infiltrated into Pakistan, owing to their frequent trips to Iran.

Despite the limitations that life in Pakistan has for the Hazara community, a female Hazara commented that Pakistan offered a better opportunity for women to

53. Informant #06, personal communication, October 2021

54. Informant #12, personal communication, October 2021

55. National Commission for Human Rights Pakistan, 2018: 7

educate themselves and actively fight for the rights of Afghans, as compared to Afghanistan⁵⁶. There are also other miscellaneous complaints regarding bureaucrats' role in prolonging the POR cards.

There are also desires within the Hazara community to shift to Iran, as the national language there, Farsi, is almost similar to Dari. But then there are also instances of the Hazara community facing humiliation there. One interviewee says his relatives living in Iran complain: "Iranians call them *Kesafat* (a piece of dirt)"⁵⁷. The other interviewed Hazara in this study offers a comparative analysis: "In Pakistan, the situation is not promising. It is not secure for us, but we are trying our best. In Iran, Hazaras aren't killed, but they are discriminated"⁵⁸.

56. Informant #11, personal communication, October 2021

57. Informant #03, personal communication, October 2021

58. Informant #11, personal communication, October 2021

4. Contributions of International and Government Organizations'

Several government organizations deal with Afghans, including the Ministry of States and Frontier Regions (SAFRON), and in particular, the Chief Commissionerate for Afghan Refugees (CCAR) and its provincial subsidiaries. They work in collaboration with international organizations such as United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), The International Organization for Migration (IOM), and some European organizations like GIZ. Several programs have been implemented to support refugees in their livelihood, health, and education.

DAFI (The Albert Einstein German Academic Refugee initiative), a scholarship programme, funded since 1992 by the German government and administered by UNHCR, is an example of supporting education of Afghan Refugees in Pakistan. The DAFI programme has enrolled over 9,300 refugees all over the world in higher education scholarships. In 2017, about 490 refugees in Pakistan were supported by this program⁵⁹. However, acquiring education is not the sole solution for attaining a job. Therefore, initiatives like DAFI+ (DAFI plus) try to support the graduated scholarship holders of DAFI in the area of skills and internship experience, as informed by a GIZ personnel⁶⁰.

There are also some projects which aim at bringing Afghan Refugees and host communities together. The UNHCR Refugee Affected and Hosting Area (RAHA) program is one of those. Supported by GIZ and the German government, it commenced in 2009 and still continues. The project has not concluded however it works with smaller profile and is in full swing with more donor commitments⁶¹. RAHA aimed to improve refugee living conditions through, 1) Creating social cohesion and empowerment through community development; 2) Improving livelihoods and local economics; 3) Restoration of social services and infrastructure (like water and irrigation systems); 4) Improving social protection among co-existing Pakistanis and

59. Auswärtiges Amt (2018) Albert Einstein German Academic Refugee Initiative (DAFI) At UNHCR, FEATURE, Vol 6. / 10.2018, p. 2, retrieved from: <https://www.unhcr.org/pk/wp-content/uploads/sites/103/2021/04/DAFI-brochure-1.pdf>

60. Informant #14, personal communication, October 2021

61. Informant #15, personal communication, October 2021

Afghan communities; and, 5) Restoring and improving the environment⁶².

Newer projects such as the Refugee Management Support programme (RMSP)⁶³, started in 2017, and focuses on activities such as implementing integrated water resource management measures, imparting entrepreneurial skills training to support refugee and host community members in Balochistan, and establishment of two urban cohesion hubs in Rawalpindi/Islamabad and Quetta, to name a few.

The Social Support for Vulnerable Afghan Refugees and Host Communities (SSARC)⁶⁴ project concentrates on issues such as mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) of refugees. MHPSS focuses on capacity training for personnel of the institutions and NGOs involved, as well as influential community members of both Pakistani host societies and Afghan refugees, to enhance psychological support and create “safe spaces” for refugees and Pakistanis to meet and exchange views.

Positive collaborations and support from international organizations to the government of Pakistan has improved the lives of many refugees. Nonetheless, concerns regarding provision of similar support for host communities has also been expressed.

Abbas Khan, the Commissioner for Afghan Refugees for KP, confirmed that while many projects have been implemented for the younger generation of Afghans, there is still a huge gap in bringing Afghan youth to the centre of programming:

“70% of Afghans are under the age of 30 and we’ve already seen two or three lost generations who could not complete their formal education. Therefore, donors must focus on short term skill development to support those who have missed acquiring formal education, so that they may earn a living”⁶⁵.

