

Case Study Series

RETURN TO AFGHANISTAN?

**A Study of Afghans Living in
Zahedan, Islamic Republic of Iran**

**Faculty of Social Sciences
University of Tehran**

**Mohammad Jalal Abbasi-Shavazi, Diana Glazebrook,
Gholamreza Jamshidiha, Hossein Mahmoudian and Rasoul Sadeghi**

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About the Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit

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Foreword

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 primary destinations for Afghan migrants in Iran, this study aims to provide a deeper understanding of Afghan households and labour migrants, and to explore livelihoods, regional and transnational networks and perceptions about returning to Afghanistan for Afghan family groups/households and labour migrants residing in Iran.

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 US\$10 million per day.¹ (UNHCR estimated its expenditure in Iran to be US\$352 million up until 2001.²) It was as a result of domestic economic and social concerns in the 1990s that refugee policy towards Afghans shifted to emphasise repatriation.

In 2002, the government of Iran signed a Tripartite Agreement with the government of Afghanistan and UNHCR facilitating the voluntary return of Afghans to Afghanistan. In 2003 this Agreement was revised and extended for two years. Between 2002 and 2004, over 750,000 Afghans returned from Iran with the voluntary repatriation operation. In late 2004, it was estimated that a little over one million documented Afghans³ 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.

This report highlights the findings of the Zahedan case study, which was conducted in April and June, 2005, by the Faculty of Social Sciences of the University of Tehran as 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 original household 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, Mr Anvar Asaie, Ms Masoumeh Nazari, and Mr Mohammad Javad Mohaghegh, whose efforts were invaluable in collecting the data for this project.

Mohammad Jalal Abbasi Shavazi, Tehran, October 2005

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

² UNHCR, “Return to Afghanistan”, <http://www.unhcr.ch/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/afghan>

³ This figure is based on a report by the UNHCR using data from the 2003 BAFIA registration project. Recent Iranian government legislation, such as the (2003) eleven “Regulations on accelerating repatriation of Afghan nationals” under Article 138 of the Constitution, differentiates Afghan nationals in terms of those who are documented and those who are not. A “documented” Afghan national carries a valid passport, a valid visa and a valid residence permit, and has been registered by BAFIA’s most recent campaign.

Contributors

Mohammad Jalal Abbasi-Shavazi is an Associate Professor and Head of the Department of Demography of the University of Tehran, Tehran, Iran, and Associate, Research School of Social Sciences, Australian National University (ANU), Canberra, Australia. Abbasi-Shavazi's PhD study focused on immigrant fertility in Australia. He has conducted several studies on Iranian fertility transition and has published extensively on these subjects.

Diana Glazebrook has a PhD in anthropology from the Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies, ANU. She has conducted field-based research, and published on the subjects of West Papuan refugees from Indonesian Papua living as permissive residents in Papua New Guinea, and Hazara refugees from Afghanistan living as temporary protection visa-holders in Australia.

Gholamreza Jamshidiha is an Associate Professor and Dean of the Faculty of Social Sciences of the University of Tehran. He has conducted a survey and published papers on the determinants of Afghan refugees in Golshahr, Mashhad.

Hossein Mahmoudian is an Assistant Professor in the Faculty of Social Sciences of the University of Tehran. He conducted his PhD research on demographic and social characteristics of Muslim women in Australia, and has published papers on fertility, migration and women's issues.

Rasoul Sadeghi is a Research Assistant at the Institute for Social Studies and Research, University of Tehran. He has conducted his MA research on ethnicity and fertility in Iran.

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Glossary

<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>amayesh</i>	"amayesh" literally means logistics; the <i>amayesh</i> project was implemented by the Iranian authorities to identify regional and infrastructure potentials to accommodate refugees in Iran; the <i>amayesh</i> project for Afghan refugees was conducted during July 2003 and February 2004
<i>aroos</i>	bride
<i>aroosi</i>	wedding
<i>bisavad</i>	non-literate
<i>chador neshin</i>	tent-like dwelling of nomads, also <i>kuch neshin</i>
<i>hawala</i>	money transfer
<i>hosseinieh</i>	meeting place for religious commemoration of the martyrdom of the Shia Imam Hossein, and other communal religious activities
<i>jerib</i>	unit of land measurement, approximately one fifth of a hectare
<i>mehmanshahr</i>	literally "guest city" – unregulated refugee settlement usually located on the edge of cities across Iran; there are estimated to be 80 such settlements and seven regulated "camps" across Iran
<i>mahr</i>	a financial provision negotiated as part of the nuptial contract; sometimes the <i>mahr</i> is paid upon marriage, but often it is deferred until after the termination of a marriage
<i>mohajerin</i>	forced religious migrants (usually refers to those Afghans who came to Iran during the Soviet occupation 1979–89)
<i>nawroz</i>	New Year based on the Solar Hijra Calendar, beginning on the vernal equinox
<i>panahandegan</i>	refugees, usually refers to those Afghans who came to Iran after the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan (after 1989)
<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>Seyed</i>	the descendants of the Prophet Mohammad
<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 heated water
<i>Tooman</i>	Iranian currency; US\$1 = approx. 887.5 <i>Tooman</i> or 8,875 <i>Rial</i> (March 2005)

Summary

Since the installation of the internationally supported interim authority in Afghanistan in late 2001, 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 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 Afghan single labour migrants. The study moves beyond the quantitative data on repatriation to explore the perceptions and concerns of Afghans in Iran. Specifically it examines the prospect of returning to Afghanistan or remaining in Iran.

The conditions, intentions and strategies of Afghan respondents living in Zahedan can be summarised as follows:

Afghan households in Zahedan

Reasons for household decision-making about return

- Perceived lack of security, welfare (education and health) and housing in Afghanistan discourages household respondents from returning to Afghanistan, and existence of these in Iran encourage respondents to remain in the medium term;
- Respondents who assessed their household's economic situation to have deteriorated in Iran were almost three times more willing to return to Afghanistan as those respondents who assessed their economic situation to have improved, with respondents who claimed their situation to be unchanged significantly least willing; and
- Living conditions for Afghan households in Zahedan are substantially worse than both Tehran and Mashhad, and house ownership is uncommon;
- Some households had returned to Afghanistan and then returned again to Iran due to lack of work, while other households had returned to Afghanistan and then the household head had returned alone to Iran to earn money for remittances.

Afghan perceptions of their long-term future in relation to Afghanistan

- About one quarter of respondents intended returning to Afghanistan in the medium term;
- Household respondents least willing to return to Afghanistan were those resident in Iran for 16–20 years, indicating a relationship between duration of residence and reluctance to return, however those resident for 8–10 years were also significantly unwilling to return; and
- Household respondents intending to return to Afghanistan indicated that they planned to do so as intact family groups preferably to their place of origin.

Afghan livelihood strategies in Zahedan

- Households utilised mainly regional social networks in Iran as safety nets, especially for coping with the costs of illness;
- There was a commonly held view that sustainable return required returnees to have capital and/or assets; and
- The extreme economic vulnerability of female-headed households was observed, with monthly expenditure on average 35.5% less than other households.

Links to Afghanistan

- Household respondents rarely submit regular remittances to relatives in Afghanistan but may respond to requests for specific urgent needs, while single labour migrants submit frequent and substantial amounts of remittance via *hawala* to Afghanistan;
- Respondents whose property (house and/or land) in Afghanistan is currently subject to *amanat* were extremely unwilling to return;
- Several respondents intending to return had purchased land in Afghanistan or were saving money in order to purchase land; and
- Household respondents could not rely on relatives in Afghanistan to support or sustain their reintegration in the event of return.

Afghan labour migrants in Zahedan

Reasons for becoming migrants

- Most labour migrants had either brothers or uncles living in the household of their parents in Afghanistan or close to it, substantiating the hypothesis that horizontal networks determine migration to Iran by spreading risks within and between households; and
- Respondents described migration as a coping strategy that allowed their family to receive remittances to pay for daily needs and to resolve debts.

Experiences of Afghan migrants in Zahedan

- All except one labour migrant respondent had paternal and maternal uncles and/or cousins and/or brothers in Iran at the time of migrating, substantiating the hypothesis that pre-established transnational networks facilitate the migration of subsequent family members;
- In spite of varying and sometimes substantial periods of unemployment, labour migrant respondents claimed they sent an annual average of 970,000 *Tooman* (US\$1,008) in remittances to Afghanistan, usually via *hawala* or sent with acquaintances, and usually remitted to respondents' fathers or wives; and
- The frequency of respondents' return to Iran suggests that labour migrants are still able to find employment, with many gaining work through recommendations or introductions by relatives or friends.

Future intentions in terms of return/mobility

- Afghan labour migrants in Zahedan preferred not to return again to Iran for work;
- More than one third said that if they were legally permitted to remain in Iran they would do so;

- In the event of remaining in Afghanistan, respondents expressed a clear preference for returning directly to the place of their family household and land, and making secondary onward movement to Baghlan, Kabul or Kandahar only if there was no work locally and they had financial needs; and
- Most labour migrant respondents expressed no intention to seek work in another country, with minor interest in the UAE and Pakistan, followed by Austria and the Netherlands.

1. Introduction

1.1 Rationale for the research

The Soviet occupation of Afghanistan (1979–89) caused massive migration of as many as three million Afghans to Iran (see Table 1). A period of Afghan repatriation from Iran following the withdrawal of the Soviets in 1989 was terminated by the fall of Najibullah’s regime in 1992. The years 1992–2001 were 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 (see Table 2).

From the 1990s, as a result of domestic economic and social concerns, Iranian refugee policy shifted to emphasise prevention and repatriation.⁴ 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 programme.⁵ In 1998–99, the Iranian authorities engaged in a parallel deportation campaign of up to 190,000 undocumented Afghans.⁶

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,⁷ various “regulations on accelerating repatriation of Afghan nationals” were introduced. 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.⁸ 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).

Year of arrival	Numbers of Afghans
1980	200,000
1981	500,000
1982	800,000
1983	1,200,000
1984	1,500,000
1985	1,800,000
1986	2,000,000
1987	2,221,000
1988	2,700,000
1989	2,900,000
1990	2,940,000
1991	3,000,000
1992	2,900,000
1993	2,700,000
1994	1,850,000
1995	1,623,000
1996	1,420,000
1997	1,400,000
1998	1,400,000
1999	1,400,000
2000	1,326,000
2001	1,482,000

Table 1. Arrival from Afghanistan to Iran 1980–2001 (until 1 January 2001)

UNHCR Pakistan, www.un.org.pk/unhcr/Afstats-stat.htm

Note that UNHCR Pakistan qualifies that its figures for the Islamic Republic of Iran are based on (Iranian) government estimates only.

⁴ Rajae, p. 62

⁵ UNHCR Pakistan, <http://www.un.org.pk/unhcr/Afstats-stat.htm>

⁶ US Committee for Refugees, in D. Turton and P. Marsden, 2002, *Taking Refugees for a Ride? The Politics of Refugee Return to Afghanistan*, Kabul: AREU, p. 15

⁷ 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).

