

**BOUND FOR THE CITY:  
A Study of Rural to Urban  
Labour Migration  
in Afghanistan**

Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit

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## About the Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit (AREU)

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## Executive Summary

This report presents findings of a study on internal labour migration in Afghanistan. The study aimed to gain a better understanding of the reasons for, and reality and patterns of, rural to urban labour migration in the country, as it relates to individual and household risk management. This report is based on primary information collected through a survey on 997 individuals in three cities: Kabul, Herat and Jalalabad.

The research illustrated that young adults are most likely to migrate, with the average age of the population being 31.19 years. The majority of the respondents were married (66.7%); half had brought their families with them to the cities. Most of the migrants also provided the main source of income for their households, and landlessness and homelessness were very high among respondents, 71 and 43 percent respectively.

Migration flow towards the cities is rapidly increasing. Nearly half of the migrants interviewed had come to the cities within the last year. Not surprisingly, lack of work in the rural areas and the perception of better opportunities in town were the major causes of migration. A majority of the respondents (70.2%) also had experience of cross-border migration.

As might be expected, the costs associated with migration to the cities can be quite high. Savings constitute a major portion of the money used to migrate, though some migrants did note receipt of assistance from other sources (friends, family). Once in the city, migrants spend a significant portion of their earned income on basic necessities of living (housing, food) and therefore they accumulate little. Women, in particular, earn on average two and half times less than their male counterparts in the same job sectors.

What this study found that was surprising, however, relates to the ability to access labour markets in urban areas and the lack of seasonality of migrant flow. Specifically, the data revealed:

- **Lack of access to labour markets.** It took an average of three weeks for the migrants to get any type of employment in the city. Despite possessing the skills for certain jobs, daily wage labour and unskilled work in the construction sites are the main sources of employment for the new migrants. Incidence of unemployment in cities remains high, and there are no formal opportunities for workers to gain skills that would help them graduate to more secure employment.

Accessing the labour markets is also difficult for the migrants because they usually lack any vertical social relations which can assist them in finding work. The majority of the respondents (66%) got their first job in the city without any help of others. However, those who can establish social connections are able to access more gainful and secure employment. For women, in particular, support from social connections is crucial to finding a job.

- **Self employment.** A small portion of the study population were able to start their own business venture, however, this task is also difficult, as it took on average two years' time to start a business. Capital was required in almost all cases, and the average required was \$170. In most cases, savings were the main source of accumulating capital for initiating a business. In a

few cases, it is observed that social connections played a role that replaced the need for financial capital.

- **Migration flow.** In most of the cases, rural to urban migration seems to be unidirectional. More than half of the respondents had planned to settle permanently in the cities, while 13.4 percent had already settled in the cities. Perceived higher economic opportunities account for the most significant reason people planned to settle.

This study also revealed that the common assumption that people migrate to urban areas during the agricultural “off seasons” and then return when on-farm labour opportunities increase is a false one. Seasonality and the cycles of rural employment seemed to have little effect on the timing of migration and return of migrants to their home villages.

- **The perception of an urban advantage.** Despite the problems faced by the migrants in finding a job or a place to live and the high cost of living in the cities, many of the respondents felt that they had managed to improve their economic situation through migration. The length of migration was found to correlate significantly with the improvement of economic situation of the migrants. Nevertheless, many migrants noted a constant struggle to afford city living, and the average savings migrants had in hand at the time of interview was only 100 Afs [US\$2].

This research highlights how rural to urban migration is an outcome of prevailing rural poverty. While migrants may perceive an improvement in their economic situation, migration is also responsible for shifting rural poverty to urban settings. Likewise, urban labour markets are not expanding to accommodate the increasing flow of migrants to the cities, which is aggravating the complexity of poverty.

While this study does not make suggestions for migration policy per se, it does include recommendations for interventions that can be developed both at the source and at the destination of migration. These include: creation of programmes that promote employment in non-agricultural activities in rural areas; expansion of schemes to provide low-cost housing for the rural and urban poor; provision of skill enhancement opportunities in the urban areas; and increased facilities for on-the-job training in urban employment sectors, among others. A comprehensive poverty alleviation strategy, however, is urgently needed to supplement these interventions.

## 1. Introduction

This report presents findings from a study on internal labour migration<sup>1</sup> in Afghanistan. The aim of the study is to gain a better understanding of the reasons for, and reality and patterns of, labour migration in Afghanistan as it relates to individual and household risk management. Previous research conducted by the Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit (AREU) on rural livelihoods shows that non-farm labour is a highly important livelihood strategy for the rural poor. Farm labour outside of the village is also an important source of income and many people are involved in a combination of farm and non-farm work throughout the year, both within their own village and in other places.

However, there is still little understanding of why, how, and when people move, who moves (is it just young men as commonly assumed?), for how long and to do what. As a result, there is little acknowledgement of this important livelihood strategy within policy and programming, except for an implicit anti-mobility stance by the government when it comes to rural–urban migration.

The search for a better and more secure livelihood drives many migratory movements. This is most common where survival is at stake. Migration, both inside and outside Afghanistan and in other Third World countries, is a critical income strategy for people of all wealth groups. For the wealthier households in rural Afghanistan, labour migration is found to be a strategy of accumulation. However, for the poor it is crucial way of coping with uneven job opportunities inside the village and a way of seeking better-paid work.<sup>2</sup> AREU's ongoing research on cross-border migration illustrates the different push factors at source and pull factors across the border that encourage people to migrate despite different risks at both locations.

Developing a greater understanding of the reasons for and mechanisms of migration is important if government and aid agencies are to create coherent evidence-based policies that recognise the current role of such livelihoods strategies. This study aims to increase understanding of the choices people make with regards to migration, as well as the types of work migrants engage in, and build on the research that AREU is already engaged in to investigate the role of cross-border migration to neighbouring countries.

## Methodology

This report is based on primary information collected through a survey of 997 individuals<sup>3</sup> in three major cities of Afghanistan: Kabul, Herat and Jalalabad. It may be worth noting that migration to secondary cities or provincial towns may take on a different form which is not explored in this study. Instead of targeting migrants at their place of origin (rural areas), this research deliberately focused on the cities as a place of destination. The reasons were multiple: first, there is ongoing research about migration which is targeting people in the rural areas<sup>4</sup> and secondly, a large dataset with information on 11,000 rural households is available

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<sup>1</sup> Internal labour migration refers to population mobility for employment purposes within the borders of a nation state. It can take many forms, including rural–urban, rural–rural, urban–rural, urban–urban and can be permanent or temporary, seasonal and circulatory.

<sup>2</sup> Grace, J. and Adam Pain. 2004. *Rethinking Rural Livelihoods in Afghanistan*. Kabul: Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit.

<sup>3</sup> This research considered “individual” as a unit of analysis.

<sup>4</sup> The Aga Khan Development Network has been conducting research on migration. The focus of the research is mainly the rural areas.

which has covered the issue of migration as well.<sup>5</sup> In addition, AREU's research on rural livelihoods also provides information and insights about the conditions of the rural economy.<sup>6</sup>

It is therefore expected that all of these initiatives will generate information and provide analysis about the rural contexts, rural labour markets and factors that generally push people to migrate. The present research will complement this by providing information and analysis of urban contexts, particularly the urban labour markets which absorb the migrants by providing opportunities to make a living.

Fieldwork for this research was conducted during a period of six months from September 2004 to February 2005. A semi-structured questionnaire was used to interview migrant labourers in all three cities to address a set of key questions (Box 1). The interviews were conducted by a group of research assistants,<sup>7</sup> both male and female, with both Dari and Pashto language skills. Information was then processed and analysed with SPSS software.

**Box 1: Key Research Questions**

- Who migrates for labour, to where, when and for how long? Do people go to different areas at different times of the year? Do people migrate both within *and* outside Afghanistan? How do people decide where to go (e.g., word-of-mouth information)?
- Why do different people migrate (e.g. push and/or pull factors)?
- What types of work do they find? Do some people seek and/or find specific forms of labour, and if so why?
- How do different people find work?
- What are the costs associated with migration (travel, accommodation, family care at home, etc.)?
- What assets do they own in their home village/town?
- Are these migration patterns historical or new to their household and community?
- Do people migrate out of choice?
- What factors constrain people's ability to migrate?
- What factors help people to migrate?
- What are the labour market dynamics at destination?
- What are the outcomes of migration? Does migration contribute to poverty alleviation?

It may be worth mentioning that it was difficult to maintain any standard statistical procedure in drawing the sample for the research. Therefore, attempts were made to cover a cross-section of the population to gain some sorts of generalisation of the findings. Three different groups of migrants were interviewed, as follows:

- a. **Those who were looking for jobs in the cities** at the time of interview: this category of respondents was drawn from different cross-roads in all three cities where people gather early in the morning to find a job. In Kabul particularly, the research team identified ten cross-roads where hundreds of labourers gather every morning. In Herat and Jalalabad cross-roads were few (three in each of the cities). Potential employers usually come to those cross-roads to recruit labourers as per their demands. In each of the locations, research assistants first selected a place for interviews. They then approached the people willing to give an interview to come to that place. Research assistants

<sup>5</sup> A report has already been published based on the analysis of the National Risk and Vulnerability Assessment dataset.

<sup>6</sup> Grace and Pain, 2004.

<sup>7</sup> Fieldwork in Kabul was conducted by Asif Karimi, Leena Wahedi, Ahmed Shaheer and Aziza Siddique, in Jalalabad by Asif Karimi and Aziza Siddique and in Herat by Aziza Siddique.

first had introductory discussions with the people to find if they were migrants or not. Only a few people standing at the cross-roads to find a job were not migrants.

- b. **Those who were involved in any gainful employment** at the time of interview: in selecting respondents for this category, attempts were made to cover a wide range of enterprises where migrant labourers were working. For example, in Kabul and Herat, respondents for this category were drawn from different small and large factories, construction sites, and small business enterprises. In Jalalabad, no factories were found within the city boundary; therefore respondents were selected from other enterprises. Female respondents were selected from different factories, such as a small spinning factory, food processing and weaving factories both in Kabul and in Herat.
- c. **Those who were self employed** at the time of interview: self employed people were drawn from the big and small market places and on the streets as they were hawking different items. In choosing the respondents of this category, stress was placed on covering a variety of enterprises.

Table 1 provides the distribution of respondents at different locations. About half of the respondents were from Kabul while the remaining half were from the other two cities. The distribution of the sample among the three different categories of migration was also about the same.