Admitting that the POR card has lots of limitations to own property or start businesses, Abas is optimistic about some reform approaches by the current government of Pakistan.

In 2018, one such attempt was made by Prime Minister Imran Khan on opening discussion regarding giving Afghans (those Afghans who were born in Pakistan)

62. Pakistan Government (2016) Refugee Affected & Hosting Areas Programme – RAHA, a 2 page brochure

63. Commissioned by German government and implemented by giz, the lead executing agency: SAFRON

64. Commissioned by German ministry of Cooperation and Development and implemented by giz, Pakistani Partners: SAFRON and CCAR

65. Abbas Khan, personal communication, October 2021

Pakistani nationality. This discussion did not receive positive feedback from other political actors and hence, did not progress much further.

Projects for refugees are necessary, but not enough. This is where the relationship between the government of Pakistan and international organizations is key. There is a dire need to install more refugee-oriented policies and projects, and the support of international organizations is crucial in this regard. Conversations with personnel working in international organizations elicit that certain government authorities aren't very keen on the "integration" of Afghan refugees. Hence, even after 40 years, there lacks a proper policy covering the "stay of Afghans" in Pakistan. A project leader from an international organization says:

"There is a need to move on with the policies, that's my belief. You have to see that you are talking about millions of Afghans. You can spend any amount on projects, but a project has a beginning and an end. Some projects have some sustainability to continue, like some agriculture projects through the RAHA initiative, but it should be more concrete on the policies. Pakistan has to move a bit forward. When we meet the government representatives, we used to say Pakistan is being very kind for hosting so many refugees in the last 40 years. Which is correct. And the Pakistani authorities say this is so nice of international donors. So honestly it's the same song every day and it's becoming something boring. There is a need to reform. Something must come up from the government. It is wonderful that 1.2 or 1.3 million are registered and got POR cards. But this is the past. There is a need to allow them to work" ⁶⁶.

Projects like DAFI, RAHA, RMSP and SSARC are addressing the objectives highlighted in the life perspectives of Afghans in this paper. However, there is still lack of commitment on bringing both societies at 'eye-level'. Until and unless suitable policies are not crafted to supplement socio-economic initiatives for the refugees, there will remain a stark gap in truly recognizing the rights of Afghans.

66. Informant #14, personal communication, October 2021

5. Conclusion: A Need for Policy Making and More International Initiatives

During the inauguration of a “safe space” Afghan refugee project in Kohat, KP, on 3rd November 2021, a representative from the refugee community had a chance to speak. He spoke in Pashtu and a CCAR officer translated his words to English. He thanked the Pakistani government and international organizations for the support they had provided his community for the last forty years. His ending statement received applause:

“...this is my humble request. Don’t bring us anymore food, bring us skill (training).”

Pakistan, despite not being party to the 1951 refugee convention, has accepted Afghan refugees for over four decades. Afghans in Pakistan work (informally), contribute to the economy, and feel at home. Lack of national refugee legislation has negative long term consequences for the well-being of the country and life perspective of Afghan refugees in Pakistan.

The interviewed Afghan refugees expressed their perspectives on life through:

- Feeling satisfied and secure in Pakistan as they find it a peaceful environment;
- Being optimistic on receiving better chances of education in the future, despite the challenges they face (for themselves or their children);
- Working in different sectors of the industry and self-employment – informally - in spite of facing legal and practical difficulties;
- Appreciating every working opportunity as a reflection of their dignity, even the ones that pay less;
- Being thankful to be accepted in the society, despite being attributed labels and mocked, especially in time of political tensions; and,
- Expecting more support from Pakistani authorities, especially regarding Identity Cards, Bank Accounts and work permissions.

More cooperation is needed between international organizations and the government of Pakistan in establishing refugee-oriented initiatives, reforms and suitable policy making, with special focus on Afghan youth and women.

While international organizations are keen to herald initiatives, their major concern is the snail pace of policy-making in the country. Implementation of projects must be supplemented with concrete policies and laws that ensure economic prosperity and sustainable development, for both the refugees and the host communities.

International projects must also focus more on Afghans living out of camps, whose number is higher than those living in the camps (70% of all refugees). These Afghans endure more problems regarding livelihood, education and health.

Based on the personal reflections of Afghan refugees in this study, it can be concluded that they live a life replete with uncertainty, but also yield hopes and dreams. They appreciate ongoing peace in Pakistan, and foreordain working and earning their own money, and building a dignified life.

