

Case Study Series

**TRANSNATIONAL NETWORKS
AND MIGRATION
FROM HERAT TO IRAN**

Elca Stigter

Funding for this research was provided by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the European Commission (EC) and Stichting Vluchteling

January 2005



© 2005 The Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit (AREU). All rights reserved.
This case study was prepared by an independent consultant with no previous involvement in the activities evaluated. The views and opinions expressed in this report do not necessarily reflect the views of AREU.

About the Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit (AREU)

The Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit (AREU) is an independent research organisation that conducts and facilitates action-oriented research and learning that informs and influences policy and practice. AREU also actively promotes a culture of research and learning by strengthening analytical capacity in Afghanistan and by creating opportunities for analysis and debate. Fundamental to AREU's vision is that its work should improve Afghan lives. AREU was established by the assistance community working in Afghanistan and has a board of directors with representation from donors, UN and multilateral organisations agencies and non-governmental organisations (NGOs).

Current funding for AREU is provided by the European Commission (EC), the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), and the governments of Great Britain, Switzerland and Sweden. Funding for this research was provided by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the EC and Stichting Vluchteling.

Acknowledgements

This research could not have been undertaken without the assistance of numerous people and agencies along the way, which has been greatly appreciated:

- Claire Bourgeois (former head of the UNHCR office in Herat) and her team for all their professional support and the temporary home that they provided the author with - in particular Tomoko, Mauricio, Qadir, Basir, Bobby, Francesca, Siddiqi and Abdulla.
- IRC Herat, in particular, Suzanne and her protection team (Tahera, Faribe, Himatullah, Dastagir) for facilitating the work in Ghoryan.
- AREU for their overall support for the research - especially Aftab, Alexia, Brandy and Royce.
- Alessandro Monsutti, the advisor of the Transnational Networks project, and Ewen Macleod of UNHCR for their advice, information and insightful comments during the entire research period.
- The research assistants for all their commitment and hard work - Dr. Jamil and Rona, and Anil and Saghar - and drivers Hafizullah and Basir Ahmed.
- All those Afghans, men and women, who opened their homes to the research team to share stories about their lives, personal struggles, hopes and hardships in Afghanistan and Iran.

Thank you!

Table of Contents

Glossary	i
I. Introduction	1
A. Rationale for the Research	1
B. Main Questions and Structure of this Report	3
C. Methodology	3
II. Migration and Return in an Urban Herat Neighbourhood	5
A. Wealth and Socio-economic Classes	5
B. Transnational Networks and Motives for Migration and Return	10
III. Rural Herat - Migration as a Social Strategy	12
A. Livelihood Patterns in the Village	12
B. Migration as a Key Strategy	15
IV. Contemporary Migration - Travel to and Life in Iran	18
A. Iranian Policies and Afghan Migrant Flows	18
B. The Route to Iran	20
C. Life and Employment in Iran	25
D. Income, Expenditures and Savings	27
V. Conclusion and Recommendations	29
References	33
Appendix A. The Nimroz Taxi Stand in Herat	36

Glossary

Afghani (or Af)	official Afghan currency
<i>bai</i>	landowner
<i>baz kar</i>	sharecropper
<i>chowk</i>	place where daily labourers congregate to find work
<i>geraw</i>	pawning or mortgage
<i>gozar</i>	neighbourhood
<i>gelim</i>	kelim
<i>gharib kar / charikar</i>	very poor sharecroppers, usually accommodated by landlords
<i>hawala</i>	money transfer
<i>hawaladar</i>	person who undertakes the money transfer action
<i>jalab</i>	animal trader
<i>jerib</i>	unit of land measurement; approximate 1/5 hectare
<i>kariz</i>	underground water storage
<i>khistmand</i>	tenant
<i>mahr</i>	dowry
<i>mahram</i>	guardian
<i>manteqa</i>	area, cluster of village with linked identity
<i>mahajerat</i>	migration (due to a problem)
<i>merajan</i>	elder
<i>mujaheddin</i>	Holy Warriors fighting in <i>jihad</i> , or holy war
<i>nahia</i>	district
<i>nemcha bai</i>	half landlord, able to employ sharecropper
<i>qacaqbar</i>	smuggler
<i>qawm</i>	lineage
<i>rahbalat</i>	guide
<i>rishsafid</i>	literally “white beard,” elder
<i>sarparast</i>	representative
<i>taqaway</i>	loan from landlord, often in the form of wheat
toman	Iranian currency
<i>wasita</i>	connection/intermediary
<i>zakat</i>	charity

I. Introduction

A. Rationale for the Research

Since the Communist coup in 1978 and the Soviet invasion in 1979, Afghans have found *en masse* refuge in neighbouring countries as well as further afield. The attacks on the World Trade Center in September 2001, and the fall of the Taliban in November 2001, set the stage for a new era filled with hope for peace and prosperity in Afghanistan. Since 2002, the country has witnessed over three million Afghans returning to their home country through facilitated repatriation operations,¹ and these large numbers have been perceived to be an expression of the acceptance of the legitimacy of and confidence in the new government.

The sustainability of this large return movement, as well as the actual homecoming, however, has been questioned by many. A 2002 study by Turton and Marsden with regard to the repatriation operation states that “the official figure for the number of returnees is an accurate record of those who received assistance, but not of those who repatriated. The provision of assistance to returnees...resulted in an unknown number of ‘recyclers’ signing up for repatriation and then returning to the country of asylum after having collected the assistance package.”² Furthermore, many of those who returned might have been seasonal migrants with no intention of staying in Afghanistan or those who eventually returned to their country of asylum because of the difficulties faced in their home areas.

Agencies often emphasise that refugees are enabled to go “home,” without providing a critical analysis of what they conceive to be home, why they go home and how it has changed since they were forced to leave.³ Voluntary repatriation as one of the durable solutions of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) might not be sustainable in practice, as the term “durable” implies a linear movement along with a degree of finality that does not necessarily reflect the complexities of real life. Returning home does not necessarily mean the end to insecurities or vulnerabilities, and it might not halt migration.⁴ Indeed, return sometimes prompts onward passage, leading to a pattern of multi-directional cross border movements.

The diverse nature of cross-border movements justifies a further examination of the formal categories of return used by international agencies. These categories can be viewed against a spectrum with, on the one side refugees, asylum seekers, and those offered “temporary protection,” based on the 1951 Refugee Convention, and on the other side those leaving for economic or environmental reasons.⁵ The boundaries between refugees and economic, also referred to as voluntary, migrants have become increasingly blurred as part of globalisation processes for different reasons.

¹ UNHCR. *Obstacles to return*. Geneva: UNHCR. 2004; 2.

² Turton, D. and Peter Marsden. *Taking Refugees for a Ride? The Politics of Refugee Return to Afghanistan*. Kabul: Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit. 2002.

³ Bakewell, O. *Returning Refugees or Migrating Villagers? Voluntary Repatriation Programs in Africa Reconsidered*. Geneva: UNHCR. 1999, 1.

⁴ Black, R. and Khalid Koser. “The End of the Refugee Cycle?” In: Black, R. and K. Koser (eds.) *The End of the Refugee Cycle? Refugee Repatriation and Reconstruction*. New York: Berghahn Books. 1999; 2-17.

⁵ Until recently, UNHCR made a conscious effort to maintain a sharp distinction between refugees and other types of international migrants, so as to underline their special status and protection needs. This position confirmed the explicit objective of host governments and agencies to contain and prevent migration (Black and Koser, op cit., 8).

Decision-making in favour of departure can be informed by a wide variety of causes, from personal factors to social, economic and political strategies. Secondly, a less rigid categorisation clears space for the overlap of different forms of migration at one point in time, as well as their transformation of one into the other over time.⁶ In this paper, the term “migrant” is used to indicate people who have moved as a result of at least some degree of compulsion, without making any assumptions about the predominant nature of this move.

Associated with repatriation is the concept of sustainable reintegration, which assumes that returnees root themselves again in their village or area of origin by re-establishing their livelihoods. The “migrant cycle,” however, indicates that return is not necessarily followed by a permanent stay, and that “home” and “belonging” can have various meanings employed at different points in time. Sustainable reintegration therefore does not imply being rooted, but, on the contrary, may presuppose the active maintenance of dynamic social networks over a wide geographical space. These transnational networks give protection as well as structure and meaning to an individual’s life, which can facilitate return and reintegration of former migrants providing that others stay abroad.⁷

This study is part of the Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit’s (AREU) Transnational Networks project, itself a follow-up to the research conducted by David Turton and Peter Marsden in 2002, which resulted in the report *Taking Refugees for a Ride? The Politics of Refugee Return to Afghanistan*. The research for this project coincided with UNHCR’s framework of strategies for the remaining Afghan case-load in Pakistan and Iran in the post-2005 situation. Seeking solutions for this case-load in refugee terms and with humanitarian approaches is considered to be crucial yet insufficient. Besides the continued need for protection of some Afghan refugees, and the provision of visas and basic human rights for those Afghans that will not return to Afghanistan in the longer term, one of the framework’s pillars emphasises the need to manage those migratory movements that are largely economic in nature.⁸

This case study on Herat Province was undertaken within the context of a larger AREU Transnational Network project. In 2004, research was also undertaken in Faryab Province, and at the Kandahar bus stand in Kabul; case study reports and a briefing paper on these will be published in 2005. In 2005, research will be undertaken in eastern Afghanistan, Pakistan and Iran, along with advocacy efforts at the governmental level in Afghanistan (and neighbouring countries) to enhance understanding and appreciation for this key livelihood strategy.

Because of the dearth of data with regard to the current nature and scope of migratory movements to Iran and Pakistan, this study aims to enhance an understanding of this phenomena to support bilateral negotiations, as well as to advise the government of Afghanistan on how to provide minimum standards of security and income to Afghan migrants in the longer term.⁹

⁶ Van Hear, N. *From 'durable solutions' to 'transnational relations': home and exile among refugee diasporas*. UNHCR Evaluation and Policy Analysis Unit. New Issues in Refugee Research, Working Paper 83. Geneva: UNHCR. 2003.

⁷ Transnationalism refers to the multitude of relations and circuits and attachments that occur between and across places or nations. The proliferation of the concept has resulted in an increasing ambiguity. Despite this concern, it is still perceived to be a useful concept that explains phenomena with regard to different topics viewed from different angles. One of these thematic areas is “the expansion of social networks that facilitate the reproduction of transnational migration, economic organization, and politics.” (Guarnizo, L. with Michael Peter Smith. “Transnationalism from Below.” *Comparative Urban and Community Research*. 1998; 6: 3-34.)

⁸ UNHCR, op cit., 3.

⁹ Ibid.

B. Main Questions and Structure of this Report

With no data on labour migration of Afghans to its neighbouring countries, the purpose of this case study is to enhance a general understanding of the phenomenon of migration. As this study concerns Herat, it was decided to focus on Iran as a migration country. Therefore, the main questions that informed the research were the following:

- What is the extent of labour migration of Afghan individuals and families from one urban and one rural area of Herat to Iran?
- What are the causes of these migratory movements?
- What are the social strategies and intra-household decision-making patterns with regard to these migration processes?
- What are the costs and the benefits of labour migration for individuals and their social networks in Afghanistan and Iran, in particular with regard to entry into Iran, debts, remittances and savings?
- What have been the immediate consequences of a more aggressive Iranian policy towards Afghans, in particular for Afghan labour migrants?

This report covers the findings as well as the consequent recommendations of the research. Chapters Two and Three describe the urban neighbourhood and the rural area, with a particular emphasis on livelihood strategies and the causes, motives and strategies associated with past and current displacement patterns. Chapter Four presents the costs and benefits of migration of Afghans to Iran, with a focus on the routes, the usage of smugglers, employment opportunities, savings and remittances. The final chapter offers recommendations to the governments of Afghanistan and Iran and assistance agencies dealing with migration.

C. Methodology

The research team spent two months in total in Herat Province in spring and summer 2004, with slightly over one month in an urban neighbourhood and less than one month in the rural area. The urban neighbourhood in Herat was selected on the basis of the following indicators: a high level of return, the presence of transnational networks, as well as a mixed ethnic, religious and economic profile. In total, almost 50 inhabitants of the urban area were interviewed; about one-fifth of this group had more than one interview. Two-thirds of the respondents were women. Besides respondents who had never left Herat, interviewees were at various stages in the displacement cycle. These included: migrants returned from Iran; migrants from elsewhere in Afghanistan who had settled temporarily in the neighbourhood; and migrants who returned from their displacement elsewhere in Afghanistan.

The rural research was undertaken in Enjil District, which was selected on the basis of its proximity to Herat City for security reasons. The main selection criterion for the rural site was the high prevalence of labour migration.

Initially, a second rural site in Ghoryan District which borders Iran was incorporated to understand the dynamics of migration in a frontier region, but due to security reasons, repeated visits turned out to be not feasible within the set timeframe. No specific references to Ghoryan will be made in the text, although the data have supported the presented analysis.

The respondents in the village in Enjil were of Tajik, Pashtun and Baluch origin, and included both men and women of different age groups occupying different socio-economic classes. Sixty respondents were interviewed, some more than once. As in the urban neighbourhood, interviewees were at various stages in the cycle of displacement. These included: migrants returned from Iran, and migrants returned from elsewhere in Afghanistan, alone and with their families.

An insecure environment presented ongoing challenges for the research team. These included relatively short working days and a high level of distrust because of the perceived lack of assistance received from the government and international agencies. Other challenges during the fieldwork were:

- Especially in the urban neighbourhoods, accessing young men was a challenge as they were often absent because of work in Iran or elsewhere in Afghanistan. This explains the relatively higher number of female respondents in the urban area.
- The confusion between doing research without the provision of assistance, and the continuing demands for humanitarian aid, which in some cases might have biased the information provided in terms of ethnic profile of an area, expected numbers of return, and estimated numbers of potential migrants.
- The suspicion with which the research team was sometimes received, in particular when asking detailed questions about migration to Iran. Fears were that providing information about plans, routes and life in Iran would result in a clampdown on migration opportunities. For this reason, direct references to the areas where field research was conducted have been removed.
- There were several challenges with regard to translation, either with regard to Dari-English or with regard to Uzbek-English, in particular with some women in Uzbek households in Herat.

