

Case Study Series

RETURN TO AFGHANISTAN?

**A Study of Afghans
Living in Tehran**

Faculty of Social Sciences
University of Tehran

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

June 2005



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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.

Foreword

Iran is one of the most concentrated areas of Afghan migrants and refugees. Its early refugee policy towards Afghans has been described as “open door”, and refugee status was granted to incoming Afghans on a *prima facie* basis. It has been estimated that Iranian state expenditure subsidising education, health services, transport, fuel and basic goods for approximately two million Afghans in Iran peaked at \$US10 million per day.¹ It was as a result of domestic economic and social concerns in the 1990s that refugee policy towards Afghans shifted to emphasise repatriation.

In 2003, the government of Iran signed a revised Tripartite Agreement with the government of Afghanistan and UNHCR to facilitate the voluntary return of Afghans by March 2005. Between 2002 and 2004, over three quarters of a million Afghans returned from Iran with the voluntary repatriation operation. In late 2004, it was estimated that a little over one million documented Afghans² remained in Iran. Additionally, as many as 500,000 transitory labour migrants are said to move backward and forwards between Afghanistan and Iran, employed mainly in the agricultural and construction sectors.

Despite the long history of migration and refugee movements between Iran and Afghanistan, little comprehensive research has been undertaken to examine the social, cultural and economic situation of Afghan migrants before and after migration to Iran. Conducted in the cities of Tehran, Mashhad and Zahedan, the three largest destinations for Afghan migrants in Iran, this study aims to provide a deeper understanding of Afghan communities and households, and to explore livelihoods, regional and transnational networks and perceptions about returning to Afghanistan for Afghan family groups/households and transitory labour migrants residing in Iran. This report highlights the findings of the Tehran case study which was conducted during January and April 2005.

This case study was conducted by the Faculty of Social Sciences of the University of Tehran, and is a component of the Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit’s Transnational Networks research project. We owe many thanks to those who have made contributions to the implementation of the project. This report is the result of the fruitful collaboration and teamwork of all contributing authors. Diana Glazebrook’s input was fundamental throughout the study, particularly in writing this report. We would like to acknowledge Alessandro Monsutti and Meimanat Hosseini Chavoshi for their thoughtful comments and suggestions during the design of the questionnaire for this study. The Faculty of Social Sciences as well as the office of Vice Chancellor for Research Affairs of the University of Tehran provided institutional support. Our final thanks and appreciation go to our interviewers (Zohreh Hosseini and Nader Mousavi) whose efforts were invaluable in collecting the data for this project.

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Tehran, April 2005

¹ B. Rajaei, 2000, “The politics of refugee policy in post-revolutionary Iran”, *The Middle East Journal*, (54)1, p. 59

² This figure is based on a report by the UNHCR using data from the 2003 BAFIA registration project. The terms “registered” and “documented” Afghans living in Iran refer to the Iranian Government’s legislation (Regulations on accelerating repatriation) that differentiates Afghan nationals in terms of those who have been registered by BAFIA in 2003.

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Glossary of terms

<i>amanat</i>	the object (e.g. land, house or livestock) of an arrangement where a relative or acquaintance looks after a person's property until they return to inhabit or use that property again
<i>aroos</i>	bride
<i>aroosi</i>	wedding
<i>ashena</i>	acquaintance
<i>ashura</i>	the tenth day of Moharram commemorates the day of martyrdom of Imam Hossein
<i>azadaari</i>	funeral ceremony
<i>bisavad</i>	illiterate
<i>dabirestan</i>	Iranian education system, high school (three years), equivalent to grades 9–11
<i>dastforoosh</i>	hawker, e.g. may sell fruit from a mobile cart, or may walk the streets selling coats carried and displayed on the seller's back
<i>diplom</i>	Iranian education system, a degree indicating twelve years of school completed
<i>ebtedaii</i>	Iranian education system, elementary education (five years)
<i>eidi</i>	gift, usually money or clothes, given on the Persian New Year (<i>nawrooz</i>), the first day of the month of Farvardin in the Persian Solar Calendar
<i>faleke</i>	designated place, often a public square, where labourers wait for prospective employers to contract them for daily work
<i>famil</i>	relatives (aunts, uncles, cousins, nephews, nieces)
<i>famil-e door</i>	distant relatives (the in-laws of aunts, uncles, cousins, nephews, nieces)
<i>gerow</i>	pawning or mortgage
<i>ghesmat</i>	fate or destiny
<i>halal</i>	something legal according to the teachings of Islam, for example, smuggling drugs is considered not to be a <i>halal</i> occupation
<i>hamsayegi / mahali</i>	neighborhood
<i>hamshahr</i>	originating from the same city
<i>hawala</i>	money transfer
<i>khane dar bar-a bar-e kar</i>	accommodation provided as part of wages, often farm workers
<i>khanevade</i>	nuclear family
<i>khish</i>	lineage
<i>khomes</i>	an Islamic moral norm and sort of "voluntary tax" dictating that Muslims should set aside one fifth of their disposable

	income annually to be distributed by religious leaders or Imams to Muslim people in need, especially Seyed
<i>mehmanshahr</i>	literally “guest city”: regulated refugee settlement located on the Iran–Afghanistan border
<i>jerib</i>	unit of land measurement, approximately one fifth of a hectare
<i>imamzadeh</i>	children or relatives of one of the twelve Shia Imams, usually refers to their burial place which is a pilgrimage site
<i>mahr</i>	dowry or bride price
<i>mohajerin</i>	forced religious migrants (usually refers to those Afghans who came to Iran during the Soviet occupation 1979–89)
<i>Moharram</i>	one-month period of commemoration of the martyrdom of Imam Hossein in which Ashura occurs
<i>namoos</i>	protection of the honour of daughters and wives against the possibility of rape
<i>nazr</i>	usually cooked food gifted to neighbour or relative in the name of Imam Hossein, especially on religious commemorative days
<i>nawrooz</i>	Iranian New Year based on the Persian Solar Calendar falling on the first day of Favardin (21 March)
<i>panahandegan</i>	refugees, usually refers to those Afghans who came to Iran after the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan (after 1989)
<i>qachaqchi</i>	smuggler
<i>rahn</i>	bond for rented house: landlord invests the bond and keeps the interest, returning the principal intact to the renter at the end of the rental contract; the higher the <i>rahn</i> , the lower the rent, and vice versa
<i>rahnamei</i>	Iranian education system, middle school (three years), equivalent to grades 6–8
<i>ramazan</i>	annual month of fasting for Muslims
<i>rouzeh</i>	public and household ceremonies of mourning that commemorate the martyrdom of Imam Hossein at Karbala in 679 AD
<i>sarrafi</i>	money-changer
<i>Seyed</i>	the Shia and Sunni descendants of the Prophet Mohammad (Shia Imams are categorised as Seyed)
<i>shakhsi</i>	private, indicating “ownership” – can indicate two types of ownership in the context of housing: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Gholnamei</i> (unofficial): deed of title negotiation between the buyer and seller without official government registration but allows for legal recognition • <i>Sanad</i> (official): official deed of ownership transaction registered in the Governmental Property Registration Office

<i>sowghaat</i>	gift which is often a souvenir or symbol of a particular location (e.g. foodstuff or handcraft of that place), also known as <i>tohfeh</i>
<i>tashnab</i>	enclosed area inside a house, without running water, where personal bathing is done using a bucket of water heated on a stove
<i>Tooman</i>	Iranian currency; \$US1 = approx. 887.5 <i>Tooman</i> or 8,875 <i>Rial</i> (March 2005)
<i>zakat</i>	Islamic tax: wealth proportionate with one's income earned from agriculture and animal husbandry, or proportionate with one's wealth such as gold or silver, paid in kind (e.g. in sheep, wheat or gold) to Imams or religious leaders for distribution among Muslims in need
<i>ziaratgah</i>	pilgrimage site

Summary

Since the installation of the internationally supported interim authority in Afghanistan in 2003, Tripartite Repatriation Agreements between Afghanistan, Iran and the UNHCR have facilitated the voluntary repatriation of around 770,000 Afghans from Iran. The Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran has legislated to further accelerate repatriation by raising the cost of living for Afghans in Iran. At the time of this research in 2005, approximately one million documented Afghans remained in Iran, with over 95% living outside government settlements known as *mehmanshahr*. Additionally, up to 500,000 undocumented transitory labour migrants from Afghanistan were working in the agricultural and construction sectors in Iran.

This multi-sited study was conducted in Iran in the cities of Tehran, Mashhad and Zahedan, and focused on both Afghan household groups and single labour migrants. The study moves beyond the quantitative data on repatriation and projected return figures to explore the perceptions and concerns of Afghans in Iran about the prospect of returning to Afghanistan or remaining in Iran in the medium term.

The intentions and strategies of Afghan respondents living in Tehran can be summarised as follows:

- Afghan labour migrants in Tehran experienced substantial unemployment and preferred to be working in Afghanistan;
- household respondents, unlike labour migrants, rarely submitted regular remittances to relatives in Afghanistan, and struggled to sustain their own households in Iran;
- both study groups (households and single migrants) utilised mainly regional social networks in Iran as safety nets;
- over two thirds of household respondents did not intend to return to Afghanistan in the medium term;
- respondents intending to return to Afghanistan planned to do so as intact family groups;
- households least willing to return to Afghanistan were those resident in Iran for 8–10 years, or over 20 years;
- housing, health and education facilities as well as employment opportunities in Iran encouraged Afghan households to remain, and the perceived absence of these facilities as well as insecurity in Afghanistan discouraged their return; and
- respondents could not rely on relatives in Afghanistan to support or sustain their reintegration in the event of return, and regardless of region of origin, respondents aspired to return to Kabul or another major city as they perceived urban centres to be more secure and better resourced.

1. Introduction

1.1 Rationale for the research

The Soviet occupation of Afghanistan (1979–89) caused massive migration of some 2.6 million Afghans into Iran. A period of Afghan repatriation from Iran following the withdrawal of the Soviets in 1989 was terminated by the onset of war in Afghanistan in 1991 that endured for the next decade. The period 1991–2001 is characterised by substantial migration (both forced migration and labour migration) of Afghans from Afghanistan to Iran, as well as substantial repatriation (both voluntary and involuntary) of Afghans from Iran back to Afghanistan.

From the 1990s, as a result of domestic economic and social concerns, Iranian refugee policy shifted to emphasise prevention and repatriation.³ Iran's first repatriation programme for Afghans was formalised in late 1992 with the establishment of a Tripartite Commission (comprising Afghanistan, Iran and UNHCR). During 1993, about 600,000 Afghans returned to Afghanistan – over 300,000 of them under the repatriation program.⁴ In 1998–99, the Iranian authorities engaged in a parallel deportation campaign of up to 190,000 undocumented Afghans.⁵

In 2003, following the installation of an internationally supported interim authority in Kabul, the government of Iran signed a revised Tripartite Agreement with the government of Afghanistan and UNHCR to facilitate the voluntary return of Afghans by March 2005. While return to Afghanistan was voluntary, domestic legislation aimed to accelerate repatriation from Iran. In 2003, under Article 138 of the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran,⁶ various “regulations on accelerating repatriation of Afghan nationals” were introduced. In 2004, the Iranian government implemented further measures intended to “induce a more substantial level of repatriation of Afghans in 2004” by raising the cost of living for Afghans in Iran.⁷ These measures included the introduction of school fees for Afghan children at all levels, and the re-registration of all Afghans who had been registered under the 2001 BAFIA exercise (including payment of a US\$6–8 fee).

This was the backdrop against which voluntary repatriation of some 770,643 Afghans occurred in the period 1 March 2002 – 31 October 2004.⁸ It is also the backdrop against which a little over one million documented Afghans (1,009,354 individuals) remain in Iran including 190,765 households and 113,201 single Afghans,⁹ and as many as 500,000 undocumented single transitory Afghan labour migrants.¹⁰ The scale

³ Rajaei, p. 62

⁴ D. Turton and P. Marsden, 2002, *Taking Refugees for a Ride? The Politics of Refugee Return to Afghanistan*, Kabul: AREU, p. 12

⁵ US Committee for Refugees in Turton and Marsden, p. 15

⁶ According to Article 138 of the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran and in conformity with two prior decrees No. H23538T/58858 dated 22.12.1379 (12 March 2001) and No. H26697T/13521 dated 08.04.1381 (28 June 2002)

⁷ UNHCR *Global Report 2003: Islamic Republic of Iran*, <http://www.unhcr.ch/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/home/opedoc.pdf?tbl=MEDIA&id=40c6d7500&page=home>, accessed 2 May 2005

⁸ UNHCR Kabul, *Operational information monthly summary report March 2002–October 2004*, in E. Stigter, 2005a, *Transnational Networks and Migration from Herat to Iran*, Kabul: AREU, p. 19

⁹ Afghan population and family status in Iran as of 1 November 2004, Amayesh and Repatriation databases (note: there are some missing data values in the source).

¹⁰ US Committee for Refugees, *World Refugee Survey 2004 Country Report*, <http://www.refugees.org/countryreports.aspx?subm=&ssm=&cid=118>, accessed 29 May 2005

and speed of the return programme (particularly the period March–September 2002 when 1.7 million Afghans returned from Iran and Pakistan) provoked discussion about the sustainable reintegration of Afghan returnees.¹¹ A report commissioned by the Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit during the period of assisted return movement in 2002 drew attention to the lack of sustainability of large-scale and rapid assisted return. The Turton and Marsden report (*Taking Refugees for a Ride? The Politics of Refugee Return to Afghanistan*, 2002) focused on returnees' internal movement, their continued multi-directional movement across boundaries, and their participation in regional and transnational social networks. The final recommendation of the report made explicit a connection between sustainable reintegration and transnational social networks, proposing “undertaking in-depth, qualitative research to improve our knowledge of refugee decision-making and the regional and transnational networks that sustain the incomes of Afghan households and families.”

This recommendation laid the ground for the development of AREU's long-term Transnational Networks project, which also coincided with UNHCR's reappraisal of repatriation elaborated in its paper *Afghanistan: Challenges to Return* (March 2004). The paper acknowledges the need for a new framework for approaching repatriation that is not formulaic, and instead develops context-specific reintegration strategies that take into account the mix of Afghan refugees, asylum-seekers and different categories of economic migrants in Iran and Pakistan. “Repatriation is subject to a diverse array of influences including the original reasons for flight, the differing experiences of exile and displacement, family capital and assets, the motivations and strategy for repatriation, the risks and challenges inherent in return and reintegration in different locations, and the policy and institutional actions that shape the overall return process.”¹²

This case study of Afghans living in Tehran draws on a limited respondent group of 50 households and fifteen labour migrants to explore:

- how respondents perceive their livelihood and other prospects in the event of returning to Afghanistan or remaining in Iran;
- participation in and function of regional and transnational networks;
- processes of decision-making; and
- respondents' current intentions in relation to returning or remaining in the medium term.

The study was preceded by related research undertaken by AREU in the Afghan provinces of Faryab and Herat, and in the city of Kabul, in 2004, and it was undertaken concurrently with related research in Pakistan, and in Nangarhar Province in eastern Afghanistan. Each of these studies aims to enhance understanding and appreciation of transnational networks as a key livelihood strategy, “to support bilateral negotiations, as well as to advise the government of Afghanistan on how to provide minimum standards of security and income of Afghan migrants in the longer term.”¹³

While there is now extensive literature on transnational networks as they relate to migration, until four years ago, little research had been undertaken into regional and transnational social networks between Afghans in Iran, Afghanistan and Paki-

¹¹ Turton and Marsden

¹² UNHCR, 2005, *Afghanistan: Challenges to Return*, Geneva, p. 6

¹³ UNHCR, 2004, *Obstacles to Return* in Stigter, 2005a, p. 2

stan. Several recent field-based studies conducted in Afghanistan offer accounts of regional and international mobility and social networks – providing a context for this study. Alessandro Monsutti’s research into remittances among Hazara Afghans¹⁴ found that even before the massive return in 2002, the majority of Afghans had returned to Afghanistan at least once, and most households had one or two members abroad. Monsutti claims that many Hazaras:

- move constantly between Afghanistan, Pakistan and Iran;
- are engaged in multiple registers of solidarity within and outside their own lineage;
- practise a diverse basis of cooperation; and
- remit a large amount of money to Afghanistan.

Elca Stigter’s two case studies conducted for AREU in 2004 on the transnational networks and migration of Afghans from Herat to Iran, and from Faryab to Iran, further elaborate the practice of Afghan migration both inside Afghanistan, and across the international border. Stigter makes the important point that return to a country of origin does not necessarily combat insecurity and vulnerability, and that return may “prompt onward passage, leading to a pattern of multi-directional cross border movements.”¹⁵ Stigter concluded that channels of pre-established transnational networks exist between Afghanistan and Iran, and that migration to Iran constitutes a strategy for Afghan men which is both social and economic. Stigter proposes that migration functions as a coping strategy, with remittances covering subsistence costs and debt repayment, as well as contributing to a further accumulation of assets (e.g. *mahr*, house, land).