The Pakistani government focused on Afghan's repatriation in the long term; nevertheless, Afghans illustrate a high level of integration, social and emotional bonds with Pakistan and its people. Their aspirations are to make a living in Pakistan, not to repatriate to Afghanistan. Their long history of living in Pakistan is not to be ignored. Despite the lack of clear legislations regarding refugees, some Afghans have managed to study and work in Pakistan. Both actions constructed a weighty social investment relating and linking them to Pakistan and Pakistani people, rather than Afghanistan.

It is relevant to take advantage of Afghans' positive perspective on living in Pakistan and regulate it in an efficient way to develop Pakistan economically, socially and multi-culturally. Pakistani government should take serious steps regarding initiating durable solutions and functioning policies for Afghan refugees.

The fears and uncertainties of Afghan refugees regarding their status, education, children and job future, should be addressed by policy making timely. These uncertainties if left unaddressed, may lead to hostility and fundamentalist actions, or migration waves to a third country. International organizations are expected to focus more on issues such as education and skills training, the efficacy of which is subject upon the implementation of suitable policies.

Projects which focus on promoting the relationship between Afghan refugees and Pakistani host community, are also subject to suitable policy making that ensures an 'equal relationship' in context. As long as the status of Afghans in Pakistan is unclear, there is no way of ensuring maximum project output.

This study has highlighted a number of topics on which further research would be beneficial. There are also several areas where information gaps exist including, economic contribution of Afghans in Pakistan, identity confusion and the integration

process of Afghans. In particular, there is a lack of observational studies on patterns and efforts of extremist groups to take advantage of the identity confusions of Afghan refugees. Afghan women refugees also require to be studied in more detail. Future studies might, for example, look for methods as to how women (both Pakistani hosting community and refugees) can further contribute to socio-economic and political development. The issues of Tajiks, Uzbeks and other minority Afghan groups in Pakistan, also require more intense research.

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Information of Interviewees

Informant #01, A female Pashtun Afghan, living outside of camp in Peshawar, works as a tailor and private item sellers for women, single mother to five children.

Informant #02, A male Pashtun Afghan, living inside the camp in Balochistan, works as a dry fruit seller

Informant #03, A male Hazara Afghan, living outside camp in Islamabad, works in a bakery, father of three sons

Informant #04, A male Tajik Afghan, living outside camp in Peshawar, works as rice seller in the street,

Informant #05, A female Pashtun Afghan, living in a camp in Balochistan, single mother to 5 sons

Informant #06, A male Pashtun Afghan, living outside the camp in Bari Imam, Islamabad,

Informant #07, A male Pashtun Afghan, living in a camp in KP, works in a grocery shop

Informant #08, A male Pashtun Afghan, living in Bari Imam, works as daily labourer in construction/building

Informant #09, A female Pashtun Afghan, living in a camp in KP, housewife

Informant #10, A male Pashtun Afghan, living in Islamabad, works as a carpet shop manager, father of four daughters and one son

Informant #11, A female Hazara Afghan, living in Islamabad, works as human right activist, mother of two children

Informant #12, A male Pashtun Afghan, living in Bari Imam, works in a food shop as rice maker

Informant #13, An officer of the UNHCR working in Pakistan office

Informant #14, A project leader and coordinator of giz, working in Pakistan's office

Informant #15, An officer of Commissionerate Afghan Refugees, KP

Informant #16, A project coordinator of the development section of the German embassy

APPENDICES

Appendix 2: Questionnaire

Objectives	Main question	extra-questions
Opening questions	1.1.General information?	Which places have you lived in Pakistani? How is life here for other Afghans?
	Place of origin in Afghanistan? Age? Gender? Ethnicity/ language?	
Life perspective	1.2.When did you come to Pakistan?	Afghans have been very hard working people and they lived in Pakistan with lots of difficulties. What do you think Afghans reached in their life here? Something that they should be proud of in their life? What did you learned from living in Pakistan? Afghans are very diverse here in Pakistan. Right? Which values do you think they have? Religion? Belief? And which ideals? A free human? A rich human? What should Afghans who want to leave Afghanistan do? What is their advice to them? What is an ideal life for you? Whom you are comparing yourselves with? Whom among people you know has a better life? Why do you think that?
	2.1.How has been the life in Pakistan for you? Explain.	
	Very good good Neither good nor bad hard Very hard	
	2.2.Some Afghans have a better or worse life in Pakistan? What is the reason?	
	2.3.What should your child do to be successful in her/his life? What is your best advice?	
	2.4.What would your life be like if you did not come to Pakistan? Would you be happier? Would you have a better or harder life?	
	much better better Neither harder nor easier harder Much harder	