**Table 1. Number of people interviewed at different locations**

Location		Respondent type			Total
		Looking for work	Currently employed	Self employed	
Kabul	Count	171	178	151	500
	% of Total	17.2%	17.9%	15.1%	50.2%
Herat	Count	72	100	75	247
	% of Total	7.2%	10.0%	7.5%	24.8%
Jalalabad	Count	95	80	75	250
	% of Total	9.5%	8.0%	7.5%	25.1%
Total	Count	338	358	301	997
	% Total	33.9%	35.9%	30.2%	100.0%

In addition to the individual interviews gathered through the questionnaire, a total of 20 in-depth case studies were conducted with both male and female migrants to get a more detailed understanding about the reasons for migration at the places of origin, decision-making process of migration, ways of coping in the places of destinations, rural–urban linkages and the outcome of migration. In conducting the survey, whenever the interviewers came across any interesting case which described any particular aspect of migration more significantly, the respondents were chosen to do more in-depth interviews. These case studies also provide an understanding about how much migration for labour is a recent or typical livelihoods strategy for individuals and their households, and why, and what other strategies households and communities employ. Furthermore, about 20 employers were interviewed in all three cities to understand their attitudes towards the migrant labour force.

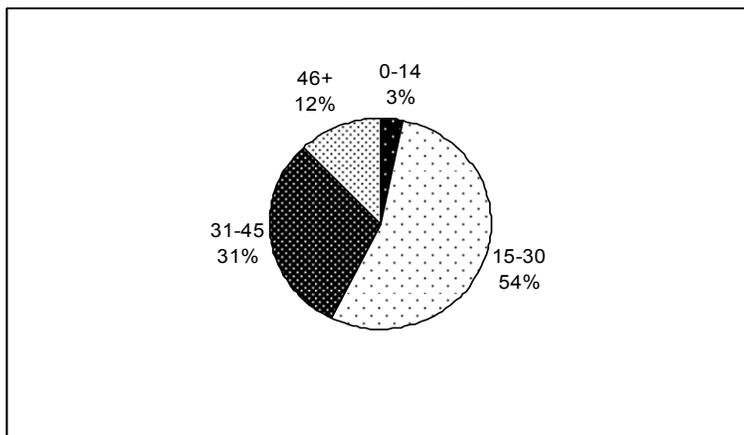
## 2. Characteristics of the Study Population

This section provides a brief demographic profile of the study population and highlights the key socioeconomic characteristics of the respondents.

### Age and sex

Data show that young people are most likely to migrate, with the average age of the population interviewed being 31.19 years. This age varied slightly in the three cities. In Kabul, the average age of the respondents was 32.57 years, while in Herat and Jalalabad, the average age of the respondents was 31.54 and 28.09 respectively. Comparing males and females, the average age for male migrants was 30.44 while for females it was higher, at 37.23 years. Figure 1 shows the distribution of the migrant population across different age groups. Not surprisingly, given that the majority of respondents were interviewed at cross-roads waiting to be picked up for manual labour, it also illustrates that the majority of the respondents were at the prime age to do such work.

**Figure 1. Distribution of migrants by age group**

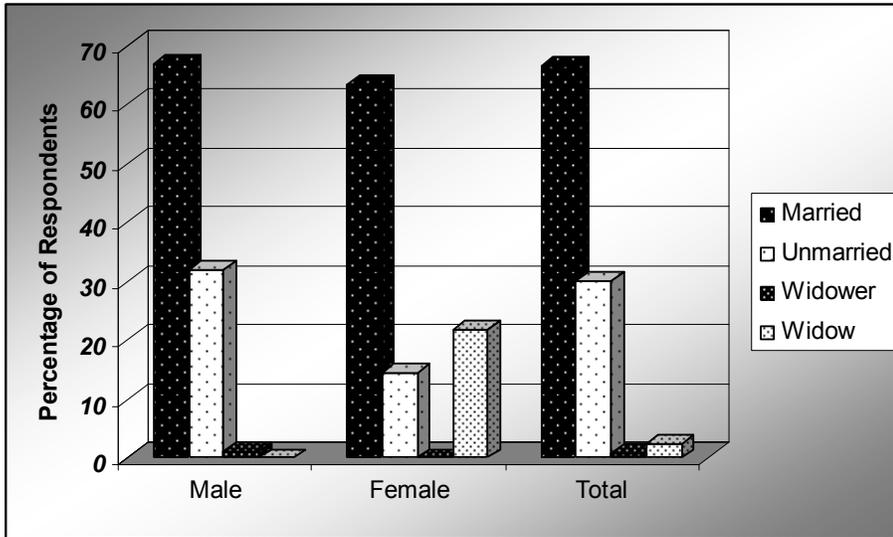


Only 11 percent of the respondents who were interviewed in Kabul and Herat were female. In both places, only currently employed females were interviewed. The researchers found no females who were looking for a job or were self-employed, but this is likely because women who seek labour opportunities will not be located at places such as cross-roads, which traditionally are gathering places for male labourers only.

### Marital status

The majority of the respondents in the sample, both male and female, were married (Figure 2). This may be correlated to the fact that married people have more family responsibilities which pushes them to migrate to the cities in the case of income failure in the rural areas.

**Figure 2. Marital status of the study population**

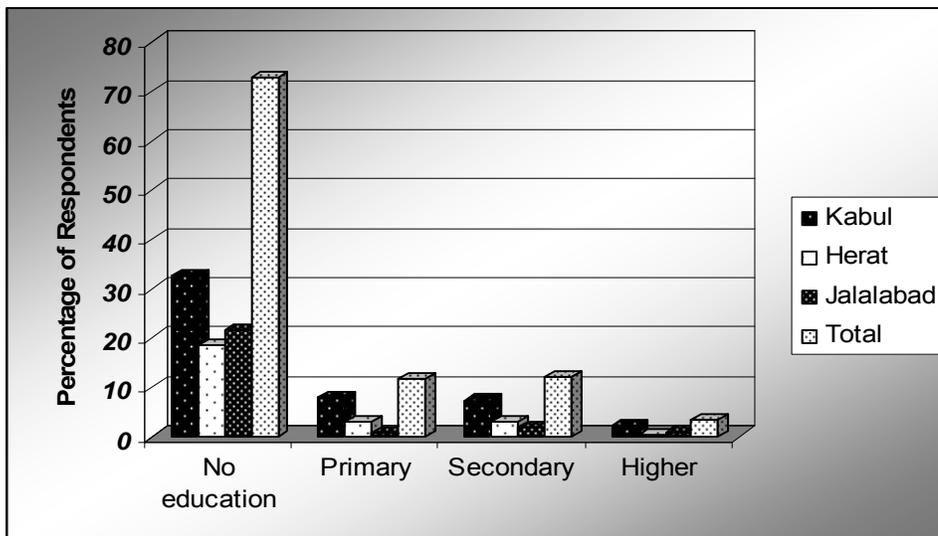


Some young, unmarried girls were also found to be working, both in Kabul and in Herat. However, observation showed that most of the unmarried working girls only work in the same enterprises where their mothers work. A high number of women in the sample were widows, but there was insufficient data to determine whether they became widows after migration or whether the difficulty of being a widow in the rural areas was a factor in their migration to the cities. What the case study information did reveal, however, was that despite social restrictions, economic hardship pushed them into the labour market.

### Education

The high levels of illiteracy characteristic of Afghanistan as a whole were also evident in the study population (Figure 3). A little less than three-quarters of the respondents had no education. Those who had any education (altogether 27.1%) had either been in Iran or in Pakistan refugee camps where they had some access to schooling.

**Figure 3. Levels of education of the study population**



## Ethnic identity

The majority of the people interviewed for the study were ethnic Pashtuns, followed by Tajiks and Hazaras (see Table 2). A high number of Pashtuns were interviewed in Jalalabad, which is a Pashtun-dominated area. In Kabul most people interviewed were Tajiks and in Herat most of the respondents were Hazaras.

**Table 2. Distribution of the respondents across different ethnic groups**

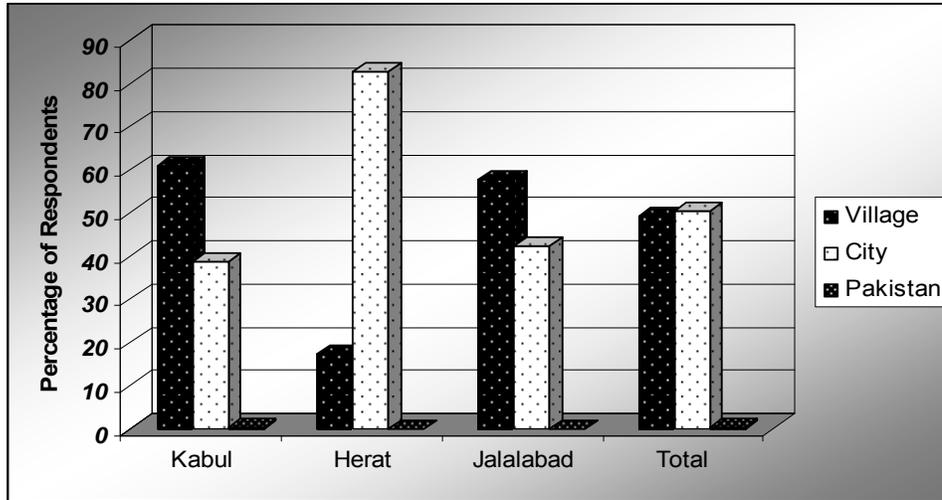
Location	Ethnic Identity						
	Pashtun	Tajik	Hazara	Uzbek	Turkmen	Pashai	Arab
Kabul	35%	39.6%	20.2%	1.2%	2.6%	0.4%	1%
Herat	15.4%	36.4%	47.8%	0.4%	0%	0%	0%
Jalalabad	91.2%	8%	0%	0%	0.8%	0%	0%
Total	44.2%	30.9%	22.0%	.7%	1.5%	.2%	.5%

## Place of origin

Not surprisingly, with the exception of the capital Kabul, the majority of respondents hailed from provinces bordering the city to which they were migrating. Kabul, however, had the most diversity in places of origin of respondents, with people migrating from 30 provinces. However, the highest percentage of migrants to Kabul were from the rural areas of Kabul Province itself (16.8%), followed by neighbouring Parwan (15.8%) and Wardak (10.2%). In Herat, the majority of the migrants interviewed were from neighbouring Ghor Province (19.8%), followed by Kabul (16.2%) and Bamyan (13%). About half of the migrants interviewed in Jalalabad were from Nangarhar Province (49.2%) followed by neighbouring Laghman (25.2%) and Kunar (8.4%).