⁸ UNHCR, *Global Report 2003: Islamic Republic of Iran*, <http://www.unhcr.ch/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/home/opendoc.pdf?id=40c6d7500&tbl=PUBL>, accessed 8 September 2005

Repatriation from Iran	Assisted	Spontaneous	Total
1988–89	–	–	–
1990	–	–	–
1991	–	–	–
1992	7,000	287,000	294,000
1993	337,000	269,000	606,000
1994	121,000	106,000	227,000
1995	92,000	103,000	195,000
1996	8,000	6,000	14,000
1997	2,000	–	2,000
1998	14,000	–	14,000
1999	9,000	152,000	161,000
2000	184,000	31,000	216,000
Total⁹	775,000	954,000	1,730,000

Table 2. Repatriation of Afghans from Iran to Afghanistan
UNHCR Pakistan, www.un.org.pk/unhcr/Afstats-stat.htm

This was the backdrop against which voluntary repatriation of some 770,643 Afghans occurred in the period 1 March 2002 – 31 October 2004.¹⁰ 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,¹¹ and as many as 500,000 undocumented single Afghan labour migrants, some of whom move backward and forward between Afghanistan and Iran.¹² The scale and speed of the return programme (particularly in the period March–September 2002 when 1.7 million Afghans returned from Iran and Pakistan) provoked discussion about the sustainable reintegration of Afghan returnees. 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*, 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

⁹ Some totals may not add up due to rounding.

¹⁰ 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

¹¹ 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).

¹² US Committee for Refugees, *World Refugee Survey 2004 Country Report*, <http://www.refugees.org/countryreports.aspx?subm=&ssm=&cid=118>, accessed 29 May 2005

*locations, and the policy and institutional actions that shape the overall return process.*¹³

While there is now extensive literature on transnational networks as they relate to migration, until several years ago little research had been undertaken into regional and transnational social networks between Afghans in Iran, Afghanistan and Pakistan. 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 such as houses and land.

This case study of Afghans living in Zahedan draws on a respondent group of 60 households and fifteen labour migrants to explore:

- how respondents perceive their livelihoods opportunities 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 research into transnational networks undertaken by AREU in Tehran and Mashhad (Iran) in 2005, and in Faryab and Herat (Afghanistan) in 2004. It was also undertaken concurrently with transnational networks research in Pakistan (Karachi, Peshawar and Quetta). A related study on rural-to-urban migration in

¹³ UNHCR, 2005, *Afghanistan: Challenges to Return*, Geneva, p. 6

¹⁴ A. Monsutti, 2004b, “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

Afghanistan was undertaken in 2005.¹⁶ 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.”¹⁷ An AREU briefing paper on transnational networks published in 2005 (drawing on the findings of the studies on networks between Faryab and Herat, and Iran) argues that the government of Afghanistan and policymakers need to acknowledge and realise the economic potential of regional labour migration for Afghanistan’s future. In formulating an appropriate response to Afghan migration, the paper concludes that the governments of Afghanistan, Iran and Pakistan, along with the assistance community, must:

- recognise that migration is not only a reaction to war and economic hardship, but also a key livelihoods strategy that is likely to continue well beyond the UNHCR’s voluntary repatriation programme;
- establish a bilateral labour migration framework that provides a clear legal identity and rights for Afghan labourers in Iran;
- provide easier access to passports for Afghans;
- increase awareness of the contribution, both in labour and otherwise, of Afghans to the Iranian and Pakistani economies; and
- in line with international conventions, continue to uphold the refugee status and protection of the most vulnerable.¹⁸

One final note on the use of terminology in this report: Centlivres and Centlivres-Demont emphasise the term *mohajer/mohajerin* as an Arab word that translates as “refugee(s)” in Islamic countries, and is based on the root *hejra* which makes direct reference to Mohammad’s flight from Mecca to Medina. Those classified as *mohajerin* have gone into exile “especially for religious reasons, when the regime in power does not allow the free practice of Islam.”¹⁹ In 1979, the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan coincided with the Islamic Revolution in neighbouring Iran, and the Islamic principle enshrined in the Quran²⁰ of hosting refugees and displaced people was given particular respect in light of the revolution. Rather than the simple English translation of *mohajerin* as migrants or refugees, in the context of the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan, the term *mohajerin* was said to refer to “religious migrants”.

¹⁶ J. Abbasi-Shavazi et al., 2005, *Returning to Afghanistan? Afghans Living in Tehran*, Kabul: Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit; J. Abbasi-Shavazi et al., 2005, *Returning to Afghanistan? Afghans Living in Mashhad*, Kabul: Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit; E. Stigter, 2005a, *Transnational Networks and Migration from Herat to Iran*, Kabul: Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit; E. Stigter, 2005b, *Transnational Networks and Migration from Faryab to Iran*, Kabul: Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit; Collective for Social Science Research, 2005, *Afghans in Karachi: Migration, Settlement and Social Networks*, Kabul: Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit; A. Opel, 2005, *Bound for the City: A Study of Rural to Urban Labour Migration in Afghanistan*, Kabul: Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit

¹⁷ UNHCR, 2004, *Obstacles to Return*, in Stigter 2005a, p. 2

¹⁸ E. Stigter and A. Monsutti, 2005, *Transnational Networks: Recognising a Regional Reality*, Kabul: Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit, p. 2

¹⁹ P. Centlivres and M. Centlivres-Demont, 1988, “The Afghan refugee in Pakistan: an ambiguous identity”, *Journal of Refugee Studies* 1(2):145

²⁰ “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

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.²¹ After the withdrawal of the Soviets in 1989 and the subsequent civil war between various mujahedin factions, Afghans seeking refuge in post-1993 Iran were no longer considered to be religious migrants, but simply emigrants. From 1993, the Iranian government started issuing temporary registration cards to undocumented or newly arrived Afghans.

The Farsi word for a refugee is “*panahinda*”, whereas the word “*mohajer*” refers to an emigrant (the word “*mohajarin*” refers to emigrants in the plural). However, in official documents the government of Iran has referred to undocumented and documented Afghans as emigrants rather than refugees. Whereas “*mohajer*” was considered to be an honourable term, “*panahandegan*”, or refugee, was considered to have a pejorative nuance, even connoting impoverishment.²² UNHCR’s work has been restricted to those 5 percent or so of Afghans who are considered to be refugees, that is, those living in *memhanshahr*.

There is a third and significant category of Afghans in Iran, and that is the labour migrant who may cross repeatedly between Afghanistan and Iran, leaving his family behind in Afghanistan. These 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.²³

1.2 Main research questions

The Transnational Networks research in Iran comprises studies in twelve neighbourhoods in three cities: Tehran, Mashhad and Zahedan. The study has collected 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 looked 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 were:

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)?

²¹ Rajaei, p. 57

²² Complicating this, prior to the 1979 revolution, a small number of Afghans 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).

²³ US Committee for Refugees, *World Refugee Survey 2004 Country Report*

- How do they see their long-term future in relation to Afghanistan?

With *labour migrants* from Afghanistan living in Iran:

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

1.3 Zahedan and Sistan Baluchistan case study

There are several characteristics of Sistan Baluchistan Province that differentiate it from most provinces in Iran: the fact that it has the lowest level of development across various indicators, its location at the frontline of anti-smuggling activities by the state, and its majority Sunni Islam population.

Zahedan is the capital of Sistan Baluchistan Province and its main economic centre supporting many small- and medium-scale industries including cotton textiles, woven and hand-knotted rugs, ceramics, processed foods, livestock feed, processed hides, milled rice and bricks. Agricultural industries have been affected by a 7-year-long chronic drought in the province since 1998.

The 1999 Human Development Report of Iran lists Sistan Baluchistan Province at the bottom of the Human Development Index.²⁴ UNICEF reported that 53% of the population of Sistan Baluchistan Province has access to safe water compared with 83% nationally, 22% of children aged 6–10 years are non-literate compared with 4% nationally, and there are similarly wide gaps in nutrition indicators. Along with the provinces of West Azerbaijan and Hormozghan, Sistan Baluchistan has been identified in national surveys as having low access to social services.²⁵ Compared to the total population, Sistan Baluchistan has higher fertility and lower literacy and education levels for women (70% of Baluch women are estimated to be non-literate). There is a substantially higher unemployment rate in Sistan Baluchistan Province.²⁶

Iran shares a 936-kilometre border with Afghanistan and a 909-kilometre border with Pakistan.²⁷ Narcotics are smuggled from Afghanistan into Iran through the two border provinces of Sistan Baluchistan and Khorasan by various means.²⁸ The frontline of the government's anti-narcotics smuggling activities are located in Sistan Baluchistan and Khorasan provinces, where personnel from Iran's law enforcement forces include the Islamic Republic of Iran Ground Forces (regular army), the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), and paramilitary known as Basij. Since mid 2000, the IRGC has

²⁴ From the *Interim Report of the Commission on Human Rights on the Situation of Human Rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran*, Maurice Copithorne, United Nations General Assembly, AA/55/363, 8 September 2000, p. 11

²⁵ UNICEF 2004

²⁶ M.J. Abbasi-Shavazi, P. McDonald and M. Hosseini Chavoshi, 2003, "Changes in Family, Fertility Behavior and Attitudes in Iran", Working Paper in *Demography* No. 88, Australian National University

²⁷ W. Samii, 2003, "Drug Abuse: Iran's thorniest problem," *The Brown Journal of World Affairs*. IX(2):289

²⁸ Samii, p. 289

created defence units at the village level by giving rudimentary military training to villagers to help defend against smugglers.²⁹

The existence of cross-border Baluch alliances are said to further complicate anti-smuggling offensives.³⁰ Like those in neighbouring Pakistani Baluchistan, the majority of the population of Sistan Baluchistan are ethnic Baluch. It has been proposed that shared Baluch ethnicity that straddles the international border is more binding than the tie of shared national citizenship.³¹

1.4 Methodology

The research was conducted in a particular domestic (Iranian) political milieu: at the time of the research, Iran was a signatory of a Tripartite Repatriation Agreement with Afghanistan and the UN to actively facilitate the repatriation of Afghans living in Iran. Additionally, beginning in April 2005, a media campaign was conducted on national television to encourage Afghans to return to Afghanistan.³² While this research did not specifically solicit data on the impact of this political situation on refugee decision-making, the point has been made by other researchers that the combination of facilitated repatriation and perceived pressure from the host society has influenced Afghan decision-making to return.³³

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.

As well as asking about respondents' perceptions or intentions (which risks rhetorical answers not grounded in actual practice), questions were formulated that focused on practices and actions that had actually been undertaken. For example, those respondents who expressed interest in third-country resettlement were asked:

- What information do you have about that country?
- What are your sources of information about that country?
- For what reason does that country interest you?

²⁹ Samii, p. 289

³⁰ Samii, p. 294

³¹ Samii, p. 294

³² "Regulations on accelerating repatriation of Afghan nationals" (2003) Article 5 states that Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting (IRIB) will promote and encourage Afghan nationals to return to Afghanistan.

³³ Turton and Marsden, p. 33

- What efforts have you already made towards applying for third-country settlement to that country?

A second example relates to the form and destination of remittances: those respondents who said that they had relatives in Afghanistan were asked:

- By what means do you have contact?
- What form of assistance have you provided each other?
- Have you sent money, and if so, to whom?

A final example relates to financial difficulty: those respondents who claimed that they had faced urgent needs were asked:

- What was the urgent need for which you needed money?
- How did you resolve that urgent need?
- From whom did you borrow money?

While the framing of questions in this way goes some way towards distinguishing an intention from an action taken, it does not go as far as observation by the researcher of respondents' actual practices and action.