One final note on the use of terminology in this report: in the West, the description of an asylum-seeker as a migrant rather than a refugee is considered to deny the “political” character of their claim. The case of Iran complicates this classification. Turton and Marsden make the distinction between refugee status as a legal obligation and the Iranian classification of Afghan as *mohajerin* or “involuntary religious migrant”.¹⁶ In 1979, the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan coincided with the Islamic Revolution in neighbouring Iran. The Islamic principle enshrined in the Quran¹⁷ of hosting refugees and displaced people was given particular respect in light of the revolution in Iran. The Islamic principle of *hijrat* asserts that practising Muslims fleeing their own country on the grounds that they are unable to properly practice their faith deserve the noble status of *mohajerin*. Rather than the simple English translation of *mohajerin* as migrant or refugee, the term *mohajerin* refers specifically to an “involuntary religious migrant”. *Mohajerin* were issued with identification cards known as “blue cards”, and granted indefinite permission to stay in Iran legally. Until 1995 they had access to subsidised health care and food, and free primary and secondary education.¹⁸ After the withdrawal of the Soviets in 1989 and

¹⁴ A. Monsutti, 2004, “Cooperation, remittances and kinship among the Hazaras”, *Iranian Studies*, (37)2, p. 219–40

¹⁵ E. Stigter, 2005b, *Transnational Networks and Migration from Faryab to Iran*, Kabul: AREU, p. 1

¹⁶ Turton and Marsden, p. 14–15

¹⁷ “The homeland of Islam (dar-al-Islam) is one. It is a homeland for every Muslim, whose movement within [its domain] cannot be restricted...Every Muslim country must receive any Muslims who emigrate thereto, or who enter it, as a brother welcomes his brother: ‘Those who entered the city and the faith before them love those who flee unto them for refuge, and find it in their breasts no need for that which had been given them, but prefer the fugitives above themselves through poverty become their lot...’”, *Quran* 59:9 in Rajaei

¹⁸ Rajaei, p. 57

the subsequent civil war between various mujaheddin factions, Afghans seeking refuge in Iran after 1993 were categorised not as *mohajerin*, but as refugees or *panahandegan*. After 1993, the Iranian government started issuing temporary registration cards to undocumented or newly arrived Afghans. Whereas “*mohajerin*” was considered to be an honorable term, “*panahandegan*”, or refugee, was considered to have a pejorative nuance, even connoting impoverishment.¹⁹

There is a third and significant category of Afghans in Iran and that is the transitory labour migrant who may cross repeatedly between Afghanistan and Iran, leaving his family behind in Afghanistan. These transitory labour migrants are known in Farsi as *kargar-e fasli* (seasonal workers) or *kargar-e Afghani* (Afghan workers), and it has been estimated that more than 500,000 single Afghan labour migrants live in Iran, employed mainly in the agricultural and construction sectors.²⁰

1.2 Main research questions

The Transnational Networks research in Iran comprises studies in twelve neighborhoods in three cities: Tehran, Mashhad and Zahedan. The study collects data on the previous livelihood strategies of Afghans before leaving Afghanistan, the current status of their assets in Afghanistan, and the relations they have sustained with Afghanistan. It also looks at Afghans’ current livelihood strategies including their participation in regional and transnational social networks. The research offers insight into Afghan perceptions and plans in relation to their future, and it touches on the projected livelihood strategies of Afghans intending to remain indefinitely in Iran, and the projected livelihood and reintegration strategies of Afghans intending to return to Afghanistan.

The research questions focusing on transnational networks, livelihoods, reintegration and cross-border movement are:

With *Afghan households* that have been based in Iran longer than eight years (both households in a city and households in camps):

- What are the reasons for households remaining in Iran?
- What livelihood strategies do these households have?
- What links, if any, do they have to Afghanistan, and how have these varied over time (e.g. remittances, visits, work)?
- How do they see their long-term future in relation to Afghanistan?

With *transitory labour migrants* from Afghanistan living in Iran:

- What is the nature of the life of migrants (both in terms of work and life-style), and how is this similar to, or different from, their experiences of life in Afghanistan?
- What are the positive and negative aspects of being migrants (opportunities and constraints)?
- What are the reasons for becoming migrants?
- What are their future intentions in terms of return, mobility etc?

¹⁹ Complicating this, prior to the 1979 revolution, a small number of Afghan were issued “white cards” stipulating their status as *panahandegan* (or refugees) entitling them to tax exemption, the right to work, and the right to obtain travel documents (Rajaei, p. 57–8).

²⁰ US Committee for Refugees, *World Refugee Survey 2004 Country Report*

1.3 Methodology

The principal research tool used was an extensive structured questionnaire comprising an introductory sequence of closed questions eliciting demographic data, followed by several sequences of open-ended questions on the subject of migration history, livelihood strategies, social networks and future intentions. The mixed closed and open-ended format allowed for analysis of correlations or relationships between respondents' intention to return to Afghanistan and other factors such as gender, ethnicity, children's educational level and duration of residence in Iran.

Comprising 80 questions, the principal questionnaire was organised in terms of linear time:

- life in Afghanistan before leaving;
- initial arrival to Iran;
- livelihood strategy in Iran and participation in social networks;
- decision-making in relation to returning or remaining; and
- livelihood strategy in the event of return.

An introductory sequence of questions provided demographic data on the region of origin, education, occupation and household structure. The questionnaire was trialled in the interviewers' neighborhoods in Tehran, and it was revised in response to feedback from the interviewers and respondents. Each questionnaire took approximately two hours to complete, and interviewers carried out a total of 50 interviews in four neighborhoods in Tehran: Shahr-e Rey, Bagherabad, Nematabad and Kan. The sample was selected based on the proportion of Afghans living in each of the four neighborhoods. Features that were selected for in the sample included: widows as household heads, ethnicity, age and phases of arrival to Iran (i.e. communist-led coup and subsequent Soviet occupation 1979–89; conflict between the Najibullah government and mujaheddin 1989–1992; interfactional fighting and rise of Taliban 1994–2001; and coalition intervention and overthrow of the Taliban 2001.²¹

A second open-ended questionnaire that specifically targeted the migration experience of single, Afghan labour migrants in Iran was then conducted with fifteen labour migrants in Tehran. It was assumed that this respondent group would be unlikely to hold residency permits, so respondents were not asked disclose this sensitive information. For the purposes of this study, it is assumed that this group was unregistered, and therefore representative of the large group of undocumented Afghans in Iran. The design for this questionnaire was influenced by data from Stigter's Herat and Faryab case studies, and utilised Alessandro Monsutti's migration time–place matrix. This second questionnaire comprised 40 questions including an introductory sequence of closed questions eliciting demographic data, followed by several sequences of mixed closed and open-ended questions on the subject of livelihood resources and strategies prior to migration, function of the labour migrant's social network in Iran, remittances and savings, and future migration strategies. Features that were selected for in the sample included: place of origin in Afghanistan and occupation in Tehran.

In Tehran, the two Afghan interviewers (male and female) were Seyed Shia. Given Afghan apprehension that the Iranian government was implementing campaigns to

²¹ These phases of arrival are elaborated on in UNHCR, *Afghanistan: Challenges to Return*.

identify and deport undocumented Afghans, the coverage and timing of the research was highly sensitive. The trialling of the questionnaires and training of the interviewers was critical as the project's success depended on the capacity of the interviewers to carry out interviews with sensitivity and tact, and demonstrate trustworthiness in relation to respondents. Interviewers used a snowball technique rather than random sampling, asking willing respondents to refer them to other Afghans. Interviewers also worked through their own networks to identify respondents, and in the case of Tehran this has probably resulted in a higher proportion of tailors interviewed, reflecting the social network of one of the interviewers whose husband is a professional tailor. Interviewers were directed to explain to respondents that the transnational networks study was an international project carried out by research teams in Afghanistan, Pakistan and Iran, funded by UNHCR Geneva, and managed by a Kabul-based research institution, and that in Iran the project was implemented by a team of researchers from the University of Tehran. Interviewers were also directed to advise respondents that every effort would be taken to protect the identity of respondents – for example, identifying details such as name, street address in Iran, workplace in Iran, and village of origin in Afghanistan would not be recorded, and questionnaires would be coded for identification. Data was collected between February and April, 2005.

Along with the questionnaires, interviewers undertook social mapping of neighborhoods to identify the availability of utilities and services, schools, training centres, mosques, clinics and community organisations. Additionally, research team members made field visits to each of the four neighborhoods in Tehran, holding informal discussions with community figures, and making relevant observations. These field visits often resulted in spontaneous group discussions which were invaluable opportunities to gauge Afghan concerns at the local level.

1.4 Report structure

This report details the findings of the research and presents recommendations arising from these findings. Part 2 sets the context for the report by summarising the history of Afghans in Iran, followed by a selection of respondents' reasons for leaving Afghanistan, and concludes with a description of Iranian government policy towards Afghans from 1979 to the present. Part 3 focuses on households in Tehran comprising Afghan family groups living in Iran for eight years or more. This section provides data on current livelihood strategies and respondents' perceptions of their current situation in Iran compared to their previous situation in Afghanistan. It then examines participation in regional and transnational social networks, including the direction of movement, "objects" circulated, and relationships between senders and receivers. It concludes with a section on decision-making processes, strategies in the event of return to Afghanistan, and aspirations for third-country resettlement. Part 4 focuses on the experiences of transitory single Afghan labour migrants in Tehran who have left their families behind in Afghanistan and live with co-workers, friends or family members in Iran. This section considers the subjects' family histories of migration between Afghanistan and Iran, the impact of migration on their families in Afghanistan, and future migration intentions. Part 5 concludes with a discussion of the research results and patterns in terms of the main research questions.

2. Afghans in Iran

2.1 History of Afghans in Iran

Transitory migration of Afghans to Iran motivated by economic differences has occurred since the nineteenth century. The phenomenon of Afghan Shia pilgrimage to Iran²² has occurred for several hundred years. The first documented movement of Afghans to Iran occurred in the 1850s when up to 5000 Hazara households migrated to Iran and settled at Jam and Bakharz.²³ It was recorded that some 15,000 families (approximately 168,000 people) settled in Torbat-e Jam in the east of Mashhad during the centralist rule of Amir Abd Arahman (1880–1903), making up 90% of the local population.²⁴ After the seizure of power by Reza Khan after the last Qajar king in about 1937, Hazara Afghans in Iran were officially categorised as a tribal group called Khawari and represented at ceremonies and Iranian national celebrations.²⁵

The third major movement of Afghans to Iran occurred as a result of the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan from 1979–1989. Relative seclusion, stability and peace had been sustained until 1973. Disorder, insecurity and ongoing disputes between left-wing parties led to two coups in 1978 and 1979 in which President Daoud and his successors Taraki and Amin were killed, and the way was paved for the Soviet invasion in 1979. A *jihad* was proclaimed against the Soviets and many Sunni and Shia clergy encouraged migration. The Islamic revolution in Iran resulted in the promotion of Islamic “brotherhood” and attracted some three million Afghans who were accorded *mohajerin* status, or involuntary religious migrants. While 80 camps or *mehmanshahr* were built, only about 2.5% of the Afghan population in Iran resided in these camps; most Afghans settled in poor neighborhoods on the periphery of Iranian cities.²⁶ During the 1980s, Afghans were said to fill a significant gap in the workforce during the war against Iraq.²⁷ Repatriation figures peaked following the Soviet withdrawal in 1989, with 1.3 million Afghans returning from Iran between 1992 and 1995.²⁸

The process of voluntary repatriation came to an end with the outbreak of violence: from 1989 when the mujaheddin were at war with the central government, and after the fall of Kabul in 1992 when civil war broke out between Afghan factions and ethnic groups. Civil war resulted in a third wave of movement to Iran and Pakistan, this time particularly the urban, educated middle class. Reflecting the non-religious motivation for their flight, those Afghans who fled to Iran at that time were classified as *panahandegan* or refugees. The fourth major movement of Afghans to Iran occurred in response to the repressive rule of Taliban militants, and fighting between Taliban and opposition groups between 1994 and 2001. After the fall of the Taliban in 2001, a Tripartite Repatriation Agreement was signed by Afghanistan, Iran, and UNHCR. From 1 March 2002 to 31 October 2004, 770,643 Afghans returned

²² S.A. Mousavi, 1997, *The Hazaras of Afghanistan: An Historical, Cultural, Economic and Political Study*, St Martin’s Press: New York, p. 148

²³ Mousavi, p. 149

²⁴ Shah Alami in Mousavi, p. 150

²⁵ Owtadolajam in Mousavi, p. 152

²⁶ UNHCR, *Afghanistan: Challenges to Return*, p. 9

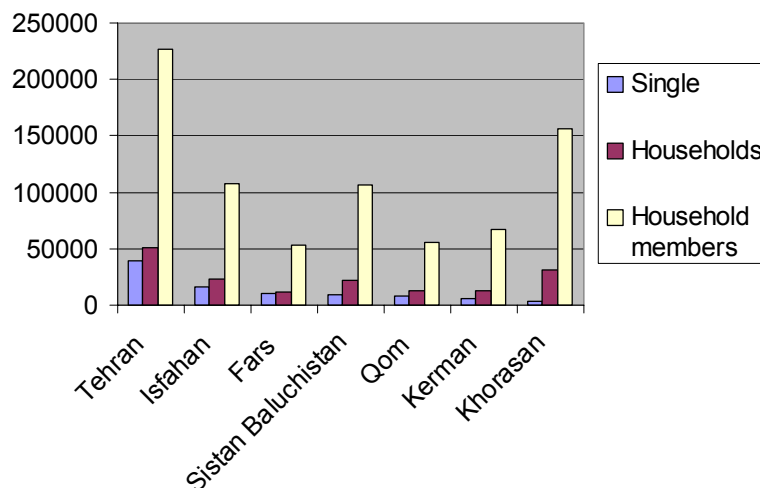
²⁷ UNHCR, *Afghanistan: Challenges to Return*, p. 9

²⁸ UNHCR Pakistan, based on estimates obtained from the Government of Iran, <http://www.un.org.pk/unhcr/Afstats-stat.htm>

from Iran with the voluntary repatriation operation.²⁹ Around 65% of Afghan returnees from Iran were men of working age.³⁰ The following characteristics of Afghan returnees from Iran have been noted by the UNHCR:

- the majority of returnees during 2002 had left Afghanistan within the last five years;
- a much higher than expected number (42%) returned to urban destinations;
- approximately 40% (predominantly single, undocumented men) repatriated outside the official UNHCR assisted voluntary return process; and
- compared with the percentage of Hazara Afghans (predominantly Shia) in Iran, far fewer Hazara than other ethnic groups such as Tajik and Pashtun have returned to Afghanistan.³¹

In November 2004, it was estimated that a little over one million documented Afghans (1,009,354 individuals) remained in Iran, including 190,765 households and 113,201 single Afghans.³² Single Afghans live mainly in the provinces of Tehran (39,796), Isfahan (16,330), Fars (10,102), Sistan Baluchistan of which Zahedan is capital (8,920), Qom (7,603) and Kerman (6,348). The pattern of single Afghan residence mirrors that of Afghan households, except for Khorasan province, of which Mashhad is capital, which is the second-most populous destination of Afghan families but the eighth-most populous destination of single Afghans with only 3,495 single migrants residing there. The majority of Afghan family households live in the provinces of Tehran (50,959 households or 227,056 household members), followed by Khorasan (31,805 households or 155,893 members), Isfahan (22,915 households or 107,490 members), Sistan Baluchistan (22,355 households or 106,908 members), Kerman (13,035 households or 66,807 members), Qom (12,334 households or 55,931 members) and Fars (11,315 households or 52,888 members). Additionally, at the end of 2003, UNHCR documented the “population of concern” living in *mehmanshahr* (mainly Afghans and some Iraqi) as follows: Kerman (12,730), Fars (5,800), Khorasan (5,440), Sistan Baluchistan (5,300), Markazi (4,700), Khuzestan (3,450), West Azerbaijan (3,340), and Semnan (2,900).³³



²⁹ UNHCR Kabul, *Operational information monthly summary report March 02–October 04*

³⁰ UNHCR, *Afghanistan: Challenges to Return*, p. 9

³¹ UNHCR, *Afghanistan: Challenges to Return*, p. 11

³² Amayesh and Repatriation databases

³³ UNHCR, 2003, *Statistical Yearbook Islamic Republic of Iran*, <http://www.unhcr.ch/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/statistics/opendoc.pdf?tbl=STATISTICS&id=41d2c17a0&page=statistics> (accessed 2 May 2005)

The ethnicity of documented Afghans in Iran is predominantly Hazara, followed by Tajik: Hazara (377,036), Tajik (270,552), Pashtun (129,807), Baluch (46,622), Uzbek (20,438), Turkmen (3,848) and other (27,976).³⁴

2.2 Leaving Afghanistan

Prior to 1979, Afghans generally left Afghanistan because of impoverishment and debt brought on by drought and adverse government policy. After 1979, they fled from the effects of war during the Soviet occupation, the mujaheddin factional warfare, and the rise of the Taliban movement. These effects included: insecurity, forced conscription, risk to the honour of daughters, looting, ideological indoctrination and poverty.

Some respondents fled during the time of President Daoud (1973–78) as a result of inability to pay government taxes and recover from indebtedness. For example, a Seyed man had fled his rural area in 1977 aged 15, and his father had worked as a flour maker and watermelon seller:

We came here [to Iran] two times, the first one year before Daoud. It was drought in Afghanistan and my father could not afford to pay our taxes to the government and became indebted. Daoud announced that the government budget was low and citizens must pay their taxes. On the advice of my cousin, my father and I fled to Iran. When Daoud fell from power [killed in

coup d'état 1978] we returned to Afghanistan. Then the Soviet invasion took place, and one of my mother's relatives got a position in the Communist government and forced us to become Communists and again we were forced to flee.

Year of arrival	Number of respondents
1356/1977	1
1358/1979	1
1359/1980	8
1360/1981	6
1362/1983	4
1363/1984	8
1364/1985	1
1365/1986	1
1368/1989	1
1369/1990	1
1370/1991	3
1372/1993	1
1373/1994	1
1374/1995	1
1375/1996	9

Afghans left during the Soviet occupation to protect the honour of their daughters (*namoos*) against violation by soldiers, to protect their religion from debasement or prohibition, and to avoid conscription. Common among respondents was the reason of protecting the honour of their daughters against rape by soldiers: Soviet soldiers during the Soviet occupation and, later, Afghan soldiers during the mujaheddin factional fighting. A Hazara widower who arrived in Iran from Kabul in 1980 aged 25 explained: "During the civil war, those who were fighting were forcing their way into houses, and my father for the protection of his daughters left Afghanistan to come to Iran." Several respondents used the term "to flee for one's life" to describe the way they left Afghanistan during the Soviet occupation as a response to members of their family being killed. One respondent who came to Iran

³⁴ Amayesh and Repatriation databases

in 1985 aged 14 from Mazar-i-Sharif explained: “During the war in the Soviet time, my paternal uncle was martyred and we had many enemies, and we had to flee for our life.”

Several respondents who left Afghanistan during the Soviet occupation mentioned compulsory military service as a reason for leaving. For example, a Seyed man who had been a farmer near Mazar-i-Sharif and left Afghanistan in 1982 aged 17 explained: “I was reaching the age of entry to National Service, and out of fear of being sent to the frontline, I escaped to Iran.” Another respondent, a 60-year-old Hazara man originally from Kabul, stated that the post-Islamic revolution in Iran had prompted Afghan Muslims fleeing the Communist regime to come to Iran. Initially entering Iran as a single labour migrant, this respondent arranged for his family to come to Iran in 1981:

I came to Iran for employment before my family arrived. In the time of Taraki [1978–79], they said that I had to do National Service for the second time and for this reason I did not return to Afghanistan until the Soviet invasion, and then because of the Communist regime I remained in Iran. I gave money to my brother-in-law to bring my family from Afghanistan to Iran. We came here out of fear of war, and because of the words of Imam Khomeini who said that Islam has no borders.