The main research methods consisted of semi-structured interviews, mapping and observation. Interviews were held in informal groups and with individuals. Triangulation of data was done by repeated visits to a selected number of households to obtain in-depth information, the use of different research methods over an extended period of time (e.g., the return to the urban neighbourhood after six weeks) and the use of a multi-ethnic and gender-balanced team.

Furthermore, a one day mission was undertaken to interview returnee families in different districts in urban Herat, and a two-day survey was undertaken at the Nimroz taxi stand in Herat to provide further insights into displacement patterns to Iran. Besides this survey, further interviews were undertaken with travellers, including those heading groups (*sarparast*) and smugglers, and the Nimroz taxi stand manager, to enhance further understanding with regard to the route to Iran. Moreover, interviews were undertaken with the mayor of Herat, the representatives of the provincial Department of Refugees and Repatriation and the Iranian mission, and various sections of UNHCR, the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), UN-Habitat, HRS, Ockenden International, and the International Rescue Committee (IRC).

II. Migration and Return in an Urban Herat Neighbourhood

Herat used to be at the crossroads of civilisation - its north-south axis was part of the old silk route which went from Herat to Maimana to Balkh and Takhar, and an east-west axis ran from Herat to Iran towards Europe. Until recently Afghanistan's border with Iran was only drawn on maps, while on the ground the 900 kilometre line through desert territory had neither fences nor border posts on the Afghanistan side. Even during King Zahir Shah's reign, which lasted from 1933 until 1973, the border was open, which, along with a strong Iranian currency, stimulated trade, religiously motivated visits and labour migration.¹⁰ The orientation of western Afghanistan has always been towards Iran and Turkmenistan, an outlook that continues to be reconfirmed because of the relatively weak central government in Kabul.

The urban neighbourhood of Herat City covered in the field research became one of 18 neighbourhoods (*gozars*) of district (*nahia*) nine as a result of the reshuffling of Herat's district boundaries after 2001, partially as a result of population growth.¹¹ Established in the 1970s when a large landowner from Kabul sold his land, the area was entirely destroyed by the Soviets in 1979. Since its destruction, when many of its inhabitants fled to neighbouring Iran or elsewhere, the neighbourhood has witnessed many families occupying the ruins or rebuilding houses on a temporary or more permanent basis. The transitory nature of the neighbourhood still persists in some of its streets, where households do not always know their neighbours. Since 2002, former inhabitants have increasingly been returning from Iran, slowly transforming the make-up of the neighbourhood. The *arbab* (representative) indicated that 15 percent of the population is still said to be abroad, with the vast majority in Iran. Land and rent prices are rapidly increasing due to the blossoming economy of the city, the high level of return, and therefore an increasingly limited availability of affordable rental houses for poorer households.

A. Wealth and Socio-economic Classes

The profile of inhabitants is economically, socially and ethnically mixed, with the majority consisting of Sunni Tajiks. The professions of the male heads of household can be divided into daily labourers, businessmen, shopkeepers, real estate agents, NGO employees, and lower level government officials. Tajiks and Pashtuns can be found in all professional categories, while Uzbeks generally occupy the lower echelons of the neighbourhood. The few Shi'a families, both Tajik and Hazara, are said to be more mid-level. However, the wealth of a family is not determined solely by occupation, but also by the availability of horizontal and vertical redistribution networks (described below), material assets, the composition of the household, gender and age. This in turn influences the decision-making with regard to migration.

Pain makes a distinction between relatively vertical redistribution networks, which run from richer to poorer households and are maintained on the basis of a redistribution of resources, such as *zakat* (charity) and a system of loans between

¹⁰ DACAAR. *Note on labour migration from Pashtun Zaranj, Herat*. Informal document. Kabul: DACAAR. 2004.

¹¹ The General Information Sheet of the Herat Municipality of Nahia 9 provides the following numbers: 10,000 men; 10680 women; 41364 children. The total population is 62,045, with 217 returnee families, 117 disabled and eight addicted.

landlords and dependent households.¹² In contrast, horizontal networks exist among households of equal socio-economic status, which allows for a sharing of risk and the building of obligations of assets in times of need. As will be discussed later, those households with an absence of more extensive horizontal networks are unlikely to migrate, as there is no one with whom to activate this informal insurance mechanism of spreading risk among a wider group.

Lower ranking socio-economic classes

The residents who never left Herat belonged to the poorer socio-economic classes of the area. They were, however, not rooted in the area – many lived in different parts of the city, never staying on for an extensive period of time because of ongoing fighting, the difficulties of finding a livelihood, or the lack of shelter. The many years of conflict often resulted in the loss of their assets or family, thereby further decreasing the strength of their horizontal redistribution networks, which might have supported a displacement further away.

Other families who occupy the lower socio-economic echelons of the neighbourhood are those returning since the fall of the Taliban, mostly as a consequence of the increasingly aggressive policies of the Iranian government. Some used their own transport, others the repatriation trail organised by UNHCR and the Iranian government. Their socio-economic status can be partially explained by their relatively short stay in the area and the time needed to find employment and, in some cases, housing. Some of these returnees are only passing through, falling back on the hospitality of relatives or the chance that their rental accommodation happens to be in the neighbourhood. After the initial period of integration, their situation might present a different picture.

The income of these households is based on the wages of its various members. If present, the male heads of household are casual workers, with a few working with the local government in low-ranking yet secure jobs, with earnings in the range of US\$48 to \$72 per month.¹³ In the majority of cases, however, work, and therefore income, is irregular, with some taking on different jobs at the same time.¹⁴ Besides doing domestic chores, women often supplement their families' income with spinning wool, baking bread, doing the laundry or other home-based work.

House ownership is a crucial asset in Herat. A minority of the families did not own houses, either living temporarily with relatives or renting houses of those who are still in Iran or residing elsewhere in Herat. These are often shared with other mostly related families to reduce the monthly rent. Families who own houses, either inherited or bought in the early 1990s when land was cheap, experience this level of security as a strong asset, in particular in the current setting of increasing rents and a shortage of cheap housing.

With an average daily income of US\$2-3, food expenses can be covered. Yet when illnesses and other emergencies occur, the fine balance between income and

¹² Pain, A. *Livelihoods Under Stress in Faryab Province, Northern Afghanistan. Opportunities for Support*. Save the Children (USA) Pakistan/Afghanistan Field Office. 2001.

¹³ The following exchange rates have been used (Summer 2004): 1 US\$ = 50 Afghani (Afghan currency) = 1000 tomans (Iranian currency).

¹⁴ Male heads of household work as cart pushers (20-40 Afghani per day), vegetable/fruit cart pushers (100-150 Afghani a day), in construction work (120 Afs per day), as a guard in a garage (3000 Afs a month) and electronics shop (rents the shop - 100-120 Afghani per day), and as drivers (1500 Afghani per month). Age determines as well the height of the salary - young men in their teens can find work as assistants but earn accordingly (car workshop assistant - 50-100 Afghani per week).

expenditures is disrupted. Savings are often not available, and money will be borrowed from available social networks, in particular neighbours and relatives, on the basis of generalised or balanced reciprocity. Generalised reciprocity can be found among close kin, where the social component is more important than the material one, while balanced reciprocity can be witnessed among neutral strangers who exchange goods and services of equal value.¹⁵

The absence of horizontal redistribution networks causes people to resort to more vertical ones, at least if available. For instance, the *arbab* of the neighbourhood can provide access to assistance, but only if the family is part of his network. Otherwise wealthier neighbours or relatives can be a source of credit or *zakat*, as part of a sense of generalised reciprocity. Reciprocity as such enhances social ties, due to which the existence of debts is not necessarily perceived as a negative state of affairs but is dependent on the position of the giver and receiver.¹⁶

Uzbek households in the neighbourhood

A second distinct group of inhabitants in the neighbourhood are Uzbek families from the northwestern province of Faryab. Except for one, who came before the arrival of the Taliban as a consequence of the fighting among different *mujaheddin* groups, all of the displaced Uzbeks had selected Herat to become their shelter during Taliban time. They settled temporarily because of the relative security, the employment opportunities or the imprisonment of relatives in the Taliban jail. The length of time present in the neighbourhood varied from 40 days to over a year.¹⁷

The various displacement histories exemplified by these families show that displacement is not a cyclical movement, but multi-directional, in which households split up and individual members join a larger unit again on the basis of national and transnational networks. Some families have always stayed within Afghanistan, while others decided to go to Pakistan or Iran at a certain point of time, alone or with their families. Return to Faryab occurred, as one instance in the displacement history, but a longer stay could never be sustained for economic and protection-related reasons. In general, as a result of displacement, a depletion of assets had occurred, reducing their material resources and pushing them to resort to other ways to ensure their livelihoods, such as in one instance, giving their daughters away in early marriage.

In terms of income level, the Uzbek families compare well to other lower socio-economic families, but their social networks tend to focus more on other Uzbek families that are spread across various neighbourhoods in Herat as well as further away. They also experience a higher level of mobility. They share compounds with other Uzbek families to reduce the monthly costs of the rent. Likewise, ethnic group, place of origin and personal liking can provide a degree of closeness in a city that is foreign to them.

One woman, who is considered to be the poorest of four Uzbek households sharing a compound, gives her housing history in Herat:

¹⁵ Sahlins, 1965, 1972 in Monsutti, A. (2004a) "Guerres et migrations." *Editions de l'Institut d'ethnologie, Neuchatel/de la Maison des sciences de l'homme*. Paris. 2004, 225.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ The massive IDP influx to Herat from the surrounding provinces has reduced both the salaries and the jobs available for casual labourers in Herat (see Harpviken, K.B., Suleman, M. and Merete Taskdal. *Strengthening the Self-reliance of Returnee Communities, the Enjil Community Development Programme, Herat province, Afghanistan*. Report from an Independent Mid-term review for Ockenden International. 2001, 7).

“My husband and I came from Qaysar three years ago. First we went to the Khoja Khaleh area. We stayed there half a year, renting a house for 300 Afghanis a month. Then we moved next to the customs house - 200 Afghanis a month. These were all completely destroyed houses. We stayed there for two months. Then we moved to Mohalla Mushbaniya and stayed six months, again for 200 Afghanis per month. Over one and a half years ago we came here. My neighbour found my present house for 1700 Afs per month. My family and I share it with three other families - I pay 200 Afghanis per month while the other families pay 500 Afghanis per month.”

Uzbek men found jobs as guards, cooks, or carriers. Sometimes different jobs were done at the same time. Average wages are around 100-150 Afghanis a day (US\$2-3), but income can be irregular. Professional histories show that they are flexible, performing different jobs at different points in time of their displacement history. For instance, one man had skills in leather producing, construction (masonry), brick-making and was in Herat pushing his own cart in the bazaar until his physical condition deteriorated, after which he started selling fried potato pancakes. Uzbek women undertake different tasks to obtain income for their families, combining these with their household duties, such as cleaning and spinning wool, making fried potato pancakes, or doing laundry.¹⁸

As is the case with the other poor families in the neighbourhood, income provides only for daily subsistence. If in need, families turn to each other, at least if their temporary settlement shows a degree of permanence, or otherwise direct requests for loans to entrepreneurs or employers (e.g., wool). The *wakil* (neighbourhood representative) is not known to them, and one woman indicates that expectations for assistance from wealthier families often remain unmet: *“A rich man is a person that when a poor man comes he does not answer. A poor man is a person who invites people in to share the bread.”* This suggests that, within their experience, vertical redistribution networks have been largely unavailable, and only more horizontal ones can be counted on.

The precarious situation of the internally displaced migrants, and other social classes occupying the lower echelons of the neighbourhood, becomes obvious when considering the policies of the Herat administration, which issued directives against the selling of potato pancakes for health reasons. The sellers of these pancakes, but also those who have carts and sell vegetables or fruits, are harassed by the police, with the risk of having to pay a fine, spend a night behind bars and have all goods confiscated. This presents a situation in which those occupying the bottom rank of the labour market are being put at an even more disadvantageous position.

The Uzbek households appear to be continuously strategising to deal with the complexities of their displaced lives. Reasons that inform the decision to leave or not are related to the decisions of the other households occupying the same compound. If one household leaves, the rent increases for the remaining families and a reduction occurs in immediate psychological and economic support networks. Some prefer to save more money before returning to Faryab, which indicates the relative economic opportunities in Herat City. As all are aware of the poor economic opportunities in their province of origin, different scenarios are continuously adjusted on the basis of information coming in through their

¹⁸ Estimates of income vary - from 50 Afghanis (US\$1) a day to the same amount a week. For the pancake selling, one Uzbek woman hired Herat boys to sell the pancakes in the bazaar. Some women are more industrious than others - they invested in the equipment which in the longer term provides them with a higher daily income.

transnational and national networks, including the option of onward movement upon return to their place of origin, although leaving the family behind.

Mid-level and higher socio-economic classes

The mid- and upper-level socio-economic classes are occupied by businessmen (e.g., clothes, cumin), *hawaladars* (money changers or persons involved in the money transfer action), and real estate agents. Others work with NGOs, are teachers or temporarily unemployed. Many are Tajik, but other ethnicities also feature among these wealthier families. Some are literate, others are not, but the large majority appear to have an elaborate network of relatives and others to invest in and build on. Women are generally not working, unless they are educated themselves and have become teachers.

Those families who came to the neighbourhood approximately 10-15 years ago settled down, as land prices were cheap and investments worthwhile, and many had the presence of relatives in the area. These families have remained ever since - sometimes shifting from a rental house to building their own houses, gradually improving their economic situation. These families never left Afghanistan, and the option of moving to Iran was never considered to be part of the opportunities available. One woman tells:

“My husband used to get his clothes [for his business] from Iran and Pakistan. He went to Iran more than ten times and took me along with him. Since the Taliban left, I only stayed here and went for picnics outside of the city. I never mentioned about going to Iran, staying there and finding work, and neither did my husband. My mother, brothers and sisters were here.”

In this instance, with increased security, the wholesale clothes business has shifted to Herat, diminishing the need to travel to Iran.