An introductory sequence of questions provided demographic data on the region of origin, education, occupation and household structure. Each questionnaire took approximately two hours to complete, and interviewers carried out a total of 60 interviews in five locations in Zahedan in April and May:

- Karimabad: 16
- Shirabad: 12
- Old Road and perimeter districts: 13
- Babayan district: 10
- Zahedan city centre: 9

The sample was selected based on the proportion of Afghans living in each of the locations. Features that were selected for in the sample included: widows as household heads, ethnicity, age and phases of arrival to Iran (communist-led coup and subsequent Soviet occupation 1979–89; conflict between the Najibullah government and mujahedin 1989–1992; and interfactional fighting, rise and fall of Taliban 1992–2001.³⁴ Afghan households established in Iran for a period of less than eight years were not included.

A second visit was made by interviewers to Zahedan in mid June. Targeting those household respondents who were comparatively articulate and open in the first interview, 15 respondents were selected and invited to participate in a second in-depth interview. Using a structured interview schedule, the second interview was designed to elicit more detailed data on current livelihoods opportunities, links to Afghanistan and how these have changed over time, and hopes and concerns in relation to return to Afghanistan.

Alongside the household interviews, 15 single labour migrants in Zahedan were interviewed using an open-ended questionnaire. It was assumed that this respondent group would be unlikely to hold residency permits, so respondents were not asked to disclose this sensitive information about their status. For the purposes of this study

³⁴ These phases of arrival are elaborated on in UNHCR, *Afghanistan: Challenges to Return*.

it was assumed that this group was unregistered, and therefore representative of the large number of undocumented Afghans in Iran. The design for this questionnaire was influenced by data from Stigter's Herat and Faryab case studies, and Alessandro Monsutti's migration time–place matrix.³⁵ The labour migrant 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. This questionnaire was revised following analysis of the Tehran study's labour migrant data. Several questions were added to extend data on the background of migration, particularly the role of social relations and assets bases. Features that were selected for in the sample included: place of origin in Afghanistan and occupation in Zahedan.

Given Afghan apprehension that the Iranian government was implementing campaigns to identify and deport undocumented Afghans, the coverage and timing of the research was highly sensitive. The training of 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 to the respondents. It is possible that the use of random sampling (rather than the snowball technique) in Zahedan affected the quality of data in the household study, resulting in a second visit being made to Zahedan. However the labour migrant study in Zahedan also used random sampling and the data from this study was significantly more detailed than the same study in Tehran which used snowball sampling. Additionally, it is possible that the use of Shia interviewers to interview predominantly Sunni respondents (76.7%) in Zahedan may have affected the depth of the data as the interviewers may have been unable to establish themselves as trustworthy by virtue of their identity as Shia Afghans.

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 April and June, 2005.

Along with the questionnaires, interviewers undertook limited social mapping of neighbourhoods to identify the availability of utilities and services, schools, training centres, mosques, clinics and community organisations. Additionally, research team members made field visits to several of the locations in Zahedan, 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.

³⁵ Stigter 2005a, 2005b; A. Monsutti, 2004a, "Guerres et migrations," *Editions de l'Institut d'Ethnologie*, Paris: Neuchatel/de la Maison des Sciences de l'Homme.

1.5 Report structure

This report details the findings of the research and presents recommendations arising from these findings. Part 2 sets the context of the report by summarising the history of Afghans in Iran, followed by a selection of respondents' reasons for leaving Afghanistan. It concludes with a description of Iranian government policy towards Afghans from 1979 to the present. Part 3 focuses on Afghan households living in Zahedan for eight years or more. It begins by presenting data on current livelihood strategies, participation in regional and transnational social networks, and respondents' perceptions of their current situation in Iran compared to their previous situation in Afghanistan. It then considers decision-making processes in relation to returning to Afghanistan, and looks at respondents' strategies in the event of return to Afghanistan and aspirations for third-country resettlement. Part 4 focuses on the experiences of single Afghan labour migrants in Zahedan 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 the context 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. Afghan Shias have been making pilgrimages to Iran³⁶ for several hundred years. The first documented movement of Afghans to Iran was in the 1850s when up to 5,000 Hazara households migrated to Iran and settled at Jam and Bakharz.³⁷ 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 Abdur Rahman (1880–1903), constituting up to 90% of the local population.³⁸ After the seizure of power by Reza Khan after the last Qajar king in about 1937, Hazaras from Afghanistan were officially categorised as a tribal group called *Khawari* and represented at ceremonies and Iranian national celebrations.³⁹

It has been estimated that as many as several hundred thousand Afghan labour migrants were present in Iran prior to the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan.⁴⁰ Major movement of Afghans to Iran occurred as a result of the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan from 1979–89. Relative seclusion, stability and peace had been sustained until 1973, while disorder, insecurity and ongoing disputes between left-wing parties led to two coups in 1978 and 1979 in which President Daoud was killed by Taraki and Amin, then Taraki was killed by Amin who was killed by Soviet troops. A

³⁶ S.A. Mousavi, 1997, *The Hazaras of Afghanistan: An Historical, Cultural, Economic and Political Study*, New York: St Martin's Press, p. 148

³⁷ Mousavi, p. 149

³⁸ Shah Alami in Mousavi, p. 150

³⁹ *Khawari* literally means "people of the east". Also referred to as *Bairbari*, these people migrated from Afghanistan in the previous century, mainly to Khorasan, and many integrated and were naturalised as Iranians. A larger number migrated onward to Iraq; many of the *Khawari* now residing in Mashhad were expelled from Iraq in the 1970s. The citizenship of the *Khawari* in Mashhad is now disputed, and many have been issued *amayesh* documents with specific mention of Iraqi nationality (Alessandro Monsutti, personal communication).

⁴⁰ UNHCR, *Afghanistan: Challenges to Return*, p.9

jihad was proclaimed against the Soviets and many Sunni and Shia clergy encouraged migration. The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan resulted in the influx of 2.9 million Afghans to Iran from 1980–89.⁴¹ During the 1980s, Afghans were said to fill a significant gap in the workforce during the war against Iraq.⁴² Repatriation figures peaked following the Soviet withdrawal in 1989, with 1.3 million Afghans returning from Iran between 1992 and 1995.⁴³

The process of voluntary repatriation came to an end with the outbreak of violence: from 1989 when the mujahedin were at war with the central government, and after the fall of Kabul in 1992 when civil war broke out. 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 from Iran with the voluntary repatriation operation.⁴⁴ Around 65% of Afghan returnees from Iran were men of working age.⁴⁵ 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 previous 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 Hazaras from Afghanistan (predominantly Shia) in Iran, far fewer Hazara than other ethnic groups such as Tajik and Pashtun returned to Afghanistan.⁴⁶

⁴¹ UNHCR Pakistan, based on estimates obtained from the Government of Iran, <http://www.un.org.pk/unhcr/Afstats-stat.htm>

⁴² UNHCR, *Afghanistan: Challenges to Return*, p. 9

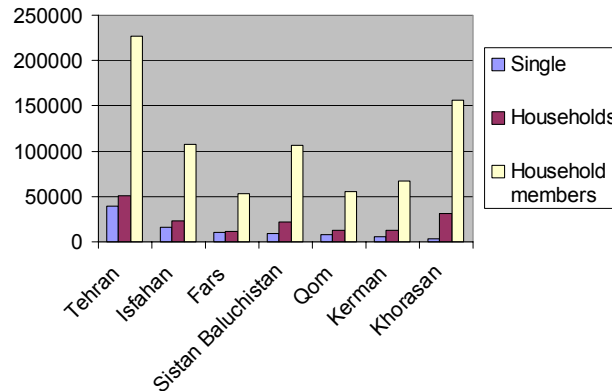
⁴³ UNHCR Pakistan, based on estimates obtained from the Government of Iran, <http://www.un.org.pk/unhcr/Afstats-stat.htm>

⁴⁴ UNHCR Kabul, *Operational information monthly summary report*, March 02–October 04

⁴⁵ UNHCR, *Afghanistan: Challenges to Return*, p. 9

⁴⁶ UNHCR, *Afghanistan: Challenges to Return*, p. 11

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.⁴⁷ 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 several refugee settlements known as *mehmanshahr* (mainly Afghans and some Iraqis) 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).⁴⁸



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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).⁴⁹

2.2 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

⁴⁷ Amayesh and Repatriation databases

⁴⁸ 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

⁴⁹ Amayesh and Repatriation databases

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.⁵⁰

The primary responsibility for foreign nationals in Iran lies with the Ministry of the Interior, in cooperation with both the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Labor.⁵¹ The Ministry of Interior comprises its Tehran headquarters, 25 provincial bureaus, and *mehmanshahr*.⁵² 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 2.9 million Afghans to Iran from 1980–89.⁵³ According to some commentators, it was the combination of 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, that allowed Afghans settling primarily in eastern Iran's rural and urban areas.⁵⁴ Some 3% were accommodated in camps while the remainder settled in urban areas and settlements on the periphery of cities. Iran's early refugee policy towards Afghans was "open door", and refugee status was granted to incoming Afghans on a *prima facie* basis.⁵⁵ 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.⁵⁶

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.⁵⁷ 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 health); 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

⁵⁰ US Committee for Refugees, *World Refugee Survey 2004 Country Report*

⁵¹ Rajaei, p. 47

⁵² US Committee for Refugees, *World Refugee Survey 2004 Country Report*

⁵³ UNHCR Pakistan, based on estimates obtained from the Government of Iran, <http://www.un.org.pk/unhcr/Afstats-stat.htm>

⁵⁴ Rajaei, p.50

⁵⁵ UNHCR in Turton and Marsden, p. 15

⁵⁶ Rajaei, p. 56–7

⁵⁷ Rajaei, p. 62

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 programme.⁵⁸ The government extended the issuing of cards several times, but eventually declared them invalid in 1996. In 1995 the government issued *Laissez-Passer* (LP) documents for one-way travel out of Iran either for repatriation or for resettlement. During 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 US\$10 million per day for subsidised education, health services, transport, fuel and basic goods.) As the UNHCR had limited its assistance to refugees in designated settlements since 1985, 95% of Afghans living throughout Iran in rural and urban areas were largely ineligible for any kind of assistance.⁵⁹

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 programme. The Iranian authorities engaged in a parallel campaign of deporting up to 190,000 undocumented Afghans in 1998–99.⁶⁰ During this time, Iran was described by the US Committee for Refugees as increasingly confining refugees to designated residential areas or settlements.⁶¹ The Iranian authorities withdrew government subsidies for health and education for Afghan refugees residing outside these, partly as an incentive for Afghans to move into settlements. The settlement populations fluctuated much more in 1999 than in previous years, with as many as 98,000 living in settlements 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 settlements. 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 satisfied 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 the 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

⁵⁸ Turton and Marsden, p. 12

⁵⁹ Rajaei, p. 59

⁶⁰ US Committee for Refugees in Turton and Marsden, p. 15

⁶¹ US Committee for Refugees in Turton and Marsden, p. 15

individual basis through the FNECC, but do not make this information public.⁶² On 22 June 2001, the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs made employers of foreign illegal workers subject to heavy fines and imprisonment.⁶³ Many small businesses employing 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, Afghans had received a range of statuses, the majority 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 programme, 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. 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 programme, those Afghans 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 programme.