## Location of the immediate family

Looking across the three cities, on average half of the respondents had their immediate family members living in the respective cities with them, a figure which may be correlated to the issue of homelessness in the rural areas, which will be analysed later. Yet a closer examination of each city showed variation in these figures (see Figure 4). In Kabul, for example, 60.8 percent of the respondents left their families behind in the rural areas, mainly because of the problems associated with finding housing in the capital. Herat shows a completely different picture. The majority of the migrants in that city brought their families to Herat, possibly because of the lower costs of renting houses in the city. In Jalalabad, a higher percentage of people left their families in the rural areas, because the majority of migrants to this city were from Nangarhar Province and had the opportunity to visit their families frequently.

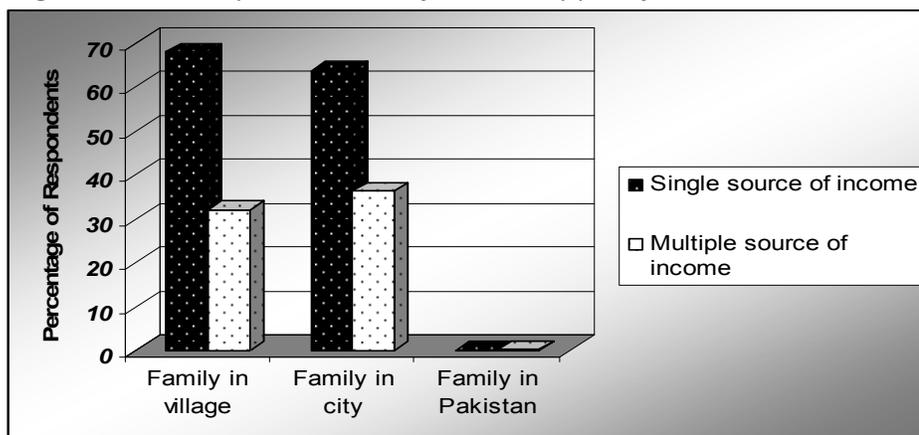
**Figure 4. Location of the immediate family of the respondents**

### Family size and economic activities

The average family size of the respondents was 8.56 members. In Kabul it was 8.59 while in Herat and in Jalalabad, it was 8.02 and 9.01 members respectively.

Migrants were the main sources of cash income for their families in most of the cases (see Figure 5). Overall, about two-thirds of the respondents' families had a single source of cash income, which came from the work of the migrants in the cities, while one-third of the migrants' families had multiple sources of cash income. There seems to be no correlation to the location of the family of the migrants. Sixty-eight percent of the respondents who left their families behind in the rural areas were the main source of income for their families, while 63.8 percent of migrants who brought their families with them were the main sources of income. A significant number of the families who migrated to the cities (36.2%) had more than one family member working. This may be correlated to greater work opportunities in the cities compared to the rural areas.

Half of the female respondents were the only income earner for their families. For these women, it is obvious that economic hardship pushed them into the labour market despite cultural restrictions on their economic activities outside the private domain.

**Figure 5. Sources of cash income by location of family**

## Ownership of house or any productive assets in the village

Data show that both homelessness and lack of assets is significantly high in the rural areas, which are important reasons for migration to the cities. Overall, 43 percent of families did not own a house in the rural areas, while 71 percent of the families did not own any productive assets (including land and livestock). The prevalence of homelessness among the migrants to Jalalabad City was comparatively less, which is correlated to the fact that they most often left behind their families in the rural areas.

**Table 3. Ownership of house and other productive assets in the villages**

Location		Ownership of house in the village		Total	Ownership of productive assets in the village		Total
		Yes	No		Yes	No	
<b>Kabul</b>	Count	300	200	500	150	350	500
	% of Total	30.1%	20.1%	50.2%	15.0%	35.1%	50.2%
<b>Herat</b>	Count	109	138	247	72	175	247
	% of Total	10.9%	13.8%	24.8%	7.2%	17.6%	24.8%
<b>Jalalabad</b>	Count	159	91	250	65	185	250
	% of Total	15.9%	9.1%	25.1%	6.5%	18.6%	25.1%
<b>Total</b>	Count	568	429	997	287	710	997
	%	57.0%	43.0%	100.0%	28.8%	71.2%	100.0%

Homelessness and assetlessness were very high in the case of women, at 77.3 and 87.3 percent respectively, a fact that correlates strongly with other AREU research regarding women's ability to access and own land and other rural assets.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Grace, J. 2005. *Who Owns the Farm? Rural Women's Access to Land and Livestock*. Kabul: Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit.

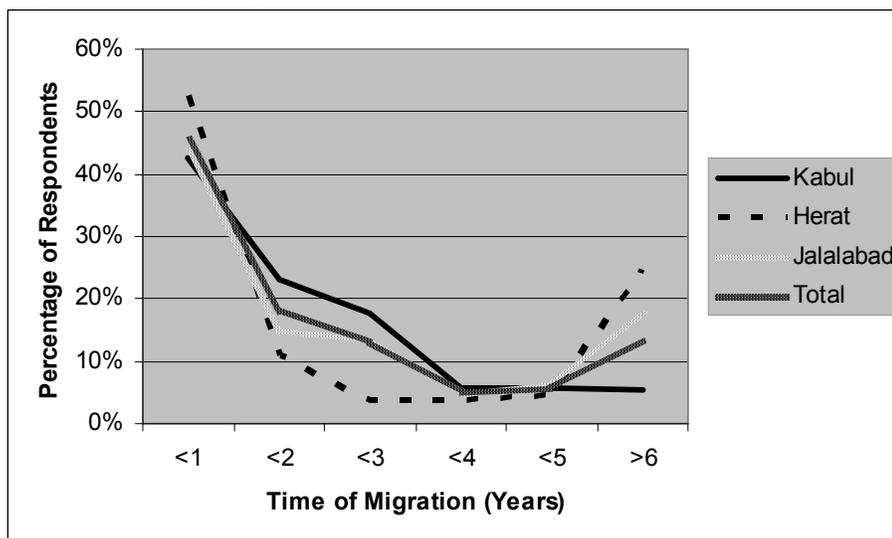
### 3. Causes of Migration and Seasonality

This section provides information and analysis about the key factors that cause migration. In addition, the section examines a key assumption that rural to urban migration is often seasonal – and that people come to the cities during the agricultural “off season” in the rural areas and then return when employment opportunities increase. Information and analysis is also presented about the costs associated with migration and undertaking employment in the new city.

#### Migration flow

Data show that migration flow towards the cities is rapidly increasing. Figure 6 displays the migration flow over the last five years. A little less than half of the respondents of this research were newcomers to the cities, who had arrived within the last year. This is two and a half times more than the percentage who came to the cities a year ago. In Herat, more than half of the respondents had come to the city within a one-year period, followed by Jalalabad and Kabul.

Figure 6. Flow of migration



A similar situation was observed in the National Risk and Vulnerability Assessment (NRVA) survey. Over the course of the year prior to the NRVA survey, 22 percent of the rural households had at least one member of the family migrate in the last five years.<sup>9</sup> The average length of stay of the migrants in the city was 2.8 years, the longest in Herat City (3.43 years) and the shortest in Jalalabad City (1.39). For Kabul, the average stay was 2.2 years.

#### Causes of migration

As is to be expected, the data show that lack of work in the villages is one of the major causes of migration. Forty-two percent of the respondents mentioned that both lack of opportunities in their home villages and the perceived better opportunities available in the cities were the major factors in their deciding to migrate, while 38 percent of the respondents mentioned the lack of rural

<sup>9</sup> Ghobadi, N., Koettl, J. and Renos Vakis. *Moving out of Poverty: Migration Insights from Rural Afghanistan*. Kabul: Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit. Forthcoming 2005.

employment opportunities alone as the major cause of their decision to migrate. Similar findings were observed in other recent studies.<sup>10</sup>

This observation supports the findings from AREU's ongoing research on cross-border migration, which observed that in the post-Taliban era, continued poverty and lack of employment opportunities in Afghanistan are the main push factors for migration. Related to this are seasonal unemployment and low wages.<sup>11</sup>

An AREU qualitative study conducted in Faryab Province noted the relationship between demographic factors and reasons for cross-border migration:

*The reasons for migration differ in accordance with age. The single migrants have left the village because of the difficulties of finding work, having debt and the requirement of saving money for the mahr (dowry)...they (young people) generally spend a relatively longer period of time in Iran as compared to married men, who often return within a year. Married people are generally said to leave because of the lack of employment opportunities, as money is needed to cover debt, basic needs or the mahr of a son.<sup>12</sup>*

While the study population of the current research came from 30 different provinces, the sample was not designed to analyse which province had the fewest economic opportunities. The story of Sher, presented below, illustrates a case of extreme poverty which pushes people from the village to the cities. It further illustrates the constraints for young people to get a job in the cities.

**Box 2: Examples of push factors of migration**

Sher, a 12-year-old boy, lost his father about two years ago. He is the elder son of the family. After his father's death, he had to take responsibility for the family. Sher tried to find work in the village but failed. His mother then decided to send him to Kabul. She borrowed some money from a relative and sent him with another relative to Kabul to find work. In the city, he did not know anyone who could help him find a job. His relative (the person with whom he came to the city) also did not have enough connections to get him a job. He then started waiting in a cross-road for work. Because of his young age, he is often refused work by employers. If he gets a job, he is given much less money than the usual wage rate. In the city, he lives in a hotel, which costs him 30 Afs [US\$0.70] per night. Whenever he can manage some savings, he goes to the village. His family lives on his money.

The story of Sher also describes one household's decision-making pattern. Although Sher is the main income earner of his family, his mother had the main contribution in deciding his migration, as well as arranging support for him to migrate. The case of Hejrat Ullah described in Box 3 presents the other facets of the inflow of migrants to the cities. The story also describes why returnee refugees from the neighbouring countries are concentrating in the cities, instead of going back to their native villages.