Because resistance to the Soviet occupation was a punishable offence, several respondents stated that their actual experience of imprisonment, or fear of imprisonment, was the reason for their flight. A Seyed farmer originally from Mazar-i-Sharif who fled to Iran in 1984 aged 19 explained:

We escaped from the Soviet Union – they forced people to be Communist, and dissenters were jailed and for this reason we came to Iran.” Another Hazara man originally from Kabul who fled to Iran in 1980 aged 36 explained: “I was jailed a few times in Afghanistan and because of the fear of that, in 1980 I came to Iran, and the situation there was very hard.

Some Shia (and Tajik Sunni) respondents, who had left Afghanistan during the Soviet occupation and returned after the Soviet withdrawal, left Afghanistan for a second time during the rise of the Taliban movement. Sometimes these return journeys also coincided with lifecycle events, for example, the death of a spouse, or the request by an elderly parent that their children return to care for them. For example, one Tajik Sunni widow, originally from Kabul explained:

The first time, I came to Iran at the time of Najibullah. At that time I was not married. My brother came to Iran because he was afraid of conscription, and came to Iran with his family. One year later, I became engaged and when my daughter was nine [1983] we returned to Afghanistan at the request of my husband’s mother who was alone. But after 15 years, I returned to Iran again because my husband was martyred and I was alone, and there was war, and life was very difficult, it was about 7 years ago in 1998.

Several respondents who left Kabul during the Taliban regime described the damage sustained during shelling and bombardment. One Tajik Sunni man, who left Kabul in 1996 aged 24 with his wife and son, had worked as a shopkeeper in his father’s grocery shop and lived in his father’s rented house in Kabul. This respondent stressed that three times he had re-built his father’s house after it had been damaged by shelling, and each time he had purchased new furniture and household

items. He explained that his own daughter had died of fright as a result of the shelling: “The Taliban attacked my house nightly. They arrested me and beat me with electricity coil. I was in hospital for three months. When I got better, we fled to Iran.” Some respondents who fled to Iran during the Taliban regime had been conscripts (for both sides), and had “deserted” because their wages were not sufficient to support their wife and children. For example, one respondent, a 29-year-old Tajik Sunni from Kabul who came to Iran in 1996 with his wife and two infants explained: “The salary of conscript was not sufficient to live on and I was unable to afford to pay rent on my family’s house, and for one entire year I was unable to afford to pay for fuel [for heating and cooking], and for these reasons I came to Iran.”

2.3 History of Iranian government policy towards Afghans

In 1976, Iran ratified the 1951 UN Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol with reservations regarding articles 17 (wage earning employment), 23 (public relief), 24 (labour legislation and social security), and 26 (freedom of movement). With regard to article 17, recognised refugees with residence permits must apply for work permits in Iran, which, in most cases, restrict them to manual labour. In practice, while the authorities have granted few work permits to refugees, it should be said that they have generally tolerated the presence of Afghans working in areas where labour shortages have existed. Both the UN Refugee Convention and its Protocol have force of law in Iran: Article 155 of the Iranian Constitution states that the Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran may grant asylum to those who request political asylum, except traitors and criminals under Iranian law. In 1963, prior to ratifying the Refugee Convention, the government of Iran had adopted an ordinance relating to refugees that provided a legal and administrative framework to grant asylum to refugees, which remains in force. Article 122 of the Labor Law of Iran provides that the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs may issue, extend, or renew the work permits of immigrants from foreign countries, particularly Islamic countries, as well as those of refugees, provided they have a valid immigration or refugee card and are subject to the written agreements of the Ministries of the Interior and Foreign Affairs.³⁵

The primary responsibility for foreign nationals in Iran lies with the Ministry of the Interior, in cooperation with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Labor.³⁶ The Ministry of Interior comprises its Tehran headquarters, 25 provincial bureaus, and 80 refugee camps known as *mehmanshahr*.³⁷ Refugee matters are handled by the Ministry’s Bureau of Aliens and Foreign Immigrant Affairs (BAFIA), established in the early 1980s.

The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan resulted in the influx of 2.6 million Afghans to Iran. The size of the influx, combined with the Iranian government’s lack of preparation, and post-Islamic revolutionary desire by Iranians to aid Muslim refugees fleeing communist-occupied Afghanistan, resulted in Afghans settling primarily in eastern Iran’s rural and urban areas. Some 5–10% of Afghans were accommodated in camps.³⁸ Iran’s early refugee policy towards Afghans was ‘open door’, and refugee

³⁵ US Committee for Refugees, *World Refugee Survey 2004 Country Report*

³⁶ Rajaei, p. 47

³⁷ US Committee for Refugees, *World Refugee Survey 2004 Country Report*

³⁸ Rajaei, p. 50

status was granted to incoming Afghans on a *prima facie* basis.³⁹ From 1979–92, most Afghans entering Iran were issued with “blue cards” which indicated their status as involuntary migrants or *mohajerin*. Blue card holders were granted indefinite permission to stay in Iran legally. Until 1995, blue card holders had access to subsidised health care and food, and free primary and secondary education, but were barred from owning their own businesses or working as street vendors, and their employment was limited to low-wage, manual labour.⁴⁰

As a result of domestic economic and social concerns in the 1990s, refugee policy shifted to emphasise prevention of illegal entry and repatriation of Afghan refugees.⁴¹ Since the 1990s, Iran has:

- made repeated efforts (often in collaboration with UNHCR) to document and register Afghans in Iran in preparation for repatriation;
- implemented several deportation campaigns;
- incrementally reduced services to Afghans (particularly education and medical); and
- legislated employment restrictions (most notably Article 48 in 2000).

However, these policies did not have a significant impact on the number of Afghans in Iran, which in 2001 remained at 2.1 million.

Iran’s first repatriation programme for Afghans was formalised in late 1992 with the creation of a Tripartite Commission comprising Afghanistan, Iran and UNHCR. In 1993, the Iranian government issued over 500,000 temporary registration cards to undocumented and newly arrived Afghans. During 1993, about 600,000 Afghans returned to Afghanistan – over 300,000 of them under the repatriation program.⁴² The government extended the issuing of cards several times, but eventually declared them invalid in 1996. In 1995 the government issued *Laissez-Passer* documents for one-way travel out of Iran either for repatriation or for resettlement. During the period of the mid 1990s, as a result of economic downturn and domestic political pressure, Iran began to withdraw refugees’ health and education subsidies. (In 1994, expenditure on two million Afghans was estimated by the Iranian government to be as high as \$US10 million per day for subsidised education, health services, transport, fuel and basic goods.) As the UNHCR had limited its assistance to refugees in camps since 1985, 95% of Afghans living throughout Iran in rural and urban areas were largely ineligible for any kind of assistance.⁴³

In 1995, the government announced that all Afghan refugees must leave Iran, but later in the year it sealed its border to Taliban-ruled Afghanistan, effectively ending repatriation efforts. In 1998, the Iranian government and UNHCR resumed their joint repatriation program. The Iranian authorities engaged in a parallel campaign of deporting up to 190,000 undocumented Afghans in 1998–99.⁴⁴ During this time, Iran increasingly confined refugees to designated residential areas and enclosed camps. The Iranian authorities withdrew government subsidies for health and education for Afghan refugees residing outside refugee camps, partly as an incentive for Afghans

³⁹ UNHCR in Turton and Marsden, p. 15

⁴⁰ Rajaei, p. 56–57

⁴¹ Rajaei, p. 62

⁴² Turton and Marsden, p. 12

⁴³ Rajaei, p. 59

⁴⁴ US Committee for Refugees in Turton and Marsden, p. 15

to move into camps. The camp populations fluctuated much more in 1999 than in previous years, with as many as 98,000 living in camps during the year.

In 1999, UNHCR and the Iranian authorities tried unsuccessfully to negotiate a new repatriation agreement. UNHCR sought to avoid a programme of “voluntary” repatriation accompanied by a parallel programme of forced repatriation. UNHCR’s goal was to institute a refugee-screening programme jointly with the government that would assess individual claims and provide protection to those recognised as refugees, and avoid deportations and confinement of Afghans within camps. The new agreement was not signed but the government appeared to back down on its previous position that refugees should be confined to camps – allowing self-sufficient refugees to remain in designated areas. UNHCR’s concern about the proper registration of Afghan refugees was eventually achieved with the BAFIA registration of all foreigners in 2001.

In April 2000, the Parliament passed a law under Article 48 of the third five-year development plan requiring all foreigners not in possession of a work permit to leave Iran by March 2001. Exceptions were made for those whose lives would be threatened, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs was given responsibility of determining the presence or absence of a threat to life. The legislation also established the Foreign Nationals Executive Co-ordination Council (FNECC) to be chaired by the Ministry of the Interior, to deal with international relations and the “arrival, settlement, deportation, expulsion, training, employment, health, and medical treatment” of foreigners. Iranian authorities conduct refugee status determination on an individual basis through the FNECC, but do not make this information public.⁴⁵ On 22 June 2001, the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs made employers of foreign illegal workers subject to heavy fines and imprisonment.⁴⁶ Many small businesses that employed Afghans were shut down, and the government revoked the work permits of some Afghans. Afghans with residence cards were permitted to work in sixteen categories of mainly manual work.

In 2000, BAFIA conducted a major exercise in registration of all foreigners. BAFIA issued certificates to documented foreigners that superseded all previously issued documents, which became null and void. Prior to the 2001 registration, Afghan had received a range of statuses, most without the rights and benefits normally accorded to refugees under the UN Refugee Convention. Most were denied the right to move freely within the country and faced other restrictions in employment, education, documentation and foreign travel. UNHCR agreed to participate with the Iranian government in a joint repatriation programme in 2000. Under this program, Afghans in Iran, regardless of their status or time of arrival, were invited to come forward either to benefit from material assistance to repatriate voluntarily, or to present their claims for the need for protection from return. Observers noted problems with the government’s screening criteria, which tended to deter or exclude uneducated applicants from agricultural backgrounds whose claims of persecution were based on religion (being Shia) or ethnicity (as Hazaras). Under the joint program, those Afghan recognised as requiring protection were granted three-month temporary residence permits (renewable four times), and were required to reside in the province where the permits were issued, until the situation was conducive for their return. Separate from the refugee-screening procedure, BAFIA and UNHCR established a voluntary repatriation program.

⁴⁵ US Committee for Refugees, *World Refugee Survey 2004 Country Report*

⁴⁶ Turton and Marsden, p. 31

In late 2001, the US military campaign in Afghanistan and subsequent fall of the Taliban saw Iran resolve to repatriate Afghans and prevent the entry of other Afghans by closing the border with Afghanistan. Iranian officials established two camps on the Afghan side of the border in the southwestern province of Nimroz. In January 2002, after installation of the internationally supported interim authority in Kabul, UNHCR shifted its programme in Iran to facilitate Afghan repatriation. The Tripartite Repatriation Agreement signed in April 2002 Agreement planned for the return of 400,000 refugees from Iran during the first year of operation, starting on 6 April 2002. It was estimated that the same number would return in 2003 and 2004.⁴⁷

In 2003, under Article 138 of the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran, eleven articles were approved by Member Ministers of the Executive Co-ordination Council for Foreign Nationals. These eleven articles were titled “Regulations on accelerating repatriation of Afghan nationals”. Article 3 concerned the prevention of unauthorised employment of Afghan nationals by taking legal action against Iranian employers who employed Afghan nationals without work permits. Article 4 prohibited Afghan nationals, except for those who entered the country holding a valid passport and visa and were issued with a residence permit, from the following facilities: all administrative services; activities in all parties and political, social and cultural groups of Afghan displaced persons; opening of new accounts in banks and interest-free loan associations and financial and credit institutions; and issuance and extension of any kind of insurance policy and provision of insurance services. Article 5 stated that the Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting Organisation (IRIB) would promote and encourage Afghan nationals to return to Afghanistan, and would warn Iranian citizens about illegally employing or settling Afghan nationals. Article 8 stated that renting accommodation to Afghan nationals, except for those who have entered the country with a valid passport and visa and who have been issued with a residence permit, was prohibited except with the permission of the provincial BAFIA offices.

In 2003, the government of Iran signed a revised Tripartite Agreement with the government of Afghanistan and UNHCR to facilitate the voluntary return of Afghans by March 2005. From 1 March 2002 to 31 October 2004, 770,643 Afghans returned from Iran with the voluntary repatriation operation.⁴⁸

2.4 Profiles of Afghan neighborhoods in Tehran

In November 2004, it was estimated that a total of 266,852 documented Afghans lived in Tehran, including 39,796 single people and 50,959 families/households. Afghan households in Tehran headed by women numbered 1,871.⁴⁹ During the social mapping phase of the project, it was noted that Afghans in Tehran were clustered in the areas of Shahr-e Rey, Kan, and Nematabad, and these locations were selected as field sites.

Shahr-e Rey/Bagharabad

Shahr-e Rey (of which Bagharabad is a sub-district) is located approximately 15 km to the southeast of Tehran city. Tehran is divided into 22 districts, and District 20 (*Mantqeh Bist*) is one of the most populous districts in Tehran. The city of Shahr-e Rey is at the centre of District 20, located between Pak Dasht, Varamin, and Ghiam

⁴⁷ UNHCR in Turton and Marsden, p. 19

⁴⁸ UNHCR Kabul in Stigter, 2005a, p. 19

⁴⁹ Amayesh and Repatriation databases

Dasht. Shahr-e Rey has a population of around one million including approximately 160,000 non-nationals: 10,000 Iraqis and 150,000 Afghans working mainly as labourers, farmers, tailors and stonemasons.⁵⁰ Both income levels and the cost of rent in District 20 are lower than in other districts, and as a result, the area can be characterised as migrant-receiving, including migrants from other parts of Iran such as Turks, Kurds, Lor and Fars ethnicities. Shahr-e Rey is home to the Shia Muslim shrine of Shah Abdol Azim which is visited by more than one million pilgrims every year.

Kan

Kan is located approximately 25 km northwest of Tehran city. There are approximately 700 Afghan households in Kan, with the majority Tajik Sunni. Most Afghan residents are engaged in the construction sector, gardening and streetside shoe mending. Thirty percent of Afghans in Kan have been resident there for over ten years. There is one Afghan school and one government health clinic, as well as several private health clinics. Tajik Sunni residents of Kan use clergy to deal with problems at the neighborhood level, whereas Shia Afghan residents have an elected committee whose eight representatives work to help resolve neighborhood-level problems.

Nematabad

Nematabad is located approximately 10 km south of Tehran city. There are 600–800 Afghan households in Nematabad which includes the areas of Abdulabad, Zamzam, Jalili, Shariati T-intersection and Vasfnard. Nematabad is an industrial area, with mainly metal-turning workshops (lathe), fabric and tailoring. Around 35% of Afghans living in Nematabad are employed in the carpentry industry. There are about ten large tailor workshops in Nematabad with each employing as many as twenty people, as well as several smaller workshops. Around 25% of Afghan residents in Nematabad work in the tailoring industry. There are several shoemaking production workshops which employ about 10% of Afghans. A further 10% are employed as simple labourers and builders, and the rest work as hawkers or metal workers. Most Iranians in Nematabad work as clothes and fabric sellers, and in the metal lathe industry.

In terms of ethnicity, 60% of Afghans in Nematabad are Hazara, 35% are Tajik, and the remainder are Kizilbash, Seyed, Pashtun and Uzbek. Shia residents are in the majority (65%) and 35% are Sunni. There are four Afghan community schools in Nematabad with 1,200 students enrolled. Eight *hosseinieh* or meeting places are used by Afghans for religious commemorative ceremonies during the time of *Moharram*. Afghan residents in Nematabad have established and maintained a community fund that residents contribute to, and may borrow from in times of need. Afghan residents usually seek dispute resolution from community elders, and Iranian police are rarely requested to intervene.

2.5 Profiles of Afghan household respondents in Tehran

- Ethnicity⁵¹: Hazara 48%, Seyed 23.9%, Tajik 18%, Kizilbash 6%
- Religion: Shia 80%, Sunni 20%
- Age, sex, marital status of respondents:

⁵⁰ *HamShahri* (newspaper), 25 January 2005

⁵¹ This data is drawn from respondents' own categorisation of their *qomiat*, translated as "ethnicity".

- Mean age: 40.3 years
- Male: 42 (84%)
- Female: 8 (16%)
- 78.3% currently had a spouse
- 19.6% were widowed
- Province of origin in Afghanistan:
 - Kabul: 57.1%
 - Mazar-i-Sharif: 12.2%
 - Herat: 10.2%
 - Balkh: 4.1%
 - Uruzgan: 4.1%
 - Jowzjan: 4.1%
 - Wardak: 2%
 - Bamyán: 2%
- Situation of work in Afghanistan before leaving:
 - working: 56%
 - student: 22%
 - unemployed: 10%
- Type of work in Afghanistan before leaving:
 - agriculture: 22.2%
 - shopkeepers: 14.8%
 - tailors: 14.8%
 - labourers: 11.1%
 - blanket weavers: 11.1%
 - carpenters: 7.4%
 - garage proprietor/kebab cook/confectioner/basic mechanic: 3.7%
- Assets in Afghanistan:
 - 50% (25 respondents) claimed they had owned land in Afghanistan and ten respondents claimed they retained access to that land
 - 30% (15 respondents) said that they owned their own house
 - 48% (24 respondents) said they had lived with their parents and did not specify whether the house was rented or owned
 - 8 respondents said that they had retained access to that house
- Route to Iran: 30% of respondents entered Iran via Pakistan, 60% of those spent less than one week in Pakistan.
- Province of arrival in Iran:
 - Mashhad: 50%
 - Zahedan: 18%
 - Tehran: 16%

46% of respondents stayed less than one week in first place of arrival. 73.2% made secondary movement to Tehran, and 7.3% to Kerman.
- Current neighborhood of residence: 74% of respondents mentioned that relatives or acquaintances had been living in their current neighborhood before they relocated to that neighborhood.
- Household size, Tehran: mean average 5.4 people, ranged from 2–12 people
- Family size: mean average of children (not necessarily currently living in respondents' Tehran household) was 3.6 children, family size ranged from 0–8 children.