Originally from other districts of the city or Herat, Farah or Laghman Province, Pashtun and Tajik families bought houses towards the end of the Taliban period.¹⁹ Return was instigated due to the perceived safety in the area, partially because of their ethnic group, and the presence of others (e.g., same Pashtun lineage). Savings were in all cases brought back from Iran, and sometimes further accumulated during the Taliban time while working for NGOs or in real estate. Real estate has become a major business over the past couple of years, thereby showing some of the prominent power relations in the area. Agents act as intermediaries between house owners and clients, or newly constructed houses are sold on the market for sale after completion.

Social networks appear to be widely spread. In addition to those related to relatives and neighbours (though in particular women of Pashtun business families appear to be more restricted in their movements), business networks are also built on friendships and common business interests. In one case, a Pashtun family, based on a network of business associates, is involved in the *hawala* business with linkages to Pakistan, Iran, Mazar and Kabul. The *hawala* system constitutes an integral part of the maintenance of transnational networks, as it allows for the

¹⁹ Only a few families of this socio-economic category are renting their house (with a rent of around 3000 Afghani/US\$60 per month).

transmission of money and goods to reconfirm social and economic relations over a wide geographic space.

B. Transnational Networks and Motives for Migration and Return

The socio-economic categories as described above present an almost static overview of the different groups in the neighbourhood. Reality is more fluid and shifts in wealth can be witnessed as a consequence of asset accumulation or depletion of investments, income and property as well as the availability of horizontal and vertical redistribution networks. In particular upon return from Iran, time is needed to re-establish, and (re)connect with, social networks and often a decrease in assets occurs before the reverse trend can set in again. The availability of employment is crucial to ensure the provision of basic needs.

When the Herat neighbourhood was razed to the ground and mined during the Soviet invasion, families either moved temporarily to other areas in the city or left altogether to Iran. These reasons of immediate departure sometimes became mingled with fears of conscription or persecution. Approximately 60 percent of the families were said to have returned during Najibullah's period, but the Taliban prompted the immediate departure of many once more because of the overall atmosphere of harassment, persecution and lack of employment opportunities.

Some individuals or families returned regularly to Afghanistan during the many years of conflict, exemplifying the often multi-directional movements that generally characterise migration patterns. For instance, individual household members went ahead to Iran for security reasons but consequently returned to pick up their family, or a pattern was established the other way around, with a family brought to security in Iran upon which the male head of household returned to fight with the *mujaheddin* in the 1990s. Furthermore, single men started going to Iran to save money to get engaged and married, every time returning to Afghanistan for these important moments in their lives. Consequently, they brought their wives and children along with them to Iran during the Taliban period.

Of many of these families, some relatives have so far stayed back in Iran, although many were expected to follow the paths of their relatives to (re)establish themselves in Herat because of the increasingly difficult situation for Afghan families in Iran. In various instances, their family in Herat advised them to either extend their stay to save sufficient money to buy land, in particular as families have grown over time, or, if work is secure, to stay on. In other instances, Iranian wives objected to a move to Afghanistan for reasons explained below. These transnational networks are regularly reconfirmed by an exchange of persons and information, including trips back to Iran for social and medical reasons.²⁰

The exposure to a more developed country during the many years of displacement, a better educational and physical infrastructure and other cultural practices has changed aspirations of those families and individuals who have returned to Herat. The readjustment to a new and less developed environment takes time. Especially for urban women, a return to Afghanistan is associated with adjustment problems

²⁰ In contrast (with Pakistan), the research findings indicate that Afghan refugees in Iran say they have had very little contact with relatives back home and few have a good understanding of how their area/village/town is doing or what has happened to their property. (Hoodfar, H. "Families on the Move: The Changing Role of Afghan Refugee Women in Iran." *Hawwa*. 1 June 2004. 2(2): 141-171.) This could be explained by the fact that many have no land in Afghanistan.

due to the increased workload in the home, pressure from their immediate surroundings to dress and behave in certain ways, lack of development, restrictions on freedom of movement and difficulties in relating to other Afghan women.²¹

The return movement to the neighbourhood has been characterised by many families who have some form of registration documents in Iran, with men returning alone being the exception. Some returned to check on their property and collect the rent before travelling back to Iran. A few young men returned alone to join their families who had preceded them to Herat. The number of individual men migrating to Iran for employment reasons is minimal, suggesting the relative ease to find employment in the urban setting despite the lower wages, as well as the importance of the presence of close relatives.

Moreover, while the situation in Iran was often economically challenging for families, as one man indicated (*“why escape from the Iranians all the time when what I earn is only sufficient for daily expenses”*), for single men the employment opportunities in Herat, a decrease of their own transnational networks, along with the availability of housing and relatives, informed their decision to return to Herat. The costs would otherwise have been shaped by a continued yet illegal stay in Iran, associated with fear of deportation and other psychological costs, despite the comparatively higher wages and the possibility of saving money when living at the fringes of society as a migrant worker.

In Herat, employment appears to be one of the fundamental prerequisites for a sustainable livelihood, as income can cover basic needs, including rent. If social networks are weak, the need to pay intermediaries to find work becomes more urgent. However, in time, irrespective of their background, for the large majority it appears to be feasible to find employment, even if it is only in construction, confirming the relative number of opportunities available.²² Skills learned in Iran, such as masonry skills, turn out to be a crucial asset when seeking jobs. Other assets can be crucial, such as house ownership to obtain financial resources (e.g., by pawning the house), or having a large household with various members who can contribute to the household income.

The challenges faced by returning families can be decreased on the basis of the initial support provided by the presence of their relatives and friends, who can assist in finding work, housing and providing credit and information, thereby facilitating a new beginning. The importance of the support given by these networks becomes clear, when considering that the *wakil*, often the gatekeeper to aid, provides access to assistance for his own relatives, neighbours and friends. These transnational networks spread risk, in which one part of the family stays back in Iran, while another section returns to Afghanistan, preparing the ground for further return in the longer term if economic, social and political conditions become increasingly stable.

²¹ Most women interviewed in Herat City felt there were adequate opportunities to work but some felt they were limited by their husbands, their lack of education, large workloads in the home and the limited numbers and types of jobs for females. Some of the young women who had been in Iran for most of their lives felt that they were discriminated against in their efforts to find a job.

²² One man with a university education in Iran needed around seven months to find work as a cashier - for daily labourers this period of time is shorter.

III. Rural Herat - Migration as a Social Strategy

The district of Enjil has often been referred to as “the breadbasket of Herat.” With the combination of rich agriculture and easy access to the city, many of its inhabitants had jobs in the urban area, with the government, their own businesses or as daily labourers.²³ Besides exposure to a relatively liberal city atmosphere, many Enjil residents also experienced a different culture, infrastructure and services when seeking refuge in Iran. This has changed aspirations and expectations, and permeates all aspects of life, while still providing one cause of ongoing migration to Afghanistan’s western neighbour.

Enjil District became a centre of fighting almost immediately after the 1978 coup, as resistance and militia groups operated from the rural areas surrounding Herat. Because of the immediate overlap between land ownership and political power, as well as its close proximity to the city, the village has always been entrenched in the ongoing power shifts and struggles in western Afghanistan. This strategic importance caused much insecurity, but the village remained largely intact because of its location on the city’s eastern, less strategic, side where fighting had been less heavy.²⁴

The village of study in Enjil District is relatively close to Herat City, a few kilometres after the city district boundaries. Of the approximately 2000 inhabitants, a large minority is Tajik, and the majority Pashtun. The two ethnic groups are spread throughout the village and intermarriage takes place, indicating a relatively stable relationship among them.²⁵ Despite its proximity to Herat City, which suggests the availability of sufficient labour opportunities, a large majority of Enjil men continue to depart to Iran to seek work.

A. Livelihood Patterns in the Village

Largely based on agriculture and livestock ownership, livelihoods and coping strategies of people living in rural western Afghanistan are traditionally diverse and better developed than those in northern provinces.²⁶ The main crop is wheat, and other crops consist of rice, corn and lentils, with overall production having decreased as a consequence of the ongoing drought. Nowadays, as Grace and Pain point out,²⁷ in Afghanistan many rural households use labour migration as either a strategy for accumulation (wealthier households) or as a coping strategy for uneven job opportunities within the village or to seek better-paid work.

Over the past 30 years, as in the whole surrounding area, the village underwent major changes. Due to population growth, more and more land was used for settlement purposes, leading to a decrease of available agricultural land surrounding the village. It was said that in the past there were less than 50 families, a number which has quadrupled since then. Moreover, access to the city,

²³ Harpviken et al, 2001, op cit., v.

²⁴ Ibid, 5.

²⁵ In some instances Pashtuns have been discriminated against, directly and indirectly, thereby negatively affecting their livelihoods. (UNHCR/SO Herat. (2004d) *SO Herat Returnee Monitoring Report 2003 - Internal Draft 1*. Confidential unpublished report. UNHCR Sub Office Herat. 2004.) The research team has not observed this in the village.

²⁶ WFP. *Afghanistan Countrywide Food Needs Assessment of Rural Settled Populations 2002-2003*. Kabul: WFP Vulnerability Analysis Mapping Unit and Partners. 2003, 22.

²⁷ Grace, J. and Adam Pain. *Rethinking Rural Livelihoods in Afghanistan*. Kabul: Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit. 2004.

and therefore trading opportunities, increased due to the availability of cars and a better road connection.

During the Communist regime, the village received many subsidies as a consequence of its support for Najibullah's government, and the fact that half of its land belonged to the government. After his fall, government assistance came to a halt, resulting in less favourable conditions for those who continued to work on the land. Over time, the wealthiest and most powerful families moved to the nearby city, subcontracting their land to the remaining socio-economic classes in the village.

The entire village population appears therefore to be more homogenous on the surface, though differences clearly become apparent after the first impression. Due to population growth, and inheritance laws, which stipulate the division of land among sons, the average size of landownership has decreased. A minority of families in the village own land - around 30 percent. Landownership cuts across ethnic lines, though the Tajiks have so far always held the position of *arbab*, suggesting their relative power over Pashtun families.

However, land ownership does not secure a regular income anymore. As a recent WFP report confirms, the rainfall during 2003 did provide some relief to farmers, but "the lack of sufficient seeds, the loss of traction animals and tools through distress sales over the last few years and the out-migration of able-bodied men across the border to Iran in search of work have all resulted in below normal cultivation and harvests." The irrigation system lacks water for distribution and the *karizes* remain empty, as underground water tables have not been able to sufficiently replenish, due to which financial assets were depleted to buy generators.²⁸

The cash economy has gradually taken over part of the subsistence economy. This is reflected in the need for cash income, in which basic subsistence products are increasingly bought in the market, and demands for electrical equipment, the latest fashions and other luxuries multiply because of heightened aspirations as a consequence of living in Iran. This has been coupled with an overall increase in basic costs of living as a consequence of the decrease of the value of money.

This increase in prices is also mirrored in the size of the *mahr* (dowry), which is mostly not demanded in the poorest households because of the unavailability of assets, but also not for those marriages of wealthier families who exchange daughters for political and/or socio-economic reasons. The size of the *mahr* varies, but is on average between 200,000 and 300,000 Afghanis (US\$4000 -US\$6000). As one Baluchi man explained:

"Now it is very difficult to get married. Families used to not insist a lot to give them more money, but now everybody dreams of money. Why do people otherwise go to Iran than to obtain this money?"

The main occupations in the village are based on agricultural work, and the assets available to men. Landowners often need to find additional labourers, and contracts can take on different forms. The landlord-tenant relationship is based on the availability of assets (oxen, seeds, etc.) by the tenant for which he will receive

²⁸ WFP, op cit., 22. In an evaluation report on assistance provided, several respondents indicated that without the deep wells, there would have been a net out-migration to Iran this year due to the drought (Harpviken et al, 2001, op cit., 36).

one-half of the harvest. Sharecroppers only provide their labour throughout the year and earn one-fifth of the crop, while labourers are hired on a daily basis.

With the relative high number of small landowners (e.g., one to three *jeribs*, with one *jerib* = 0.2 hectare), there is less need to find additional labour for cultivation. Furthermore, sharecropping but also tenant contracts have become less attractive over the years, in particular with the recurring drought, and in comparison with the more favourable income of daily wage work. Therefore, landlords have found it increasingly difficult to find tenants and sharecroppers for their land.²⁹ For tenants, but also for larger landowners, the drought had detrimental consequences, with the investments in the cultivation of land, such as oil for machines, fertiliser, etc., felt to be higher than the consequent gains. The hard work is explained by the two following quotes:

“My father and grandfather are sharecroppers. At that time they were accepting less money - they were working during summer and in winter taking a loan which was repaid in summer. As I remember the story of my father and grandfather, it needs energy...A sharecropper earns less than a construction worker.”

“All year we are working, but still we do not have a lot.”

One Pashtun small landowner indicated that he is a tenant of 50 *jeribs* of land. His five sons help him, and sometimes he needs to hire labourers. This amount of land is however exceptional, and many men are working on land that is smaller in size, namely less than 20 *jeribs*. Some women tend to work on the land, and there are said to be no clear differences between male and female tasks. Others contribute to the household income by selling dairy products.

Increased dependence on vertical networks, including receiving charity, characterise families with no male member in Iran. One woman stated:

*“My husband is a farmer. We have two cows in the compound from the owner of the land. The husband [of my sister] is working in construction. We never discussed the option of going to Iran - then there is no one to look after the family. Our father was also a sharecropper. Nothing has changed. The land is from the former *arbab*. He came and asked my husband to work on his land. It is enough for the family, the expenses for food. People give us clothes and shoes.”*

Daily work can be found in the village, the surrounding rural area and Herat. In Herat several *chowks* are the meeting ground for employers and labourers, if other contacts have been unable to provide work. Daily wage work is bound by season, as in spring more work is available as compared to winter, with rain halting construction. Comparing the economic situation with two years ago, men believed that employment opportunities have increased, yet daily wage work continues to be highly irregular and therefore difficult to fully depend on.