Job/economic situation perspective	<p>3.1. How do you like your current job? Why? Good/bad money? It makes you happy/tired/sick/unhappy?</p> <table border="1" data-bbox="239 700 308 1492"> <tr> <td>Economically very good</td> <td>Economically good</td> <td>Neither good nor bad</td> <td>Economically bad</td> <td>Economically very bad</td> </tr> </table> <p>3.2. If you had stayed in Afghanistan, what do you think would be your job? Better payment?</p> <table border="1" data-bbox="308 700 409 1492"> <tr> <td>Economically much better</td> <td>Economically better</td> <td>Neither better nor worse</td> <td>Economically worse</td> <td>Economically much worse</td> </tr> </table> <p>3.3. Which job do you like your child select/get? Specifically which job will be best for your son? Specifically which job will be best for your daughter?</p>	Economically very good	Economically good	Neither good nor bad	Economically bad	Economically very bad	Economically much better	Economically better	Neither better nor worse	Economically worse	Economically much worse	<p>Have you changed your job in recent years? Do you like leave your job and find a new job? What is your idea job? To whom you are comparing yourself? Which Pakistani you know, with same potentials like you have a better or worse job? Which Pakistani you know, with same potentials like you have a better or worse job? Do you feel discrimination in your job place? Give me an example? What do you think is the reason?</p>
Economically very good	Economically good	Neither good nor bad	Economically bad	Economically very bad								
Economically much better	Economically better	Neither better nor worse	Economically worse	Economically much worse								
Pak-Afghan relationship perspective	<p>4.1. How is your relationship with Pakistanis?</p> <table border="1" data-bbox="636 700 756 1492"> <tr> <td>Very good</td> <td>good</td> <td>Neither good nor bad</td> <td>difficult</td> <td>Very difficult</td> </tr> </table> <p>4.2. "Returning to Afghanistan" makes sense for you? Why?</p> <p>4.3. Do you like to stay in Pakistan? Or return? Or go to a third country? Why?</p> <p>4.4. Which languages do you know? Do you know Urdu/other languages which are practically needed in your city in Pakistan? How long it take to learn it?</p>	Very good	good	Neither good nor bad	difficult	Very difficult	<p>Which languages do you know? How often you used your own language? How often you used Urdu or other languages which are practically need in your city in Pakistan? Tell me three characteristics of Pakistanis? What do you think about Afghans in Pakistan? With which three characters you can introduce them? Have you heard anything about Afghans in Pakistan that you feel is not fair? It is not correct? What? why do you think that Afghans are labelled with that an unfair character? Do you feel welcome in Pakistan? Why? What are your reasons? Do you like to stay in Pakistan? Or return? Or go to a third country? Why?</p>					
Very good	good	Neither good nor bad	difficult	Very difficult								
Concluding questions?	<p>5.1. Do you like to add anything?</p>	<p>What is your dream? What do you really like to gain? You will do everything to reach?</p>										

Appendix 3: List of documents required for opening a bank account for Afghan refugees

Accounts for Afghan Refugees

- Valid proof of registration (POR) card issued by NADRA may be accepted as identity document for opening of account. In this regard Branches/RMs/BMs/TLs/BSOMs must verify the identity of the Afghan refugees holding POR card through NADRA Bio metric verification system, before opening account.
 - a) Copy of Valid proof of registration (POR) card issued by obtained and kept on record.
 - b) Proper and Enhanced due diligence is exercised before opening of account by taking following documentary evidence/taking steps:
- Proof of source of income/expected credit in transaction is obtained where possible.
- In case no documentary proof then source of income is verified by visit of house/business place documented in the RM's address verification report.
- Copy of previous Pakistani or Foreign bank account statement of last six months.
- Obtaining utility bill/rent agreement etc.
- Reference from Pakistani National.

Note:

- a) All accounts of Afghan refugees have been assigned "high risk " (by default)
- b) Approval for opening of these accounts is obtained from branch banking head/business head (in case other segment)
- c) Account activities are reviewed on monthly basis and any unusual activity is reported to compliance division on immediate basis.

Source: an internal document of a commercial bank of Pakistan, 2021

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