3. Afghan households in Tehran

The data in this section is drawn mainly from an open-ended questionnaire (80 questions) targeting Afghan households that had been resident in Iran for more than eight years. Interviews with 50 Afghan households were undertaken in four neighborhoods in Tehran. The data in Part 3 focuses on the migration experience of Afghan labour migrants who are both single and transitory, and usually live in their place of work, or share rooms with friends, co-workers or family (mainly brothers, cousins or uncles).

3.1 Livelihood strategies

Housing

Among Afghan respondents in Tehran, only two out of 50 respondents claimed that they owned their own house, while 48 were renting.⁵² Of these, 41 paid both monthly rental and bond (*rahn*), and six paid only *rahn*. The mean average for *rahn* was 2.4 million *Tooman* (\$US2,700) with the lowest being 300,000 (\$US335) and the highest being 5.5 million (\$US6,175). The mean average monthly rental was 36,000 *Tooman* per month (\$US40) with the lowest being 4,000 (\$US4.50) and the highest being 100,000 (\$US112). Afghan houses in Tehran had the following facilities:

- municipal water and electricity: 100%
- municipal gas: 84%
- gas cylinder: 16%
- telephone: 68%

Around 16 of respondents lived in a one-bedroom house, while 19 lived in a two-bedroom house. The relative comfort of a house depended on the amount of *rahn* and rent that the tenant could afford. One widow described her house in Tehran as a “shelter” rather than a house. It comprised one bedroom, a space for cooking, and a space for bathing (*tashnab*). Most households comprised two generations only. A few households comprised two nuclear families co-renting a house. Several households with very low incomes shared facilities such as kitchen and bathroom, or they shared houses. For example, one family sublet a room to a relative for 30,000 *Tooman* per month. Some families had rented fairly dilapidated houses and undertaken repairs themselves before moving in.

In contrast, respondents listed the facilities in their housing in Afghanistan as follows:

- electricity: 49%
- telephone: 0%
- municipal water: 10.2%
- wood only for fuel: 69.4%
- wood and kerosene: 12.2%

⁵² It was not confirmed whether the two houses owned by Afghans in Tehran were subject to the official deed of ownership transaction known as *sanad* which is registered in the Governmental Property Registration Office, or the unofficial transaction between buyer and seller known as *gholnamei*. We were informed anecdotally that some Afghans had negotiated with Iranian acquaintances to purchase houses on their behalf, and an incident had occurred where an Iranian acquaintance had subsequently made additional substantial claims when the house had been resold.

Thirty percent or 15 respondents claimed that they owned their own house in Afghanistan, and 48% or 24 respondents said they had lived with their parents without specifying whether that house was owned or rented. Few respondents living in Kabul had owned their own house; most had rented houses with the following facilities:

- electricity
- water drawn from a well
- wood (sometimes kerosene) for household fuel for heating and cooking

Most respondents from rural areas in Afghanistan had owned their own houses, and these houses had no electricity, relied on either well water, spring-fed water or river water, and wood and/or animal droppings for fuel, and had a *tashnab* rather than a bathroom. Several respondents who had worked as farm employees had received accommodation as in-kind income (*khane dar bar-a bar-e kar*).

Work and education

Most respondents were illiterate. This is not surprising as the mean average age of respondents (40.3 years), together with the fact that most respondents had arrived in Iran during the Soviet occupation (16–25 years ago), meant that many respondents would have experienced restricted access to schooling when they were children. Around 42% of respondents described themselves as *bisavad* or illiterate, 26% had primary school education, 12% had lower secondary education, 4% had upper secondary education, 6% had a high school diploma, 4% had university education, and 6% had theological school training.

Respondents described their current work situation in Tehran as follows:

- working: 84%
- incapable of working due to age or disability: 8%
- unemployed : 2%

Respondents listed their current occupations as:

- tailor: 23.3%⁵³
- builder's labourer: 20.9
- machine embroiderer: 11.6%
- shoe-mender: 7%
- builder/bricklayer: 7%
- hawker: 4.7%
- stonemason: 4.7%
- pistachio shelling, pistachio distributor to shellers, bead-sewer, security guard, school janitor, salt seller, dried bread buyer/seller: 2.3%

Of those respondents who had worked in Afghanistan, the following five occupations were listed:

- agriculture: 22.2%
- shopkeepers: 14.8%

⁵³ It is probable that the high proportion of Hazara and Seyed tailors interviewed reflects the social network of one of the interviewers whose husband is a professional tailor.

- tailors: 14.8%
- labourers: 11.1%
- blanket weavers: 11.1%
- carpenters : 7.4%

While agriculture and shopkeeping were the most predominant occupations in Afghanistan, among respondents in Tehran, they were minor occupations in the locations where interviews were conducted. Respondents listed their first job in Iran as:

- builder's labourer: 22.9%
- tailor: 12.5%
- builder: 10.4%
- stonemason: 8.3%
- agriculture: 8.3%

Clearly, labouring work is most common as the first job upon arrival in Iran, and as the current source of employment. Most respondents had worked in several occupations, but on average they remained in each job for over five years. The mean average duration of the first job was 6.3 years, second job 6.5 years, and third job 4.7 years. Other skills listed by respondents included: tailoring, agriculture, building, stonemason, shoe mending, gardening, confectioner, welding, photography, basic mechanics, carpet weaving, electrician, industrial painting, carpentry, animal husbandry, nursing, chainmaking and poultry manufacturing.

Income and expenditure

The following occupations earned the following average daily rate (*Tooman*) in Tehran:

- stonemason/stonecutter: 7,000–10,000 (\$US7.80–11.00)
- machine embroiderer: 6,000–12,000 (\$US6.60–13.00)
- tailor: 5,000–10,000 (\$US5.60–11.00)
- factory worker: 5,000–10,000 \$US5.60–11.00)
- builder/bricklayer: 5,000–8000 (\$US5.60–9.00)
- security guard: 4,000 (\$US4.50)
- builder's labourer: 3,000–8,000 (\$US3.30–9.00)
- welding: 3,000–5,000 (\$US3.50–5.60)
- agricultural worker: 3,000 (\$US3.30)
- vehicle oil changer: 2,500 (\$US2.80)
- salt seller: 2,000–3000 (\$US2.20–3.30)
- shoe mender: 1,500–2,000 (\$US1.70–2.20)
- hawker: 1,000–8,000 (\$US1.10–9.00)
- pistachio shelling: 500 (\$US0.55)⁵⁴

Respondents were asked to specify their monthly expenses (including rent and bills for utilities like water, gas, electricity and phone). Respondents' households spent

⁵⁴ Based on 50 *Tooman* per kilo of pistachios, averaging two kilos per hour.

on average 169,000 *Tooman* (\$US190) per month with the lowest being 35,000 (\$US39) and the highest being 500,000 (\$US560).

Around 14% or 7 respondents disclosed that they had received other sources of financial and non-financial income. One person received money from *khomes*; one person received a war widow pension from an Iranian Martyr Foundation, and three respondents had received food or in-kind assistance from their employer. Respondents were asked to list urgent needs that they or their Afghan relatives had experienced since living in Iran. Around 80% of respondents disclosed that they had faced urgent needs including:

- sickness: 37.5%
- housing bond or *rahn*: 27.5%
- marriage costs: 12.5%⁵⁵
- and everyday or subsistence needs: 12.5%

Respondents mentioned that they had resolved this urgent need by the following means: loaned money from immediate family or relatives (48.7%) and loaned money from non-relatives, i.e. friends or acquaintances (28.2%). Two respondents (5.1%) had received assistance from UNHCR.⁵⁶

Families with extremely low expenditure and low *rahn*/rent were usually female-headed households with dependent children, who had negligible networks (horizontal or vertical) to draw on for assistance. Often these household economies had become further weakened by accident or illness that had required (expensive) medical treatment. Some families relied on *zakat* for their survival. Seven households were headed by widows and two households were headed by widowers. Widow-headed households were considerably poorer than other households, with monthly expenditure on average 33% less than other households. Mean monthly expenditure by widows totalled 120,000 *Tooman* compared with 180,000 *Tooman* by other households.⁵⁷ Widows expended 8% more for *rahn* with the mean average being 2.6 million compared with 2.4 million for others, and their mean rent was 45% less than other households, paying 21,000 monthly compared with 38,000 for other households.

Of the seven widows interviewed, two had regular contact with their husband's family, two had little contact, and two had no contact. Some widows had maintained contact with their husband's family by virtue of the fact that the widow and her husband had been cousins, and so her husband's father was her own uncle. Or this connection occurred in the second generation in the marriage of cousins, for

⁵⁵ The cost of marriage is substantial to an Afghan man in Afghanistan and Iran. In Iran, the costs include: wedding ceremony and reception including wedding clothes; *rahn* for separate rented houses for bride and groom; household items such as carpets, refrigerator, gas stove, and television; gold for the bride; and cash money to the parents of the bride. The total cost of getting married may be as high as 12 million *Tooman* for Afghans in Iran, and much higher depending on capacity.

⁵⁶ The *UNHCR Global Report 2003: Islamic Republic of Iran* stated that UNHCR's main objectives regarding Afghans were to facilitate voluntary repatriation of Afghanistan refugees (in the context of the Assisted Joint Program agreed by UNCHR and the governments of Iran and Afghanistan) and to deliver programs to vulnerable target groups including women and girls, mainly in *mehmanshahr* but including some other locations, including literacy classes, reproductive health training, food assistance and support to refugee school children. <http://www.unhcr.ch/cgi-in/texis/vtx/home/openssl.pdf?tbl=MEDIA&id=40c6d7500&page=home> accessed 2 May 2005

⁵⁷ The lowest expenditure mentioned for widows was 35,000 monthly compared with 60,000 for other households, and the highest expenditure for widows was 300,000 monthly compared with 500,000 monthly.

example: “I have no relation with my [deceased] husband’s family except via my husband’s sister because her son married to my daughter.” None of the seven widows had received any financial assistance from their husband’s family. One widow aged 25 was requested by her in-laws to relinquish her two children aged 8 and 6 upon the death of her husband. When she refused, they pressured her to sign an official letter declaring that she would not seek financial assistance from them in the future. This widow received *zakat* and lived on a little more than 1,000 *Tooman* per day:

We are spending as much as we have. When we don’t have anything we don’t spend anything. If we can’t pay our rent [20,000 *Tooman* monthly] the owner deducts this amount from our *rahn*...when my husband died after an accident, his family came here and said: ‘Give your children to us, otherwise we will not help you.’ I did not accept. Then the whole family of my husband gathered together and requested my signature on a letter that we both signed. The letter stated that I would not give my children, and would never ask for help from my husband’s family. I have not had any news from my husband’s family since that time. They have returned to Afghanistan.

Some widows whose daughters had subsequently married stated that their daughter’s husband provided financial assistance to the family, for example: “My son-in-law buys clothes for us, or if we have difficulty, he assists us pay debts, and the reverse, I help my daughter with her housework.”

Some widows were able to utilise horizontal networks to live more comfortably. For example, one 65-year-old widow whose 85-year-old husband (previously a baker and cook) had recently died lived with her 48-year-old widowed daughter and four grandsons, one of whom worked as a tailor. Her widowed daughter received a pension from the Iranian Martyr Foundation (her husband had died in military service to the Iranian government, possibly during the Iran–Iraq war of 1980–88). The elderly widow had four other sons who helped her financially: one worked as a water pipe installer in another province, one worked as a tailor in Tehran, another worked as a tailor in Kabul, and a fourth son who had worked as a stone cutter in Tehran and now lived in the Netherlands. This widow planned to return to Afghanistan in 2005 to live with her son in Kabul.

Households with high monthly expenditure and substantial *rahn* usually had at least one family member employed in a stable occupation, and utilised horizontal (such as family and relatives) and sometimes vertical (such as Iranian employers, shopkeepers) networks of assistance. For example, one respondent, a 33-year-old Tajik Sunni from Kabul, had worked as a shopkeeper in his father’s grocery shop in Kabul. In Tehran he had worked as a shoe repairer and a street cleaner, and for the last four years as a housecleaner. His current work attracted a regular clientele and he worked 8am–11pm for 15,000 *Tooman* daily, or approximately 360,000 monthly. He estimated his monthly expenditure for himself, his wife and five dependent children to be 250,000 *Tooman*. He had no monthly rental expenses but had paid an initial amount of 5 million *Tooman* for *rahn*. This respondent claimed that his situation had improved since living in Iran as he had left Afghanistan with debt, and had been able to accumulate savings in Iran. He had occasionally faced financial difficulty in Iran, and had borrowed money from an acquaintance to pay for the medical treatment of his wife. An Iranian employer whose house he cleaned loaned money to this respondent whenever requested, and a local Iranian shopkeeper had loaned him amounts of money from 50,000–100,000 *Tooman* when needed. In turn, the respondent had loaned his brother-in-law money for *rahn*, and he also remitted money regularly to

his maternal aunt and sister in Afghanistan via an Afghan gold seller, and via *hawala*. He claimed that he sent 60,000 *Tooman* monthly to his sister (his only sibling) who had returned to Afghanistan from Iran, and whose husband had died. He also remitted 80,000 *Tooman* monthly to his mother's sister in Afghanistan, a widow whose sole child had been killed while in national service.

3.2 Afghan perceptions of livelihoods in Iran and Afghanistan

Around 36% of respondents claimed that their situation had worsened in Iran, 34% said their situation had improved in Iran, and 30% said their situation had remained the same. While “economic situation” was the term of reference used, many respondents chose to assess their comparative situation in terms of social factors. It should be noted that many respondents assessed that their situation in Iran had worsened, and then qualified this assessment based on “incidental” factors such as car accident, ill health, death of a spouse, or natural increase in family size and dependents.

Situation in Iran comparatively worse

Around 36% of respondents claimed that their situation had worsened in Iran. Several respondents referred to the fact that their social situation had declined in Iran. For example, one respondent, a 50-year-old Seyed widow who still owned (currently leased out) a house, livestock and land in Afghanistan explained: “our situation in terms of welfare has improved [three of six children educated to the level of high school diploma] but we have lost important things such as identity, and they [Iranians] look at us as foreigners and we have no future.” Many respondents referred to the restricted employment field (manual occupations) for Afghans in Tehran. One respondent had left Afghanistan in 1990 aged 17 and had completed nine years of schooling. His father and two brothers were carpenters, and the family owned their own house as well as a grocery shop, workshop and land. They had sold their house, but currently owned the other assets. In Tehran this respondent had worked as a tailor for six months and as a stonemason for thirteen years. He explained: “In Afghanistan, our life was better because it was our country, the jobs were our jobs, but in Iran we cannot work in suitable jobs because of government regulations.” A 38-year-old Hazara man working as a machine embroider explained that in Afghanistan his father had owned 66 *jeribs* of land, two houses and a kelim-weaving workshop. He said: “Afghanistan was better for us because we could continue our education and make something of ourselves. But here, we have wasted our lives. We haven't produced anything. Our lives have been restricted here. The cost of living is high and we have only experienced misfortune.” A Kizilbash man from Kabul with twelve years of education who worked as a tailor in Tehran and employed others said: “There is no difference, we have a subsistence life here and we had a subsistence life there. In Afghanistan we ate potato and here we eat potato.⁵⁸ Here, expenses are high and income is low, and the situation in Afghanistan was also the same. But we could improve our situation in Afghanistan by continuing our education.”

The reference to education in the last sentence refers to the fact that Afghans are legally restricted to labouring occupations in Iran, whereas in Afghanistan, higher education enables entry into higher status professional occupations. Government

⁵⁸ In Iran, rice costs 500–1,300 *Tooman* per kilo depending on the quality, compared to 150 *Tooman* per kilo for potatoes.

occupations attract a certain social status, and although government salaries are very low, they are reliable. An Iranian expression in Farsi with which many Afghans in Iran would be familiar likens government wages to a spring: the water is an eternal trickle (literally narrow water or *ab-e barik*). Whereas private sector wages are likened to a flood – the water is abundant but dries up as suddenly as it appears (literally floodwater or *ab-e sayl*). Of those 56% of respondents who were working in Afghanistan prior to coming to Iran, only 7.1% had worked in the government sector, with the same number working in the private sector, 50% working independently, and 21.4% employers themselves. One respondent suggested that his prospects had been as limited in Afghanistan as they were currently in Iran. This 30-year-old Hazara man who had no schooling explained: “Our situation has not changed very much because we are “labourers” here and were “labourers” there, but here we have a comfortable life because of welfare facilities. But in terms of property and capital the situation is the same: we had none there and we have none here.”

Some respondents defined their economic situation in terms of their current level of debt and assets. A widow respondent explained that her husband, a taxi driver in Kabul, had been killed (“martyred”) in Afghanistan in 1991. The family had owned their own house in Kabul, but had been evicted by the regime after her husband’s death. In 1996 she migrated to Iran with her three children then aged 3, 5 and 6. In Tehran, she had worked as a tailor, but was not working at the time of the interview. This family expended 40,000 *Tooman* per month and paid 10,000 per month in rent, and had borrowed 1.8 million *Tooman* for *rahn* from her mother’s brother. She said: “Our situation has worsened in Iran, I just have this carpet (gestures to carpet), and I have a 1 million *Tooman* debt, but in Afghanistan we had a house, we had a good life and my husband was alive.”

Another widow was resolute in the fact that her situation had deteriorated in the period that she had been living in Iran as a direct consequence of a war injury previously sustained in Afghanistan. This respondent had fled to Iran with her husband and six children aged 1–14 in 1998, after her accountant husband was beaten by the Taliban: “The Taliban beat my husband because he was Shia, and his back became broken. His back did not improve. Because I was afraid that he might be killed, we came to Iran in 1998. We worked together and tried to save money for medical treatment. Finally, he died from his injury.” Several of the respondent’s children had completed three or four years of education in Afghanistan, but had been unable to continue schooling in Iran. When her husband had been sick, the respondent herself had been preoccupied, and the three middle children had been forced to work on the street as hawkers. This respondent expressed profound regret at the fact that she had been unable to educate her children. The family had owned a three-room house in Kabul which they had subsequently sold, and the widow described her tenant status in Tehran as “homeless”.