It was indicated that *“a worker should work 14 days to basically be able to buy oil and basic things with four persons in the family.”* Wage prices differ, but the

²⁹ This has been confirmed by Klijn, who found the same challenges for landowners since they cannot find farmers or tenants to work on their land. (See Klijn, F. *Water Supply and Water Collection Patterns in Rural Afghanistan - An Anthropological Study*. Peshawar: DCAAR. 2002, 22. Available at: www.dacaar.org) Many men would not take the risk of investing in land in a drought situation and would rather work in the district centre, in Herat or in Iran.

average is between 100 and 150 Afghanis (US\$2-3). In Herat, providing that work is available most of the time, a daily labourer can earn about 2000 Afghanis per month (US\$40), while lower government staff (e.g., cleaner) or shepherds for instance earn 1700 Afghanis (US\$34) per month. These wages are considered to be only sufficient to cover the basic needs of the family, without the occurrence of illness or major events as part of the life cycle.

B. Migration as a Key Strategy

Families and individuals moved during every regime - during the Soviet occupation, the consequent *mujaheddin* era and when the Taliban were in control of western Afghanistan. Initially, some families but also many young men left due to forced conscription and the lack of overall employment opportunities. Others left when Najibullah's regime fell as a consequence of their government affiliations. The Taliban regime prompted another flow because of the high levels of harassment and discrimination, and the lack of employment opportunities. The number of migrants subsequently multiplied as a consequence of the drought.

Since the Soviet occupation, more than half of the male respondents had at least gone once to Iran, with almost a quarter showing recurring movements. The reasons for their migration were work, persecution and pursuit of a better life during the years of conflict, with an average stay of one year and nine months, with a minimum of a couple of months and a maximum of four years.³⁰ About 115 individuals and 100 families were estimated to be in Iran in the summer of 2004.

Those who stayed on in the village are either considered to be wealthy, with sufficient connections to ensure jobs for their relatives or those having no horizontal networks which otherwise would have ensured redistribution, and consequently reconfirmation, of responsibilities and wealth. Wealth however is relative, and even if the male head of a family owns 20 *jeribs* of land (and has two wives), there could be insufficient work for all his sons, who are then likely to migrate to Iran. Furthermore, other overriding reasons to stay back in the village include having no close male relative to look after the family while being in Iran, being of old age, or disabled (as employment in Iran is often of physical nature), or remaining in the village as the one designated to look after the other families as part of a strategy of spreading risks.

Migration cuts across ethnic groups and socio-economic classes, and is a continuing phenomenon, in which departure to Iran can be preceded by arrival from the same country. Many young men travel cross-border for the first time in their lives, with the majority of migrants being single or engaged. The average age of single men is 18.5 years, with ages between 14 and 28 years. Except in the case of one 14-year-old boy, the other 14- and 15-year-olds were accompanied by their fathers or elder brothers. The married men are between 23 and 40 years old.³¹

³⁰ With one of 13 years taken out of the analysis of the average.

³¹ The findings from the village fail to completely concur with those from the Nimroz taxi stand survey (see Appendix A). A small majority of contemporary migrants are Pashtun, which reflects the ethnic division in the village, as compared to the ethnic groups represented during the survey, of which the majority of travellers are Tajik. In the village, the majority of the migrants in Iran are below the age of 20 and single, while the survey data show that the travellers are in the age category of 20-29, with 64 percent of all travellers married. Reasons for these differences can be found in the particularities of the village, its relative closeness to Iran as well as Herat and therefore an increase in aspirations because of its semi-urban status, while, when groups were approached during the taxi stand survey, it is unlikely that the youngest will answer the questions.

The reasons for migration differ in accordance with age. The single migrants have left the village because of the difficulties of finding work, having debts (e.g., of the family, such as the wedding of the brother), and the requirement of saving money for the *mahr*. Furthermore, the desire for luxuries and joining friends has prompted their departure, and they generally spend a relatively longer period of time in Iran as compared to married men, who often return within a year. Some of them migrate annually or return biannually. Married men are generally said to leave because of the lack of employment opportunities, as money is needed to cover debts, basic needs or the *mahr* of a son.

Available work in and around Herat is said to be highly irregular, and when comparing average monthly wages, the wages in Iran tend to be double for unskilled work (with a difference of about US\$70 - see Chapter 4). Even when work is available in the village, as suggested by the example below, men carefully weigh the costs and benefits, and might decide against return to Afghanistan on the basis of a higher income and more job security, albeit temporarily, in Iran. For instance, one woman narrates:

“I called my husband to come in the beginning of the winter as there is no work now. My husband became angry - thinking that I do not want him to come home. My brother came back yesterday from Iran and said that your husband is angry with you. I will now call him again and tell him that if you wish to come, come, but please know that there is no work now. When there was work on the land, I called him and he did not want to come. We spent a lot of money last year, and he misses his family.”

Furthermore, seasonal patterns in both Iran and Afghanistan partially determine when departure and return is prompted. In spring the need to cultivate the land draws more men home, while in summer, after the harvest, the number of travellers to Iran increases, when no other work is available elsewhere. In autumn and winter, in particular married migrants leave but are also more inclined to travel back to their families because of the decrease in available construction work. However, other factors come into play as well, as other areas of work in Iran are not seasonally bound, such as employment in workshops, the service sector and certain agricultural jobs.

The decision to leave is mostly made by the migrants themselves, but often in close consultation with their parents, wives or brothers. A few 14-year-old boys were taken to Iran by their fathers to assist with earning money for the household, to cover debts or to accumulate savings for the construction of a house. In other instances, in particular when the son is considered to be too young and immature to be removed from the supervision of his family, he tends to leave without informing his parents or brothers, sometimes persuaded by his peers and tempted by the stories of a more prosperous life in Iran. For instance, one Tajik man tells:

“Two of my brothers are in Iran, the other two are married. One of them discussed it with us, and we agreed. The second one was in school and we tried to prevent him from going but he left. He said that he could go during his school holidays for two to three months, but now he is still in Iran since 1.5 years. The first one wanted to see the living condition outside of Afghanistan. He has been in Iran for two years...My personal opinion is that if you are familiar with the person’s morale and background (e.g., not gambling, spending money on prostitutes), then he can go to Iran and become a man. Otherwise it is not right. A young man is like a pot

without a cover - you can put many things in it and like metal it can bend in all directions. Other boys need therefore more guidance and they should stay here.”

For many single young men their migration to Iran is a rite of passage from boyhood to manhood, in which they ideally return with enough savings to cover the expenses of the *mahr* and the wedding. Their time away from relatives, often with their friends, is a critical experience which allows them to explore a different lifestyle and prove that they can support themselves. It can also financially and emotionally prepare them for marriage, which gives them a whole set of new responsibilities as the provider for and protector of their own family. Some succeed, while others fail as they miss their family in Afghanistan, cannot cope with the hard physical work or continue to be too tempted to spend their money on luxuries.

These recurring movements are a consequence of transnational networks that are maintained by the transmission of persons, information, goods and remittances. Both men and women are crucial in the process of reconfirming these networks, with men often migrating across the border to seek work, send remittances and bring savings home, while women take care of the household, generally supported by a male relative, and ensure that news from the home front, including potential employment opportunities, is passed on. However, even if employment conditions, including salaries, improve in Afghanistan, a reduction in the strength of these networks, and the number of migrants, would not necessarily be reduced instantly. As Massey et al. point out:

“But the conditions that initiate international movement may be quite different from those that perpetuate it across time and space. Although wage differentials, relative risks, recruitment efforts, and market penetration may continue to cause people to move, new conditions that arise in the course of migration come to function as independent causes themselves: migrant networks spread, institutions supporting transnational movement develop, and the social meaning of work changes in receiving societies. The general thrust of these transformations is to make additional movement more likely, a process known as cumulative causation.”³²

Thus, this rural area exemplifies how migration to Iran has turned into a social strategy, supported and protected by transnational networks. The next chapter discusses further how the process of migration is carried out both physically and financially, and the impact this has on migration decision-making.

³² Massey, D.S., Arango, J., Hugo, G., et al. “Theories of International Migration: A Review and Appraisal.” *Population and Development Review*. 1993. 19(3): 431-466.

IV. Contemporary Migration - Travel to and Life in Iran

A. Iranian Policies and Afghan Migrant Flows

The first refugee outflows in the 1980s and '90s received a warm welcome in Afghanistan's neighbouring countries. The Iranian government took formal responsibility for the Afghans and allowed them to live where they found work. In addition, they had access to health care, basic education, subsidised food and were allowed to work in designated sectors.³³ The Iranian government took a certain pride in this offer of assistance to the approximately two million Afghans that had fled the Communist regime.

When the Najibullah government fell in 1992, many Afghans repatriated back to their country. This movement came to a halt because of further interfactional fighting and the advance of the Taliban from 1994 onwards, with in particular ethnic minorities fleeing central and northern Afghanistan.³⁴ Since the mid '90s, however, the large majority of Afghans in Iran have remained undocumented, and in other areas it became clear that the Iranian government had withdrawn from its earlier position of formal support to Afghan migrants.

Since the perceived installation of peace in Afghanistan in late 2001, Iranians generally feel that their country's hospitality has lasted long enough and that it is time for Afghans to go home. By early 2002, the Iranian government had structurally been implementing policies to provide disincentives for Afghans to stay on in the country.³⁵ The general view of the Iranian government is that Afghan refugees pose a significant burden because of the sheer numbers of their presence and the relatively high levels of unemployment in Iran. In September 2001 the government announced that there were 2,355,427 registered Afghan aliens in Iran, of whom the majority, 61 percent, were male.³⁶ Moreover, the interest of national security appears to be all-pervading and instigated by drugs trafficking still taking place along the Afghan-Iranian border, along with an uncontrollable flow of migrants that continue to cross the border into Iran.³⁷

Policies to encourage repatriation started with greater regulation and control of the labour market, exemplified by an increase in raids on working sites by Iranian security forces,³⁸ and penalties given to employers hiring Afghan labourers.³⁹ For instance, Article 3 of the Decree Regulations on Accelerating Repatriation of Afghan Nationals states: "Provisions of Article 181 of the Labour Act (1990), Article 11 of the Act on Regularising Part of the Financial Regulations of the Government (2001) concerning preventing unauthorised employment of Afghan nationals shall

³³ Strand, A., Suhrke, A. and Kristian Berg Harpviken. *Afghan Refugees in Iran: From Refugee Emergency to Migration Management*. Policy Brief, CMI/PRIO. July 2004.

³⁴ UNHCR, op cit., 6.

³⁵ Strand et al, op cit., 4.

³⁶ UNHCR/Iran. *Annual Protection Report Iran-2002*. Confidential, unpublished report. Geneva: UNHCR. 2003, 2.

³⁷ Parallel to rising levels of trafficking, Afghanistan's neighbouring countries are also affected by growing levels of abuse, resulting from a spill-over of trafficking, often a consequence of remuneration in kind. Expressed as a percentage of the population age 15 and above - up to 2.8% of the people in Iran consume opiates, a far higher percentage than in Western Europe. UNODC. *The Opium Economy in Afghanistan: An International Problem*. Second edition. UN, New York: UN. 2003.

³⁸ UNHCR Iran, op cit., 7.

³⁹ "Illegal recruitment of a foreigner is subjected to a penalty of 140,000 rials per day. Since the early commencement of the reforming plan for employment of foreigners and the period of information campaign for employers, as at 21/12/2003, a number of 4693 foreigners who had been illegally employed were identified and had been penalized to a total amount of 719,000,000 Rls." Sobh-e-Zahedan. *Illegal recruitment of a foreigner is subjected to a penalty of 140,000 Rls. per day* (Unofficial Translation). 03/01/04.

be implemented. This shall be done by taking legal actions against the Iranian employers who employ unauthorised Afghan nationals who have not obtained work permits.”

Other measures to increase the pressure on Afghans to repatriate, in particular families, have been the closure of informal Afghan schools⁴⁰ and restriction of opportunities for higher education (in 2003),⁴¹ the denial of access to housing as well as to administrative services, bank accounts and interest-free loan associations and financial and credit institutions, as well as insurance policy and services.⁴² Furthermore, formal documentation that had granted Afghans a legal identity was withdrawn, and Iranian women who had married Afghan men lost their Iranian citizenship (the number of these women who could be sent back amounted to 30,000).⁴³ The only Afghans who can circumvent the implications of these measures are those holding a valid passport, visa and residence permit.

The formal repatriation operation from Pakistan and Iran started respectively on the 1st of March and the 1st of April, 2002. An agreement was reached with the Bureau of Foreign Citizens (BAFIA) to refer unregistered Afghan families and vulnerable individuals to UNHCR for their inclusion in the organised repatriation movements. The trends have been the following:

- From 1 March 2002 to 31 October 2004, in total 770,643 individuals returned from Iran with the voluntary repatriation operation, of which 121,513 individuals indicated that they went to Herat.⁴⁴
- Of this number of returnees to Herat, 69,673 were men and 51,840 were women.⁴⁵
- The pace of organised repatriation varied through the reporting period, reaching a peak in the summer months, in particular in 2002 and 2004, after which it slowed down. The peak was in July 2004, with almost 80,000 returning within that time span.⁴⁶

The relatively higher number of men using the repatriation operation to return to Herat suggests other reasons for their stay than solely protection, with the predominant motive likely to be seasonal employment. This is confirmed by the fact that the overwhelming majority of Afghans taking advantage of the programme of unregistered Afghans were single males.⁴⁷ At the same time, as for instance compared to the repatriation figures in Faryab, a relatively higher percentage of families has returned to Afghanistan’s western border province, likely because a high number of families migrated to Iran due to the province’s proximity to the border.

These repatriation figures are further complemented by return numbers to Iran, as can be witnessed from the statistics collected at the Nimroz taxi stand, described in Appendix A. This suggests that these cross-border movements are likely to be multi-directional, in which return to the place of origin can be prompted by another departure to Iran.

⁴⁰ Hoodfar, op cit.

⁴¹ Strand et al, op cit., 3.

⁴² Islamic Republic of Iran. *Decree: Regulations on Accelerating Repatriation of Afghan Nationals*. Teheran. 15 December 2003.

⁴³ Strand et al, op cit., 2.