<sup>10</sup> The analysis of NRVA data also suggests that "migration is likely to be related to lack of local employment opportunities as opposed to an ex-post response to shocks. This study also concluded that internal migration is an income strategy of last resort and is a response of a complete absence of local alternatives." See Ghobadi, Koettl, and Vakis, 2005.

<sup>11</sup> See Stigter, E. 2005a. *Transnational Networks and Migration from Herat to Iran*. Kabul: Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit; Stigter, E. 2005b. *Transnational Networks and Migration from Faryab to Iran*. Kabul: Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit; and CSSR. 2005. *Afghans in Karachi: Migration Settlement and Social Networks*. Kabul: Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit.

<sup>12</sup> See Stigter, 2005a.

**Box 3: Returning from Pakistan with skills**

The native village of Hejrat Ullah (23 years old, ethnic Pashtun) is in Nangarhar Province. Hejrat Ullah migrated to Pakistan with his parents when he was a young boy. He has heard that the reason they left their native village was that their house was destroyed during the Soviet invasion. In Pakistan, due to economic hardship, his father sent him to work in a shoe factory when he was 12. For his work as an apprentice in the factory in Pakistan, he used to get no money but food three times a day. He has no education but has the expertise of shoe making. About four years ago, Hejrat Ullah and his family decided to return to Afghanistan. As they have no property in Nangarhar, they decided to come to Kabul instead of going to their village. Soon after coming to Kabul, Hejrat Ullah got a job in a shoe factory and now earns 300 Afs [US\$6] per day, triple the income he used to earn in Pakistan.

Insecurity is another factor that pushes people to migrate from the rural areas to the cities. However, this was not an issue ranked as equally important as unemployment. NRVA data also had similar findings. Only nine percent of NRVA respondents who had at least one migrating member within the household mentioned insecurity as a reason for migration.<sup>13</sup>

**Table 4. Causes of migration**

Location		Cause of migration			
		Lack of work in village	Insecurity	Better opportunity in the city	Lack of work in village and better opportunity in town
Kabul	% within Location	30.6%	10.8%	4.6%	54.0%
	% of Total	15.3%	5.4%	2.3%	27.1%
Herat	% within Location	52.6%	34.4%	2.8%	10.1%
	% of Total	13.0%	8.5%	.7%	2.5%
Jalalabad	% within Location	38.8%	9.6%	2.0%	49.6%
	% of Total	9.7%	2.4%	.5%	12.4%
<b>Total</b>		<b>38.1%</b>	<b>16.3%</b>	<b>3.5%</b>	<b>42.0%</b>

In the present study, altogether 16.3 percent of respondents mentioned insecurity as their prime reason for migration. However, this percentage does not only reflect insecurity at the place of origin. Most of the respondents who had been in Iran mentioned that they felt insecure there due to various restrictions imposed by the Iranian government. AREU's ongoing research project on cross-border migration provides evidence that the recent policy restrictions imposed by the government of Iran have made it increasingly difficult for Afghan migrants to continue to live and work in that country.<sup>14</sup>

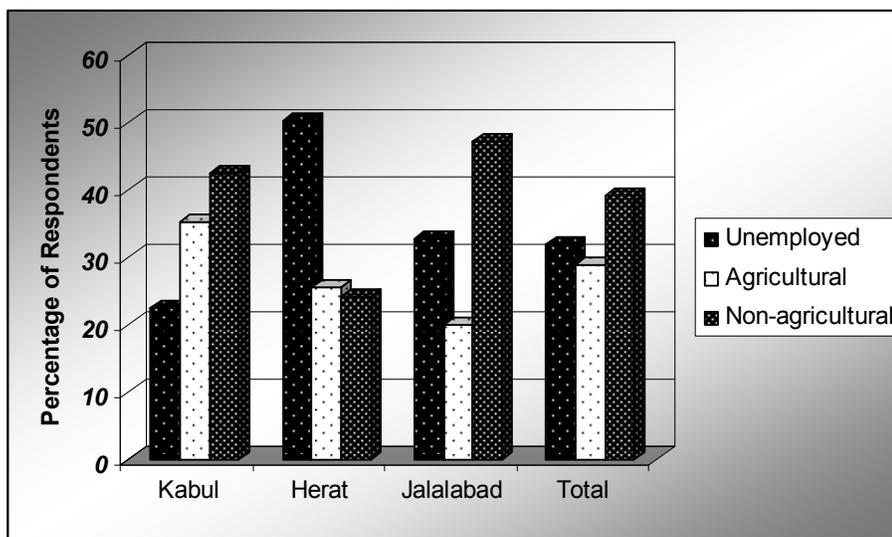
An examination of respondents' employment prior to migration provides a more detailed picture about the situation of the rural economy that pushes people to migrate to the cities. Data show that the rate of unemployment in the rural areas is significantly high. One-third of the respondents were fully unemployed before coming to the cities (see Figure 7), and a majority of the remaining two-thirds were under-employed. Among those who did have employment, a high percentage was involved in non-agricultural activities.

<sup>13</sup> See Ghobadi, Koettl and Vakis, 2005.

<sup>14</sup> For details, see Stigter 2005a, 2005b.

Of those who were involved in any agricultural activities, only 3.7 percent had their own land.<sup>15</sup> The rest worked on the land of others. This finding was also observed in AREU's rural livelihoods research, which found that the majority of poor rural people were involved in non-agricultural activities that generate insignificant income for the households to maintain their living.<sup>16</sup>

**Figure 7. Occupation prior to migration**



Among the female migrants, 74.5 percent were unemployed prior to migration, while 14.5 percent used to work on family farms. The remaining 10.9 percent used to work for others, such as cooks, household help, etc.

## Seasonality

Most surprisingly, the data show that in the case of rural to urban migration, seasonality is not a major cause of migration. Seasonality in the rural economy is related mainly to the agricultural season. The general assumption was that during the off-seasons in the rural areas, people come to the cities to find employment and return when there is a high demand for labour in the rural areas. This is a common phenomenon in other South Asian countries. The Aga Khan Development Network's ongoing study on seasonal migration, however, shows that people move from one place to another in search of employment. This study is particularly targeted at seeing the patterns of seasonal migrants. AREU's ongoing qualitative research on urban livelihoods also shows that some people move to the rural areas to escape from the cold weather in winter (in Kabul) and hot weather in summer in Jalalabad.

Case study materials show that employment sectors in the urban labour markets are often not affected by seasonality. Therefore, people do not have reasons to go back to the village. Box 4 illustrates this further.

<sup>15</sup> Land ownership also does not secure a regular income anymore. Lack of sufficient seed, the loss of traction animals and tools through distress sales over the last few years and out-migration of able-bodied men have all resulted in below normal cultivation and harvests.

<sup>16</sup> Grace and Pain, 2004.

**Box 4: An example of non-seasonal employment**

Zulmai, a 17-year-old Pashtun, came to Herat from Kandahar about 11 months ago in search of employment. His father died about six years ago. They used to stay at the house of his father's employer. After the death of his father, he along with his one brother, two young sisters and mother shifted to his maternal uncle's house. Zulmai and his uncle tried many times to find work in the village for him with no success. He then decided to go to Herat. He heard from his friends that there are lots of work opportunities available in Herat. Zulmai managed to convince his uncle about migrating to Herat; his uncle also gave him 1000 Afs [US\$20] for his travel costs.

In the city, Zulmai was very fortunate to get a good job. He obtained dish-washing work in a restaurant on the second day of his arrival in the city. For the initial three months, he used to get 80 Afs [US\$1.60] per day plus three meals which has now increased to 150 Afs [US\$3]. He lives at his workplace, which does not cost him any money. He does not have any weekly holiday but gets three/four days off per month to visit his family in the village. All of his income he gives to his mother.

Overall, the average number of months respondents stay in the cities before returning to visit their home village is 10.75.<sup>17</sup> For Herat it is 11.66 months, while it is 10.9 and 9.55 months respectively for Kabul and Jalalabad. Those who left their families behind in the rural areas typically spend a couple of weeks with their families, especially in the winter, because of relatively fewer employment opportunities available in the cities. In Jalalabad, a higher number of migrants had their families in the village, which is the reason respondents in Jalalabad spend more time in the rural areas. Most of the respondents in Herat brought their families to the city, so they rarely go to the village. Employment prior to migration also explains this. Since most of the respondents were either unemployed or were involved in non-agricultural activities, agricultural seasonality does not affect their movements much.

### Decision-making, migration costs and travel to the cities

A high percentage of the migrants (70.7%) made the decision to migrate on their own. This is mainly correlated to the fact that most of the migrants are the sole income earners of their families and therefore are the major household decision-makers as well. In the rest of the cases, mainly in the case of young people, other family members had taken the decision. These findings contrast with the findings from the NRVA data, which concluded that migration is often a household strategy.<sup>18</sup>

The costs associated with migration seem to be very high, which also means that the extreme poor who can not manage the required money are unable to migrate to the cities to seek better opportunities. On average, migrants in the sample brought 5,250 Afs [US\$105] with them to meet their travel costs and initial expenses to settle in the cities. Those who came to Kabul and Jalalabad brought with them on average 3,794 Afs [US\$76] and 3,140 Afs [US\$63] respectively, while those who migrated to Herat brought with them almost double the overall average (10,333 Afs, or US\$207). In the sample, a significant number of those who settled in Herat returned from Iran with a solid amount of money. The average amount of money brought by the respondents was about a month's average income in the city.

<sup>17</sup> This calculation was derived by recording the number of months of those who had returned to visit their home village, and averaging this with the projected date of return from those respondents who had not yet traveled back to their home in the rural areas.

<sup>18</sup> See Ghobadi, Koettl and Vakis, 2005.

The average cost of travel associated with migration was 1,221 Afs [US\$24]. It was 1,307 Afs [US\$26] for Kabul while 1,283 Afs [US\$25] and 987 Afs [US\$19] for Herat and Jalalabad respectively.

The majority of the migrants (68.1%) accumulated the money from their savings, which given the lack of employment opportunities in their home villages, must have taken a long period of time to accrue and indicates that migration is often the result of a long-term plan. Relatives and friends also played an important role in supporting migration. About 22 percent of migrants borrowed money from them. Although not very significant in the percentage term (9.2%), migration has caused asset erosion as well.

Although the majority of migrants did not have financial support of their relatives and friends, a significant number of people came either with friends or relatives to the unknown cities. The remaining 54.5 percent came solely with their families, with the help of relatives.