Situation in Iran comparable

Around 30% of respondents said their situation had remained the same in Iran as it had been in Afghanistan. Some respondents made the point that their current situation was better than the situation that they had fled during the time of war in Afghanistan, but similar to their situation prior to the war in Afghanistan. Many commented that some aspects had improved and other aspects had worsened, and therefore on balance their situation had not changed. For example, a Seyed man who arrived to Iran in 1986 aged 13 with seven years of schooling had come from a farming family that had employed shepherds. In Iran he had worked as a farmer for

three years, a crystal maker for two years, a plastics factory worker for two years, an embroiderer for eight years, and currently worked as a tailor. He explained: “It cannot be said that it has got better or worse. In Afghanistan we did not work, we were comfortable and we employed shepherds. Initially in Iran the situation was very bad for us, but it has improved and currently we have employees and our life is comfortable.”

Some respondents claimed that they were living relatively comfortably in Tehran, and had also lived comfortably in Kabul, so they judged their situation to be unchanged. One such respondent had vast transnational networks to draw on overseas. This respondent had previously lived in Kabul with his father and brothers whose occupations included government civil servant, teacher and grocery store proprietor. The family had owned their own house as well as a shop, workshop and car. The house was destroyed in a missile attack, and the family subsequently sold the other assets before leaving Kabul for Iran in 1980. Aged five on arrival, the respondent had then completed eight years of education in Tehran, and had worked as a motorcycle mechanic, a tailor and an embroiderer. This man lived with his wife, infant son, and mother in Tehran. He had a brother living in Sweden, a sister and brother living in Norway, and uncles in Canada and Germany. He had contact with them via telephone, email and internet chatting, and his siblings in Norway often remitted money to him. In turn, he had remitted money via *hawala* to cousins and uncles remaining in Afghanistan. “Our situation has not changed very much because we had a house, car, workshop and shop in Afghanistan. In Iran we have a house and car but not a shop. In addition, my father died here.”

Some respondents claimed that although the state of war did not exist in Iran as it had done in Afghanistan, the restricted employment opportunities and high cost of living in Tehran meant that on balance, their life was equally difficult. One such respondent with three years of education had worked as a motor mechanic in Kabul, where he had lived in a large house co-owned by his father and father’s brother (who currently occupied the house). The respondent came to Iran with his entire family in 1996. In Tehran, he lived in a household of eleven including his wife, son, parents, three sisters, brother-in-law, sister’s son and five others. The family expended 200,000 *Tooman* per month on living expenses, plus 35,000 per month on rent. Two siblings worked in a plastic factory, the respondent worked as a hawker, and his mother earned money cutting block sugar. This respondent explained, “The situation has not changed. Here we have problems paying for *rahn* and electricity and water, and finding a job. In Afghanistan there was war and the situation was not good.”

Situation in Iran comparatively better

Thirty-four percent said their situation had improved in Iran. Of the 56.5% of respondents who had been working in Afghanistan prior to arriving in Iran, 14.3% had been working in a family enterprise (usually agriculture) without wages. Several respondents who had no access to paid work in their region of origin in Afghanistan clearly differentiated between Afghanistan and Iran in terms of income-earning potential and economic independence. This was particularly the case for men in rural areas. Sons of farmers usually worked without wages on their father’s land which was often share-farmed with their father’s brother(s). A Seyed man with eleven years of schooling in Afghanistan had previously worked his father’s land (80 *jeribs*) without salary. He came to Iran in 1982 at the age of 17, and had worked as a builder’s labourer for seven years, as a builder for two years, and as a worker in a

plastics factory for five years. He had educated his five children to secondary school in Tehran, and the eldest two boys had trained as tailors. He explained: “Our situation is better in Iran because I am independent and by the income I can earn, I have a comfortable life.” Other respondents (retrospectively) appreciated the freedom of their previous rural life, and their capacity to live a low consumption lifestyle, and regretted the constant demands of consumption and expenditure integral to urban life, especially rent. One such respondent came from a family of farmers in the rural area of Bamyan in Afghanistan where he had lived in his father’s own house. In Iran, his family size had increased from three to ten, and he had worked as a builder’s labourer for twenty years to support a household of nine, including seven dependent children. He spent 57,000 monthly for rent and 150,000 for monthly living expenses. He explained: “We had a good situation in Afghanistan because we practised agriculture, but here if one day we don’t rise early, the landlord will knock on the door and ask for rent.”

Other respondents defined their situation in terms of access to facilities, especially education. One respondent aged 60 had completed elementary education in Kabul where he had worked as a cook. His family had not owned their own house, but owned three to four *jeribs* of land (which were currently in the hands of the respondent’s brother). In Tehran, the respondent with his wife had raised seven children. Among the four eldest ones, two had completed their high school diploma or twelve years of education, and two had completed eight years. His second-eldest daughter was now working as a teacher in Kabul. “The situation has not changed because in Afghanistan we earned 3,000 monthly and our situation was good. Now we are working very hard but we spend all of our money. [But] in terms of facilities, Iran is better than Afghanistan.” Overall, the children of Afghan respondents born in Iran had completed substantially higher education than their parents. However, some families (often with non-literate, or barely literate, parents) had not managed or afforded to educate their children in Iran, and some children had lower education than their parents.

3.3 Afghan social networks

Relations with Iranians

Around 40% of respondents claimed that they visited Iranians, with 27.8% visiting on annual occasions such as Persian New Year or *Eid*, and 44.4% visiting once per month. Sixty-two percent of respondents said that they had received some form of assistance from Iranians. The type of assistance received from Iranians included:

- helping in religious and other ceremonies: 25%
- finding work: 21.9%
- financial: 21.9%
- visiting sick people: 12.5%
- providing rice and/or clothes: 9.4%

Of those 68% of Afghan respondents who said they had helped Iranians, the form of assistance given included:

- free work, usually tailoring: 26.5%
- loaning money: 20.6%
- work matters: 20.6%

- taking Iranians to hospital when ill: 11.8%
- helping with ceremonies: 11.8%

The most common form of assistance was assistance at the time of ceremonies where large numbers of guests required hosts to borrow crockery, cooking dishes and gas cylinders. Some Afghans who had no refrigerators were given ice by their neighbours who had freezer facilities. Sometimes Iranian neighbours had loaned their sitting rooms to Afghans to hold such ceremonies. Several respondents also mentioned that their Iranian neighbours had either loaned cars without cost, or where a neighbour used his car as a taxi, provided taxi services at a discounted rate. Occasionally Iranian neighbours had advocated on their Afghan neighbours' behalf to negotiate the lowering of rental with an Iranian landlord. One respondent mentioned that his Iranian employer had loaned him money to pay for *rahn* (1.7 million), indicating that vertical networks of assistance could be utilised. Another respondent, a Kizilbash professional tailor who employed other tailors, disclosed that one of his Iranian co-workers had taken out a bank loan on behalf of the respondent in order that he could purchase a new sewing machine.⁵⁹ Tailors and machine embroiderers often mentioned that they provided free or discounted tailoring services to their Iranian neighbours. Another respondent mentioned that he had purchased a car and a mobile phone through an Iranian friend, and the ownership documents for both car and phone were (necessarily) in the name of this friend. A final example is provided by the case of a 43-year-old Tajik shoe repairer. This man had previously worked as a labourer, but had sustained injuries after a car accident and was reduced to light work. The respondent had borrowed 250,000 *Tooman* from an Iranian friend, a proprietor of a public bath (*hamam-e umumi*), who permitted the respondent to solicit his shoe repair trade in a vacant space in his public bath facility at no cost.

Relations with Afghan relatives and acquaintances in Iran

Ninety-eight percent of respondents had Afghan relatives or acquaintances (usually people they had known in their place of origin in Afghanistan) living in Iran. Some respondents made the point that their relations with Afghan family and relatives in Iran were not just utilitarian, but functioned equally for sharing times of sadness and happiness. Of those who had Afghan relatives or acquaintances in Iran, 73.5% visited them, 24.4% had telephone contact (including letter and visiting), and 2% had no contact. Afghans in Tehran sometimes travelled to other cities for significant events such as funerals, wedding ceremonies, or sometimes for the celebration of the New Year. Such visits were also utilised to make pilgrimage to religious sites like Imam Reza in Mashhad, Shabdollahzaim in Shahr-e Rey, Tehran, and Hazrat-e Massoumi in Qom.

Around 89.8% said they had loaned money to their Afghan relatives or acquaintances in Iran. Of those relatives or acquaintances to whom respondents had loaned money, 48.8% had loaned money to members of the immediate family, 16.3% had loaned to their own brothers, 11.6% had loaned to their mother's brother, and 2.3% had loaned to their wife's brother. Purposes for loaning money included: sickness (31.8%), bond or *rahn* (20.5%), marriage (15.9%) and everyday needs (13.6%). Other purposes

⁵⁹ Under Article 4 of 'Regulations on accelerating repatriation of Afghan nationals', Afghan nationals, except for those who have entered the country holding a valid passport, visa and have been issued with a residence permit, are prohibited from opening new accounts in banks, interest-free loan associations, and financial and credit institutions.

mentioned included: purchase of car, purchase of computer, capital for work, and business failure.

Afghan relatives and acquaintances in Iran provided each other financial assistance to help with *rahn*, to assist with the costs of funeral ceremonies⁶⁰ and wedding ceremonies, and to help pay for medical treatment in the instance of work injury, car accident, illness or childbirth. Tailors and machine embroiderers mentioned that they had loaned money from relatives or acquaintances to purchase new machines and tools. Another common form of assistance was for the payment of smuggler costs for new arrivals from Afghanistan, as well as assistance for initial *rahn*, and provision of accommodation on first arrival. Some mentioned that they had helped a relative find work, or that they had provided training to a relative for a particular occupation. An example of the range of types of assistance given to family members was offered by a 38-year-old Hazara man: “I gave my brother a 50,000 *Tooman* contribution towards his *rahn*, I also helped another brother with the costs of his wedding ceremony. I helped my sister by training her children in machine embroidery. When one of my brothers had a car accident, I took care of him while he was in hospital for six months.” A Tajik Sunni widow of 28, and mother of five, had borrowed *rahn* totalling 3 million *Tooman* from her nephew: “He is not married and he gave us money for *rahn* until we return to Afghanistan when we will return it to him.”

The custom of assistance at the time of wedding and funeral was not always continued in Iran. For example, a 45-year-old Hazara widow and mother of six children explained: “In Afghanistan, at the time of the death of a husband, relatives contribute money to assist the widow. But in Iran, no one contributed money for me to help with the cost of the funeral ceremony. Here in Iran my family did not carry this out and did not assist in the funeral and burial of my husband.” The brother of this widow’s husband was living in the US, and she used the metaphor of “wheat-flour” to describe his abundant wealth: “In the house of my husband’s brother, they have wheatflour...but I asked him to loan money to help with my husband’s funeral and he did not send anything. What is the benefit of having relatives with abundance [living overseas] when they do not help others?”

Many respondents explained that they could not afford to loan much money to their relatives as they themselves were often spending more money than they earned. Several respondents said that when they had money, they had loaned this money. One respondent, a machine embroiderer, said that he usually spent 250,000 *Tooman* per month and earned 200,000 *Tooman* per month. He had previously borrowed money from his brother to pay for part of his *rahn* which was 2.5 million *Tooman*, and he had borrowed other money for his own wedding in Iran. He had not managed to repay either of these loans, but had loaned small amounts of money to other people for weddings and *rahn*. He said: “I do not usually have much money, [but] when I have had money, I have loaned small amounts for wedding ceremonies and also for food. Some times I help others with 50,000 or 100,000 *Tooman* for *rahn*.”

⁶⁰ In Tehran, costs for burial and funeral ceremony were as much as 2 million *Tooman* and higher depending on the family’s capacity. Due to the high cost of burial plots inside the city of Tehran, Afghans and poorer Iranians were commonly buried at Ghiam Dasht (a low-rent, industrial area with a high Afghan population located 25 km southeast of Tehran). Other funeral-related costs include the mosque ceremony, and catering for those attending the funeral and for visitors in the 40-day mourning period following burial.

Relations with Afghan family and relatives remaining in Afghanistan

Most respondents (84%) had family or relatives remaining in Afghanistan. Of these relatives who remained in Afghanistan, respondents mentioned the following:

- brothers: 21.2%
- mother's brother: 15.2%
- spouse's family: 15.2%
- sister: 9.1%
- son or paternal aunt or respondent's parents: 6.1%

Of those who had relatives remaining in Afghanistan, 11.9% claimed they had no contact, 35.7% had phone contact, 33.3% had phone and letter contact, 7.1% letter only, and 9.5% heard news of their relatives via acquaintances travelling between Iran and Afghanistan. A few had received messages recorded on cassette tapes from relatives.

Around 54% of respondents said they had sent money to relatives in Afghanistan, and 7.3% had sent *sowghaat* from Iran. Respondents sent money to relatives in Afghanistan including: close family (29.2%), parents (16.7%), brothers (12.5%), parents-in-law or sister (8.3%), and father's brother or father's brother's son (12.5%). Of those respondents who sent money to Afghanistan, 61.5% had used trusted acquaintances visiting Afghanistan, and 38.5% had used *hawala*. Two respondents mentioned that they had sent money via *sarraaf*.

Several respondents had requested that their relatives look after assets such as land or housing in their absence. Some compensated their relatives, others gave permission for their relatives to lease that asset, such as house or land, and keep the income from the lease arrangement. For example, a Seyed man from a family of farmers near Bamyan had maternal and paternal uncles and their families remaining in Afghanistan. "They did not help us but we helped them. When they had a problem, we gave our land in Afghanistan to them to rent in order to raise money to solve their problem." Another respondent explained: "I asked them [his own relatives] to take care of the inheritance of my wife, and I send them winter clothes from Iran as compensation."

Some respondents had sent amounts of money to relatives in Afghanistan for the purposes of accumulating capital such as buying land, or for rebuilding a house. One respondent had sent money to help repair a mosque in his local area near Ghazni. Another had sent money to his brother in Afghanistan for the cost of his brother's marriage. Forty-six percent of respondents claimed that they had not sent remittances to Afghanistan. Another respondent who had provided many loans to his own family members in Iran explained: "I have not been able to save money [in Iran] in order to send money back to Afghanistan." Several respondents claimed that they were sending money to assist family members or relatives who had returned to Afghanistan and were experiencing difficulties there. One respondent said that he had loaned money to his mother's brother to return to Afghanistan, and was now remitting money via *hawala* to help support this uncle. Another respondent had sent money to Afghanistan for the first time to fund the return trip of his brother-in-law from Afghanistan back to Iran: "Recently I sent money to my brother-in-law through *hawala*. My brother-in-law had returned to Afghanistan and regretted his situation and had no money to return to Iran. He called us and asked us to send \$US300. We sent money to him and he returned to Iran."

Relations with Afghan relatives living overseas

Most respondents (66%) had family members or relatives living overseas including: Europe (Germany, Netherlands, Denmark, Finland, Sweden and Norway), UK, US, Canada, Russia, Pakistan, Dubai and Kuwait. The relationships between respondents and the relatives overseas included:

- son/daughter of father's brother: 18.8%
- sibling: 21.9%
- spouse's family: 12.5%
- father's cousin: 6.3%
- son of maternal uncle: 6.3%
- own son: 6.3%

Some respondents had only one relative and others had several. For example, a Hazara professional tailor whose father had been a clothing shop proprietor in Kabul, explained that his mother's brother and family lived in Netherlands, his father's sister and family lived in Norway, his wife's sister and son of his mother's sister lived in the UK, and his father's cousin lived in Kuwait.

Of those respondents with relatives living overseas, 21.9% said they had no contact with them, 43.8% said they had phone contact, 12.5% said they had email or internet chatting contact, and 3.1% had letter contact only. Of those who had relatives overseas, 62.5% claimed they received no assistance from their relatives, 21.9% said they had received financial assistance from them, and 9.4% had received *sowghaat* or gifts from them. A few respondents (3.1%) said they sent requested items to their relatives overseas and/or hosted their relatives when they visited Iran.

Another motivation for contact with relatives in Afghanistan and overseas was for the purpose of identifying women of marriageable age – specifically, identifying women in Afghanistan as *aroos* or brides for Afghan men living in Iran, and identifying Afghan women living in Iran as *aroos* for Afghan men living overseas. 47.8% of respondents (or their relatives) in Iran had brought women from Afghanistan to marry in Iran. 29.8% or 14 households said they or their relatives had arranged for an Afghan woman living in Iran to marry an Afghan man living abroad. Afghan women in Iran had travelled to the following countries for the purpose of marriage with an Afghan man:

- Germany: 28.6%
- UK: 14.3%
- Netherlands: 14.3%
- Norway, Denmark, US, Canada, Australia and Afghanistan: 7.1%

A few respondents mentioned that they or their relatives had identified Afghan women living in Pakistan as *aroos* for Afghan men in Iran. It was claimed that the *mahr* requested by the families of Afghan brides in Afghanistan was considerably less than that requested by Afghan families in Iran. Additionally, Afghan men in Iran considered that Afghan women living in Afghanistan made better brides as they were more likely to adhere to traditional values with relation to gender relations and family life, and those from rural areas were considered able to tolerate hardship and difficult circumstances. Conversely, Afghan men overseas were said to prefer Afghan women living in Iran as brides, as they were considered to be more “modern” and adaptable to European life. This data about the transnational circulation of women

as brides adds another dimension to the phenomenon of transnational networks in the establishment and consolidation of transnational relations between the respective families of the groom and bride in Afghanistan, Iran and in other countries.⁶¹

3.4 Decision making about the future

Informed decision-making

Respondents were asked several questions about sources of information on Afghanistan in order to gain insight into the formation of decision-making about return. Respondents were also asked about visits made to Afghanistan, experiences of family members who had repatriated, and access to mass media for news about Afghanistan. News received by the mass media included:

- Iranian newspaper, television or radio: 42.8%
- Afghan friends and relatives in Iran: 18.4%
- combination of BBC news, Iranian media and relatives: 20.4%
- BBC only: 12.2%
- radio broadcasts from Afghanistan (Dari and Ashena): 1 respondent

Around 48% of respondents said they or their family members had visited Afghanistan since living in Iran. Most of those who had visited had done so after the installation of the interim government following international intervention, that is, of those who had visited Afghanistan:

- 2004: 29.2%
- 2003: 16.7%
- 2001 and 2002: 4.2%
- 2000 and 1981: 8.3%
- during the years 1982, 1989, 1991, 1995, 1996, and 1997: 4.2% (1 respondent)

Of those who had visited, 75% had visited once only, and 16.7% had visited twice.