⁴⁴ UNHCR/BO Kabul. *Operational Information Monthly Summary Report March 02-Oct 04*. UNHCR BO Kabul. 2004, 2.

⁴⁵ Ibid, 7.

⁴⁶ Ibid, 4.

⁴⁷ UNHCR Iran, op cit., 1.

B. The Route to Iran

In 2003 and 2004, migration to Iran continued from all districts of Herat, as well as from neighbouring provinces and those further to the north.⁴⁸ Even in semi-urban districts, departure of men to Iran continues to take place because of the drought, unemployment and lack of overall opportunities. Only for male inhabitants from more central city districts was migration considered to be minimal. A comparison between 2002 and 2003 shows that migration caused by persecution has clearly been decreasing, with the overwhelming majority leaving to seek employment opportunities in Afghanistan's neighbouring country. These movements to Iran seem to be recurring, and, according to some respondents, accelerating because of the drought, despite the increasingly restrictive environment in Iran.

Even during the time of King Zahir Shah, men resorted to the guidance of smugglers to cross the border into Iran. Until ten years ago it was still possible to illegally cross the border at Islam Qala, but nowadays this option has been ruled out because of strong Iranian border policing, the cross-border drugs smuggling (which results in a high level of insecurity in the northwestern part of the province), as well as the local politics played out between former Governor Ismail Khan and more centrally driven efforts.⁴⁹ Herat remains therefore a major hub for travellers to Iran from western, northwestern and parts of central Afghanistan to transfer to vehicles carrying the travellers to Afghanistan's more southern provinces of Farah and Nimroz.⁵⁰

Smugglers and their networks

Official passports, visas and other legal documents are difficult, and for some virtually impossible to obtain, therefore many Afghans continue to resort to smugglers.⁵¹ The illegal route is considered to be the best alternative without any other option available. In particular when younger men travel for the first time to Iran, smugglers from the area of origin can provide guidance, deal with Baluchi smugglers who facilitate the actual crossing of the border, as well as onward

⁴⁸ See Appendix A; DACAAR, op cit.; UNHCR, op cit., 4; and UNHCR/SO Herat. (2004c) *Report of Mission to Enjil, Gozara & Zandajan Districts - Herat Province. Mission Date: 14/01/2004*. Unpublished Report. UNHCR Sub Office Herat. 2004. There has been a reduction of migrants entering Iran for protection reasons. Over 89 percent of the deportees interviewed in 2003 indicated that their reason for entering Iran was employment opportunities (67% in 2002). Fleeing conflict was the reason given by five percent of the persons interviewed in 2003 opposed to 12 percent in 2002 (UNHCR/Herat, 2004b: 2). At the same time, in an informal assessment made by UNHCR Herat based on interviews in Ghoryan District, 13 percent of the returnees had gone back to Iran to find work, while this percentage was estimated to be higher if the team had been able to visit the more insecure and unstable parts of the district in the west and far south (note on Ghoryan district, UNHCR Herat, protection unit).

⁴⁹ Personal communication, UNAMA Herat.

⁵⁰ For instance in 2003, 12,977 men and 2374 women crossed the Shagali exit/entry point in Iran, and in 2004 (01/01/04 up to 19/02/04) 2850 men and 365 women. The majority of men most likely crossed to seek employment in Iran. For return to Afghanistan the following numbers have been given: 4451 men and 2106 women for 2003 and 1706 men and 589 women for the first seven weeks of 2004, suggesting that many are likely to use the voluntary repatriation operation to return (UNHCR/SO Herat. (2004e) Personal email from Anayatullah, 3/19/04.)

⁵¹ The term "smuggler" has been used both for the intermediary smugglers, often originating from the same areas as the migrants, and the Baluchi smugglers. For instance, Monsutti differentiates between guide and smuggler by stating: "Contrairement aux activités des *hawâladar* [...], ces pratiques sont considérées comme un système d'exploitation qui dépasse les limites de la coopération. Le terme *râhbalat* signifie 'guide' (littéralement 'celui qui connaît la route') et a une connotation moins négative que *qâcâqbar*, 'passeur, contrebandier'. Bien que les deux soient souvent interchangeables, dans l'usage courant, on désigne plutôt par *râhbalat* l'intermédiaire hazara et par *qâcâqbar* l'accompagnant baloutche." In Herat, references to smugglers were allegedly always made with the term *qâcâqbar*, although some of these took on the intermediary function. Furthermore, with regard to signifying group leaders, the term *sarparast* is used, referring to someone "leading" a group of migrants, often relatives, neighbours or friends, on the basis of his age or previous migration experience, and takes on an intermediary role, apparently without the potential risk of exploitation attached to his role.

movement in Iran to the place of destination. The trip is considered to be risky as a result of the presence of robbers and Iranian police who can arrest and deport the newly arrived migrant. At the same time, the narratives on deportation and violence also have a positive function, confirming masculinity, strength and courage while facing these kinds of situations.

Many Afghans travel without the guidance of a smuggler to southern Afghanistan. Some are guided by a *sarparast*, a representative who is often a relative, neighbour or friend, who takes on that role as he is either the oldest and/or the most experienced when it comes to travelling to Iran. He will lead the negotiations with the smugglers in the south and hand them the money required on behalf of the group. Furthermore, if requested, taxi drivers can guide the migrant to smugglers. The regular price for the taxi from Herat to Nimroz is 700-800 Afghanis (US\$14-16), and with the information on smugglers an additional 400-500 Afghanis (US\$8-10) can be charged. Those who have been several times to Iran tend to look for a smuggler in Nimroz to reduce the costs involved.⁵²

The majority of smugglers that accompany the travellers from western Afghanistan tend to originate from the same village or area as the migrant. In particular those who act as intermediaries and are at the same time relatives, neighbours and friends, tend to constitute an integral chain in the sustenance of transnational networks. The following two examples provide some further detail on how smugglers and guides operate:

“I gave my son to a trustworthy person to bring him to Iran. That person is now in Iran - he sometimes does this job. He has no permanent residence - he has lots of relatives both in Iran and Afghanistan and works sometimes three months there and then comes back.”

“My husband is a smuggler and he brings people from Afghanistan to Iran and every month he goes to Iran and comes back and sometimes he stays for ten days in Iran. My husband has been doing this work for two years and he brings people to Iran and receives 12,000 Afghanis for his work and then brings people from the Zahedan border. He spends some money at home and saves some, because in the winter he cannot go to Iran...I do not want him to go to Iran. I am worried about him because of the possibility that the police at the border catch him, beat him, take his money and send him back to Afghanistan. But my husband does not listen to me, he thinks he can earn a lot of money that way. He is alone and does not have any partner and any one to guide him...He brings five or six people every time.”

While some are professional smugglers, others are more likely to combine the leader function with going to Iran themselves for employment or other reasons. In practice, the distinction between professional and “less professional” intermediary smugglers can be blurred.⁵³

The fact that a smuggler is often closely connected to the migrants that he accompanies establishes a degree of trust in the transaction. The smuggler sometimes joins the group all the way to Iran, and is likely to be well-connected in certain neighbourhoods in the city of destination. If the migrant is unable to pay

⁵² They gave 60,000 tomans each to the bus driver at the border and he took them during the night.

⁵³ One man indicated that he only takes those relatives, neighbours and friends. He receives about 7000 tomans for his guidance function, and an additional 8000 tomans is paid to Baluchi smugglers to cross the border.

the agreed upon sum on time then the smuggler can turn to his family in the area of origin. In one instance, a mother paid the smuggler the requested sum within three months from selling milk and eggs and her teacher's salary, as her son had been unable to find a job within the first couple of months in Iran.

In another case, the group of migrants from the village fled away from the smuggler to avoid having to pay the smuggling costs. He got hold of one of them who was then forced to work for two years for himself and his friends to pay the money. When his mother learned of the story, she went to the families of those friends and demanded the return of that money, which she (partially) received:

"I received the money back - 200 lakh Afghanis. I fought a lot with his friends after those two years and I received 20-30,000 back from each. After one year my son sent a letter from Kerman saying that there was no friend and no possibility to come back. Then I sent my son-in-law to Iran, he found him and brought him back."

In both cases, the women had ailing or old husbands and had increasingly taken on the role of protector of the family, thereby exemplifying that women are not solely recipients of remittances but are active participants in negotiating the bonds between the individual members of these transnational networks, providing support if required.

From Nimroz, the migrants are taken across the border to Zabul by Baluchi smugglers. There are various ways to cross the border. One person mentioned the use of motorcycles, while others mentioned how dozens of Afghans were put in a pick-up truck. Migrants are said to have suffocated to death, or been shot at by Iranian border police. In cases of deportation before arrival in the place of destination, if it happens that a group is caught and deported, if the smuggler is well-known by the group then there is more likely to be the guarantee that they are given a second chance for freedom.

Across the border the migrants are often handed over to other Baluchi smugglers. In Zabul the group may stay for a couple of days in a guesthouse. The group of migrants is divided into the various places of destination, at least if applicable. Estimates of the number of travel days vary between five to 12 days, yet mostly between five and ten.

Iranian border policies to halt migration

Person smuggling, along with drugs trafficking, are considered to be threats to state security, partially because of their often assumed interlinkages and the fact that it undermines immigration control. Efforts to counter drugs trafficking had already been stepped up several years ago by constructing fortifications and increasing the number of Iranian law enforcement personnel along Iran's eastern border. Since the establishment of the Afghan interim administration, along with the promotion of repatriation, and the systematic denial of basic human rights of Afghans, the Iranian government increased its efforts to deport (largely undocumented) Afghans.

The interlinkages between drugs and person smuggling are anecdotal. Some of the smugglers are said to transfer drugs along with the migrants, which is more likely

to occur in borderlands that are outside the purview of the state.⁵⁴ Young men from the western border province who are tempted to make quick money, e.g., to cover debts, may smuggle drugs across the border into Iran. For instance, the border district of Ghoryan is known for this phenomenon, and men have been killed, arrested and put into prison in Iran.⁵⁵ Labour migrants from this district travel through Herat to Afghanistan's south to cross the Iranian border there for obvious security reasons.

While the Iranian government initially tolerated the situation of continuing cross-border movements, measures have become more stringent after the fall of the Taliban. In particular, the risk of deportation has increased. In 2003 the average length of stay in Iran of interviewed deportees was significantly shorter than the previous year, with a higher percentage of length of stay less than a year (55 %), as well as less than a month, indicating that they were deported shortly after they entered Iran. The lack of required documentation, or having been outside their place of residence, is the main reason given by the deportees for their arrest in Iran.⁵⁶ Deportation is often accompanied by abuse in prisons or police stations, as well as forced labour, as the stories below demonstrate.

“My younger son went with friends from this village with a smuggler from Herat City. They wanted to cross the Shagali border in Zabul but were arrested by Iranian police and kept in a security post near the border for nine days. They forced them to do construction work, and did not give them proper food. They only gave them food one time - bread with tea - and after nine days allowed them to go back to Herat. He did not have money to pay for car rent and came back to Afghanistan by borrowing money from his friends.”

“I am afraid to be beaten again - that is why I returned to the village and tried not to cross the border once more after having been beaten and held in custody by the Iranian police. I now work with my father as a sharecropper.”

In a few cases, because of the psychological costs for the deportee, a return is not planned for, but generally deportation fails to halt migration to Iran. Those migrants intercepted and arrested while crossing the border, or on their way to one of Iran's cities, often try to cross again. The causes of migration, as well as the high expectations from relatives or the fact that additional debts have been contracted to enable the trip, remain omnipresent and overrule any other concerns. In some cases, the employer has never been able to pay the migrant as a result of his forced departure, due to which the migrant returns to Iran to request his salary.

⁵⁴ DACAAR, op cit. Others who have been deported without notice from the rest of their family have no other choice than to return immediately with a smuggler. Following this, they contract new debt, which increases their poverty. In the worst case, these victims are used by traffickers to transport and distribute opium to earn quick money (Medecins Sans Frontieres [MSF], *The Return of Afghan Refugees from Iran - A Synthesis of Issues Raised by MSF Teams in the Field April-October 2002*. MSF, Kabul: MSF. 2002, 6-7).

⁵⁵ Kane mentions for instance that 40 young men were killed in 2001 while crossing the border. Kane, M. and Raja Ehsan Aziz. *Vulnerable livelihood systems in Afghanistan*. FAO study part II, Herat and Badakhshan. June 2002.

⁵⁶ UNHCR/SO Herat. (2004b) *Deportations through Islam Qala in 2002 and 2003*. Protection Section. UNHCR Sub Office Herat. 2004, 3.

The costs of entering Iran

The costs of entering Iran are largely financial, but can also trigger and be overtaken by emotional ones because of the degradation, and sometimes physical harm, as a consequence of deportation (and financial when the Iranian police take money from the deportees or when deportees have to pay smugglers again to cross the border), as well as when trafficking occurs (see forthcoming Faryab case study from AREU). Though some Afghans might become the victims of false promises and deceit by smugglers, the majority of migrants have been to Iran before or heard about the complexities of living in that country, therefore reinforcing that they actively shape their lives and are aware of the potential dangers of crossing, despite the fact that it remains unknown what the future holds.

Estimates of the travel and smuggling costs depend on how successful the negotiations are with the smugglers, the number of networks used, if the smuggler is known, experience of the migrant himself and the place of destination in Iran. Even estimates for the same cities vary greatly.

In the village, experienced migrants, and also those who had said to have used smugglers who were neighbours, provided prices in the range of US\$35-60, of which one mentioned that he had paid it to the bus driver. Others provided estimates in the range of US\$150-180, which concurs with the average of US\$172 given at the Nimroz taxi stand survey (with estimates between US\$120 and US\$340, though the two high extremes above US\$300 were taken out of the calculation of the average).⁵⁷ Considering that a migrant is said to be able to remit US\$100-200 every two months, the costs for crossing the border could be covered within this period of time, at least if work is well-paid and easily available upon arrival.

Evidence from the Nimroz taxi stand assessment suggests that the majority of travellers (80%) carry the total amount required for the travel, and 13 percent part of the money. The amount carried by most is between 80,000 and 100,000 tomans (US\$80-100). Some sell assets (e.g., sheep, wheat). Others borrow from relatives or neighbours, with amounts varying from 700 to 10,000 Afghanis (US\$14 to US\$200). Given the average costs, contrary to the expectations of some, the majority will have to obtain additional money upon arrival.