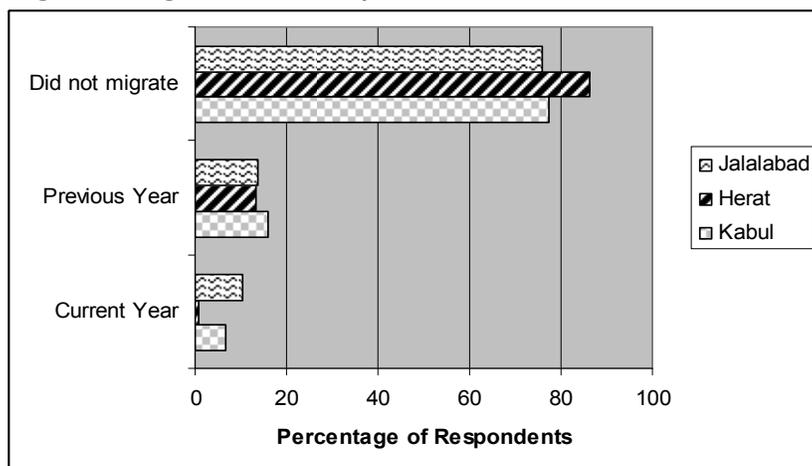
### Migration to other places and cross-border migration

The data show that after initial migration, people do not move much from one city or area to another, possibly because of the high costs involved with such a move (see Figure 8). While in the last year, only 29.4 percent people had migrated to other places, it had reduced to 12 percent during the current year. Respondents in Jalalabad moved more than the respondents of other cities.

Of those who had migrated to other places during the current year (12%), the majority (57.5%) had gone to other cities within the county. The remaining had either gone to Iran (25%) or to Pakistan (17.5%).

Search for employment alone was the most significant reason for those who had migrated between cities/countries during the current year (2004). About 90 percent of these migrants said that looking for a job was the main reason they went to other places within or outside the country. The remaining respondents had returned from refuge either from Iran or from Pakistan.

**Figure 8. Migration to other places**



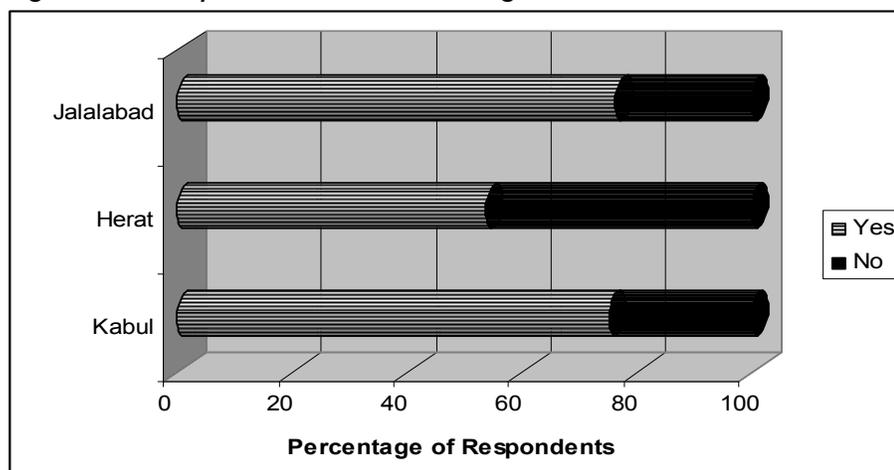
Of those who migrated anywhere else during the previous (2003) year (29.4%), a significant percentage had been either to Iran or Pakistan, 38.2 and 20.8 percent respectively. Also a significant percentage (36.5%) moved to other cities within the

country. A small percentage had gone to other rural areas (4.4%), mainly in search of employment. Respondents in Kabul moved much more than the respondents from other cities during the previous year.

Like the current year (2004), search for employment was also the most significant reason for those who had migrated during the previous year. About 69 percent of the respondents had gone to different places within and outside the country mainly in search of employment. The remaining respondents (31.1%) had returned either from Iran or Pakistan. More importantly, of those who had returned from Iran during the last year, about 40 percent mentioned that they had gone there in search of employment, while about 66 percent of those who returned from Pakistan mentioned the same reason. The remaining respondents were refugees to the respective countries because of different types of security-related problems at source.

Data also show that cross-border migration, either for economic reasons or to escape insecurity at their place of origin, was a common strategy for most of the respondents (see Figure 9). Not surprisingly, Jalalabad, with its close proximity to the Pakistan border, had the highest percentage of respondents migrating to other countries, followed by the migrants interviewed in Kabul. More than 70 percent of the respondents had some experience of migrating to the neighbouring countries.

**Figure 9. Participation in cross-border migration**



Among those who had been to other countries, insecurity in their place of origin accounted for the most dominant cause of their cross-border migration (57.6%). This finding contradicts other recent qualitative research, which found insecurity to be less significant a factor in cross-border migration;<sup>19</sup> this study was unable to determine the geographic or political factors which might have played a role in insecurity being such an important factor in migration. The remaining respondents, however, mentioned that they migrated to other countries in search of employment.

Pakistan seems to be the easiest destination for poor migrants. The majority of the respondents (56.4%) had been to Pakistan, while some (5.7%) had migrated to both Iran and Pakistan. The average length of stay for both of the countries is almost the same. Those who had been to Iran stayed there for an average of 7.45 years while those who had been to Pakistan stayed there on average 7.62 years.

<sup>19</sup> See Stigter, 2005a and 2005b and CSSR, 2005.

However, among those who had been to Iran or Pakistan solely for employment reasons, the average length of stay was almost the same, 3.27 years and 3.42 years respectively. A similar situation was also observed in the case of refugees to both the countries. The average length of refugees' stay in Iran and Pakistan were 11 and 10 years respectively.

## 4. Settling in the Cities

This short section provides information and analysis about the economic life, mainly the earnings, employment and living conditions of the migrants in the cities.

### Finding a job in the city

Migration to the city is not just an easy way of escaping rural poverty. As mentioned earlier, migration takes a significant amount of money and is hardly manageable for the extreme poor. Finding any employment in the city also seems to be not a very easy task. It took an average of three weeks for the migrants to get their first job in the city. This did not vary among the cities too much. In Kabul and Herat it was 22 days and in Jalalabad it was 20 days. However, this was not the case for the women. Most of them reported that they had to wait more than a year to find a job after they had decided to work outside their home.

Unskilled work, mainly in the construction sites, was the major source of employment for the new migrants in all three cities (see Table 5). Overall, about 60 percent of the migrants were employed in unskilled work when they first came to the city while 22.6 percent were fortunate to get a skilled job; the remaining 17.7 percent managed to start their own small business. This pattern was almost the same in all three cities.

**Table 5. Type of first job in the city**

Location		First job in the city		
		Skilled work	Unskilled work	Self-employed
Kabul	% within Location	24.8%	58.8%	16.4%
	% of Total	12.4%	29.5%	8.2%
Herat	% within Location	28.3%	53.8%	17.8%
	% of Total	7.0%	13.3%	4.4%
Jalalabad	% within Location	12.4%	67.6%	20.0%
	% of Total	3.1%	17.0%	5.0%
<b>Total (Average)</b>		<b>22.6%</b>	<b>59.8%</b>	<b>17.7%</b>

### Support received from others in finding a job

Although not very significant in percentage terms, social connections were found to have a role in helping people to find employment in the cities. The majority of migrants (66%) had to struggle to find a job when they first came to the city. They had to stand either on the cross-roads or knock door to door to obtain work. The rest of them had received support either from their friends, relatives, neighbours or a known person who helped them to get a job. For the female respondents, the situation was just the opposite. Most of them had to depend on others to help them find a job. It may be worth mentioning that there is still no formal mechanism to get information about job opportunities, whether skilled or unskilled, for both women and men.

### Income from the first job in the city

Income earned by the migrants immediately after coming to the city was not a large enough amount to meet their costs in the city. Table 6 shows that while some

people have earned more than five dollars a day, most of them do not earn much from their first job in the city to maintain their living.

**Table 6. Income from the first job in the city**

Location		Total income from the first job (in Afghani)				
		50 Afs	100 Afs	150 Afs	200 Afs	250+ Afs
Kabul	% within Location	3.8%	19.2%	27.2%	22.8%	27.0%
Herat	% within Location	13.0%	31.2%	25.5%	15.4%	15.0%
Jalalabad	% within Location	6.4%	30.8%	43.6%	6.8%	12.4%
<b>Total (Average)</b>		<b>6.7%</b>	<b>25.1%</b>	<b>30.9%</b>	<b>17.0%</b>	<b>20.4%</b>

Conversion US\$1 = ~50 Afs

The average total daily income was 146.23 Afs [US\$3] (120.31 Afs as cash and 26.95 Afs as food). The average total daily income earned by the male respondents was 156.46 Afs [US\$3.20] (128.22 Afs as cash and 29.41 Afs as food), which is two and a half times more than what women respondents had earned. For the women, average income from their first employment in the city was 63.69 Afs [US\$1.30] per day (56.55 Afs as cash and 7.14 Afs as food).

This does not vary significantly across the three cities. The average daily income for the first job for a man in Kabul was the highest, at 167.69 Afs [US\$3.40] (138.33 Afs as cash and 30.15 Afs for food) followed by Herat at 124.89 Afs [US\$2.55] (101.36 Afs as cash and 23.69 Afs for food). In Jalalabad, it was 146.23 Afs [US\$3] per day (120.31 Afs as cash and 26.95 Afs for food).

## Living in the city

The higher cost of living, increased rents and shortage of housing mean that living in the cities is difficult and expensive for all urban residents, in addition to migrants. Most of the single migrants, who left behind their families in the village, stay either in a hotel or at their workplace (see Table 7). Those who have relatively long-term work (such as help in a hotel, big construction sites, block making factories, etc.) are fortunate to stay at their workplace for no cost. Most of those who had migrated with their families live in rented houses (42.4%). A very small percentage (5.8%) of the respondents had managed to build their own house, while some people also live in abandoned government buildings or in tents for no cost.

Survey data show that help of relatives or friends to provide accommodation in the city is mostly not available, but these people help new migrants with information about affordable hotels or houses in the city.