Around 90% of respondents had family members or relatives who had repatriated to Afghanistan. Most made contact with their relatives via telephone. 84.7% claimed that they had contact via telephone, letter, and news from others travelling from Afghanistan to Iran. 8.7% said they received news of their relatives only via acquaintances visiting Afghanistan, and 6.5% said they had no contact with their relatives who had returned. Of those respondents who had contact with their relatives, 65.2% said their situation was unsatisfactory (“not good” 47.8% and “bad” 17.4%) and 23.9% said their situation was satisfactory.

Dissatisfied returnees

Several respondents stated that they were sending money to family members who had returned to Afghanistan and were in dire financial difficulty as they had not found employment. Some respondents claimed they had heard anecdotally that returnees had advised their relatives in Iran to remain there. For example, one Tajik Sunni widow who had no assets whatsoever in Afghanistan, and whose husband had

⁶¹ In future research, details about the dowry negotiated, or financial assistance remitted (if any) from Iran and overseas to the Afghan family of the groom following the wedding would add important data to the way transnational networks function.

been killed in a car accident in Iran, had heard no news directly from her own relatives but via acquaintances:

Actually I have not heard news about Afghanistan...merely I heard [it said from returnees] that if we are not deported we should try to stay since you cannot survive there...here at least there is gas and water. My son [aged 12] say: 'let's go' but if they don't deport us, we will stay here...we have no land, no shop, no capital: for what reason would we want to return?

A “morsel of bread” was a common idiom used by several respondents to describe the state of impoverishment in Afghanistan. For example, respondents said that there was not even a morsel of bread to sustain their lives in Afghanistan, and conversely, at least in Iran a morsel of bread could be found. One widow, who arrived in Iran in 1996 after her husband was killed in Afghanistan, described the situation of her own family members that had returned as desperate: “Their situation is not good: no job, cold weather with no source of fuel, and you cannot even find a small piece of dried bread.” As the sole provider for two children aged two and four, this respondent said that she had not made a final decision, but was reluctant to return to Afghanistan. Her father’s house in Kabul had been destroyed during the war, and although her brother and sister both lived in Kabul and could offer help to her, she said that the availability of housing and employment, as well as the guarantee of security, were critical factors in her decision-making.

The lack of housing and fuel (for cooking and heating) was considered to be a fundamental difficulty, especially in winter. There was also scepticism about the prospect of improvement. The idiom ‘day becomes night and night becomes day’ was used by several respondents to describe the grinding and unchanging state of life in Afghanistan. In other words, days and nights merge into each other, becoming indistinguishable as there is no expectation that the following day will bring any prospect of movement or change.

Those returning to Afghanistan from Iran without housing or without capital faced extreme difficulty. Some families had arranged for a member to return to Afghanistan, while the rest remained in Iran to fund the initial reintegration period. For example, one Hazara man explained: “My maternal uncle has gone to [Kabul] Afghanistan with his family but his sons are here. They sent money to him – if they don’t send money the life for my uncle is difficult and he cannot live there.” This respondent said that he wanted to be ‘comfortable’ in 2005, and that it was important for his eight-year-old daughter to continue her schooling, and for these reasons they would remain in Iran in the short-term. He added that he wanted to return but not immediately. If the situation (security, job opportunities) improved they intended to return to Afghanistan in the following year.

One respondent reported that lack of housing, health and education in Afghanistan was motivating some Afghan returnees to return again to Iran. This man, a 48-year-old Kizilbash professional tailor who arrived to Iran in 1980 aged 23, had educated his five children in Iran (one with a university qualification, and two with a high school diploma). His information was based on news from his sisters living in Afghanistan, and from his own 22-year-old son who had returned briefly to Afghanistan in January 2005 to arrange identification for himself as an Afghan student in Iran. The respondent explained: “The situation is very bad: no job, no housing, no health facilities, no welfare. They [our relatives] want to return to Iran and are not satisfied in Afghanistan.” This respondent said that he had not made a

final decision about returning, but he and his family preferred to remain in Iran unless there were significant improvements in access to housing and work. He had applied to the UN for third country resettlement in Canada, where he claimed mosques were abundant, and Muslims were 'more Muslim' than those in Muslim countries.

Some respondents said their relatives had experienced difficulty adjusting to the environment of Afghanistan, both in terms of limited infrastructure (including roads and transport), and in terms of being accustomed to urban Iranian culture. The Afghan interviewers in Tehran mentioned a pejorative term '*Irani gak*' used by some Afghans who had remained in Afghanistan, to describe Afghans who had returned to Afghanistan from Iran. The term indicates that returnees have absorbed Iranian gestures, manners, idioms that differentiate them from Afghans who have remained in Afghanistan. One respondent who visited Afghanistan with his brother in 2005, and had also sustained telephone contact with his sister and her husband who had returned to Afghanistan, explained: "The situation is very bad. Since the time they arrived in Afghanistan they are all unemployed, and they have become depressed as they are unable to adjust themselves to the local environment." This respondent wanted to return to Afghanistan after he has finished his Masters degree in Education in Iran, but his wife – also a university graduate and born in Iran – was reluctant. Additionally, this respondent's own brother had married an Iranian woman and would probably try to stay in Iran.

Satisfied returnees

Generally satisfied returnees had either found good work, had maintained their ownership of housing, or had sold land. One respondent mentioned that he had heard anecdotally that some returnees who had owned land had sold that land in order to live off the profit, but in general these returnees were not satisfied with their situation. It was said that the price of land and housing in some areas of Afghanistan had become inflated to such an extent that Afghans who owned property and had returned from Iran found themselves with assets of substantial wealth. One respondent's in-laws owned property and were therefore comfortable, while his sister's experience was different because she and her husband had no house, nor any work.

The experience of those who returned with capital was claimed to be different. Returnees with capital could use this capital to build their own business such as a grocery store, or to engage in trade. A 43-year-old Seyed man who came to Iran in 1977 because of drought which had severely indebted the family had worked as a labourer for eleven years, and as a mosaic maker for ten years. His five children were born in Iran, and the eldest had completed twelve years of schooling and worked as a teacher. This respondent claimed that his situation in Iran was worse than his situation in Afghanistan, where his father had previously owned assets including a house, but that he would seek to remain in Iran until the situation in Afghanistan improved: "There are many problems: no electricity, no gas, no health facilities, no medicine, no housing, no jobs. If you have money, you can work with your money as capital [e.g. trade]. If you don't have money you have no work and the work of labouring is very difficult."

Most respondents' assessment of the situation of their relatives was fairly ambiguous, that is, they mentioned some positive aspects, but then qualified that they themselves would remain in Iran indefinitely. Some respondents positively inter-

preted the situation of their relatives who had returned to Afghanistan in social terms, that is, in terms of identity. Some claimed that Afghanistan was theirs, that it “belonged” to them – implying that Iran did not “belong” to them. In other words, as migrants in Iran, they would never be entirely accepted. One such respondent was a Hazara man who had worked as a hawker in Tehran since his arrival in 1996 aged twelve, and whose father had returned to Afghanistan in 2003 to live in the house that he co-owned with his brother. In Tehran, the respondent and his brothers supported a household of eleven, and faced difficulties paying for daily needs because his income was low. In spite of the difficulty of his daily life in Tehran, and the benefit of being in his own country if he returned, this man preferred to remain in Iran: “The situation is good [for my father] because Afghanistan is their country and they are satisfied with their work, but life in winter is very hard because of the lack of facilities and fuel...if Iran allows us to stay we will stay, if not we will go [together] in spring.”

3.5 Prerequisites for return to Afghanistan

In their decision to remain or return, respondents emphasised the provision of housing, work and welfare in Iran as factors that motivated them to remain in Iran in the medium term. 42.1% mentioned housing and work, 23.7% mentioned welfare facilities (education, health), and 10.5% mentioned savings capacity.

Respondents stated the following changes would have to take place in Afghanistan in order for them to make a decision to return:

- improved security plus welfare facilities including health and education: 32%
- improved economic situation: 22%
- improved security: 16%
- improved employment situation: 12%
- establishment of Islamic government: 4%
- government assistance to the needy: 4%

One respondent stressed that it was not simply (positive) changes in Afghanistan that would motivate him to return, but that (negative) changes in Iran could also motivate him to return to Afghanistan.

The necessity of basic infrastructure was expressed by a 31-year-old Seyed man and his wife who had both received a university education in Iran: “Security should be sustained and as my wife says, ‘when the whole of Kabul gets electricity and water, then we will return’.” Provision of housing – either access to affordable rental accommodation, or access to building materials and land – was considered fundamental. One man said: “If the UN gives us bricks and iron, we will return to our own place [Balkh] and build our own house.” A 45-year-old Hazara widow, who with her husband had previously owned a house in Kabul and was currently renting a four-bedroom house in Tehran, explained: “Previously (before 1998) housing was inexpensive in Kabul. Now, the house that I owned is rented in US dollars, and I am now unable to afford to rent that house. If I had a house in Afghanistan, we would not stay here because my sister and brother are there and I would like to return.” The cost of rent in Kabul particularly was perceived to be extortionate: “If there is no work, how can we survive or pay the cost of daily living and especially rent. We have no money to pay \$US1,000 per month for rent.”

The provision of health facilities was another significant issue. One respondent said that his wife and children had agreed to return to Afghanistan, but due to the ill health and ongoing medication of two of his young children and his wife, he was unable to return to Afghanistan on account of the lack of health facilities. Another respondent, a 60-year-old Seyed man said that due to his ongoing illness, his faith in Iranian doctors, and his concern about the lack of health facilities in Afghanistan, he does not want to return.

Two respondents expressed that they wanted an Islamic government to be established in Afghanistan. These respondents did not refer to “Islamic Government” narrowly in terms of Sharia law, but rather, a government which takes responsibility for its people by providing social and economic facilities that enable the population to live without fear and hunger and in a state of relative peace. Most respondents mentioned political stability. One Kizilbash man, an economics graduate from the University of Kabul who fled Afghanistan in 1983 in opposition to the Soviet occupation and Communist regime, explained: “At least I want to be certain that there is political and military stability in Afghanistan. Also the situation for economic activities should improve as well as welfare services, health facilities and education for children.” This respondent said that he had not made a decision about returning to Afghanistan, and that other Afghans in Iran felt similarly to him: that if forced they would have no choice but to return, but if this did not occur they would wait and observe the situation in Afghanistan. Another respondent, a Seyed man from Mazar-i-Sharif who fled to Iran to escape compulsory national service under the Soviets in 1982, expressed that it was the likelihood of war that prevented him from wanting to return to Afghanistan. He had returned to Afghanistan once in 1992 during the mujaheddin civil war, but had again returned to Iran. With his wife he had raised and educated five children in Iran, two of whom worked as tailors. He explained: “We will all remain in Iran because the situation in Afghanistan is not secure, and there is the probability of war occurring again...unless I am absolutely forced, even beaten, I will try to remain in Iran.”

Some respondents who mentioned insecurity at the local level had themselves been victims of looting or theft in either Afghanistan or Iran. One such respondent, a 56-year-old man whose brother was looking after the family’s land of 100 *jerib* and six-room house in a village in Balkh Province, had experienced the theft of his livestock and horse prior to leaving Afghanistan. He said: “If there was no theft, and security, and we could keep our belongings and property safe, we would return.” Another respondent, a 30-year-old Tajik man, had been a farmer near Herat at the time of fleeing the Taliban in 1996. He explained: “If you establish animal husbandry [in Afghanistan] someone will attack you during the night and the sheep and everything may be stolen. If you have any capital there is no opportunity to use it [for risk of extortion/theft].” This respondent explained that he and his family would return to Herat in the first three months of the Persian New Year (April–June 2005) if the situation there remained stable, but he would return earlier if he knew that work was available.

3.6 Current decision-making about returning or remaining⁶²

Respondents were asked about their current decision-making processes in relation to returning to Afghanistan, and which member of their household would be responsible for making that final decision. 66% of respondents said that they intended to remain in Iran in the medium term; 26% said they intended to return to Afghanistan in the medium term, 6% said they had not made a decision. However these responses were ambiguous: some respondents said they would seek to remain indefinitely, but then qualified this by saying that they may eventually return to Afghanistan in the future. Other respondents said they definitely intended to return to Afghanistan, but whether this was a desire or an actual intention was difficult to ascertain, and the timing of this return was often not specified. What can at the least be said of respondents' intention in relation to the future is that the majority of respondents did not intend to return to Afghanistan in the short term, and planned to remain in Iran in the medium term if they were permitted to do so. While those Afghans resident in Iran the longest were least willing to return to Afghanistan, those Afghans newly resident (8–10 years) were equally unwilling to return. Those who wanted to return to Afghanistan were:

- 27.3% of respondents resident in Iran for 8–10 years
- 66.7% of respondents resident in Iran for 11–15 years
- 50% of respondents resident in Iran for 16–20 years
- 25% of respondents resident in Iran for more than 20 years

Around 82% of respondents said that they as household heads made the final decision, 8% said they would make the decision jointly with their spouse, and 4% said their father would make the final decision. Many respondents qualified that the decision to return or remain was in fact not in their hands but “in God’s hands”. That is, returning or remaining was a question of fate or destiny (*ghesmat*), which in an Islamic context equates to God’s will. One such respondent, a 29-year-old Tajik Sunni who preferred to remain in Iran until radical reconstruction and economic development in Afghanistan had taken place explained: “For now we will remain here until *ghesmat* dictates...I don’t know my own future.” Others stated that the final decision on their future would be made by the Iranian government, not themselves. An example is provided by the following case of a Seyed man who had trained as a professional tailor in Iran, had established an enterprise that employed others in Tehran, and whose three children had been born and educated in Iran. This respondent had remitted money to fund his brother-in-law’s return from Afghanistan

⁶² Jamshidiha and Ali Babaie’s study (“Determinants of Afghan migrants in Iran: Case study Golshahr Mashhad”, [Iranian] *Journal of Social Sciences*, 20(1–2) 2002: p. 71–90) presented preliminary findings on the differential attitudes of mainly Shia Hazara Afghans towards return. Analysis of responses showed several variables. Afghan willingness to return to Afghanistan under current conditions was determined by: their place of domicile in Afghanistan (rural dwellers were less willing to return than urban dwellers based on hardship and security issues in rural areas); their gender (women were less willing to return than men); their level of education (those with lower educational level were less willing to return than those with higher education); and their occupational-economic security (those whose financial situation had improved in Iran were less willing to return than those whose situation had worsened or not changed). The authors concluded that the situation of war, drought, homelessness and displacement in Afghanistan generated more suffering for women and less educated Afghans than for others, and that while these problems persisted in Afghanistan they would be unwilling to return. Jamshidiha and Anbari’s subsequent study (“Social belonging and its impact on repatriation of Afghan refugees in Iran”, [Iranian] *Journal of Social Sciences*, 23(3) 2004: p. 43–68) proposed that the stronger the social and economic attachment of Afghans to Iran, the weaker the motivation to return to Afghanistan.

to Iran. Undoubtedly this case of failed reintegration affected the family's attitude: "At this time, we have not made a decision, but all members of the family have a negative attitude towards returning. My wife wants to return but has become scared after hearing about the situation in Afghanistan...If the Iranian government permits, we will remain, if it does not we will go to another country, if we have no choice we will return to Afghanistan."

Remaining in Iran

Around 66% of respondents said that they intended to remain in Iran in the medium term. Of those respondents who wanted to return to Afghanistan, 40.5% of male household heads and 12.5% of women household heads wanted to return to Afghanistan. Reasons given for not wanting to return included:

- fear of physical and social vulnerability
- reluctance to assume the position of daughter-in-law in the household of a husband's parents
- preference for independence and household autonomy
- opposition to the low social position of women in Afghan society
- and opposition to increased workload (e.g. wood collection for fuel, water collection, bread making)⁶³

The situation for Iranian women who had married Afghan men was complex: they had lost their Iranian citizenship by marrying an Afghan, and their children were not Iranian citizens either. Strand estimates that as many as 30,000 individuals could be affected by this.⁶⁴ One respondent was in current dispute with his Iranian wife over the question of return (they had a son aged 8, and daughters aged 15 and 16). This man explained that every

A Sunni woman from Herat had experienced the disappearance of her husband after he was conscripted during the Soviet time. After her husband's disappearance, she had continued to live in her husband's father's compound (comprising four wives, and eight daughters-in-law) and they helped her raise her son. In 1981, she had fled with her infant son to Iran after her husband's family house sustained shelling from artillery. The respondent had left Iran and returned to Herat after the Soviet withdrawal, and had lived there for seven years before returning again to Iran in 1986. In Iran she had cleaned houses for 20 years, and lived with her 22-year-old son, a building labourer, and his wife and their three children. This woman valued her household's independence in Iran. She said: "In Afghanistan we had nothing, everything went to my husband's father, and here if we receive only 5,000 Tooman daily, we can manage our life...when I can accumulate investment capital to buy a house or a shop or land [we may return]. My husband's father has property but he has not given us anything because his son's death occurred before his own death, and he has four wives..." In the event of returning she said she would turn for assistance to the father of her son's wife, rather than to her husband's family.

⁶³ Homa Hoodfar's study of the attitudes of Afghan women in Mashhad proposes that the social and economic conditions for Afghan in Iran, together with their exposure to Islamic Iranian practices and ideals, has led Afghan women to adapt their cultural notions of (Islamic) women's roles, gender relations and family structure (Hoodfar, 2004, "Families on the move: the changing role of Afghan refugee women in Iran", *Hawwa: Journal of Women of the Middle East and the Islamic World*, 2(2): p. 141–71). Such adaptation has implications for these women in the event of their return to Afghanistan.

⁶⁴ Arne Strand et al., 2004, *Afghan refugees in Iran: from refugee emergency to migration management* (policy brief), <http://www.unodc.org/iran/en/jointiniatives.html>, accessed 11 April 2005.

time his wife and children heard negative stories about Afghanistan, their negative viewpoint about Afghanistan was reinforced, and they became more resistant to the idea of return. He said: “In my opinion when Afghanistan improves we will return. But my wife and children don’t want to. Now we are in dispute about this.” Households with single daughters of marriageable age tended to prefer to remain in Iran. 29% of families with unmarried daughters aged 10 years and above wanted to return to Afghanistan, and 41% of families without unmarried daughters aged 10 years and above wanted to return to Afghanistan. Fewer women household heads than men were willing to return to Afghanistan.