This phenomenon of paying the smuggler entirely or partially upon arrival (before starting to work) contradicts the picture that was drawn in the village, where many migrants were said to provide the intermediary smuggler with the money in the place of destination after having worked for some time. This can partially be explained by the fact that the smuggler used is often a relative and part of the migrant's social network in the place of origin, based on family ties, friendships and closeness of their residences, who travels regularly between Iran and Afghanistan.

A delay in handing over the money causes an increase in price, which could be one of the reasons why many migrants prefer to carry if not all than at least part of the money with them. However, this increases the possibility that, when caught by the Iranian police, the money is taken away to stop the migrants from returning.

⁵⁷ One smuggler indicated that he receives 14,000 to 18,000 Afghanis (US\$280-360) or 100,000 tomans (US\$100, which is much less) for each traveller. A report from DACAAR (2004) states that the cost of the journey is around 1000 to 1220 Afghanis (US\$20-24) from Herat to Zabul, including the price of the smugglers, and a total cost of 6740 Afghanis (US\$134.4) from Kabul to Teheran (DACAAR, op cit.).

In particular for the majority of migrants who come from rural areas, obtaining a passport to cross the border through the formal border crossings is a time-consuming and costly experience. For inhabitants from semi-urban districts around Herat, the accessibility of passports is higher, as the administration in Herat is authorised to issue passports. At the same time, there is a flourishing black market. The time required to obtain a passport is dependent on the size of the bribe, varying from two days to one week or more. One person indicated that he had needed five months to get this formal document.⁵⁸ It was reported that a formal passport can be bought for 10,000-12,000 Afghanis (US\$200-240) while a false one can be bought for 2000-6000 Afghanis (US\$40-120) on the black market.

Besides the requirement to possess a passport, legally entering Iran can only be done if in possession of a visa. A one-month tourist visa costs US\$30 and a three-month, multiple entry business visa costs US\$90. The process takes a week, and not all applicants are said to receive a visa, without clear reasons for the rejection of their application.⁵⁹

It was reported that those who returned within that period of time (as they had only visited family), could easily sell their passport to others, in particular as passports are only valid for one year.⁶⁰ Smugglers often buy these and change the pictures for re-use, which should enhance access to Iran at the security posts in the south because it allows for crossing during daytime and is perceived to provide more guarantee to enter. The use of passports by smugglers can enhance their price, and therefore the costs to the migrant.⁶¹

C. Life and Employment in Iran

In Iran, transnational networks provide protection and support to the new arrival. Relatives, neighbours or friends tend to facilitate this initial period of arrival, either by providing a place to stay, showing possible employers or *chowks* and/or by giving an initial introduction of life in Iran. First and foremost, their presence tells the migrant where to go in Iran - for migrants from the village this means particular neighbourhoods in Teheran. Especially for young men for whom it is the first time to migrate to Iran, their peer group is most likely to provide the initial support in the place of destination. As one man says:

“There is one tradition, and that is that each person helps the other - pays for others and then pays back once he finds work. If you stay in your relatives’ house for more than five or six days you get bored - there was no one of my age at my relatives’ house.”

Male relatives (or neighbours, friends, originating from the same village, area or ethnic group) tend to share a room together close to their work. If no room is provided by the employer, then a place is rented (e.g., for 75,000 tomans [US\$75] per month).

⁵⁸ An article in *the Herat Daily News* on how to get a passport highlighted the need for the passports and the consequences of a lack thereof, namely illegal border crossing. The head of the security office in Herat mentioned that his office distributed 130 passports a day. He acknowledged that some passports are distributed illegally. *Herat Daily News*. “Pressure of unemployment and getting passports.” *Herat Daily News*. 29/02/04: 2 (unofficial translation). 2004.

⁵⁹ *Ibid*. This article also indicated that the Iranian mission had complained about the fact that the Afghan passport is only valid for one year.

⁶⁰ The border crossing of Islam Qala has a computerised system on the Iranian side, while in other border crossings in the south this is not the case.

⁶¹ The following estimate was given: 180,000 tomans as compared for the smuggler who used false passports and 80,000 tomans for the one without (respectively US\$180 and US\$80).

Those men for whom migration has turned into an annual tradition, as well as those who experience difficulties in finding immediate employment on construction sites or in other professions, go to *chowks* where employers pick up their daily workers for the construction industry.⁶² Some Afghans work as masons, but the majority work as daily labourers. Because of its higher salaries, construction work (including baking bricks and digging wells) is often preferred to work in hotels or factories. Others find work as guards, which is physically less demanding.

The opinions differ with regard to opportunities to find work. The fact that migration recurs indicates that it is possible to find work, but experience also shows that not all migrants are fortunate enough to find work immediately and adjust to life in Iran. This can for instance be seen in the length of time needed to remit money. At the same time Afghans have a reputation for working hard, due to which they are never long out of work. One man stated:

“People know that it is not easy in Iran, but ‘something is better than nothing.’ Twenty percent can perhaps find a job in Iran, and when they return then it is proof that work can be found. The majority however cannot.”

Despite the regulations issued by the Iranian government, clear indications exist that Iranian employers continue to hire Afghan labourers, risking arrest and fines themselves. They therefore pose a counterforce, and are able to continue as long as they maintain good contacts with local authorities, though the risk of arrest and deportation of their labourers remains present. One man stated:

“The Ministry of Labour in Iran does not allow Afghans to work - I always return to my old employers as they will hide me. If we are caught, the employers will bribe the police...The Iranians who were working together with me decided to stop working - they found it too heavy.”

This further indicates that there is not likely to be stiff competition between Afghan migrants and Iranians for the same jobs, either because Iranians are not keen on performing physical labour for the respective salaries that they are obtaining, or possibly because of other factors that come into play.⁶³

The informal labour market provides on the one hand a certain degree of protection to Afghan migrants, as it operates outside the state parameters. Afghans often appear to obtain the necessary support from their own networks. The negative aspects of the informal labour market have been the vulnerability of Afghan labourers in terms of social security, as they are not covered by any insurance (except minimally when accidents occur on the building site, though most of the expenses are still for the victim himself) or legal protection in case problems arise with employers. With the Afghan Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs (MoLSA) having no mandate to monitor labour conditions for Afghans abroad, as well as no official links with Afghan Embassies, Afghans can only turn to already present social networks based on kinship or other commonalities.

⁶² There are some indications that some men take drugs to enable them to continue with the hard physical labour (Strand et al, op cit.).

⁶³ See Massey, et al., op cit.

D. Income, Expenditures and Savings

Besides the available employment opportunities, another reason provided for migration to Iran is the income. In comparison, wages in Iran are at least twice the salary of a simple labourer in Afghanistan. In Iran an unskilled labourer can earn around 5000 to 7000 tomans (US\$5-7) per day, a skilled labourer 8000 to 10000 tomans (US\$8-10) a day, while a daily labourer in western Afghanistan can earn between 100 to 150 Afghanis (US\$2-3) a day and a skilled person around 300 Afghanis (US\$6), along with a higher irregularity of available work.⁶⁴

Depending on the reasons for migration, the majority of men tend to save part if not all of their earnings. In particular, husbands tend to migrate for shorter periods of time with the intention to provide for their family in Afghanistan. The reasons given by single and engaged men differ, with many migrating to save money for their parents and siblings, as well as the *mahr*, along with the desire to spend time with friends, and experience the luxuries of Iran. One man said:

“My two brothers are still happy in Iran. Iran is clean, you can wear clean clothes and look smart. Up to this time we have requested them many times to send money, and they replied ‘we send it, we send it, we send it’ but so far we have not seen anything. My brothers are not the type to spend money on luxuries. They may save it or marry girls of relatives there.”

On average, husbands send between 100,000-200,000 (US\$100-200) every two months to wives to pay for their expenses at home. Single and engaged men remit money as well, though the amounts are likely smaller and less regular (e.g., 20,000-50,000 tomans [US\$20-50]). Depending on the costs of migration, and the availability of work as well as the reasons for migration, the time to start remitting money can vary from a few months up to even a couple of years.⁶⁵ Often money is sent to the wife, the father or eldest brother. In some cases, the amount is split. For instance, one man remits every two months 150,000 tomans to his wife and 50,000 tomans to his mother.

Remittances are sent via the *hawala* system or through relatives. In the village a large number of migrants (and intermediary smugglers) were said to regularly travel back and forth, through which letters, news and remittances were sent along with them. For instance, one smuggler charged two percent commission (2000 tomans commission for one lakh toman remittances). In the urban area, the *hawala* system was possibly more often used, with less relatives regularly travelling back and forth between the two countries, at least for the neighbourhood researched. Using relatives, neighbours or others known to the migrant and his family is considered to be more secure, as it was reported in Iran that some migrants had lost their money to men who had passed themselves off as *hawaladars*.

Those migrants who return to Afghanistan with savings regularly mentioned the amount to be one or two million tomans (US\$1000-2000), in particular for single

⁶⁴ Income also depends on the kind of work undertaken. For instance, one man working in a restaurant earned between 2000 to 6000 tomans per day in Iran.

⁶⁵ The study conducted by DACAAR in three villages in Pashtun Zaranj indicates that it takes migrants 2-3 months work to pay back debts, which they may have accumulated due to the need to borrow money for the journey. After that they start earning money for themselves. Some employers however keep up to a third of the employees' money as a guarantee for the continued stay and work. For instance if the migrant earns 150,000 tomans, then the employer keeps 50,000 tomans. This is the reason why it often takes time for a migrant in Iran to start sending money home (e.g., 4 to 6 months). (DACAAR, op cit.)

migrants who send fewer remittances. This amount is likely to have been saved over a period of one or two years, and may cover one-sixth to half of the *mahr* (with an average of US\$4000-6000, though this is sometimes negotiated down).

Migration as a livelihoods strategy and the reception of remittances are of crucial importance for households in Afghanistan.⁶⁶ In most instances, remittances cover expenditures for basic needs, such as food, clothes and medicine. Money is often earned for advances obtained or borrowed during lean periods, which are consequently paid off when money is earned. The benefits are often perceived to be short-term, reconfirming a self-perpetuating circle without accumulative effects.

⁶⁶ WFP, op cit., 21-2. See also Kane et al, op cit. - Kuchis in Herat said that their income consists of 20-30% remittances, sent by sons or husbands working in Iran (US\$80 to US\$380 per year).

V. Conclusion and Recommendations

“I wished that the government of Iran would allow Afghans to stay for a longer period of time as there is no work in Afghanistan.”

“I pray to God to stop them going to Iran. I told them not to go, but they do not listen.”

These two statements capture the contradictions that are often part of migratory processes, in which the latter is the emotional response of a mother, and the former expresses a wife’s perspective on the importance of migration as a livelihoods strategy. Following the channels of pre-established transnational networks, men - including those who live relatively close to an urban area which is presented as a centre of economic opportunities - continue to go to Iran as migration continues to be a social strategy that provides meaning to life, irrespective of the initial causes that had created it. Because of the cumulative causation of this process, the spread of migrants has made it increasingly easier for those who have never travelled to Iran before to seek work.

The nature of this migratory movement to Iran is overwhelmingly informal, and multi-directional. The initial causes can be found in the oil boom of the 1970s, while a dramatic increase occurred thereafter because of the high levels of insecurity and persecution, coupled with the lack of employment opportunities and social services in Afghanistan. Furthermore, population growth and natural disasters contributed to the need to seek employment elsewhere, which over time, due to exposure to different values and opportunities in the host country, led to a re-evaluation of the status of available jobs, shifting interests, as well as the acquisition of new skills.

Government-led national programmes have had a limited outreach and impact in terms of creating more employment opportunities. Though the majority of men are seeking work in those countries that offer a higher income and more jobs, part of those travelling to Afghanistan’s neighbouring country still do so for protection-related reasons. Furthermore, the comparative better medical facilities in Iran, as well as the fact that many relatives continue to reside there, are some reasons for the travel of individuals and families back to Iran.

At the household level, other factors come into play that add to the complexity of the migratory phenomenon. The availability of horizontal redistribution networks determines whether migration to Iran is actually feasible to spread risks within the household (with more than one son), or between households (of various brothers). In the rural area, migration cuts across socio-economic classes and ethnic groups, whereby daily labourers and sharecroppers (both farmers and tenants) make their way to Iran.

For many, migration is considered to be a coping strategy to maintain their assets and cover the basic needs and repay debts through remittances. At the same time, for single men but also for married men, in particular when they can bring one son along with them, migration can contribute to a further accumulation of assets, such as the *mahr*, the construction of a house, the purchasing of land or covering debts. Therefore, migration is of crucial importance as it allows for families to stay in their area of origin, while covering basic needs and having accumulative effects that enhances their relative welfare.

The motives that support the household/family strategy are often mingled with more personal reasons, such as the urge to seek new experiences for young men or earning money by those married to show that they can fulfil their marital responsibilities as major breadwinner. Thus, personal characteristics such as age, gender, marital status and health also determine the decision-making process. The intra-household decision-making process is sometimes done in mutual agreement of the husband and the wife, or parents or older brother and son or younger brother. However, some young men depart the rural area without informing their parents to avoid a confrontation, as their families might not support their migration to Iran.

Women are not only the recipients of remittances and tend to have a voice in the decision-making process, but they also tend to actively shape the movements of persons, money, goods and information along the lines of transnational networks. Information can be advice on employment opportunities, family news, but also the provision of emotional support, as well as sorrow because of the wide geographical distance, influencing a potential return to Afghanistan. Furthermore, when their husbands are old or ailing, women progressively take on the role of protector and supporter of the family, and can either cover the travel costs of their migrant son to Iran, or seek justice for perceived crimes by peers of her son or possibly a smuggler residing in the same village.