**Table 7. Places where respondents stay in the city**

Location		Hotel	Relative's house	Work-place	Own house	Rented house	Abandoned government building/tent
Kabul	% within Location	22.8%	21.0%	13.6%	3.0%	37.0%	2.6%
Herat	% within Location	7.3%	2.4%	5.7%	11.7%	65.6%	7.3%
Jalalabad	% within Location	19.2%	26.4%	13.6%	5.6%	30.4%	4.8%
<b>Total (Average)</b>		18.1%	17.8%	11.6%	5.8%	42.4%	4.3%

The cost of accommodation, whether in a hotel (for single migrants) or in a rented house of one or two small rooms (for a household), are also high. A single migrant residing in a hotel in Kabul pays on average 39.12 Afs [US\$0.80] per night while the cost of a small house is 57.59 Afs [US\$1.18] per day. In Herat, the cost of accommodation in a hotel and in a small house is a bit lower than in Kabul, 35.83 Afs [US\$0.73] and 63.26 Afs [US\$1.29] respectively. In Jalalabad, costs are the lowest, 24.17 Afs [US\$0.49] and 43.88 Afs [US\$0.90] respectively.

The real daily costs of living (accommodation, food and transport) are even higher in the cities, the average of which is 93.76 Afs [US\$1.91]. In Kabul, the daily cost of living is the highest, at 121 Afs [US\$2.47] per day followed by Herat, which is about 68.67 Afs [US\$1.40] per day. In Jalalabad, the average daily cost of living is 63.92 Afs [US\$1.30].

The high cost of living in the city restricts migration for the poor to some extent because people simply cannot afford it. Likewise, the long time it took for the migrants to get a job in the city also has implications for the extreme poor who migrate to the cities to cope with crises in the rural areas.

## 5. Urban Labour Markets

This section provides information and analysis about urban labour markets, and how migrants maintain their living in the cities.

### High incidence of unemployment

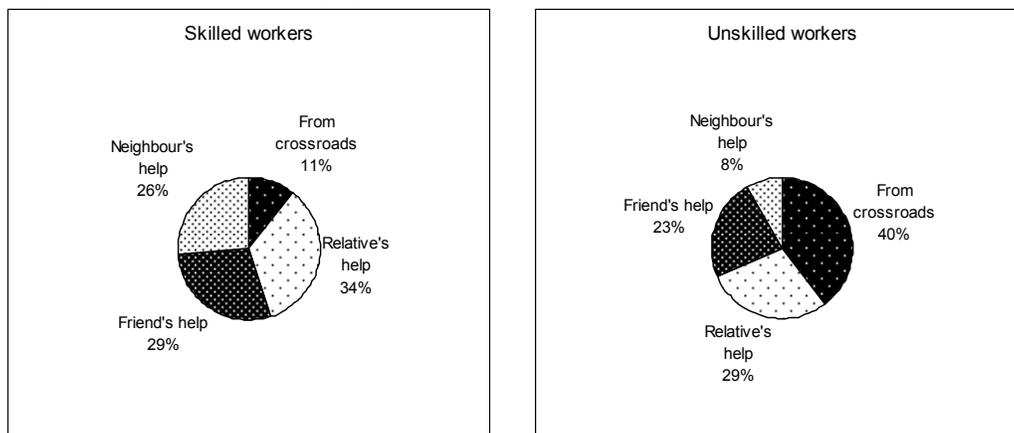
Necessary information is not available about the rate of unemployment in the cities but the presence of high unemployment rates is officially acknowledged.<sup>20</sup> The impression gathered from these data also lends validity to this finding. Unemployment is highest in Herat, followed by Jalalabad and Kabul. The average number of days the respondents wanted to work but could not find a job over the past 30 days was 16.33 days. In Herat it was 18.6 days, while in Jalalabad it was 16.6. In Kabul, the average loss of workdays in a month was 15.23. This clearly shows that the labour markets are not expanding rapidly enough to absorb the increasing number of migrants from the rural areas to the cities of Afghanistan.

The lack of opportunity in the urban areas also impacts on people's acquisition and use of skills. Despite having skills for a particular job, most of the respondents who were looking for employment reported that they would take any work they could find.

### Accessing the labour market

Of those respondents who were involved in any gainful employment at the time of the interview, half were involved in skilled work. In Kabul and Herat, more respondents were involved in skilled work, 61 percent and 66 percent respectively, while in Jalalabad, the majority of respondents (96%) were involved in unskilled work. All (99%) of the female respondents were also involved in skilled employment in the factories.

**Figure 10. Ways of finding a job**



As mentioned earlier, new migrants hardly receive any help to find a job when they first come to the cities. However, those who can establish networks in the cities manage to get more gainful employment. Once they had settled in the city, almost 75 percent of the respondents had managed to mobilise their social connections to get employment and almost half of those who were involved in skilled work received support from their social connections to get jobs.

<sup>20</sup> Central Statistics Office (CSO). 2004. *Afghanistan Statistical Yearbook 2004*. Kabul: CSO.

It has been observed in the other South Asian countries that rich relatives employ their poor relatives in their business enterprises. However, the data from this study show that this is not the general case in Afghanistan. The majority of the respondents (83.8%) mentioned that they do not have any relations to their employer. However, help from rich relatives sometimes yields a good return, as Box 5 illustrates.

**Box 5: Importance of social capital**

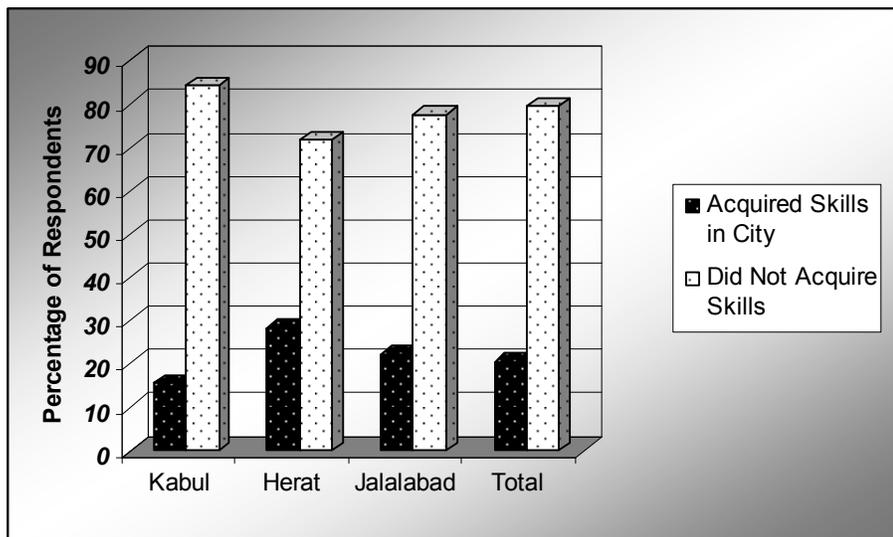
Gul Baz (27, Paghman District of Kabul) is picked up by an employer from a cross-road in Kabul to work as a mason in his big construction site. He gets 400 Afs [US\$8] a day for the job, while Mohammad Hanif (32, from Jalalabad) gets 500 Afs [US\$10] a day for doing the same work. Hanif is a distant relative of the employer and his employer has brought him from his village for the work. Gul has been unemployed for long and therefore not able to bargain for a usual wage rate despite doing the same work for the same employer.

Data also show that social connection plays a more important role than ethnic identity for the migrants when seeking gainful employment. More than two-thirds of the respondents mentioned that their employers were not from the same ethnic group they themselves belong to.

## Gaining skills in the cities

Due to the competition for urban jobs, the opportunity to gain skills is not very high in the cities (See Figure 11). Therefore, people have only limited options to move up the labour scale by gaining more skilled and secure jobs. Only 20.5 percent of the sample had gained any skills in the cities. The remainder of the sample who were involved in skilled employment gained the skills either in Iran or in Pakistan.

**Figure 11. Any skills gained in the city**



Among those who had acquired any skills, most had gained technical skills in the construction industry (such as masonry, painting, electrical work, welding, etc.). In the absence of any formal opportunities to provide training, most of the respondents acquired the skills on the job either from their coworkers or from supervisors. Only in 16 percent of the cases did people gain skills from their friends or relatives.

## Income in the cities

Although not very significant, migrants managed to increase their level of earning as they became familiar with the city. As compared to their income from their first jobs in the city (which averaged 146 Afs), the average income from their current jobs was a bit higher. Average daily income from the job the respondents were doing at the time of interview was 168.29 Afs [US\$3.40] (122.35 Afs cash and 46.52 Afs for food). Income in Kabul was highest, 194.11 Afs [US\$3.96] per day, followed by Herat at 145.6 Afs [US\$2.97] per day and Jalalabad at 139.23 Afs [US\$2.84] per day.

Women earn less than half of what men earn. For women, the average total income per day was 89.43 Afs [US\$1.83] (81.78 as cash and 7.67 for food).

Most surprisingly, those who were involved in skilled employment earned less income. This was mainly because skilled employment is typically paid on a monthly, rather than hourly basis, and skilled labourers' mean working hours is two hours less than the unskilled labourers, 9 and 11 hours respectively. Therefore, those unskilled labourers who were able to get daily employment ended up earning more than their skilled counterparts.

## Self employment

Starting a self employment activity such as selling or hawking different commodity items, running a tea-stall, mechanics, shoe-shining, repair work, etc. in the city is also not a very easy task. It took an average of two years to start a small business for most of the respondents in this research. In Kabul, it took significantly less time for the migrants to start such an activity, while in Jalalabad and Herat it took significantly longer periods, 2.45 years and 3 years respectively.

In almost all cases, capital was required to start a self employment activity. The case presented in Box 6 is about a woman who has managed to start a bread-making business after all her attempts to find a job failed.

### **Box 6: Capital and accumulation process**

Tur Pakai, a widow, lives in a semi-destroyed house in the Chehelsitun area of Kabul with her eight children. After her husband's death about seven years ago, she decided to come to Kabul from Logar. She and her children tried many times to find employment in the village but could not find any. She then contacted one of her husband's friends, who helped them come to Kabul and let them live in his house. When she first came to the city she had no idea what to do and how to do anything. She asked many people to help her find a job but instead of providing a job, they helped her with food assistance. She along with her children spent many days without any food. With the help of a neighbour she then started making bread at home and then selling it to the neighbours. From this work, she has managed to save 2000 Afs [US\$40] in one year's time. She spent these savings to buy a *tandoor* (clay oven). She now has a regular income.