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 2004.⁶⁴

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

⁶² US Committee for Refugees, *World Refugee Survey 2004 Country Report*

⁶³ Turton and Marsden, p. 31

⁶⁴ UNHCR in Turton and Marsden, p. 19

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.⁶⁵

2.3 Profiles of Afghan neighborhoods in Zahedan

As at 1 January 2005, it was estimated that a total of 11,871 documented Afghans lived in the province of Sistan Baluchistan (of which Zahedan is capital), including 8,877 single people and 104,994 household members (22,010 Afghan families/households).⁶⁶ Afghan households headed by women numbered 878, and there were 1,726 single women.⁶⁷

<i>District in Sistan Baluchistan Province</i>	<i>Families</i>	<i>Persons in Families</i>	<i>Singles</i>
Chahbahar	70	373	421
Iran Shahr	1,691	7,827	647
Khash	2597	13,055	792
Nik Shahr	91	373	96
Saravan	843	3,788	344
Zabol	5,648	26,020	2,023
Zahedan	11,070	53,558	4,554
Total for Sistan Baluchistan	22,010	104,994	8,877

Table 3. Breakdown of documented Afghan population by district in Sistan Baluchistan Province⁶⁸

Significant repatriation has occurred among Afghans living in Sistan Baluchistan, and Zahedan District particularly. In 2004, a total of 69,315 documented Afghans repatriated, including 12,522 family groups and 755 singles. Table 4 shows that out of total of 18,178 documented Afghan family groups living in Zahedan, 7,108 families (almost 40%) repatriated to Afghanistan in 2004 (second only to Saravan's rate of 49%). By far, Zahedan had the highest repatriation rate for documented singles (10% of the total or 526 people).

⁶⁵ UNHCR Kabul in Stigter, 2005a, p. 19

⁶⁶ UNHCR-Iran Amayesh database for Sistan Baluchistan 1/01/05

⁶⁷ Afghan population and family status in Iran as of 1 November 2004, Amayesh and Repatriation databases. As of January 1, 2005, UNHCR estimated the Afghan population of Zahedan to be 108,940.

⁶⁸ Source: UNHCR Iran Amayesh database for Sistan Baluchistan 1/01/05

<i>District in Sistan Baluchistan Province</i>	<i>Amayesh documented Afghans</i>			<i>Repatriation figures for 2004</i>		
	<i>Families</i>	<i>Persons in Families</i>	<i>Singles</i>	<i>Families</i>	<i>Persons in Families</i>	<i>Singles</i>
Chahbahar	86	458	421	16	85	0
Iran Shahr	2,827	13,804	700	1,136	5,977	53
Khash	4,279	22,768	829	1,682	9,713	37
Nik Shahr	133	609	103	42	236	7
Saravan	1,661	8,317	366	818	4,529	22
Zabol	7,368	35,615	2,133	1,720	9,595	110
Zahedan	18,178	91,983	5,080	7,108	38,425	526
Sistan Baluchistan Total	34,532	173,554	9,632	12,522	68,560	755

Table 4. Number of documented Afghans in Sistan Baluchistan Province against 2004 repatriation figures for documented Afghans from Sistan Baluchistan Province⁶⁹

Sistan Baluchistan shares a common border with Baluchistan regions (ethnically Baluch and Pashtun) of Pakistan and Afghanistan (Nimroz Province). The current ethnic make-up in Zahedan is broadly estimated as:

- 25% Pashtun
- 20% Tajik
- 2% Uzbek and Turkmen
- 7% Baluch (down from 29% in 2004)
- the remainder Hazara, Nuristan and Arabs

Most of the population of Zahedan are Sunni including Hanafi and Shafeie. Shias in Zahedan include the Ismailis, of whom many repatriated to Afghanistan in 2002–04. Most Afghans living in Zahedan are located in the eastern, northern and western margins of the city in areas identified as: Babayan, Jame Jam, Bazaar-e Moshtarak, Shirabad, Moradgholi district, salt factory, Tabatabaye Boulevard and the Old Road. Some Afghans can also be found in the newly built areas of the city such as Ziba Shahr. Most Afghans live in Shirabad, Babayan or Jame Jam (estimated by the interviewers to be 12% of households), followed by Bazaar Moshtarak, Tabatabaye Boulevard and Old Road (estimated 8% of households). Interviews were carried out in the following locations:

- Karimabad: 16
- Shirabad: 12
- Old Road and perimeter districts: 13
- Babayan district: 10
- Zahedan city centre: 9

In Zahedan, Sunni Afghans and Sunni Iranians (mainly Baluch) share mosques and centres for teaching and social purposes. Separate places exist at an ethnic rather than national level, for example, a mosque established and attended by Uzbeks is

⁶⁹ UNHCR Iran Amayesh database for Sistan Baluchistan 1/01/05

located on the Old Road, and another one attended by Arabs is located in Babayan. There are four main Shia *hosseinieh* in Zahedan including Baghiatallah, Mohammad Rasoolalah and Zeinabieh. Interviewers in Zahedan were informed that in the past, several Shia groups such as the Hezb-e Wahdat (Akbari branch) and known as Saheb Alzaman Hosseinieh (Helmand Shiites) have closed down their offices and *hosseinieh* as a result of the repatriation of their members.

There are several Afghan training centres operating in Zahedan offering classes including: English language, computer skills, adult literacy, sewing and first aid. Principal centres include: Shohada, Afghan Women's Institute and Al Mahdi, also known as Al Zahra. Respondents claimed that Iranian legislation in 2004 made the activities of these centres no longer legal. However, it should be clarified that under article 4 of Article 138 (Regulations on accelerating repatriation of Afghan nationals) it is officially only undocumented Afghans who are no longer eligible to use such facilities. Other agencies providing services to Afghans in Zahedan include: UNHCR, FAO, WHO, Global Partners, IRAK, Mercy Corps, Médecins Sans Frontières, Iranian Red Crescent Society and various adult education institutions.

2.4 Profiles of Afghan household respondents in Zahedan

- Ethnicity:
 - Tajik: 23.3%
 - Uzbek: 23.3%
 - Pashtun: 20%
 - Hazara, Baluch and Tajik Shia (Farsi-speaking): 10% each
 - Seyed: 3.3%
- Religion: Shia (23.3%), Sunni (76.7%)
- Age, sex, marital status of respondents:
 - Mean age: 42.7 years
 - Male: 78.3% or 47 respondents
 - Female: 21.7% or 13 respondents
 - 80% currently had a spouse
 - 15% widowed
 - 3.3% (or 2 respondents, both women) divorced
- Province of origin in Afghanistan:
 - Baghlan: 20.7%
 - Kandahar: 19%
 - Kunduz: 15.5%
 - Farah: 10.3%
 - Nimroz: 6.9%
 - Kabul and Helmand: 5.2% each
 - Uruzgan and Parwan: 3.4% each
 - Herat, Mazar-i-Sharif, Ghazni, Samangan, Helmand and one unknown province: 1.7% each
- Residence in Afghanistan:
 - rural: 61.7%
 - urban: 31.7%
 - nomad: 6.7%
- Work situation in Afghanistan before leaving:
 - working: 51.7%
 - unemployed: 20%

- home duties: 13.3%
- student: 8.3%
- was a child: 6.7%
- Type of work in Afghanistan before leaving:
 - agriculture: 41.9%
 - animal husbandry: 16.1%
 - hawker and labourer: 6.5% each
 - rubber worker, concreter, weaver, soldier, teacher, panel beater, driver, shoemaker, tailor: 3.2% each
- Assets in Afghanistan:
 - 39% (23 respondents) claimed they had owned land in Afghanistan and 9 respondents claimed they had retained access to that land
 - 35% (21 respondents) said that they owned their house (plus an additional 23 respondents said they had lived in their father's house and did not specify whether the house was rented or owned)
 - 6 respondents said that they had retained access to the house that they had owned in Afghanistan
 - 8.3% (5 respondents) had lived in a tent
- Route to Iran:
 - 41.7% (25 respondents) entered via Pakistan
 - 36% of those spent six months or less in Pakistan
- Place of arrival in Iran:
 - Zahedan: 85%
 - Birjand: 5%
 - Nehbandan, Torbat-e Jam, Fars, Kerman, Zabol and Mashhad: 1.7% each
- Current neighbourhood of residence:
 - 48.3% of respondents mentioned that relatives or acquaintances had been living in their current neighbourhood before they relocated to that neighbourhood
- Household size in Zahedan:
 - mean average: 8.5 people
 - Range: 1–26 people
 - 21 households comprised 10 or more members
- Family size:
 - mean number of children (not necessarily currently living in respondents' Zahedan household): 4.8 children
 - range: 0–11 children

3. Afghan households in Zahedan

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 60 Afghan households were held in five locations in Zahedan. A second shorter interview schedule was undertaken one month later with 15 respondents from the initial group of 60.

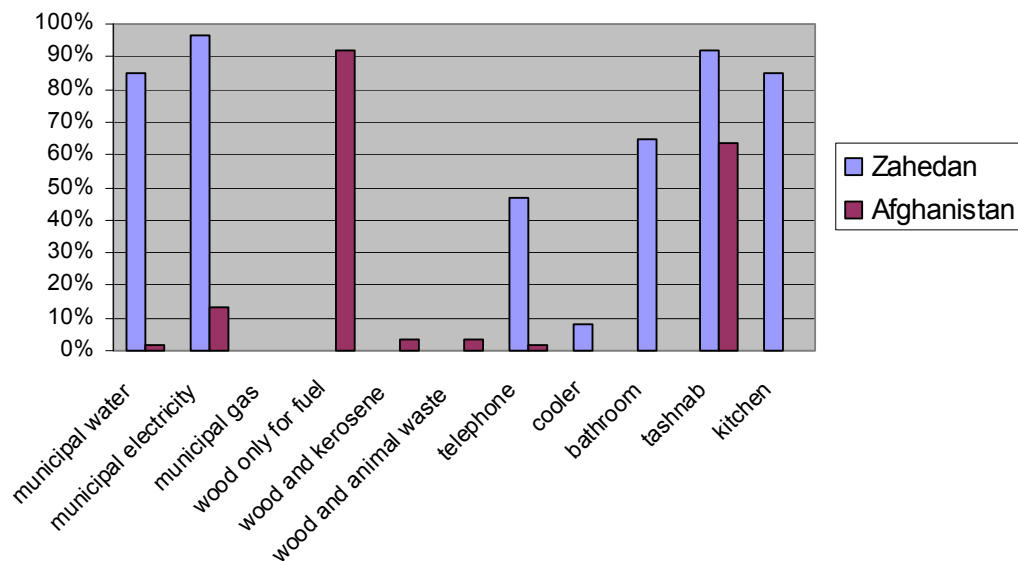
3.1 Livelihood strategies

Housing

Among Afghan respondents in Zahedan, only 3 respondents (5%) claimed that they owned their own house. 90% rented houses⁷⁰; of these, 41.7% paid both monthly rental and bond (*rahn*), and 48.3% paid only rent. Among respondents in Zahedan, the mean average *rahn* was 900,000 *Tooman* (US\$1,000). The lowest recorded *rahn* was 100,000 (US\$110) and the highest 4 million (US\$4,500).⁷¹ Monthly rental ranged from 10,000 (US\$11) to 150,000 (US\$160) with 40.7% paying 30,000–50,000 (US\$33–55). The mean average monthly rent was 50,000 *Tooman* (US\$55).