Without any regulation from the Afghan government, and with the absence of an easily accessible official passport and visa system, the use of intermediary smugglers, especially if originating from the same village, appears to be the best alternative available. Smugglers appear at many times crucial in reconfirming transnational networks over time by guiding the migrants to the city of destination, providing credit, finding employment, as well as transferring money and delivering letters back to the area of origin. While use of smugglers can risk potential exploitation, which might be reduced when the smuggler is originating from the village of origin where generalised and balanced reciprocity mechanisms tend to operate, deception can also occur from peer migrants themselves, and then it depends on the situation in the village to what extent justice is achieved.

The Iranian government's disincentives to have Afghans stay within Iran has been mostly felt by Afghan families, as can be witnessed from steadily increasing numbers returning to Herat, where their initial reintegration is facilitated by the presence of relatives who had preceded them. The discriminatory environment in Iran impacts differently on Afghan labour migrants who circulate within their own networks that provide support and protection by giving social and psychological support, credit, information on labour markets, and money transfer facilities (if not using the informal *hawala* system). With the large majority of migrants viewing their stay in Iran as temporary and economically necessary, many are able to find work and save money to sustain their families in Afghanistan and to fulfil their obligations as the male provider for the family.

The costs for Afghan migrants are apparent. The lack of formal contracts and insurance make Afghans vulnerable when employment suddenly stops, because of illness or other reasons. Income can be irregular. Furthermore, without a legal identity, Afghan migrants face difficulties in accessing justice mechanisms. Psychological costs are also apparent - many live in a situation of fear of deportation, and stress can be magnified by the absence of their families. Despite the government ordained restrictions on Iranian employers, Afghan men continue to be hired, as they clearly respond to a demand in the labour market in which

their flexibility and hard work are sought after, despite the potential risks for their employers.

Ultimately, the migrant carefully balances the pros and cons of migration to Iran, and more often than not the decision points to the overall benefits. Not only the possibility of sending remittances and savings home to support the family, or the fact that employment is available motivates departure. Many follow in the steps of others who preceded them, and thereby transnational networks give meaning and a purpose to life in an often disruptive context, causing these networks to become a social reality.

Recommendations

Additional research is required in Afghanistan, Pakistan and Iran to: a) give additional contours and details and confirm the extent of the migratory movements; b) deepen awareness, knowledge and understanding of migration and its contribution to livelihoods and development; and c) guide policy and institutional development in the field of migration. The following recommendations for governing bodies in Afghanistan and Iran, and assistance agencies working with migrants, provide a starting point for better understanding transnational networks and dealing with migration as an ongoing social and economic strategy.

Afghanistan

- Commission studies into border management, issuing of documentation (visas, documentation), improved data collection and analysis of Afghan populations abroad.
- Improve targeting of national programmes in areas of high migration outflows and/or refugee returns.
- Develop and include a national policy on migration within the National Development Framework and Budget.
- Designate a department to be tasked with responsibility for developing a foreign employment policy.
- Conduct training and awareness building among Afghan consular/embassy staff in neighbouring countries.
- Organise appraisal missions to look into the government's technical and financial support needs and to prepare a support and development programme.
- Open bilateral negotiations with neighbouring countries on management of population movements as part of the broader economic, social and commercial cooperation agenda.

Iran

- Conduct studies and analysis of labour markets impacted by Afghan presence.

- Develop a regulatory framework (working visas, entry fees, tax, certification) to encourage and manage legal migration and thereby reduce dependence on smuggling/trafficking networks.
- Engage the Afghan authorities bilaterally on issues of border management, migration, and documentation.
- Permit easing of visa requirements and procedures for family reunion, for students, for health and education purposes.

For assistance agencies

- Support additional research into migration from different parts of Afghanistan and its potential contribution to local and national development.
- Evaluate the cash value and the transmission systems for remittances to assess how they could be improved and or linked to development processes.
- Examine ways to improve and enlarge programmes supporting sustainable reintegration of returning migrants and refugees in selected areas.
- Provide technical assistance and financial support to Afghan government ministries and departments tasked with responsibility for border management, labour and employment, foreign and consular responsibilities.
- Enhance work to ensure humanitarian protection and intervention for Afghans abroad (both refugees and migrants) in need of continuing assistance.

References

- Afghanistan Network on Food Security (ANFS). *Afghanistan Monthly Food Security Bulletin August, 2004*. Kabul: ANFS. 2004.
- Bakewell, O. *Returning Refugees or Migrating Villagers? Voluntary Repatriation Programs in Africa Reconsidered*. Geneva: UNHCR. 1999.
- Black, R. and Khalid Koser. "The End of the Refugee Cycle?" In: Black, R. and K. Koser (eds.) *The End of the Refugee Cycle? Refugee Repatriation and Reconstruction*. New York: Berghahn Books. 1999; 2-17.
- DACAAR. *Note on labour migration from Pashtun Zaranj, Herat*. Informal document. Kabul: DACAAR. 2004.
- Government of Iran. *Decree Regulations on Accelerating Repatriation of Afghan Nationals*. Government of Iran, Teheran, unofficial translation. 2004.
- Grace, J. and Adam Pain. *Rethinking Rural Livelihoods in Afghanistan*. Kabul: Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit. 2004.
- Guarnizo, L. with Michael Peter Smith. "Transnationalism from Below." *Comparative Urban and Community Research*. 1998; 6: 3-34.
- Harpviken, K.B., Suleman, M. and Merete Taskdal. *Strengthening the Self-reliance of Returnee Communities, the Enjil Community Development Programme, Herat province, Afghanistan*. Report from an Independent Mid-term review for Ockenden International. 2001.
- Harpviken, K., Strand, A. and Astri Suhrke. *Afghan Refugees in Iran: From Refugee Emergency to Migration Management*. Policy Brief. PRIO/Chr. Michelsen Institute. 2004.
- Herat Daily News. "Pressure of unemployment and getting passports." *Herat Daily News*. 29/02/04: 2 (unofficial translation). 2004.
- Hoodfar, H. "Families on the Move: The Changing Role of Afghan Refugee Women in Iran." *Hawwa*. 1 June 2004. 2(2): 141-171.
- Iran News. "Lari Stresses Need for Regulating Immigration." *Iran News*. 15 March 2004; 2.
- Islamic Republic of Iran. *Decree: Regulations on Accelerating Repatriation of Afghan Nationals*. Teheran. 15 December 2003.
- Kane, M. and Raja Ehsan Aziz. *Vulnerable livelihood systems in Afghanistan*. FAO study part II, Herat and Badakhshan. June 2002.
- Klijn, F. *Water Supply and Water Collection Patterns in Rural Afghanistan - An Anthropological Study*. Peshawar: DACAAR. 2002. Available at: www.dacaar.org
- Maimbo, S.M. *The Money Exchange Dealers of Kabul: A Study of the Hawala System in Afghanistan*. World Bank Working Paper No. 13. Washington D.C.: The World Bank 2003.

Massey, D.S., Arango, J., Hugo, G., et al. "Theories of International Migration: A Review and Appraisal." *Population and Development Review*. 1993. 19(3): 431-466.

Medecins Sans Frontieres (MSF). *The Return of Afghan Refugees from Iran - A Synthesis of Issues Raised by MSF Teams in the Field April-October 2002*. MSF, Kabul: MSF. 2002.

Monsutti, A. (2004a) "Guerres et migrations." *Editions de l'Institut d'ethnologie, Neuchatel/de la Maison des sciences de l'homme*. Paris. 2004.

Monsutti, A. (2004b) "Cooperation, Remittances, and Kinship among the Hazaras." *Iranian Studies*. 2004. 37(2): 219-240.

Pain, A. *Livelihoods Under Stress in Faryab Province, Northern Afghanistan. Opportunities for Support*. Save the Children (USA) Pakistan/Afghanistan Field Office. 2001.

Rashid, A. *Taliban: The Story of the Afghan Warlords*. London: Pan Books. 2000.

Ratha, D. "Workers' Remittances: An Important and Stable Source of External Development Finance." *Global Development Finance*. 2003:157-175.

Rubin, B. R. *The Fragmentation of Afghanistan: State Formation and Collapse in the International System*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. 2002.

Smith, M.P. and Luis Eduardo Guarnizo. *Transnationalism from Below, Comparative Urban and Community Research v6 - 1998*. New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers. 1998. Available at: <http://hcd.ucdavis.edu/faculty/guarnizo/LocaTrans.pdf> (consulted 10/01/2005)

Sobh-e-Zahedan. *Illegal recruitment of a foreigner is subjected to a penalty of 140,000 Rls. per day* (Unofficial Translation). 03/01/04.

Strand, A., Suhrke, A. and Kristian Berg Harpviken. *Afghan Refugees in Iran: From Refugee Emergency to Migration Management*. Policy Brief, CMI/PRIO. July 2004.

Turton, D. and Peter Marsden. *Taking Refugees for a Ride? The Politics of Refugee Return to Afghanistan*. Kabul: Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit. 2002.

UNAMA. *Western Area Matrix of Humanitarian Intervention*. Herat: UNAMA. Jan. 2004.

UNHCR. *Obstacles to return*. Geneva: UNHCR. 2004.

UNHCR/SO Kabul. *Operational Information Monthly Summary Report March 02-Oct 04*. UNHCR BO Kabul. 2004.

UNHCR/SO Herat. (2004a) *Mission to Nimroz 07-14 April 2004*. Unpublished document. UNHCR Sub Office Herat. 2004.

UNHCR/SO Herat. (2004b) *Deportations through Islam Qala in 2002 and 2003*. Protection Section. UNHCR Sub Office Herat. 2004.

UNHCR/SO Herat. (2004c) *Report of Mission to Enjil, Gozara & Zendajan Districts - Herat Province. Mission Date: 14/01/2004*. Unpublished Report. UNHCR Sub Office Herat. 2004.

UNHCR/SO Herat. (2004d) *SO Herat Returnee Monitoring Report 2003 - Internal Draft 1*. Confidential unpublished report. UNHCR Sub Office Herat. 2004.

UNHCR/SO Herat. (2004e) Personal email from Anayatullah, 3/19/04.

UNHCR/Iran. *Annual Protection Report Iran-2002*. Confidential, unpublished report. Geneva: UNHCR. 2003.

UNODC. *The Opium Economy in Afghanistan: An International Problem*. Second edition. UN, New York: UN. 2003.

Van Hear, N. *From 'durable solutions' to 'transnational relations': home and exile among refugee diasporas*. UNHCR Evaluation and Policy Analysis Unit. New Issues in Refugee Research, Working Paper 83. Geneva: UNHCR. 2003.

WFP. *Afghanistan Countrywide Food Needs Assessment of Rural Settled Populations 2002-2003*. Kabul: WFP Vulnerability Analysis Mapping Unit and Partners. 2003.

Witt, A. "Bridging Two Afghan Worlds: Herat's Powerful Leader Nods to Kabul's Authority but Defends Conservatism." 2003. Available at: www.washingtonpost.com/ac2/wp-dyn/A26395-2003Jun6?language=printer (Accessed on 16/02/2004).

Appendix A. The Nimroz Taxi Stand in Herat

This short study was undertaken at the Nimroz taxi stand in Herat in western Afghanistan in the spring of 2004, as the border province of Nimroz is one of the major informal gateways into Iran. The following issues were addressed: causes of departure, group composition of migrants, smuggling costs and networks, and the effects of Iranian policies on Afghan men travelling to Iran via Herat and Nimroz.

Methodology

The AREU research assistant (male) was present at the taxi stop for two days to conduct interviews with the travellers, the Nimroz taxi stand manager, the Shagali taxi stand manager and some of the drivers. The sample was not random, as the taxi stand manager managed the flow of vehicles (stop them from taking off) to allow for at least one interview per vehicle.

One-page questionnaires were used during the interviewing. These data have been complemented with observation and semi-structured interviews with the taxi stand manager and taxi drivers.

Challenges of the fieldwork and subsequent analysis were mainly related to the sensitivity of the information, in particular with regard to money, family and smugglers, and the chaos at the taxi stand. Some respondents were afraid that the research assistant was part of a network of thieves plotting a robbery along the way to Nimroz. Furthermore, smugglers were not always very keen to respond to the questions. A few respondents therefore failed to answer all of the questions, which resulted in a non-response on some.

Background on the Nimroz Taxi Stand

The Nimroz taxi stand is accommodated in a larger taxi stand in Herat with vehicles going to Farah, Qala-i-Naw, Kandahar and districts in Herat Province. There are about 1000-1500 travellers daily, all moving in smaller vehicles as large buses are not used in that part of Afghanistan.

In spring, less people move from Herat due to the cultivation of wheat and vegetables. In summer the number of travellers increases after the harvest, when no other work is available elsewhere. In autumn and winter, the migrants return to western Afghanistan because of the cold weather and to give their families the required finances.

Table 1: Vehicles, Number of Passengers, and Prices Per Day

Vehicle	No. of passengers	Price for one person (Afghani)	Number per day
Saracha	6	660	6
Town Ace	12	495	6
Toyota	20	320	3
Flying coach	18	400	5

Many using the taxis to Nimroz originate from the rural areas of Herat Province. Some are from further north, travelling all the way via Maimana in Faryab. Based on calculations of the number of vehicles and seats, approximately 260 passengers

travelled to Nimroz on a daily basis in spring 2004.⁶⁷ The journey from Herat to Nimroz takes 11 to 13 hours.

A Profile of the Travellers

Of the 55 respondents going to Iran for employment purposes, the majority were from Herat Province (69 percent). Further, from western Afghanistan, seven percent were from Ghor, five percent from Badghis, and five percent were from Farah. Northwestern Afghanistan was represented as well, with five percent from Faryab, four percent from Saripul, and four percent from Jowzjan.

Table 2: Age and Marital Status of Travellers

Age	Single	Engaged	Married	TOTAL
10-19	2	--		2
20-29	6	11	13	30
30-39	1	--	19	20
40 +	--	--	3	3
TOTAL	9	11	35	55

Fifty-five percent of the travellers were between the ages 20-29, while 36 percent were in the 30-39 age group. The majority (64 percent) were married (all above the age of 20), while 20 percent were engaged (only in the age category 20-29) and the remaining sixteen percent single (in the two lowest age categories).