In a few cases, it was observed that social connections play a role which virtually replaces the need for financial capital. In Kabul particularly, it was observed that some people who have good connections with the wholesalers in the big markets take goods on credit and then repay the money once they can sell them.

There are other elements which have a cost for those who run their own business in the cities. Box 7 presents one of these.

**Box 7: Bribing the police**

Mansoor sells grapes on the street. He usually stands in one particular place (Golaie Park, Khair Khana, Kabul) every day with his push-cart to sell grapes. He prefers the place because it's very crowded and he can make good sales. He has to bribe the police with 10 Afs (5% of the total income) everyday otherwise they do not allow him to stand in the place with his cart. According to him, this is a common practice in Kabul.

The average capital required to initiate a business was apparently not very high, 8,279 Afs [US\$169], which was one and a half months' income of a skilled labourer. However, this amount is not very easy for poor migrants to accumulate. It was highest in Herat (10,349 Afs or US\$211) and lowest in Jalalabad (4,617 Afs or US\$94). In Kabul, it was 9,070 Afs [US\$185].

**Table 8. Capital accumulation process for self employment**

Location		Self-employed: how capital was managed					Total
		Own savings	Family savings	Borrowed from relative	Borrowed from friend	Sale of asset	
Kabul	# of respondents	76	10	37	18	10	151
Herat	# of respondents	52	16	4	3	0	75
Jalalabad	# of respondents	28	19	22	4	2	75
Total	# of respondents	156	45	63	25	12	301
	% of respondents	51.8%	15.0%	20.9%	8.3%	4.0%	100.0%

Savings was the main source of accumulating capital for initiating a business. More than half of those who had started their own business had managed to accumulate capital from their own savings, while 15 percent of the respondents' source of capital was savings of their respective families. Some people had even sold their assets in the rural areas to invest in a business in the city.

The financial return from self employment activities is not very great compared to skilled and unskilled labour. The average daily return from the business was 155 Afs [US\$3.16], for Kabul it was a maximum of 170 Afs [US\$3.47] per day; the lowest returns were in Jalalabad, at 133 Afs [US\$2.71] per day. Working hours for the self employed was also about the same as the other two categories (9.89 hours/ day).

## 6. Rural–Urban Linkages and Outcomes of Migration

This section presents information and analysis about the linkages between rural and urban areas and provides analysis about the outcomes of migration. Rural–urban linkages are mostly investigated among those migrants who have left their families behind in the villages.

### Visiting the family in the village

As discussed earlier in the report, a little more than half of the respondents either migrated with their family or brought their families to the cities after they had managed to earn a steady income. These people have little connection with their respective villages. It was also described how migrants mostly stay in the cities during the whole year to earn their living, therefore, they go to the village only for short visits. Table 9 presents information about the frequency of visits of those who left their families behind in the village.

**Table 9. Frequency of visits to the village**

Location		Frequency of visit to village				
		Weekly	Monthly	Quarterly	Every six months	Annually
Kabul	% within Location	21.4%	42.1%	15.1%	11.5%	9.9%
	% of Total	13.3%	26.1%	9.4%	7.1%	6.1%
Herat	% within Location	.0%	14.0%	39.5%	39.5%	7.0%
	% of Total	.0%	1.2%	3.5%	3.5%	.6%
Jalalabad	% within Location	36.4%	37.8%	24.5%	1.4%	.0%
	% of Total	10.6%	11.0%	7.1%	.4%	.0%
<b>Total (Average)</b>		23.9%	38.4%	20.0%	11.0%	6.7%

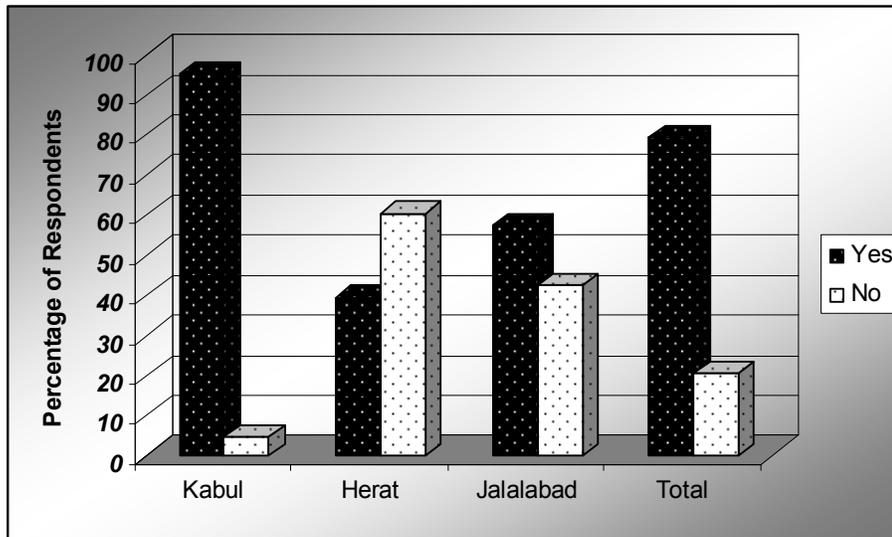
As it is a costly endeavour, migrants cannot afford to visit their families very often. In Kabul and Jalalabad, some of the respondents are from the rural areas within the provinces who visit their families on a weekly basis.

### Support received to look after families in the village

In the absence of the male household head, who is the significant income earner of the families as well, extended family members provide necessary support to the families in the village in most of the cases. Relatives and neighbours also provide significant support. Only in a few cases did respondents mention that they do not have anyone to oversee their family in the village when they are away.

### Remittances sent to the village

For those individuals who left behind their families in the rural areas, income from their work in the cities is an important survival strategy. A high number of migrants whose families remain in the village send remittances on a regular basis (see Figure 12). Those who do not send any money to their families in the rural areas have mentioned that they can not make any surplus income which they can send to their families. Only one respondent mentioned that his family had enough income in the village, so he does not need to send any money to them.

**Figure 12. Respondents sending remittances to the village**

It was very surprising to learn that not a single migrant in this survey used the Hawala system<sup>21</sup> to send money to the rural areas. It may be because of the cost involved in sending money through Hawala (typically up to 10%), which poor migrants can not afford. The other reason may be the amount of money that the migrants can afford to send to the village is too little to send through Hawala. In most of the cases (65%), migrants take the money with them when they go to visit their families. In the rest of the cases, they send money through friends and relatives.

How money is used by the village recipients also shows that migration for most of the migrants is a survival strategy. In all of the cases, money that was sent to the village was spent on basic household demands such as food, clothes, medicine, etc. A similar observation was reported in another survey conducted by AREU<sup>22</sup> which observed that remittances are typically used on consumption items rather than for investment purposes.

### Savings in the urban areas

Data show that although a significant percentage of the respondents (40.1%) had been able to make some surplus income from their work in the cities, the amount was not very high. In most cases (63%), respondents stated that the amount of savings they had in hand was less than 100 Afs [US\$2].<sup>23</sup> Those who had been involved in self-employment activities can earn a greater surplus, probably because of their regularity in income.

The main purpose of savings was reported to be investing in housing (39.5%). As mentioned earlier, most people do not own a house in the city (or in the village), and renting costs take up a large proportion of their income. Investing in housing seems to be a desperate desire of most of the people. Also a similar percentage of respondents mentioned that they save for the seasons when employment is scarce or for emergency situations in the urban areas. Those who were involved in self-

<sup>21</sup> An informal, paperless network of money exchange that uses intermediaries (*hawaladars*) to send cash from one place to another.

<sup>22</sup> Stigter 2005b.

<sup>23</sup> It is not known the length of time required to accumulate this money.

employment activities generally used their savings to reinvest in their business in order to have greater returns.

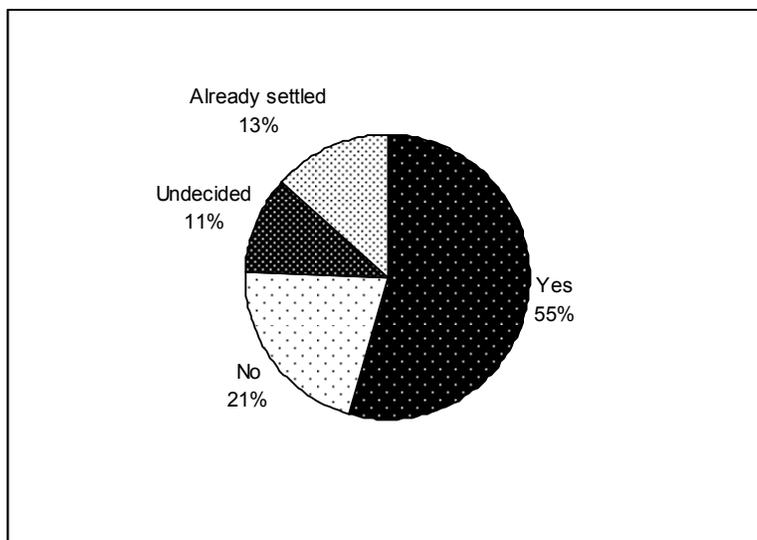
### Investment in the native village

Investment in the native village happened only in very rare cases. Only one percent of the respondents mentioned that they had made an investment either in land or livestock in their village. In all cases, these were land owning families in the village for whom it was worth investing. For the others, the reason probably is that most people can make too little surplus to make any significant investment.

### Plan of settling in the cities

Data show that rural to urban migration is unidirectional in most of the cases. Respondents were asked about their future plan of settling in the respective cities and in most of the cases the response was positive (see Figure 13). More than half of the respondents stated that they would settle in the cities, while 13.4 percent replied that they had already settled in the city. Herat had the highest percentage of respondents who planned to settle in the city while in Jalalabad, a little less than half of the total respondents had already settled in the city.