Houses occupied by Afghans in Zahedan carried the following facilities:

- municipal water: 85%
- municipal electricity: 96.7%
- municipal gas: 0%
- cooler: 8.3%
- bathroom: 65%
- *tashnab*: 91.7%
- kitchen: 85%
- telephone: 46.7%



30.2% of respondents lived in a two-bedroom house and 24.5% in a three-bedroom house. 15% of respondents did not have running water and purchased water for their daily needs from delivery tanks. One respondent who paid 20,000 *Tooman* (US\$22) monthly for rent said that his house was not connected to electricity mains but that

⁷⁰ It was not confirmed whether the three houses owned by Afghans in Zahedan were subject to the official deed of ownership known as *sanad* which is registered in the Governmental Property Registration Office, or the unofficial transaction between buyer and seller known as *gholnamei*. The researchers 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.

⁷¹ Iranian currency US\$1 = approximately 887.5 *Tooman* or 8,875 *Rial* (March 2005)

he had illegally diverted electricity to his house. This respondent had no running water and claimed that while previously the UN had provided water, it was now one of his main monthly expenses.

In contrast, respondents characterised their housing in Afghanistan as follows:

- electricity: 13.3%
- telephone: 1.7%
- municipal water: 1.7%
- wood only for fuel: 91.7%
- wood and kerosene or wood and animal waste: 3.3% each
- *tashnab*: 63.3%

Respondents' previous houses in Afghanistan were larger, and 26 respondents said they had lived in houses of 4–6 rooms.

- 35% or 21 respondents had owned their house in Afghanistan
- 23 respondents indicated that they had lived in their father's house without specifying whether this house was personal or rented, so the actual figure of ownership is probably substantially higher than 35%
- 10% or 6 respondents had rented a house
- 8.3% or 5 respondents had lived in a house provided by an employer in return for labour
- 8.3% or 5 respondents had lived in a *chador neshin* or *kuch neshin* (tent-like dwelling of nomads or *kuchi*)

Most households comprised three generations. In 13 households, the household head's mother or father or both parents lived with him/her. Sons or daughters-in-law lived in 19 households, grandchildren lived in 10 households, and household respondents' own siblings lived in 12 households. In 4 households the male household head had two wives. In 13 households, members of the extended family (brother, sister, daughter-in-law, son-in-law, nephew) contributed financially to the household in occupations including embroidery, grocer, labouring, and tailoring.

Work and education

Most respondents were non-literate. This is not surprising as the mean average age of respondents (42.7 years), together with the fact that most respondents had arrived to 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 55% of respondents described themselves as *bisavad* or non-literate, 28.3% had primary school education, 6.7% had lower secondary education, 1.7% had upper secondary education, 3.3% had high school diploma, 3.3% had university education and 1.7% had theological school training.

Respondents described their current work situation in Zahedan as follows:

- working: 80%
- incapable of working due to age or disability: 5%
- unemployed: 8.3%
- household duties: 6.7%

Respondents listed their current occupations as:

- labourer: 22.4%
- tailor: 14.3%
- grocer: 12.2%
- house cleaner: 8.2%
- embroiderer: 6.1%
- hawker, buyer and seller, teacher: 4.1% each
- sheep seller, plasterer, bricklayer/builder, shoemaker, bread collector, panel beater, well digger, welder, tiler, bicycle repairer, chef, UNICEF staffer: 2% each

Many respondents mentioned their concern about the threat of arrest and deportation due to their working in Zahedan without proper documentation. One man, a 47-year-old Uzbek tailor and fabric seller explained:

[In Iran unlike Afghanistan] we can earn sufficient for our daily needs. Life goes on. There are jobs for us, and we don't have to beg work from people we don't like. [But] we cannot work easily here. When we see a police car we are scared to death.

A Tajik widow described the unemployment of her sons after a deportation campaign in Zahedan. Unable to work due to the crackdown, they hid at home and the household borrowed money to purchase food until they could return to work.

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

- agriculture: 41.9%
- animal husbandry: 16.1%
- hawker and labourer: 6.5% each
- rubber worker, concreter, weaver, soldier, teacher, panel beater, driver, shoemaker, tailor: 3.2% each

While agriculture and animal husbandry were the most predominant occupations in Afghanistan, among respondents in Zahedan, they were not listed as occupations in the locations where interviews were conducted. Labouring, tailoring and grocery work were the dominant occupations among respondents in Zahedan. As another point of comparison, respondents' previous work status in Afghanistan was:

- independent worker: 40%
- private sector: 36.7%
- public sector: 16.7%
- family employee: 3.3%
- employer of others: 3.3%

In contrast, respondents' work status in Zahedan was:

- private sector: 59.2%
- independent worker: 34.7%
- public sector: 4.1%
- employer of others: 2%

Respondents listed their first job in Iran as:

- labourer: 55.8%
- tailor: 5.8%
- agriculture, house cleaning, shoemaking, stonemason, well digging and tiling: 3.8% each
- hawking, plastic making, weaving, watchmaking, buying and selling, panel beating, plastering, shepherd: 1.9% each

Clearly, labouring work was dominant as the first job upon arrival to Iran, whereas respondents' second job was predominantly hawking followed by sheep selling, well digging and tailoring. This shift implies mobility in employment sectors over time, with a limited shift from labouring to more skilled occupations. Most respondents had worked in several occupations. The mean average duration of the first job was 9.5 years and second job 8.5 years. Other job areas listed by respondents included: barber, mechanic, computing, driving and plumbing. Some respondents mentioned that they had benefited from learning a trade in Iran (e.g. tiling, plastering) which was in demand. For example, a 40-year-old widow explained that her situation in Iran was good: "Because fortunately my three sons have become expert in plastering and are all employed." However she explained that her sons had experienced a period when plastering work was scarce, and the family had borrowed money to survive.

In several households, particularly widow-headed households, daughters worked in the house doing tailoring and embroidery. For example, a 45-year-old Baluch widow, explained that after her husband died in 2001, her five daughters aged 22, 15, 13, 11 and 7 had contributed financially by undertaking needlework at home.

Income and expenditure

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

- hawker: 4,000–6,000 (US\$4.50–6.50)
- labourer: 4,000–6,000 (US\$4.50–6.50)
- tailor: 5,000 (US\$5.60)
- bread collector: 5,000 (US\$5.60)
- shoemaker: 5,000–7,000 (US\$5.60–7.80)
- bicycle repairer: 6,000–7,000 (US\$6.50–7.80)
- grocer: 7,000 (US\$7.80)
- embroiderer: 7,000–8,000 (US\$7.80–9)
- plasterer: 7,000–10,000 (US\$7.80–11)
- bricklayer/builder: 7,000–10,000 (US\$7.80–11)
- well digger: 7,000–10,000 (US\$7.80–11)
- tiler: 7,000–10,000 (US\$7.80–11)
- chef: 7,000–10,000 (US\$7.80–11)
- welder: 8,000–10,000 (US\$9–11)

The following occupations earned the following average monthly wage:

- teacher: 100,000–150,000 (US\$110–165)
- UNICEF staffer: 150,000–200,000 (US\$165–220)
- sheep seller: 200,000–300,000 (US\$220–330)
- panel beater: 300,000–400,000 (US\$330–440)

Respondents were asked to specify their monthly expenses (including rent and bills for utilities including water, gas, electricity and phone). 44.1% of respondents in Zahedan expended 100,000–200,000 *Tooman* (US\$110–220) monthly and 28.8% expended less than 100,000 (US\$110). The lowest monthly expenditure was 40,000 (US\$44) and the highest was 800,000 (US\$890). The mean average monthly expenditure was 200,000 (US\$220) although it should be said that this figure is distorted by one respondent's claim that their household expended 800,000 monthly. The mean monthly per capita expenditure for Zahedan respondents is 28,019 *Tooman*. The minimum and maximum amounts are 5,882 and 180,000 *Tooman*, respectively. Around 10% or 6 respondents disclosed that they had received other sources of financial and non-financial income including furniture, a sewing machine, payment of utility bills (water, electricity, phone), water supply, sanitary items and accommodation. 3 respondents disclosed that they had received assistance from UNHCR, and one each from the UN World Food Programme and an aid organisation.

Respondents were asked to list urgent needs that they or their relatives had experienced since living in Iran. Around 80% of respondents disclosed that they had faced urgent needs, defining these as:

- sickness: 44.4%
- daily living expenses: 13.3%
- rent and bond: 11.1%
- accident and business failure: 8.9% each
- smuggling cost: 4.4%
- police bribe, court fine, marriage and funeral: 2.2% each

Respondents mentioned that they had resolved this urgent need by the following means:

- loan from family: 59.6%
- loan from friend: 10.6%
- UN aid: 10.6%
- loan from neighbour: 8.5%
- respondents' personal savings: 8.5%
- assistance from respondents' children: 2.1%⁷²

⁷² UNHCR's *Global Report 2003: Islamic Republic of Iran 2003* stated that UNHCR's main objectives in relation to 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 programmes to vulnerable target groups including women and girls, mainly in *mehmanshahr* but including some other areas such as literacy classes, reproductive health training, food assistance and support to refugee school children. UNHCR, *Global Report 2003: Islamic Republic of Iran*, <http://www.unhcr.ch/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/home/opendoc.pdf?tbl=MEDIA&id=40c6d7500&page=home>, accessed 2 May 2005

In some cases, respondents had reverted to labouring work to raise money quickly. One respondent, a 30-year-old Pashtun man, had worked as a labourer, tailor and grocer, and at the time of interview was working as a textile seller. He explained:

I experienced business failure. I sold some textiles worth 2 million Tooman to a customer who fled without paying. I started labouring again and started from zero.

However this man was also able to draw on transnational networks and received financial assistance from relatives in Pakistan, Germany and the US. Assistance is not unidirectional, however, and this same respondent had sent money to his mother and brothers in Afghanistan through relatives and acquaintances travelling back to Baghlan.

11 households were headed by women: 9 were widows and 2 were female divorcees. Female-headed households were considerably poorer than other households, with monthly expenditure on average 35.5% less than other households. Mean monthly expenditure by female-headed households totalled 140,000 *Tooman* compared with 218,000 *Tooman* for male-headed households. Female-headed households expended 47.6% less for *rahn* with the mean average being 530,000 compared with 1,000,000 for male-headed households. Their mean rent was 18.8% less than other households, paying 41,000 monthly compared with 50,000 for other households. Of the 9 widows interviewed, 5 respondents mentioned that they had received assistance from their husband's family, including help in ceremonies, loaning money, help with costs of children's education and accommodation.

In some large households, the absence of men of working age profoundly affected the household economy. One such household comprised 8 members including the respondent and her aged incapacitated husband, and their widowed daughter and her five young children. The respondent herself worked as a weaver, and her only son, aged 12, worked as a casual bicycle repair apprentice. The household earned on average 80,000 *Tooman* monthly, and expended 60,000–70,000 monthly. The respondent explained that it was difficult to approximate her monthly income:

Our monthly income is entirely unreliable – it is incalculable. Sometimes work and sometimes without work. Sometimes we stay at home and pray for work.

Some widows were able to utilise horizontal networks to live more comfortably. For example, one 35-year-old Hazara widow with three dependent daughters (aged 3, 8, 13) lived with her sister's son who worked as a bicycle repairer in a shop and paid 80% of the rental costs. The widow earned money from her embroidery and sewing work, and paid 15,000 *Tooman* for rent. Her brother living in Zahedan provided her with occasional financial assistance. In contrast, another widow, a 35-year-old Uzbek mother of four children aged 5–14, relied on her own earnings from tailoring and housecleaning, and those of her 14-year-old son who worked as a kerb-side cigarette seller. She said: "My situation has got worse [in Iran] because I am a divorcee and I have nobody [to support the family] except my son."