Respondents who expressed an intention to remain in Iran indefinitely were asked about their livelihood strategy (including accommodation and employment) for remaining in Iran. 46.7% said they had no strategy, 6.7% said that they had no strategy because they were uncertain of their future, and 33.3% said they intended to continue their current work or current study. These answers appear to reflect that while they would prefer to remain in Iran, they cannot actively plan for this to happen because this option depends on whether the Iranian government will allow them to stay. 53.4% claimed that they did not have a particular strategy for accommodation or employment in the event of them remaining in Iran. Most respondents who expressed a desire to remain in Iran qualified that this period would be indefinite, depending on whether the situation improved in Afghanistan, or whether they would be forcibly deported from Iran.

The more educated the children in a household, the less likely parents wanted to return to Afghanistan (although households with illiterate children also preferred to remain in Iran):

- 42% of households with illiterate children wanted to return
- 50% of households with children possessing 1–3 years of education wanted to return
- 20% of households with children possessing 4+ years of education wanted to return

3.7 Returning to Afghanistan

Around 26% of respondents said they intended to return to Afghanistan in the medium term. 10.5% or four respondents mentioned that they intended to return to Afghanistan, and would remain in Iran until they had saved sufficient money to purchase land or a house in Afghanistan, and other preparations necessary for their return such as selling any assets. Several respondents made the point that in order to return to Afghanistan they would need substantial savings, as there was no guarantee that they could generate income in the short-term, and they would need capital to start a business. Even those with savings risked completely depleting their savings during their search for employment. A Hazara tailor who had relatives who had returned to Afghanistan explained: “All are unemployed: they are spending their savings, and they are not satisfied with the health or education situation.” This respondent had trained as a professional tailor in Iran, and had saved sufficient money in Iran to send funds back to Afghanistan to purchase land.

One respondent who claimed that he had savings capacity (monthly income of 350,000 *Tooman*) said that he planned to return to Afghanistan in the medium term, but would remain in Iran in order to save sufficient money to purchase assets in Afghanistan: his own house, land, and perhaps a grocery shop for his sons. But the

prospect of remaining in the short to medium term in Iran to do this was not attractive, as he had become wearied by the struggle of living as a migrant in Iran. By way of illustration, he narrated an experience in his previous neighborhood of Sultan Abad: after prolonged quarrelling, some local Iranians had beaten their Afghan neighbours and attacked their houses. The respondent had hidden himself in his house for a month, and when he and his family finally fled they were forced to abandon most of the family's belongings. This man stated that he preferred to return to Afghanistan than remain in Iran, but he had also submitted an application to UNHCR for third country resettlement. His main concern was that his children continue their education (he himself had completed elementary Quranic teaching), and that be able to support his family through legitimate and honest means, that is *halal*.

Several respondents expressed the desire, but not the intention, to return to Afghanistan. For example, a 36-year-old illiterate Hazara widow, who came to Iran in 1996 after her husband was killed in the war, had educated her three children in Iran, and her eldest daughter had married and was living with her husband in Kabul, as were her own parents and brother, and her husband's parents. In spite of this apparent support available in Kabul, the widow was reluctant to return: "My children want to return to Afghanistan and I also want to return, but I can't live there because the life is very hard in Afghanistan." She judged that her life would be more difficult in Afghanistan than in Iran in spite of the fact that her economic position in Tehran had forced her to borrow 1 million *Tooman* from her maternal uncle for *rahn* (total 1.8 million), and her income from casual tailoring work was extremely low.

Some respondents expressed relatively straightforward desires to return, but it is difficult to ascertain to what extent this kind of response was simply rhetorical. For example, one respondent, a 29-year-old Tajik Sunni, worked as a food delivery driver in Tehran. Two of his brothers had returned to Afghanistan, and one had returned again to live in Iran. This respondent explained: "Basically there is no work whatsoever, the life is extremely hard, and the economy weak. The people cannot pay the cost of everyday living...If factories were established and industries developed and there was work, we would be back in a day." Another respondent's answer is similar. Previously the owner of 170 *jerib* of land, and a mechanic and garage proprietor in Afghanistan, this respondent had worked as a stonemason, carpenter and hawker in Iran, and had been forced to borrow money from acquaintances regularly. He explained: "Yes, we will return. Iran is not our country: they don't allow us to live here. If I had a place to sleep in Afghanistan I would go there tonight, not tomorrow morning." Another respondent asked rhetorically: "Who is dissatisfied with their homeland? It is better to be hungry in Afghanistan than sated in Iran." This respondent, a Tajik Sunni shoe repairer, was injured in a car accident in Iran. The accident had damaged his health, and indebted his family severely: he still owed 180,000 *Tooman*. He said that he would return to Kabul in spring if security was maintained. Then, if he judged the situation to be sustainable, he would return permanently, bringing his wife and four children.

Strategy for return to Afghanistan

The following table represents the data gathered on previous ownership and current access to assets (shop, workshop, land, house) in Afghanistan. While almost half of the household respondents (22) had owned land in Afghanistan, only ten respondents had retained access to that land (currently leased or the subject of *amanat*). Fifteen

respondents said that they had owned their own house in Afghanistan, and 24 indicated that they had lived with their parents but did not specify whether their parents' house was owned or rented. In the case of house ownership, fourteen respondents had sold their house and eight respondents had retained access to their house.

<i>Assets in Afghanistan</i>	<i>House</i> ⁶⁵	<i>Land</i> ⁶⁶	<i>Shop</i>	<i>Workshop</i>
Owned	15 (30%)	22 (44%)	15 (30%)	7 (14%)
Sold	14 (28%)	4 (8%)	6 (12%)	3 (6%)
Lost access (abandoned/ destroyed)	16 (32%)	4 (8%)	4 (8%)	3 (6%)
Retained access	8 (16%)	10 (20%)	3 (6%)	1 (2%)

Apart from access to assets, income stream also impacted on returnees' experience of reintegration. Respondents were asked which members of the household would return, and which members of the household would remain in Iran. Here, the assumption was that those remaining in Iran would remit money to support their family in Afghanistan. 97.7% of respondents said they would return as an entire family to Afghanistan, and would not separate or leave family members behind in Iran. The only exception was a single Hazara man who lived with his mother and sister, and suggested that his sister would return and he and his mother would remain in Iran so that he could save money to purchase land in Afghanistan.

Respondents were asked if they returned to Afghanistan, which region they wanted to return to, and the reason for their decision. Respondents nominated the following cities: Kabul (63.3%), Mazar-i-Sharif (18.4%), Herat (10.2%) and Ghazni (4.1%). The most obvious pattern to emerge was that regardless of their region of origin, respondents tended to prefer to resettle in a major city such as Kabul, Mazar-i-Sharif or Herat. Most respondents (85.7%) originally from Kabul intended to return to Kabul; 33.3% of respondents originally from Mazar-i-Sharif wanted to return to Mazar with 50% wanting to return to Kabul. All respondents (100%) originally from Herat wanted to return to Herat. Single respondents from the provinces of Bamyan, Wardak, Gharebagh and Uruzgan wanted to return to Kabul city, whereas respondents from Jowzjan and Balkh provinces wanted to return to the closest major city of Mazar-i-Sharif.

⁶⁵ An additional 24 respondents (48%) said they had lived in their parents' house in Afghanistan but did not specify whether their parents' house was owned or rented, so the figure of prior home ownership in Afghanistan could be substantially higher than 30%.

⁶⁶ Five respondents owned 1–19 *jeribs*, three respondents owned 20–50 *jeribs*, three respondents owned 51–99 *jeribs*, five respondents owned 100 *jeribs* or more, and six respondents were uncertain of their land size. Additionally, ten respondents had owned livestock in Afghanistan, but only one person claimed to have access to that livestock (currently leased).

Origin	Destinations of 49 respondents*			
	Mazar-i-Sharif	Kabul	Herat	Ghazni
<i>Herat</i>	0	0	5 (100%)	0
<i>Bamyan</i>	0	1 (100%)	0	0
<i>Gharebagh</i>	0	1 (100%)	0	0
<i>Balkh</i>	2 (100%)	0	0	0
<i>Uruzgan</i>	1 (50%)	1 (50%)	0	0
<i>Ghazni</i>	0	0	0	1 (100%)
Total	9 (18.4%)	31 (63.3%)	5 (10.2%)	2 (4.1%)

*Of these 49, 2 did not intend to return to Afghanistan.

Reasons listed for returning to these places included:

- birthplace: 22.9%
- relatives and acquaintances there: 20.8%
- raised there: 16.7%
- capital city with facilities: 16.7%
- father's house or own house or land there: 20.8%
- existence of Shia population: 2.1%

Several respondents that nominated Kabul also mentioned security, better infrastructure, health and education facilities, and better employment prospects. Sometimes where a husband and wife were from different locations, the place of return was the subject of negotiation. One respondent mentioned ethnicity in his choice of place of resettlement. This man, a 50-year-old Shia Hazara, explained that he preferred to go to the suburb of Dasht-e Barchi in Kabul as it was a residential area for Shia, and many of his relatives lived there.

Respondents were asked if they returned to Afghanistan, who would accommodate them initially, and what was their relationship to that person. Around 98% of respondents had relatives in Afghanistan, and of these:

- 30.6% said no one could provide them with accommodation
- 10.2% would return to their own house
- 12.2% would return to their brother's house
- 10.2% would return to their father's brother or his son's house
- 6.1% would return to their mother's brother's house
- 6.1% would return to their daughter's husband
- 6.1% would return to their sister's house
- 4.1% would return to their wife's mother's house

Most respondents who expressed that no one could accommodate them explained that their relatives' economic position was as weak as their own. Many respondents preferred to rely on their own personal resources. For example, the following respondent, a 50-year-old widower without assets in Afghanistan (his father had

owned 170 *jeribs* of land but the respondent did not know of the status of this land, and feared that it may have been “appropriated” since his departure 25 years ago), explained:

For those returnees who have assets, life is OK, calm. Without money, life is hard. It depends on your wealth: if you have a house your life will be comfortable...Nobody [will accommodate me initially], first we will trust in God. Next we will look to our own pocket and then we may decide to go to a guesthouse...I will return to [Kabul] Afghanistan. Iran is not my birthplace. If I had a place in Afghanistan I would return immediately.

While this respondent had kept in contact with relatives in Afghanistan via phone, he had never remitted money to his relatives in Afghanistan. Another elderly respondent who had come to Iran with his sister in 1981, leaving behind all of his relatives in Afghanistan, did not want his family to accommodate him, just to assist him to find a place to rent. This man had occasionally sent small amounts of money to his brother in Afghanistan: “My family – my brother and brother-in-law – [are in Kabul] but I don’t want to go to their home, I merely want them to help me to rent a house for myself.”

Respondents were asked if they returned to Afghanistan and experienced financial difficulty, who would assist them, and how were they related to that person. 44% said that no one would be in a position to provide assistance, 20% said assistance would be provided by family members, 12% said assistance would be provided by his father’s brother and his sons, 10% by his own brother. One respondent, a 31-year-old tailor, had rights to his father’s house in Kabul which was currently occupied by his father’s brother’s sons. This respondent had maintained contact with his relatives, and had sent small amounts of remittances to family members in Afghanistan via acquaintances. This respondent said that he would arrange a bank loan in his father’s name: “My father has savings deposited in the bank, so he can loan money to us.” He planned to return to the house of his father in Kabul in 2006 when further reconstruction had taken place.

Respondents were asked what sort of work they anticipated to do when they returned to Afghanistan. 46.8% of respondents were not certain (23.4% said it depended on the situation and the type of work available and 23.4% said they did not know). Work categories mentioned by respondents included:

- labouring: 8.5%
- shopkeeping: 6.4%
- tailoring or embroidery: 6.4%
- agriculture, or selling or animal husbandry: 4.3% each

In relation to the prospects of their children, 39.1% of respondents said they did not know, 19.6% wanted their children to continue their education, 6.5% aspired teaching work for their child qualified to high school diploma and/or university level in Iran, and 4.3% mentioned the categories of tailoring and carpentry.

Third country resettlement

Respondents were asked whether they aspired to migrate to another country, and to nominate which country they had considered migrating to. Only ten respondents (20%) disclosed that they aspired to migrate to another country. The countries listed

included: Canada 30% (three respondents), “Europe” 20% (two respondents) and 10% (one respondent each) to Finland, Norway, Netherlands, Australia and Iraq. Of those respondents who sought resettlement in another country, 50% had relatives living in that country. 50% had learned about that country from other people, while 33.3% had learned from their own family members. 50% had taken no action to apply for asylum in one of these countries, and 41.7% had sent a

letter to the UNHCR. Respondents were asked why they chose that country. 36.4% said they had relatives there, 18.2% mentioned education opportunities, 18.2% mentioned welfare facilities, and 9.1% mentioned both education and welfare facilities. One respondent praised the opportunities for mature-age study available to his 45-year-old mother-in-law in Finland. One respondent said that he had spent much money travelling to Turkey to apply for refugee status in the Danish Embassy but his efforts had been unsuccessful. Another respondent said that he had seriously considered engaging a smuggler to enter Norway, but had changed his mind because of the risks.

Most respondents expressed that they preferred to remain in Iran, but if they were forced to return to Afghanistan they would do so. Some qualified that they preferred to live in a Muslim country, or a country with similar language and customs. Several were resolute about not wanting to live in a non-Muslim country. One woman, a 50-year-old Seyed widow said that she would not apply for asylum in another country because she did not want to be buried in another country. One 56-year-old Seyed Shia man who had done pilgrimage to Karbala Iraq in 2001, and who wished to make pilgrimage to the tomb of Bibi Zaineb in Syria, said that he would like to resettle in either Iraq or Syria.

UNHCR process for resettlement

An initial request is made by an applicant setting out the reasons they believe they should be resettled. No special format for this type of letter is prescribed. This letter is then reviewed and if the reasons given in a letter fit the resettlement criteria agreed with the host countries, an in-depth interview is conducted to determine the specific reasons for the request, and assess credibility and eligibility for resettlement.

4. Transitory Afghan labour migrants in Tehran

The data from this section is drawn from an open-ended questionnaire (40 questions plus time–place migration matrix) that specifically targeted the migration experiences of single Afghan labour migrants in Tehran. Interviews with fifteen labour migrants were undertaken in Tehran.

4.1 Profile of labour migrant respondents

- Age (all 15–30):
 - 20 and under: three respondents (including two aged 15 and 16)
 - 20–25: six respondents
 - 26–30: six respondents
- Province of origin:
 - Kabul 33.3%
 - Ghazni 20%
 - Behsood 20%
 - Parwan, Mazar-i-Sharif and Quetta (Pakistan) 6.7% each
- Rural or urban area: rural 53.3%, urban 46.7%

- Ethnicity:
 - Hazara 86.7% (13 respondents)
 - Seyed 6.7% (1 respondent)
 - Uzbek 6.7% (1 respondent)
- Religion: 93.3% Shia, 6.7% Sunni.
- Year of arrived in Iran: 60.1% first came to Iran from 1994–99 (Taliban regime), in 2000–04 only one respondent arrived (2004)
- Marital status:
 - 60% unmarried (9 respondents)
 - 26.7% engaged (4 respondents)
 - 13.3% were married (2 respondents)
 - One respondent had children
- Education:
 - 26.7% (4 respondents) illiterate
 - 46.7% (7 respondents) had elementary school education
 - 20% (3 respondents) had lower secondary
 - 6.7% (1 respondent) had upper secondary education

4.2 Context of labour migration

Respondents had studied, or worked in the following occupations in Afghanistan prior to coming to Iran:

- student: 26.7%
- farming father's land: 20%
- baker: 13.3%
- farm labourer, butcher, father's food shop, father's carpet shop, hawker, panel beater: 6.7% (1 respondent) each

All respondents had brothers living in the household of his parents in Afghanistan. The size of respondents' households in Afghanistan ranged from 5–38 people, with the most common size eight members. Nine respondents had a household size of eight or less, and eight households comprised extended families and included parents' siblings and their families.

Of the fifteen respondents, eleven claimed that their parents owned land. Most respondents did not know the size of the land, and the remaining five respondents estimated the size to be three *jeribs* or less. Thirteen respondents said their families had experienced debt in Afghanistan. Ten respondents stated that they had gone into debt to pay for daily living expenses, while one mentioned that his parents were indebted after buying a house. Other respondents mentioned war injury, father's illness, brother's marriage and Taliban curfew as reasons for loaning money. Nine respondents had borrowed from relatives with most (six respondents) borrowing from an uncle. Three respondents had borrowed from friends. Ten respondents mentioned that the weak economic situation and unemployment in Afghanistan had led them to seek work in Iran. Three respondents mentioned war, and one mentioned education, as reasons for migration.

Most respondents had initially come to Iran during the Taliban regime for the purposes of earning money, and their poverty was sometimes related to war, as in the case of the Ghazni curfew, or conscription. For example, a 26-year-old Hazara man originally from Kabul, who arrived in Iran aged 16 and worked as a furniture

painter, explained: “My family did not have enough money for daily needs, then my brother was conscripted for national service and our income dropped further so I borrowed money from my family and had to pay it back.” Another respondent, a 30-year-old Hazara man originally from Ghazni working as a building foreman in Tehran, said:

During the Taliban period, our city was under curfew and [because there was no import or export of goods or food] I had no money and my parents [shopkeepers] were forced to borrow money from a friend for the daily needs of my family. Against the wishes of my family I fled to Iran. I took the money from my father’s till and came with a friend via a smuggler from Ghazni to Pakistan.

4.3 Pre-established transnational networks

Substantiating Stigter’s conclusion that those men who migrate tend to have horizontal social networks – brothers and uncles who could assist redistribute the burden of their absence – all respondents had at least one, usually several, brothers.⁶⁷ When asked about the impact of the respondent’s migration on the family, most respondents mentioned that his brother(s) was looking after the family in his absence. All but one respondent had relatives (usually brothers, cousins or uncles) in Iran, and most lived initially with these relatives, and often found employment in their relative’s workplace. Some respondents had married brothers who lived with their wives and children with the respondent in Afghanistan, and who had encouraged and supported the respondent’s migration.