**Figure 13. Plans to settle in the city**



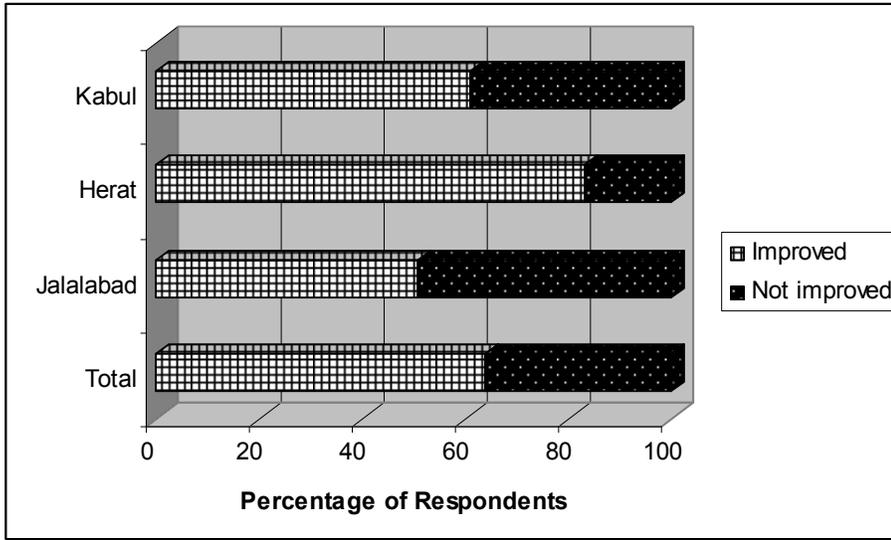
High economic opportunities in the cities account for the most significant reasons for those who have already settled or have planned to settle in the cities. A little more than a quarter of the respondents mentioned that without assets in the village, they have no choice other than settling in the cities. Also in a very few cases (0.9%), people noted that insecurity in the village prevents them from returning.

Economic reasons also account for the most significant causes that *prevent* people from settling in the cities. High cost of living is the most important reason mentioned by those (42.6%) who did not have a plan to settle. Getting a regular job is also difficult in the city, which is another major reason as to why many people can not think of settling there. Having a house in the village is the other reason for those (16.3%) who do not want to settle in the cities.

## Change in economic situation

Despite all of the problems faced by the migrants in finding a job or a place to live and the high cost of living in the cities, a high number of respondents had managed to improve their economic situation through migration. This is most high in the case of those who migrated to Herat, while about half of the migrants interviewed in Jalalabad mentioned that their economic situation had improved after they migrated to that city.

**Figure 14. Change in economic situation**



For the males, overall 61.9 percent of the respondents managed to improve their economic situation through migration, while for the women this percentage was much higher, at 80.9 percent. Those who were involved in the skilled employment sector or those who were self employed had managed to improve their economic situation most, 74.6 and 71.1 percent respectively. Length of migration was found to have a very strong correlation with the improvement of economic situation of the migrants.

## 7. Discussion and Ways Forward

### Major Themes

#### Increased migration to the cities

The research shows that migration flow towards the cities in Afghanistan is increasing at a very rapid pace for a variety of reasons. Cities in Afghanistan are already host to 30 percent of the country's total population.<sup>24</sup> In addition, other studies show that the bulk of the Afghan "refugee" population from the neighbouring countries are returning and trying to settle in the cities. For the returnee population, most of who were employed in the urban sector in different countries, going back to the rural areas to find a job after repatriation is not feasible, since their skills do not often match the jobs available in the rural areas. On the other hand, rural labour markets are also not growing to accommodate such a large labour flow. As a result, flows towards the cities are enormous. This has started to create significant pressure on the already over-burdened infrastructure of the urban centres in the country. The urban labour markets are also not expanding at the same pace as the population, which eventually contributes to the increase of urban poverty and vulnerability. Urgent policy measures and programme initiatives are needed to handle this growth.

#### Homelessness and landlessness

This study found that both homelessness and landlessness is alarmingly high in the rural areas<sup>25</sup> which factors significantly in the decision to migrate to the cities. NRVA data also show that poorer households are more likely to migrate internally while less poor households migrate externally.<sup>26</sup> Nearly half of the respondents in this survey were homeless, while about three-quarters did not own any productive assets in the rural areas. Landlessness particularly forces people to seek employment in off-farm activities in the rural areas, and instability forces people to migrate to the cities.

In the cities, housing is an extremely scarce resource, and poor migrants can hardly manage to afford their own housing. Only 5.8 percent of the respondents of this survey had their own house in the cities. This further aggravates the intensity of the vulnerability of the poor migrants.

#### Unemployment in the rural areas

The rural economy in Afghanistan is mainly dependent on both on- and off-farm activities related to the agricultural sector.<sup>27</sup> The non-agricultural sectors have not grown significantly in the rural areas to employ the large number of landless people for whom off-farm activities are the main source of employment. Women, due to restrictions on their movements, have extremely limited opportunities to earn an income in the rural areas. Consequently, unemployment and underemployment are common phenomena for a majority of the people in the rural areas. Migration to the cities is a coping mechanism for those who can manage the required high associated costs.

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<sup>24</sup> See Government of Afghanistan (GoA). 2004. *Securing Afghanistan's Future: Urban Technical Annex*. Kabul: GoA.

<sup>25</sup> This was observed in other studies as well. See Alden Wily, L. 2004. *Looking for Peace on the Pastures: Rural Land Relations in Afghanistan*. Kabul: Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit.

<sup>26</sup> See Ghobadi, Koettl and Vaskis, 2005.

<sup>27</sup> Grace and Pain, 2004.

## Seasonality of migration

It is generally assumed (and observed in other South Asian countries) that migration is often seasonal and people migrate to the cities in the agricultural “off seasons” to find alternative employment and then go back to the village when there are opportunities in the rural labour markets. This research has shown that at least in the case of rural to urban migration in Afghanistan, seasonality is not applicable. People usually come to the cities, get settled and then bring their families. This is also very strongly correlated with homelessness and landlessness in the rural areas. The other important reason was that most of the migrants were not employed in the agricultural sector prior to migration and thus agricultural seasonality does not have any impact on their decision-making. Therefore, the growth happening in the urban centres of Afghanistan due to rural to urban migration is not a temporary aspect; rather rural to urban migration is linear.

## High costs and hardship in the cities

The costs of migration from rural to urban areas are very high. In addition, it apparently takes some time to find an income-earning opportunity in the urban areas. Therefore, a large amount of money is often needed for people who make the decision to migrate to the cities. It is therefore worth assuming that these high costs limit the extreme poor from utilising migration as a livelihood strategy.

## Social support

As written elsewhere, social relations play an important role in pulling people from the rural areas to the cities; in the case of cross-border migration, it was observed that people usually travel in a group for various reasons, and social connections play an important role to help people get settled and find a job in the new situation.<sup>28</sup> However, for the migrants within the country, people often were found to be independent travellers and the role of social relations was not a major factor in helping people to get settled and find employment. In the cases where people had good social connections, they often found better opportunities in the labour markets. For women, there was no mechanism to get a job without the help of others.

## Saturated urban labour markets

This research shows that urban labour markets are near the stage of saturation, which causes a high incidence of unemployment and under-employment. Urban labour markets are not expanding at the same pace as the urban population. As a result, people find it difficult to get a job on a regular basis. On average, people stay unemployed for nearly half of a month. The daily wage rate is also low and people do not have any bargaining power. Employment conditions are very informal and there is no security of employment in various sectors. Formal opportunity to gain skills to graduate in the labour markets is also absent. People can only gain skills informally on the job or from relatives. For women, the situation is even worse. There are only limited opportunities open to women and they earn much lower wages than men.

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<sup>28</sup> See Stigter, 2005a.

## Women in the labour markets

The nature of the rural labour markets and social restrictions often prevent women from participating in any income-earning activities outside of the home. This is obviously a push factor for women to migrate to the cities. However, in the context of Afghanistan, it is nearly impossible for women to migrate to the cities without any direct support from men. Conditions of women in the urban labour markets are also very exploitative compared to men. This study has observed that a very high income differential exists between men and women within the same employment sector, with women earning about half the wage of what men earn in the same job. In addition, women's labour market participation in the urban areas is constrained by many social and cultural factors. There is no mechanism for women to obtain employment without the support of a male.

## Transfer of rural poverty to the urban areas

Although many respondents in the study reported to have improved their economic situation after migration to the cities, overall migration does little to contribute to the alleviation of poverty. The study shows that migration often transfers rural poverty into the cities and most people are struggling on a daily basis to make a living. Very few people had managed to make any investment, and only a few of them had managed to improve their asset portfolio which could help them to earn a sustainable income.

## Ways forward

Migration has proven to be difficult to control directly. However, policy interventions can be taken to maximise the benefits and minimise the harmful effects of migration. Currently, there is no particular programmatic intervention in Afghanistan, neither at the governmental level nor at the non-governmental level to address the issue of migration, probably because there are enormous knowledge gaps about the situation. One of the major aims of this research was therefore to fill these knowledge gaps.

This study concludes that there are many different areas related to migration which need more exploration. Our understanding about the rural contexts in Afghanistan which usually push people to the cities are still not comprehensive. There is also no comprehensive understanding about the urban labour markets which accommodate the migrants. The ways forward suggested by this study therefore are not towards a comprehensive solution to the problem.

Previous AREU studies have attempted to provide initial suggestions about ways to handle migration on a national level.<sup>29</sup> However, policy around population movement is complex. Instead of offering policy recommendations, the current study highlights the importance of interventions that need to be taken at different levels which would decrease the flow of migration towards the cities as well as minimise the struggle of migrants in the cities.

Some of the interventions that need to be taken *at the source* of migration to minimise the causes of migration include:

- Policies and programmes promoting employment generation in the non-agricultural sector in the rural areas.

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<sup>29</sup> See Stigter, 2005a and 2005b.

- Provision of extended leases to government land to the landless people in the rural areas.
- Expansion of schemes to provide low-cost housing for the poor in rural areas.
- Provision of income and employment generation programmes targeting the landless and women in the rural areas through the expansion of micro-credit programmes.
- Support for organised groups of the poor in taking extended leases of government land in the rural areas.
- Provision of low-cost housing and housing loan schemes for the poor.
- Investments in rural industrialisation.

Some of the interventions need to be taken *at the destination* of migration to minimise the hazards of migrants in the cities include:

- Provision of low-cost and durable housing materials for the poor, and expansion of schemes to provide low-cost housing for the poor.
- Support for organised groups of the poor people in taking extended leases of government land.
- Provision of housing loan schemes for the poor.
- Provision of skill enhancement opportunities in the urban areas.
- Provision of increased facilities for on the job training.

Overall, this research highlights that rural to urban migration is an outcome of prevailing rural poverty. Through migration, a shift of rural to urban poverty is occurring. On the other hand, urban labour markets are also not expanding to accommodate the increasing flow of migrants to the cities, which is aggravating the complexity of poverty. A comprehensive poverty alleviation strategy is therefore urgently needed.

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