3.2 Afghan perceptions of livelihoods in Iran and Afghanistan

Respondents were asked to comment on their current economic situation compared to their previous situation in Afghanistan. Around 50.8% or 30 respondents said their situation had improved in Iran, 32.2% or 19 respondents claimed that their situation

had worsened in Iran, and 16.9% or 10 respondents said their situation had remained the same. Some assessed that their situation had improved in some respects and deteriorated in others. Some 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, divorce, and natural increase in family size/dependents. Upon their arrival to Iran, 43.3% or 26 respondents had been single, that is, without the responsibility of a spouse and children. One respondent, a 36-year-old Uzbek man with 7 children either illiterate or with 2–3 years education (five of whom were dependent), said:

All problems in Afghanistan were on the shoulder of my father. Now it is me who is shouldering troubles of my own...I want to have my children educated, I myself have suffered from illiteracy.

Situation in Iran comparatively better

50.8% said their situation had improved in Iran. Of the 51.7% or 31 respondents who had been working in Afghanistan prior to arriving in Iran, 18 respondents had been working in agriculture or animal husbandry. 32 respondents had owned livestock themselves, only 23 respondents had owned land and 52.2% owned 2 *jeribs* or less. While 51.7% of respondents had been employed in Afghanistan prior to coming to Iran, 80% of respondents were currently employed in Zahedan. Reasons given for improved situation included:

- income-earning opportunities: 20 respondents
- security and welfare: 7 respondents
- health and education facilities: 3 respondents

One respondent reflected on his capacity in Iran for upward mobility over time, and accumulation of capital: a non-literate Hazara trader originally from rural Baghlan, he and his farmer father had owned substantial property (a house, 15 *jeribs* of land, 300 sheep, 4 donkeys). He arrived in Iran in 1980 and had initially worked as a labourer and water seller. During this period his income was so low that he had loaned money for paying monthly rent and for illness. For the past eight years he had worked as a successful trader, traveling backwards and forwards across the border weekly. He claimed that he spent 600,000 monthly on household expenses. “My situation has improved. My work is successful and if Iran permits me to remain I am able to accumulate capital.” The respondent had sent money to his brother in Afghanistan to purchase land in Mazar-i-Sharif but he had not made a definite decision about when he would return to Afghanistan.

Other respondents defined their situation in terms of access to facilities, especially education. Overall, the children of Afghan respondents born in Iran had completed substantially higher education than their parents. One respondent, a tailor who had seven years of schooling himself, explained that his daughters (aged 11, 13, 14) would have had very limited access to schooling in Afghanistan, and that in Iran they had completed six years of schooling. He explained:

My children have been raised in Iran. There is no literacy in Afghanistan: we [children] were looking after sheep and cows by the age of 10. Those who have returned advised us not to because of lack of facilities.

However, it should also be said that some families (often with illiterate or barely literate parents) had not managed or afforded to educate their children in Iran, and

some children had less education than their parents. For example, one respondent, a 48-year-old Baluch who worked for an international NGO in Zahedan and had acquired a high school diploma in Afghanistan prior to coming to Iran in 1978, had only managed to educate his nine children aged 4–18 to middle primary school level.

Situation in Iran comparatively worse

Around 32.2% or 19 respondents claimed that their situation had worsened in Iran. Several respondents referred to the fact that their social situation had declined in Iran. Respondents mentioned the following reasons:

- property-less in Iran: 5 respondents
- inflation: 4 respondents
- treatment as foreigners: 4 respondents
- widowhood or marriage ending in divorce: 4 respondents
- restricted employment field: 1 respondent

Respondents who previously owned land and livestock and their own housing in rural areas tended to assess their situation in Iran in comparatively negative terms. One respondent, a 55-year-old originally from Kandahar Province, claimed that he had owned his own house, land and 10 cows, as well as a car in Afghanistan, where he and his brothers and father had worked as rubber workers. They had sold all of their assets prior to leaving. In Iran the respondent had worked as a chef and a rubber worker, and his 22-year-old son worked as a panel beater. The respondent claimed that his situation in Iran was comparatively worse, and his struggle to pay for daily living expenses had meant he had borrowed a 4,000,000-*Tooman* bond from his wife's brother.

Another respondent, a 39-year-old widow and mother of seven children aged 8–22, had owned a house, land and 600 sheep in Samangan Province. Her husband had been a government officer and trader there. In Iran, her husband had worked as a labourer, security guard and grocer, and since his death, the respondent had worked as a tailor:

Our situation is worse in Iran. Migration is very bad. One must work very hard. Everything we had in Afghanistan we owned. We did not have to work when my husband was alive.

However, the widow explained that the family's house had been destroyed, the livestock had been sold or abandoned and the land had been abandoned – whether she retained rights to the land was uncertain. At the time of interview, the widow had not yet made a decision about returning to Afghanistan and contact with returnee relatives cast the prospect of return in an even worse light:

[They] say their situation is not good and advise us not to return and say Afghanistan is terrible...I have made no decision about returning...my son says the situation in Afghanistan is not good.

Several respondents who had previously lived as nomads, grazing sheep and cattle across large tracts of land and living in tents, reflected on their comparative freedom in Afghanistan. One respondent, a 55-year-old Pashtun man, had lived as a nomad, grazing 300 sheep and possessing 8 camels. In Iran the respondent had worked in agriculture and sheep buying and selling. He claimed adamantly:

“Certainly our situation in Iran is comparatively worse. We had livestock in Afghanistan and we were our own boss.” Yet like so many other respondents, the fact that he perceived his situation in Afghanistan to be better and yet did not intend to return in the medium term suggests that the emphasis placed on livestock as determining wellbeing may be overstated. This man was in contact with relatives who had repatriated, and commented on their situation: “It is not like Iran, they just survive from day to day.” The implication here is that there is little opportunity to progress or to improve one’s circumstances. So, in spite of his perception of his previous life in Afghanistan being more comfortable, this respondent intended to remain in Iran: “If it is possible to remain in Iran we will stay, otherwise we will return to Afghanistan.”

Several respondents drew particular attention to their experiences and perceptions as migrants. A 55-year-old Baluch sheep trader said that while his life had not changed qualitatively as he subsisted in both places, in Iran he was labeled as an “illegal person”, and as “a smuggler” on account of not possessing valid documentation. Another respondent, a 65-year-old Hazara Shia, explained the virtue of living in one’s homeland: “[There] no-one can interrogate us: ‘why are you here?’ But here they shout this at us.” A final example is provided by an Uzbek tailor from Baghlan who explained:

Remaining here [in Iran] is good too somehow, but we should eventually go. It [Afghanistan] is our country – we are from there. People are selfish here – they do not allow you to progress. [Whereas] you are a king in your country even if you are poor. Although the life is not good there, it is bearable.

The point being made is that in spite of the passing of time, Afghans perceive that they will be always differentiated and discriminated against as non-Iranian nationals.

The respondents above have referred to social dimensions of migration. It is not just the way people are treated as foreigners, but the restriction to low-status work for Afghans that affects their self-esteem. A 36-year-old Pashtun from rural Helmand had worked 5 *jeribs* with his landowning farmer father prior to migrating to Iran in 1980. In Iran he had worked as a well digger. Reflecting on his relative position in both places he said: “Afghanistan was better for us because we could keep our dignity there.” This respondent had returned to Afghanistan twice-yearly since 2001, and had observed that “there was only a morsel of dried bread to be had”, but said that he would not make a decision to return to Afghanistan, rather, “We will return if God wishes.” By implication, if something incidentally happened to catalyse his return to Afghanistan such as a local deportation campaign in Zahedan, or significant work opportunities in Helmand, the timing of this return would be effected by other agents, and would not be a result of the respondent’s efforts or plans.

Another respondent, a 44-year-old Tajik Shia educated in Afghanistan to high school diploma level, drew attention to what he had experienced as a lack of freedom in Iran. He referred to restrictions that prevent documented Afghans from traveling outside the province of residence registered on their identity documents without an official temporary travel permit. This permit registers the reason and duration of their travel: “It has got worse because we were free. Afghanistan was our country. Nobody prevented us from working. We were free to travel anywhere.” One respondent explained that he has paid 22,500 *Tooman* to purchase a travel permit from Zahedan that would allow travel to Mashhad (presumably for pilgrimage to the Tomb of Imam Reza). But it is not just long-distance travel that puts Afghans at risk: some

respondents claimed that any public activity in Zahedan exposed Afghans to others' enmity, or arrest and deportation by authorities: "We cannot walk in Zahedan streets [safely]."

Situation in Iran comparable

Around 16.9% or 10 respondents said their situation had not changed in Iran. Responses included: "I was a worker in Afghanistan and I am a worker in Iran" (7 respondents), and "our situation was good in Afghanistan and it is good here" (2 respondents). Others made the point that they were tenants in both places – in other words they had owned property in neither place. Some respondents claimed that they were living relatively comfortably in Zahedan, and had also lived comfortably in Kabul, and so they judged their situation to be unchanged. For example, a 37-year-old Uzbek watchmaker had lived with his father, a tea and fabric trader, in northern Afghanistan. His father had owned a house, as well as a store and land (currently the subject of *amanat*). The respondent came with his brother to Iran aged 17 in 1975, and married and remained in Iran. He had extensive trans-national connections with a sister in Canada, and brothers-in-law in Turkey and the UK. He and his wife had raised 8 children, the eldest two to high school diploma level, and the remainder currently studying in secondary school and primary school. This respondent claimed that his life in Afghanistan and Zahedan (where he had lived in the same neighbourhood for 26 years) was comparable, that is – both were comfortable. This respondent had not made a decision to return to Afghanistan, and was waiting for security and welfare facilities to improve before making a decision.

3.3 Afghan social networks

Relations with Iranians

Around 73.3% or 44 respondents claimed that they visited Iranians, with only 2.3% visiting on annual occasions such as *nawroz*, and 27.9% visiting once a month. Several of the women household heads worked in Iranian houses as house cleaners, and sometimes received gifts and clothes additional to their wages. 50% of respondents said that they had received some form of assistance from Iranians. The types of assistance received from Iranians included:

- help in ceremonies: 19 respondents
- non-financial help: 8 respondents
- loaning money: 2 respondents
- purchasing a car or house on an Afghan's behalf: 1 respondent

Of those 60% of Afghan respondents who said they had helped Iranians, the form of assistance given included:

- help in ceremonies: 14 respondents
- free work such as tailoring: 10 respondents
- loaning money: 6 respondents
- other financial and non-financial help: 6 respondents

Other assistance to Iranian neighbours included giving meat (several households had members working as sheep sellers) and giving water (some household heads worked as water sellers). The most common form of assistance was assistance at the time of ceremonies where large numbers of guests required hosts to borrow crockery, cook-

ing dishes and gas cylinders. Sometimes Iranian neighbours loaned their sitting rooms to Afghans to hold such ceremonies.

Some Iranians had placed themselves in compromising circumstances to aid their Afghan friends and neighbours. One respondent, a 44-year-old Tajik Shia trader had purchased a house, car and mobile phone in the name of his Iranian neighbours. In turn, he had loaned money to his Iranian neighbours, and loaned his house for the purposes of religious ceremonies. Another respondent, a 24-year-old Hazara Shia explained: “I was captured by the police. Our Iranian neighbour mediated and I was released.” A 48-year-old Baluch man disclosed that his Iranian neighbour took the risk of loaning his health insurance card – although it was illegal – so that the respondent’s sick child could receive medical treatment.