Respondents were asked who was involved in their decision-making to come to Iran. Ten respondents mentioned parents, and of these, three mentioned father alone and one mentioned father and uncle. One respondent mentioned his sister’s husband, and three respondents mentioned brother. Fourteen respondents had family members who had previously migrated to Iran. Eleven respondents had uncles and cousins in Iran, one had a brother-in-law, and another had a brother. Eight respondents had family members living in Tehran, with other family members living in Isfahan, Qazvin, Qom, and Sistan Baluchistan. Eleven respondents said that family members had assisted them pay for their trip to Iran, eight mentioned brother and/or father, one mentioned each of the following: grandfather, brother and uncle, sister’s husband and sister.

Ten respondents chose their destination in Iran based on having relatives there, two respondents chose their destination because of friends or acquaintances there, and three chose Tehran because of the availability of work and higher wages.

Fourteen respondents had used smugglers to enter Iran, with one respondent claiming that he gained official travel documents in Zahedan. Four respondents came via Pakistan, and one respondent came via Taftan on the Pakistan–Iran border. All respondents who used smugglers faced difficulties:

- three respondents were imprisoned, two by smugglers and one by the Iranian government in Zahedan
- nine respondents mentioned hunger and exhaustion from walking on foot, and/or fear of arrest
- two respondents mentioned dangerous vehicles and roads

⁶⁷ Stigter, 2005b

One Hazara man who arrived in 1991 aged twelve from Ghazni said: “I observed that some Afghans had gone to Iran and their life situation was good so I made a decision to go to Iran and try to improve our situation.” His brother and brother-in-law were already working in Qazvin, and the respondent travelled from Ghazni to Iran with his mother’s brother son (respondent’s cousin) who was also a labour migrant. After being arrested and detained on the border, the respondent claimed that he was subsequently released because an advocate persuaded the authorities that those under fifteen years of age were permitted entry to Iran. The respondent then went to Qazvin to join his brother who introduced him to his own employer in a plastics factory. After his brother returned to Afghanistan, the respondent found work in Tehran as a building decorator, and at the time of interview, was living alone on his worksite. The respondent said that he had remitted money (via *hawala*) for the cost of his brother’s wedding, and his father telephoned him whenever they needed money, and he usually sent amounts of 500,000–1 million *Tooman*. This man had returned to Afghanistan in 2001 for three years, and again returned to Iran in 2004. He had no plans to return to Afghanistan in the medium term.

Nine respondents lived in their own workplace, two respondents lived in the workplace of a friend, and two respondents shared a room with other single labour migrants. One respondent lived in his grandmother and aunt’s house. Among respondents, nine respondents lived in Tehran with non-family (either friends or co-workers), and three respondents lived with relatives. Three respondents lived alone. Fourteen respondents found their current living place through their own network of family or friends: nine respondents found their current place of living through family members, usually uncles, and five found their place through friends.

4.4 Remittances and saving

Unemployment was an ordinary experience among respondents. Fourteen respondents had experienced unemployment, with the mean average being approximately four out of every twelve months. During the period of unemployment, nine respondents said they lived from their savings, and three said they borrowed money for their daily needs from others. During periods of unemployment, respondents either spent their savings, or borrowed from their brother or cousin or uncle.

Respondents listed the following occupations as their first job:

- stonemason: 5
- plastics factory worker: 2
- construction labourer, agriculture, security guard, bricklayer, hawker, welder, tailor and shoe mender: 1 each

Respondents were assisted in finding their first job in Iran through their:

- cousin: 7
- brother: 3
- uncle: 2
- friend: 2

At the time of interview, respondents were working in the following occupations:

- tailor: 2
- stonemason: 2

- rubber factory worker: 2

Previous occupations in Iran included:

- building decorator
- cook
- machine embroiderer
- gas heater installer

The length of time respondents had been employed in their current job ranged from three months to ten years, with 40% in their current job for less than 12 months.

Respondents stated that they earned 3,000–20,000 *Tooman* (\$US3.50–\$22) daily. The mean weekly income of 60,500 *Tooman* (\$US68) was calculated based on six working days, however, this figure does not take into consideration labour migrants who gain work through *falake* and have no guarantee of six working days in any week. Respondents spent 5,000–50,000 *Tooman* (\$US5.60–\$56) weekly with the mean weekly expenditure 18,500 *Tooman* (\$US20). Mean weekly savings capacity was 41,800 *Tooman* (\$US47).

The mean average amount of money remitted yearly to Afghanistan was 690,000 *Tooman* (\$US775). Thirteen respondents sent regular remittances to their family in Afghanistan. (A respondent who did not send money had just finished his tailor apprenticeship and had been working for only two months.) Eleven respondents sent remittances via *hawala*, and two respondents sent it via both acquaintances and *hawala*. Thirteen respondents sent to either their father, or to their mother and father. Four respondents sent to their mother and brother, and one respondent sent directly to his elder brother.

Six respondents sent remittances annually, four respondents mentioned every six months, two respondents mentioned every three to four months. Every respondent mentioned that remittances were used by their family in Afghanistan for the costs of daily living. Eleven respondents mentioned cost of daily living only. Three respondents mentioned daily costs plus their brothers' marriage, one respondent mentioned daily costs plus brother's mobile phone purchase, and two respondents mentioned daily costs plus the purchase of land.

The remittance practices of two respondents are illustrative. A 26-year-old Hazara man working as a furniture painter earned 120,000 *Tooman* monthly and expended 48,000 monthly. Every four months, he sent approximately 300,000 *Tooman* to his elder brother via a friend. Occasionally he sent carpets and gold. His remittances were used by his family for daily expenditure, and by his brother who uses it as capital for his shop. Once he sent money to his brother to purchase a mobile phone. A second example is provided by a 16-year-old Hazara man born in Iran, whose family migrated in 1978 during the Soviet occupation. When his family repatriated to Afghanistan in 2003, this respondent continued his work as an apprentice tailor, and remitted money to his unemployed father in Kabul. He earned about 160,000 *Tooman* monthly and spent 60,000. He claimed that he remitted 300,000 *Tooman* every three months to his father in Kabul. He planned to return to Afghanistan in 2007 and would consider returning again to Iran depending on the work situation in Kabul.

All respondents had direct contact with their families in Afghanistan. Twelve respondents used telephone only, and three respondents used a combination of

phone, letter and news from acquaintances visiting Afghanistan. Eleven respondents said that in their absence their parents (father, or mother and father) looked after the respondent's family in Afghanistan. Four respondents mentioned that their brother looked after the family.

4.5 Future migration intentions

Seven respondents had not returned to Afghanistan since coming to Iran; five had returned once, two had returned twice, and one had returned three times. Seven respondents said they did not know when they would return to Afghanistan. Four respondents specified an exact time between one week and four months. One said that he did not intend returning, another said he would return in two years time, and another said he would return when security and reconstruction was evident. Six respondents said they would return to Kabul, three said Ghazni, three said Behsood, and one said Mazar-i-Sharif or Parwan. Reasons given for returning to these places included:

- location of land/house: 5
- location of family: 3
- birthplace: 5

Respondents were asked in the event of their return to Afghanistan, did they intend to migrate again to Iran. Five respondents said they would migrate again to Iran, five said it depended on their situation in Afghanistan, and four claimed they did not intend to migrate again to Iran. Of those respondents who said they may not return again to Iran, eight respondents said they would possibly seek work in Kabul, and one mentioned Mazar-i-Sharif. Reasons given by respondents for migrating to Kabul or Mazar-i-Sharif were:

- work opportunities and facilities: 5
- raised there: 2
- family there: 2

One Hazara man who arrived in Iran aged thirteen and had worked as a stonecutter for eleven years asked: "If I could find work in Afghanistan, why would I want to return to Iran?" This man remitted 1–1.5 million *Tooman* annually via *hawala* to his brother and mother in Behsood. He did not plan to return to Afghanistan in the near future, but when he did, he said he would seek work in Kabul if necessary. Whether he returned to Iran depended on his capacity to get work in Afghanistan. Another Hazara man who came to Iran aged fourteen with a friend against his parent's wishes had worked as a building foreman in Tehran. This respondent returned to Afghanistan in 1992, and in the same year migrated back to Iran. Again he returned to Afghanistan in 1996 and then migrated to Iran in 1997. This respondent aspired to return to live in Ghazni (the place of his family's house and land) in May 2005. He did not intend to return again to Iran, and would go to Kabul to look for work if necessary. His wife and two children lived in his father's house in Ghazni, and he remitted 1.5 million *Tooman* via *hawala* every six months to his father for the costs of daily living.

Few respondents were interested in seeking work abroad. Eleven respondents said they were not interested, three expressed interest and mentioned Emirates (Dubai), Australia and Canada. Reasons given for selecting these countries included:

- good income

- family living there
- work opportunities
- security

5. Conclusion

5.1 Afghan households in Tehran

Reasons for households remaining based in Iran

The data from this research confirms the hypothesis that the longer the time of residence in Iran, the less likely respondents want to return to Afghanistan. However, those respondents resident in Iran for 8–10 years were almost as reluctant to return to Afghanistan as those respondents who had been resident in Iran for more than 20 years.

Respondents' assessment of their economic situation influenced their attitude towards remaining in Iran or returning to Afghanistan. Respondents who assessed their household's economic situation to have improved in Iran were significantly more willing to remain in Iran than those respondents who assessed their economic situation to have not changed, or to have deteriorated. It should be qualified that in spite of the clear majority who wanted to remain in Iran, many of these same respondents also expressed dissatisfaction with their social and economic marginalisation in Iran. Access to housing and facilities such as electricity, gas and running water, and access to welfare facilities particularly health and education in Iran motivated households to remain in Iran in the medium term.

Several respondents mentioned their children's education as a reason for remaining in Iran. However it was not simply the continuing education of children that motivated some households to remain in Iran: the very fact of their children's education was also a factor. The more educated the children in a household, the less likely parents wanted to return to Afghanistan, although there was not significant difference between the view of households with illiterate children versus households with children possessing 1–3 years of education.

Afghan livelihood strategies in Tehran

Those Afghans interviewed in Tehran were still finding employment (only one respondent was unemployed at the time of interview) and entering into tenancy arrangements with landlords despite legislation restricting tenancy and employment to those who entered Iran with a valid passport and visa, and who held a residency permit.

Respondents participated actively in regional social networks that functioned as safety nets. Most had family members and/or acquaintances in their current neighborhood of residence, and most borrowed money from, and loaned money to, family and/or acquaintances in times of need for such purposes as: illness, accident, funeral costs, housing bond, marriage costs and the smuggling fees of relatives. Iranians also featured in Afghan livelihood strategies in Tehran. Horizontal networks (co-workers, neighbours) were more common than vertical (landlord, employer, shopkeeper) between Afghans and Iranians, but both were utilised.

An unexpected result was the extent of transnational networks among Afghan respondents in Iran to the West (mainly Europe, Canada and Australia) versus the extent of remittances from relatives in these places to Afghan respondents in Iran. Most respondents had family members living overseas, and most had direct communication with their relatives. However, very few disclosed that they had ever

received financial assistance from their relatives living overseas. Also unanticipated was the frequency of arranged marriages between Afghan families of brides in Iran, and the Afghan families of grooms living abroad. Apart from the practice of brides travelling abroad for the purpose of marriage, some respondents themselves aspired to migrate to another country. Those who had relatives or acquaintances living in other countries were more likely to aspire to migrate to another country. Five out of 50 Afghan respondent households living in Iran had approached UNHCR for resettlement.⁶⁸

Data from this case study challenges the notion that in the event of return to Afghanistan, and as a livelihood strategy, Afghan families would leave some members behind in Iran to remit money to help finance the family's reintegration. This research revealed that all except one family intended to return as an intact family unit to Afghanistan, and would not separate or leave family members behind in Iran.

Links to Afghanistan

Most respondents participated in transnational networks spanning Iran, Afghanistan and Europe. In these networks, cash, gifts, and women as brides are the main "objects" of circulation. These transnational networks are sustained by direct contact via letter, phone and internet. Only about half of respondents had sent money to relatives in Afghanistan once, and very few specified that they regularly remitted money to relatives in Afghanistan. Most respondents mentioned that their own household's economic situation in Tehran was too weak to be supporting other relatives in Afghanistan. Remittance patterns of single labour migrants were radically different to those of households – both in terms of amount sent and frequency.

An unanticipated link between Afghans in Iran and Afghanistan concerned arranged marriages. Almost half of the respondents said that they, or their relatives in Iran, had travelled back to Afghanistan to marry Afghan women whom they then brought back with them to Iran. In spite of these links with relatives in Afghanistan sustained by direct communication, and occasional remittances, gifts and intermarriage, these links could not be relied on for assistance in the event of return or in the process of reintegration. Many respondents assessed their relatives' situation to be even weaker than their own and unable to provide accommodation or financial assistance on their initial arrival in Afghanistan.

Afghan perceptions of long-term future in relation to Afghanistan

The majority of respondents did not intend to return to Afghanistan in the short term, and planned to remain in Iran in the medium term if they were permitted to do so. Respondents mentioned the need for a stronger economy and labour market, and improved welfare facilities including health and education. Peace and security were perceived as critical prerequisites for return. The perception of insecurity in Afghanistan has a gendered dimension: households with single daughters of marriageable age clearly preferred to remain in Iran compared with other households. Further, 12.5% of women household heads compared with 40.5% of male household heads wanted to return to Afghanistan.

⁶⁸ Afghan asylum seekers to industrialised countries fell 80% from 54,000 in 2002 to 9,000 in 2004. Those countries that received Afghan asylum applications in 2004 include: UK (1,400), Germany (900), Austria (750), Netherlands (700), Denmark (300) and Hungary (60). UNHCR Afghan Refugee Statistics, February 2005, <http://www.unhcr.ch/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/afghan?page=chrono>, accessed 11 April 2005.

Having owned land prior to migration does not seem to have any bearing on intention to return, while still having access to land is important. Several respondents aspired to save sufficient capital prior to returning to Afghanistan in order to purchase property there, and many others had already sent money to relatives in Afghanistan for the purpose of buying either land or a house.

Kabul, Mazar-i-Sharif and Herat were clearly the preferred places of resettlement regardless of respondents' location of origin in Afghanistan. Preference was based on the presence of family members, perceived work opportunities and better infrastructure and welfare facilities.

It is probable that respondents' decision-making to return to Afghanistan was affected by the experiences of their relatives who had returned from Iran to Afghanistan. Most respondents had relatives who had repatriated to Afghanistan, and most received first-hand, updated news about conditions for returnees. Several respondent households were sending money to Afghanistan to provide for the livelihood of other relatives that had returned. Additionally, almost half of the respondents said they or their family members had visited Afghanistan, with over one third of visits undertaken in 2003–04.

5.2 Transitory Afghan labour migrants in Tehran

Reasons for becoming migrants

This study substantiates Stigter's hypothesis that the availability of horizontal networks determine whether migration to Iran is feasible to spread risks within the household or between households.⁶⁹ All labour migrant respondents had brothers living in the household of their parents in Afghanistan, with one third of respondents having four or five brothers. When asked about the impact of the respondent's migration on the family, most respondents mentioned that his brother(s) were looking after the family in his absence. Additionally, over half of respondents' households in Afghanistan comprised extended families, including the respondent's parents' siblings and their families.

Respondents described migration as a coping strategy that allowed their family to receive remittances to pay for daily needs, and to resolve debts. A couple of respondents mentioned remittances were used for both daily needs and as capital for investment. The majority of respondents' families in Afghanistan had become indebted in order to pay for their daily needs during the state of war.

Experiences of Afghan migrants in Tehran

The fact that nearly all respondents mentioned they had cousins, uncles, brothers and brothers-in-law living in Iran suggests that channels of pre-established transnational networks facilitate the migration of subsequent family members. While having a family practice of labour migration may not be a reason in itself for migration, it is probable that some Afghan men decide to migrate on the basis that their migration will be facilitated by family members and relatives in Iran. The decision to migrate was a family affair with most respondents' parents and some older married brothers involved in the respondent's decision to migrate. Additionally, most respondents'

⁶⁹ Stigter, 2005b, p. 29

trips to Iran, and initial settling-in period (finding accommodation and work), were facilitated by relatives, usually cousins, uncles or brothers in Iran.

An unexpected finding from this study was the extent of unemployment among Afghan labour migrants in Tehran. Respondents reported substantial periods of unemployment with the average four in every twelve months. During this time they lived from their savings, or loaned money from family. In spite of periods of unemployment, respondents still remitted an average of 690,000 *Tooman* (\$US775) annually to their family in Afghanistan, usually via *hawala*. Their continued migration and secondary return to Iran (over half had returned to Afghanistan at least once) suggests that neither unemployment, nor their lack of access to insurance services to protect against work injury, are sufficient obstacles to dissuade them from continued migration. In spite of government regulations making the employment of Afghan nationals without work permits illegal,⁷⁰ labour migrants are still being employed and many gain employment through recommendations or introductions by relatives or friends.

Future intentions in terms of return/mobility

Over one third of labour migrant respondents said they would return to Iran, and the same number again said that their return to Iran was conditional on the work situation in Afghanistan. As expected, Kabul was seen as a potential destination by those seeking work but not intending to return to Iran. Most labour migrant respondents expressed no intention of seeking work in another country. Those who expressed interest mentioned Emirates (Dubai), Australia and Canada for reasons including good income, family living there, work opportunities and security.

Labour migrant respondents did not have definite plans about returning to Afghanistan. A little under half of respondents had not returned to Afghanistan at all since coming to Iran, and this same figure claimed they did not know when they would return to Afghanistan. Following the practice by Afghan returnees of making their move in the warmer months of spring and summer, a quarter of respondents claimed that they would return to Afghanistan in the next four months (May–August). Respondents from places other than Kabul expressed a clear preference for returning directly to the place of their family household and land, and making secondary movement onward to Kabul only if there was no work locally and they had financial needs. This contrasted with the majority of Afghan households in Iran (of whom very few had houses or land in Afghanistan), who preferred to return from Iran to Kabul even if they had not originated from Kabul.⁷¹

⁷⁰ Article 3 of 'Regulations on accelerating repatriation of Afghan nationals' concerns the prevention of unauthorised employment of Afghan nationals by taking legal action against Iranian employers who employed Afghan nationals without work permits.

⁷¹ While 57.1% of respondents were from Kabul originally, 64% of household respondents said if they returned to Afghanistan they intended to return to Kabul.

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