Table 3: Ethnicity and Province of Origin

Ethnicity	Herat	Badghis	Farah	Ghor	Saripul	Faryab	Jowzjan	TOTAL
Tajik	31	3	2	3	--	--	1	40
Uzbek	--	--	--	--	2	3	1	6
Pashtun	7	--	1	1	--	--	--	9
TOTAL	38	3	3	4	2	3	2	55

Sixteen per cent of the travellers were Pashtun, 11 percent were Uzbek and the large majority, 73 percent, were Tajik. The Tajiks mostly came from Herat Province, but also from Badghis, Farah and Ghor. The Uzbeks came from the northwest (Saripul, Faryab and Jowzjan) and the Pashtuns were in this case only from the western provinces (Herat, Farah and Ghor).

Table 4: Ethnicity and District of Origin of Herat Province

	Enjil	Guzara	Ghoryan	Adraskan	Kushk	Kushki Kuna	Gulran	Zindajan	Pashton Zarghon	Obe	Herat City	Shindand	Rabat-i-Sangi	KohSan
Tajik	5	2	2	1	5	2	2	3	1	3	1	2	1	1
Pashtun	--	--	2	--	1	1	--	1	--	2	--	--	--	--
TOTAL	5	2	4	1	6	3	2	4	1	5	1	2	1	1

Except for Chist-i-Sharif, Farsi, and Karukh, all districts of Herat Province were covered in the assessment. Only two respondents (from Herat City and Enjil) intended to cross the border in Nimroz, though not for employment reasons but to visit their relatives on the other side of the border (both because someone was ill).

⁶⁷ The representative (*nomayenda*) of the Shagali taxi stand indicated that about 400 to 500 persons depart daily from Shagali. He however calculated that 10 to 15 taxis leave daily, which could then result in a number of travellers similar to that of Nimroz. Those travelling via Telai will also end up in Shagali. Another assessment should be done with regard to the reasons that determine which end destination is selected in Afghanistan - Shagali or Nimroz.

The large majority, namely 78 percent, were travelling with friends. If taking the other categories of travel companions into account as well (that is, travelling with friends and neighbours, brother, other relatives, etc.) - then the number amounts to 94.5 percent. Others were travelling alone or failed to answer the question.

Table 5: Number of People the Respondent is Travelling With (total 55)

No of people	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	Not Said
Respondents	2	-	-	2	6	6	4	5	9	5	4	4	3	1	1	--	--	--	2	1

Table 5 suggests that migrants, on average, travel with 7.6 fellow travellers to the border crossing with Iran in Nimroz. There were some very large groups (two groups consisted of 19 travellers, one from Ghor and one from Saripul), while the groups consisting of 10 or more travellers came from all provinces.⁶⁸

The family of the travellers (parents, wife and children) stayed back in Afghanistan for different reasons. Overall, the situation in Afghanistan was considered to be secure enough, but no money was available to cover their travel costs. Further, the travel to Afghanistan's neighbouring country was perceived to be highly dangerous because of the robbers along the way and the Baluchi smugglers in the south.

One respondent said, "I do not want to lose my family," while another mentioned that "it is very dangerous for women" and a third clearly indicated his doubt by saying, "Am I crazy to bring my family? It is (almost) impossible to arrive myself so how can the family?" Further, there was considered to be "no need, Afghanistan is better for the family," and "if I do (bring the family), I cannot earn enough," clearly indicating the reason for going to Iran, namely to earn income.

For 64 percent, the sole reason for travelling to Iran was for employment. Twenty-seven percent indicated that they were planning to cross the border for both work and to visit relatives. Further, four percent solely intended to visit relatives and five percent travelled for both employment and other reasons.

Other reasons for travel included: a respondent going to find his brother, who had not been heard from in two years; one going to collect his salary from an Iranian employer; and a man hoping to work in Tehran for approximately five months after which he will try to go to Dubai via Bandar Abbas.

Table 6: Comparison of Salaries in Herat and Iran

	Herat	Iran (unskilled)	Iran (skilled)
Salaries per day	100-150 Afghani	5000-7000 tomans	8000-10000 tomans
Salaries per day in US\$	US\$ 2-3	US\$ 5 - 7	US\$ 8-10

Low salaries in Afghanistan constituted a major reason for leaving. Afghan salaries are between 100 to 150 Afghanis a day (one respondent stated that salaries in Afghanistan could be even less, namely 1500 Afghanis per month, which amounts to US\$30 per month).

⁶⁸ Herat eight respondents, Ghor one respondent, Jowzjan two respondents, Saripul one respondent, Faryab two respondents, Badghis one respondent.

The Use of Smugglers

Afghanistan has two formal border crossings with Iran, yet the majority of travellers prefer the informal border crossings in Nimroz or Shagali in Farah Province, as they normally have documents. In the country's most southwestern province, travellers are dropped off at a place called Bazari Nimroz, from where they continue to cross the border into Iran with the assistance of Baluchi smugglers. The borders in the south are porous, and despite risks of deportation and the potential risks of abuse by trafficking networks, the high level of unemployment in the country and comparative higher salaries in Iran lead to the decision to depart.

The majority of travellers to Nimroz spent only one day in Herat City (65 percent) as they come from Herat Province. Twenty-seven percent spent two nights in the city, and the remaining respondents more time. Reasons provided for the limited stay were no work (73 percent), low wages (18 percent), combined no work/low wages (four percent), and one other (finding brother in Iran).

The smugglers that accompany the travellers towards the border area in Nimroz tend to originate from the same village or area as the migrant (62 percent). Other respondents indicated that a friend knew the smuggler as he was from his village, area or a relative (15 percent), or that they received the name of the smuggler from their brother (nine percent), or were using a relative who is smuggler (four percent). Four percent of the respondents were smugglers themselves.⁶⁹ This clearly suggests the partial overlap of different social networks, and proves that smugglers are often known to their clients.

The groups of travellers are handed over to Baluchi smugglers in Nimroz who then organise the crossing of the border and onward movement in Iran. Considering that smuggling is a business based on demand and supply, the smugglers are mutually dependent on each other, with some providing the clients and others providing the service of transport across the border. Any disagreement could result in the break of this social contract, decreasing future business opportunities.

The migrants perceived the travel south and the actual border crossing to be dangerous as a consequence of robbers along the way (22 percent), Baluchis (who could be smugglers and/or thieves - 11 percent) and the Iranian police (16 percent). Further, 40 percent provided a combination of the above-mentioned dangers, and 11 percent referred to the hot weather and the desert-like environment in the south of Afghanistan. Thus, using a smuggler from western or northwestern Afghanistan provided the migrants with a sense of trust and security in an environment otherwise perceived as hostile.

The taxi stand manager and some of the drivers also referred to the dangers for women travelling due to a heightened risk of kidnapping (and rape) by Baluchi smugglers or Iranian police. One relayed the story that many women can be found again after two or three months in Iranian cities, pregnant. Another driver mentioned that one Afghan woman had been raped by eight men, a story which might express the general distrust towards Baluchis instead of actually being true.

The large majority of travellers carried the money for the trip with them. Forty-four percent of the respondents carried 80,000 tomans, 24 percent carried 90,000

⁶⁹ Other reasons were: difficulty to find a smuggler in Herat, someone had given them a name, and one respondent indicated that he had been to Iran several times and did not require a smuggler.

tomans, 27 percent 1,000,000 tomans and four percent carried 80,000-90,000 tomans. Only two percent indicated that they travelled with 40,000 tomans.

Table 7: Destination Versus Amount of Money Carried

Tomans	US\$	Tehran	Isfahan	Mashad	Yazdi	Kerman	Zahedan	No answer	TOTAL
80,000	89	14	1	4	1	1	1	--	22
90,000	100	6	3	--	1	1	1	--	12
100,000	111	6	4	2	1	--	2	--	15
80,000-90,000	89-100	1	--	--	--	--	1	--	2
40,000	44	1	--	--	--	--	--	--	1
No answer	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	3	3
TOTAL		28+3	8	6	3	2	5	3	55

Eighty percent of the respondents carried the total amount of money required for the travel, while 13 percent only had part of the amount on them. No clear correlation can be found between the destination in Iran and the amount of tomans carried. Upon arrival, some of the migrants needed to find other ways to give the smuggler the money required for the journey.

Fifty-one percent of the respondents had been to Iran before. All respondents used smugglers to cross the border. It is often assumed that illegal migrants are lured into travelling to a country on the basis of false promises and deceit. As over half of the respondents had been to Iran before, it can be concluded that smugglers respond to a clear demand and need on the part of migrants, while those who are travelling for the first time to Iran might experience a higher risk of being deceived and becoming disillusioned upon arrival.

In Iran - Deportation, Destination and Remittances

In Iran, the majority of travellers were going to Teheran. Fifty-six percent of the travellers were heading towards Teheran, while 14.5 percent were going to Isfahan, 11 percent to Mashad, nine percent to Zahedan, two percent to Kerman and five percent to Yazd.

Estimates of the number of travel days varied between five to 12 days. Twenty-seven percent indicated that the journey was expected to take five days, 15 percent six days, nine percent seven days, 16 percent eight days, and 16 percent ten days. Further, five percent mentioned an estimate of five to six days, while another five percent indicated six to eight days. Only two percent gave an estimate of 10-12 days. The expected days of travel, when correlated against the city of destination, varied. For instance, the travel to Teheran was estimated at five to ten days.

Of those who had been to Iran before, 14 percent had been there in the past 11 months, 36 percent in the past two years, 25 percent when the Taliban were in power, and 25 percent before this period of time.⁷⁰ This suggests recurring movements to Iran, with half of the migrants having returned to Afghanistan since the establishment of Karzai's government. The ongoing drought and the limited

⁷⁰ Depending on the province, the Taliban were in control from 1995 onwards (Herat) or 1998 onwards (e.g., Faryab in northwestern Afghanistan though two previous efforts in 1997 and 1998 by the Taliban took place to conquer the region).

availability of employment opportunities push some male Afghans into crossing the border once more into Iran.

While the Iranian government maintained a policy of acceptance of new arrivals during the Taliban regime, measures have become increasingly stringent after the fall of the Taliban. In particular, the risk of deportation has clearly increased, though it fails to halt migration to Iran. One respondent said, “They deported me twice, but what can I do” and another mentioned, “I know that the current pressure (in Iran) is bad, but what to do?” At the same time, it was indicated that on occasion the Iranian police are susceptible to receiving bribes, which can circumvent deportation in some instances.

Overall, the respondents emphasised the importance of remittances for the household economy. More than half (58 percent) indicated that the family intended to spend the money on food, clothes and medicine. Fifteen percent of the respondents stated that they would be partially saving their income for the *mahr* (the amount of money and goods paid to the family of the bride) and 22 percent indicated that the savings are solely for other purposes or combined with basic needs.⁷¹

Conclusion

Labour migration to Iran remains of overriding importance to Afghans as a consequence of the limited employment opportunities as well as the comparatively low wages in their own country. For the large majority of migrants the need to provide for their families’ basic needs in Afghanistan was the decisive reason to depart to Iran.

Different smuggling networks are interlinked, with those from Afghanistan’s western and northwestern regions maintaining close relationships with Baluchi networks in the south. These networks are mutually dependent on each other, with the first one providing the clients and the second one the service of transport across the border. Any disagreement could result in a reduction of future business opportunities, thus striking a fine balance between trust, demand and need in a rather insecure environment.

While Iranian government policies push Afghan families and individuals out of the country, some corrupt police officers allow individual Afghans to return to Iran. Despite the increased risk of deportation, Afghan men continue to travel to Iran due to the lack of employment opportunities in Afghanistan and the comparatively higher wages in Iran. As shown elsewhere, the existence of social networks on both sides of the border, and the informal nature of the labour market, provides a certain degree of protection against the deteriorating climate for Afghans in Iran.

The family of the male migrants remains at home, largely because of financial reasons. Afghanistan is considered to be safe, while the road to Iran is perceived to be dangerous for women. Thus, the pattern of migration to Iran as described here clarifies the rationale for male out-migration while preventing further displacement from their family members in Afghanistan.

⁷¹ The category “Other” included paying for a wedding party (four respondents), buying a taxi (one respondent) and paying for the medical treatment of a wife (one respondent).

RECENT PUBLICATIONS FROM AREU

June 2004	Trading in Power: The Politics of “Free” Markets in Afghanistan, by Sarah Lister and Adam Pain
June 2004	Understanding Markets in Afghanistan: A Case Study of Carpets and the Andkhoy Carpet Market, by Adam Pain and Moharram Ali
June 2004	Understanding Markets in Afghanistan: A Case Study of the Market in Construction Materials, by Sarah Lister and Zaineddin Karaev
June 2004	Understanding Markets in Afghanistan: A Case Study of the Raisin Market, by Sarah Lister and Tom Brown with Zaineddin Karaev
June 2004	Land Relations in Faryab Province, by Liz Alden Wily
June 2004	Minimal Investments, Minimal Returns: The Failure of Security Policy in Afghanistan, by Michael Bhatia, Kevin Lanigan and Philip Wilkinson
July 2004	Rethinking Rural Livelihoods in Afghanistan, by Jo Grace and Adam Pain
August 2004	Rural Land Relations in Conflict: A Way Forward, by Liz Alden Wily
August 2004	The A to Z Guide to Afghanistan Assistance, 3 rd edition
August 2004	From Subjects to Citizens: Local Participation in the National Solidarity Programme (NSP), by Inger W. Boesen
September 2004	Free, Fair or Flawed: Challenges to Legitimate Elections in Afghanistan, by Andrew Reynolds and Andrew Wilder
November 2004	Gender and Local Level Decision Making: Findings from a Case Study in Panjao, by Shawna Wakefield
December 2004	Looking for Peace on the Pastures: Rural Land Relations in Afghanistan, by Liz Alden Wily
December 2004	Gender and Local Level Decision Making: Findings from a Case Study in Mazar-e Sharif, by Shawna Wakefield

All AREU publications can be downloaded as soft copies from its web site at www.areu.org.af. Hard copies are available by contacting the AREU office in Kabul:

Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit
Charahi Ansari (opposite the Insaf Hotel and Popolano's Restaurant),
Shahr-e-Naw, Kabul, Afghanistan
Mobile: +93 (0)70 276 637; E-mail: areu@areu.org.af