Some respondents had little contact with Iranians due to the location of their dwellings in enclaves of simple housing without running water or power. One respondent lived with his eight-member family in a meagre one-room dwelling in Zahedan for which he paid 20,000 in monthly rent. He explained that he had little contact or assistance from Iranians: “Because our place of living is very bad, Iranians rarely visit. We live in groups and if we need help, we [Afghans] help each other.”

Relations with Afghan relatives and acquaintances in Iran

Respondents were asked whether they had Afghan family or acquaintances (e.g. from their village of origin in Afghanistan) living in Iran, and whether they had received assistance from them, or provided assistance to them. 98.3% or 59 respondents had Afghan relatives or acquaintances living in Iran. Some respondents used a proverb to remind the interviewer that 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:

- 53 respondents mentioned visiting
- 30 respondents mentioned phone contact
- 2 respondents had no contact

Afghans in Zahedan sometimes travelled to other cities for significant events such as funerals, wedding ceremonies, or sometimes for the celebration of *nawroz*. Such visits were also utilised to make pilgrimage to religious sites such as Imam Reza in Mashhad, although, as expected, few Sunni respondents mentioned pilgrimage.

Around 60% or 36 respondents said they had loaned money to their Afghan relatives or acquaintances in Iran. Of those relatives or acquaintances to whom respondents had loaned money:

- 18.9% had loaned money to distant relatives
- 10.8% had loaned money to acquaintances
- 70.2% had loaned money to close relatives including siblings (brothers and sisters), uncles (paternal and maternal) and nephews

Purposes for loaning money included:

- sickness: 66.7%
- bond: 16.7%
- marriage: 11.1%
- accident: 5.6%

Several respondents also mentioned that they had loaned sheep to their relatives.

One respondent, a 48-year-old Baluch man from Nimroz explained that he was a member of a local revolving loan fund that provided loans to those with urgent needs. Another respondent, a female household head who was the sole income earner as house cleaner (her elderly husband was incapacitated), explained that she had sold her jewellery to pay for her daughter's husband's funeral, and had taken her daughter and five children to live in her home.

Relations with Afghan family and relatives remaining in Afghanistan

Most respondents (88.3%) had family or relatives remaining in Afghanistan. Of these relatives who remained in Afghanistan, respondents mentioned the following:

- brothers: 24.5%
- uncle and cousins: 22.6%
- sisters: 13.2%
- spouse's family: 7.5%
- cousins: 7.5%
- distant relatives: 22.6%

Of those who had relatives remaining in Afghanistan:

- most respondents mentioned multiple forms of contact
- 5 respondents claimed they had no contact
- 26 respondents mentioned phone contact
- 19 mentioned visiting
- 16 mentioned letters
- 9 respondents heard news of their relatives via acquaintances travelling between Iran and Afghanistan

Around 23.3% or 14 respondents said they had sent money to relatives in Afghanistan, and 11 respondents had sent *sowghaat* or clothes from Iran. Of those respondents who sent money to Afghanistan, 73.3% or 11 respondents had used trusted acquaintances visiting Afghanistan, and 26.7% or 4 respondents had used *hawala*. Those who had sent money did not do so as a regular remittance in the way that labour migrants remit money. Rather they tended to send money in response to a request by relatives for a particular urgent need. Respondents sent money to relatives in Afghanistan to close family, including son, brother, mother and her brothers, mother's brother's wife, and grandfather. One respondent, a 60-year-old Tajik man originally from rural Baghlan explained that he maintained contact with his father-in-law and cousins in Afghanistan through visiting and phone contact, and: "when they have a problem we collect money and send it to them". He had sent amounts of 300,000 and 400,000 *Tooman* via acquaintances to his relatives. An Uzbek man said that he sent shoes and clothes monthly to the sons of his father's brothers in Baghlan.

Three respondents mentioned that they had sent money to Afghanistan for the purchase of land. One respondent, a 56-year-old Hazara widow originally from rural Uruzgan where she had left behind 2 *jeribs* of land, explained:

We [my neighbours and I] decided to buy land in Herat so we collected money and sent it via acquaintances to purchase the land...when our house in Herat is ready, my older son [aged 22] will decide about returning...there must be security and no risk to my son...may the government of Iran extend our stay until our house is prepared.

One respondent, a 35-year-old Uzbek man originally from Baghlan Province, explained that he had never remitted money to his relatives in Afghanistan, but since he married his second wife, his family in Afghanistan (his brother-in-law, maternal uncle and cousins) had sent money to Iran annually:

I have not helped them, but they help me. They have sent money every year since I had a second marriage.

Another respondent, a 44-year-old Tajik Shia, explained that after his house was robbed in Zahedan, his brother in Afghanistan had sent him money. A Tajik Shia originally from Kabul explained that his in-laws had recently returned to Afghanistan and were in a good position, and had sent him 300,000 *Tooman* as well as clothing.

Flows of financial assistance from Afghanistan to Zahedan were uncommon. A 21-year-old Uzbek man from rural Baghlan explained this by saying that Afghans in Afghanistan tended to perceive Afghans in Iran as wealthy. He had no expectation of his relatives remitting money to him “because they think that those Afghans who live in Iran are wealthy.”

Relations with Afghan relatives living overseas

Exactly half of respondents had family members or relatives living overseas including in: Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, India, US, UK, Russia, Canada, Australia, Netherlands, Greece, Turkey, Germany, Norway and France.

- 13 respondents had more than one relative abroad
- 14 respondents had relatives living abroad in Pakistan only
- 20 respondents had relatives in Pakistan
- 6 respondents had relatives in the US
- 5 respondents had relatives in Germany
- 4 respondents had relatives in Turkey
- 3 respondents had relatives in Saudi Arabia

Relationships between respondents and relatives overseas included: close family such as father’s brother, own brother, mother’s brother and son of mother’s brother, and sister (66.7%), and distant relatives (33.3%).

Of those respondents with relatives living overseas:

- 8 respondents said they had no contact with them
- 20 respondents mentioned phone contact
- 5 mentioned letter contact
- 5 mentioned visiting
- 1 mentioned internet chat and email

Of those who had relatives overseas, 67.7% or 21 respondents claimed they received no assistance from their relatives. 16.1% or 5 respondents had received money, and the same number had received or sent *sowghaat*.

One respondent, a 38-year-old Uzbek man originally from rural Baghlan working in Zahedan as a hawker, had several relatives abroad with whom he had telephone contact, and he claimed that he had received money from them in urgent times. His mother and brother lived in Saudi Arabia, his brother-in-law lived in the UAE, and his mother's sister lived in Turkey.

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 (such as Europe, US, Canada, Australia). 48.3% or 29 respondents stated that they or their relatives in Iran had brought women from Afghanistan to marry in Iran. 25.4% or 15 households said they or their relatives had arranged for Afghan women (number uncertain) living in Iran to marry Afghan men living elsewhere, mostly back in Afghanistan (53.3% or 8 respondents) or Pakistan (20% or 3 respondents). Other countries mentioned included: Germany (3 respondents), and US, UK, Netherlands (1 respondent each). It was claimed that *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 subscribe to traditional values about 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 more readily able to adapt to European life.

3.4 Decision-making about the future

Informed decision-making

Our situation in Iran has improved. But no place could replace our own country. We wish we could make a clear decision and were not so hesitant in our decision-making...during the last 23 years our hands and legs have been tied. We have had to struggle to survive. If we were in our own country we could understand what we are doing and we could make a better decision for our future

38-year-old Uzbek father of four daughters (aged 11, 13, 14, 16)
originally from rural Baghlan

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

- most respondents mentioned multiple sources of information
- 42 respondents mentioned radio
- 34 mentioned television
- 17 mentioned telephone (plus an additional 10 respondents mentioned news gained via other people which could have been transmitted via telephone)

- 17 mentioned their own visit to Afghanistan
- 10 mentioned via other people

Mass media specifically mentioned included:

- Iranian radio and television (10 respondents)
- BBC radio (17 respondents)
- Azadi radio broadcasting from Afghanistan (7 respondents)

Two respondents said that they did not seek information about Afghanistan and wanted nothing to do with Afghanistan.

Around 66.7% or 40 respondents said they or family members had visited Afghanistan since living in Iran. 17.5% or 7 respondents had returned to Afghanistan every year since living in Iran, 52.5% had visited only once, and 20% had visited twice. Most visits had been made after the installation of the interim government following international intervention; that is, of those who had visited Afghanistan, the following numbers had visited in the following years:

- 2004: 22.5% or 9 respondents
- 2003: 15% or 6 respondents
- 2002: 7.5% or 3 respondents
- 2001: 10% or 4 respondents
- 2000: 2.5% or 1 respondent
- 1999: 7.5% or 3 respondents
- 1997: 5% or 2 respondents

One person had visited Afghanistan in each of the years 1995, 1994, 1993, and 1984.

Visits taken for the purpose of reconnaissance or preparation are complicated, as the individual who returns – usually the male head of household – risks losing the right to return to collect family in Iran unless BAFIA issues a waiver to the requirement of surrendering the *amayesh* card for an exit LP. Otherwise, the person making the reconnaissance must enter Iran illegally to collect his family. This policy of requiring the surrendering of *amayesh* cards and issuing exit LPs poses an obstacle to such preparatory visits and to larger return movements of families.⁷³

One respondent's visit to Afghanistan in 2005 had the effect of discouraging and delaying his return: "I saw a person whose belongings were on the edge of the street. He did not have any place. His belongings were becoming damaged." This respondent also described his returnee relatives' situation as unsustainable: they had not found work and they could not pay for their daily living costs. He said: "No, we do not want to go back: we do not have any place there and we should have a place and a job."

Respondents were asked whether they had relatives who had repatriated to Afghanistan, whether they had contact with them, and their relatives' current situation in Afghanistan. One respondent stressed that the region of return would also determine the sustainability of return. A Tajik Shia, educated in the Soviet Union to Masters level, explained that:

⁷³ Alessandro Monsutti, personal communication, July 2005

...of course [whether a returnee's situation is good or not is conditional] it depends on the region and financial facility. For example, those who are in a certain province say that it is good, but those who are in Kabul advise us to remain in Iran.

Indicating the cost of return and suggesting that impoverished Afghans in Iran would find it difficult to return, one respondent explained that it was “those with money who had returned.” Contrasting Afghan households in Tehran and Mashhad, a very high percentage of households (around 75% or 45 respondents) had nuclear family members and/or members of their extended family who had repatriated to Afghanistan, and:

- 6 respondents said they had no contact with their relatives who had returned
- 31 respondents mentioned phone contact
- 13 mentioned visiting
- 7 mentioned news via other people
- 2 mentioned letters

In summary, of those respondents who had contact with their relatives, 64.4% or 29 respondents said their situation was bad and their relatives wanted to come back to Iran, 29.9% or 13 respondents said their situation was good, and 4.4% speculated that only returnees with capital had a satisfactory situation otherwise it was not good. The conditions experience by returnee relatives affected the decision-making of respondents: of those respondents who had relatives who had returned and had reported a good situation, 77% were willing to return, while in contrast, of those respondents who had relatives who had returned and had reported a bad situation, 10.3% wanted to return to Afghanistan.

Dissatisfied returnees

The conditions in Afghanistan are very bad and they [returnees] come back to Zahedan little by little.

22-year-old Tajik originally from Parwan Province

Yes, their situation was bad. They had to come back to Iran for work without their families.

35-year-old Pashtun originally from Lashkar Gah

64.4% or 29 respondents said their returnee relatives or acquaintances were dissatisfied. A “morsel of bread” was a common idiom used by several respondents to describe the state of impoverishment in Afghanistan. One respondent, a 45-year-old non-literate bicycle repairer originally from the city of Kandahar had returned there with his family in 2004, only to experience that “the situation was so bad that we could not find even a morsel of dried bread, so we came back to Iran.” This man had previously owned a house in Kandahar but it had been destroyed. His sister had repatriated and he had received news of her situation from acquaintances: her situation was also unsatisfactory and she intended to return to Iran. About the prospect of repatriating again to Afghanistan, this respondent said: “No, may God never get me back to Afghanistan.”

One respondent originally from rural Kunduz, who described himself as a poor worker, said that most of his relatives who had repatriated to Afghanistan had

returned again to Iran. This respondent preferred to remain in Iran at least in the medium term:

If Iran permits us [to stay] we would not return. We do not have any money or any house...if the government of Afghanistan gives me work and at least a monthly salary of 5,000–6,000 Afghani [US\$117–140]⁷⁴ I would return.

Another respondent, a 45-year-old Baluch widow originally from Nimroz, said that her father's brothers and relatives had returned to Afghanistan and their situation was so dire that they intended to come back to Iran. The widow said that she and her eight children aged 7–22 (all born and educated in Iran) would seek to remain in Iran: "Until the Iranian Government deports us we will stay." This widow had previously lived with her husband as a nomad in Afghanistan. She claimed that her eight children had benefited from health and education facilities in Iran although they had each received only four years of education.

A few respondents mentioned that their children born and raised in Iran were unfamiliar with the hardship of everyday life in Afghanistan. In the previous Mashhad case study, respondents elaborated on this hardship as the absence of running water, electricity and bakeries which meant that women and children fetched water for washing and cooking, gathered kindling and firewood for heating and cooking, and made bread. A Tajik man from Kunduz who had five daughters aged 4–14, recounted a story about the effect of hunger on children, and the absence of familiar and pleasurable rituals such as tea drinking:

One of my relatives told me his story: "When my young daughter cries in Iran I buy a cake for her but there is no cake in Afghanistan. We had breakfast, lunch and dinner in Iran, but we do not have them [three meals] in Afghanistan. My daughter is accustomed to that situation: we ate tea and sugar for breakfast, lunch and dinner. My daughter is now asking me about Kunduz: will we have tea three times a day in Afghanistan?"⁷⁵

The lack of housing and fuel (for cooking and heating) was considered to be a fundamental difficulty, especially in winter.

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. Other problems mentioned by returnees included the prohibitive cost of food, the cost of rent, the absence of law and the existence of favouritism.

Satisfied returnees

29.9% or 13 respondents said their returnee relatives' situation was good, and 4.4% speculated that only returnees with capital could experience a satisfactory situation. For example, a 22-year-old Uzbek tailor from Baghlan explained:

The situation in Afghanistan is bad: they are complaining of lack of work in Baghlan. [But] if somebody has money he can buy sheep and goats, and land. He can do business. He can have a store.

⁷⁴ Afghan currency US\$1 = 42.7 AFA (29 May 2005).

⁷⁵ It was difficult to translate the meaning of this story. The narrator could have also meant that his daughter asked whether in Kunduz their meals would comprise only tea and sugar and nothing else.

Returnees with capital could use this capital to build their own business such as a grocery store, or to engage in trade. One 33-year-old Baluch man originally from rural Herat, said that some of his relatives had returned:

Their conditions are good and the [Afghan] government helped them and gave them a house...if I had 500,000 Tooman (US\$550) for traveling, I would return tomorrow. Afghanistan is our country and here [in Iran] our spirits are dead and there is no place for us...I hope to return to Afghanistan. We see that our country is improving every year and we want to return.

Generally, satisfied returnees had either found good work, had maintained their ownership of housing, or had sold land. In other words, they were able to save money for the purposes of capital accumulation, or could raise capital by selling existing assets. For example, one respondent, an Uzbek man originally from a village in Baghlan Province, explained that many of his relatives had returned to Afghanistan in 2004: “Their situation is good, they are doing agriculture and animal husbandry, they are working and paying their living costs.” This respondent claimed that once he had paid current debts in Iran, he and his family intended to return to Baghlan where he had 24 *jeribs* of land, and where his maternal uncle and brother-in-law lived. This man had owned livestock (sheep and cows) prior to leaving Afghanistan in 1996, and had subsequently worked as a labourer, well digger and grocer: “We had a better life in Afghanistan because we had land and worked there. We do not have anything here.” One respondent gave evidence to the contrary though, claiming that his father’s (landowning) brothers had returned to Kunduz:

They say that they can earn money to live because they have farming land, but [in spite of this] some of them have returned to Iran.

3.5 Prerequisites for return to Afghanistan

In making their decision to remain in Iran or return to Afghanistan, respondents emphasised the provision of housing, work and welfare in Iran as factors that motivated them to remain in Iran in the medium term. 35.7% or 10 respondents mentioned that work opportunities in Iran motivated them to stay, and 7.1% or 2 respondents mentioned their wife’s Iranian nationality as the reason. Other respondents mentioned negative factors in Afghanistan that motivated them to remain in Iran: 50% or 14 respondents said that the situation was “bad” in Afghanistan, and elaborating on this, a further 7.1% or 2 respondents said that they had nowhere to live in Afghanistan, and no work.

Respondents were asked what changes would have to take place in Afghanistan in order for them to make the decision to return:

- 34 respondents mentioned security (20 respondents mentioned “stability and security” and 14 respondents mentioned “security and welfare”)
- 1 respondent specifically mentioned disarmament and collection of guns
- 16.7% or 10 respondents mentioned work opportunities
- 13.3% or 8 respondents mentioned provision of housing
- 3.3% or 2 respondents mentioned installation of an “Islamic Government”
- 1.7% mentioned “no Americans”

It should be said that several respondents who were non-literate commented that work opportunities should be available not just for educated returnees but also for non-literate returnees. 3.3% or 2 respondents said “we will return, we don’t wait for change,” and 5% or 3 respondents said they would never return.

Several respondents mentioned provision of education facilities. One respondent, a Seyed man with five years of education, had educated his seven children (aged 7–25) in Iran, with two completing high school diploma and another completing eleven years of education. This man said (perhaps rhetorically) that if he returned to Afghanistan he was prepared to beg on the streets to enable his children to finish their education.

Two respondents expressed that they wanted an Islamic government to be established in Afghanistan, suggesting that they were unaware of this already being the case. These respondents did not refer to “Islamic Government” merely 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 stability. One respondent, a 22-year-old Uzbek with six years of education in a theological school who had arrived in 1989 aged six, said that he intended to return to Afghanistan “[when] an Islamic government is established, not a government run by foreigners.” This man was interested in settling in Saudi Arabia as it was close to the House of God and he could readily make pilgrimage, and because his *bajenagh* (wife’s sister’s husband) lived there and had informed him that migrants are not discriminated against. A 39-year-old Tajik widow spoke of the risk of a weak state:

The central government is not sufficiently strong to control each part of country. Powerful opponents of the central government can still impose their rules and make life difficult for the people.

One respondent, a 27-year-old Hazara man originally from rural Ghazni who had bought land in Herat in order to build a house for his family, and worked as a successful tiler in Zahedan, suggested that returnees should take responsibility for development and not wait for it to happen before returning: “Changes are dependent on our efforts. If we remain here [in Iran] nothing can be changed. Am I right?”

3.6 Current decision-making about returning or remaining⁷⁶

Afghanistan is our place. Nobody can order us around. Here we cannot work freely. Zahedan radio announced last night: do not give Afghans work, housing etc. We cannot work here. Our children were barred from schooling last year and we do not enough money to pay for their education. [Yet] we have been here for a long time. If we go to Afghanistan we are also migrants: we do not have any place. When we came to Iran we were settled

⁷⁶ Jamishidiha and Ali Babaie’s study (“Determinants of Afghan migrants in Iran: Case study Golshahr Mashhad”, [Iranian] *Journal of Social Sciences*, 20(1–2):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).

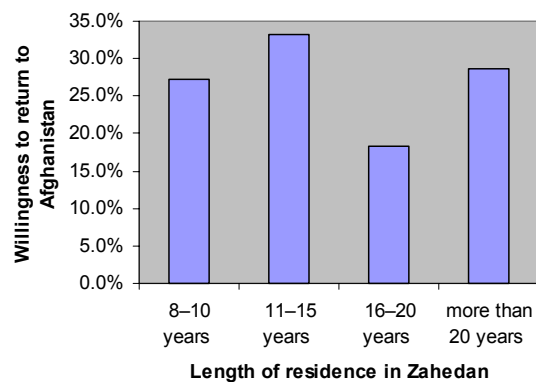
in a [serviced] camp. The government of Afghanistan could not provide us such a camp.

35-year-old Pashtun shopkeeper originally from Lashkar Gah

Respondents were asked about their current decision-making in relation to returning to Afghanistan, and which member of their household would be responsible for making that final decision:

- 33.3% (20 respondents) said that they intended to remain in Iran in the medium term
- 26.7% (16 respondents) said they intended to return to Afghanistan in the medium term
- 40% (24 respondents) said they had not made a decision

However these categories can be ambiguous. Some respondents said they would definitely seek to remain, 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 be said of respondents' intentions 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.



Those Zahedan respondents resident in Iran for 16–20 years were clearly least willing to return to Afghanistan (18.2%), followed by those resident for 8–10 years (27.3%), those resident for more than 20 years (28.6%), and finally those resident in Iran for 11–15 years (33.3%). The results allow for some correlation between length of residence and return intention. What can be said is that those resident for the least amount of time (8–10 years) were more willing to return than those resident for 16–20 years. It can also be stated that those resident for the longest period of time (over 20 years) and those resident for the shortest period of time (8–10 years) were almost the same in their willingness to return. However, if the category of 16–20 years is collapsed with 20+ years (that is, those who arrived prior to 1981 up until 1985) it can be said that those who have been resident longest were least willing to return.

It can be hypothesised that those who have been resident a long period of time (over 16 years) have raised and educated children in Iran, and have probably experienced indirect or direct socialisation in Iranian values by virtue of education and workplaces. (It should be qualified, however, that many Afghans live, work and are schooled in segregated or enclave-like situations in Zahedan.) It is also feasible that those who have been resident longest have established assets such as small businesses as well as social and economic networks in Iran, whereas their ties to Afghanistan may have weakened with the passing of time and with the death of parents, parents' siblings and even respondents' own siblings over an extended period.

Of the willingness to return of those Afghans resident for only 8–10 years, it can be hypothesised that they have had less time and therefore less opportunity to establish social and economic networks in Iran, and over a much shorter period of absence, may have sustained closer relations with nuclear and extended family members in Afghanistan.

District of residence in Sistan Baluchistan Province	Year of arrival in Iran: before 1978	Year of arrival in Iran: 1978–1986	Year of arrival in Iran: 1986–1992	Year of arrival in Iran: 1992–1996	Year of arrival in Iran: 1996–2001	Year of arrival in Iran: after 2001
Zahedan	403	9,284	4,796	5,254	18,419	795
Sistan Baluchistan Province total	572	14,233	7,622	10,609	34,693	1,586

Table 5. 2004 repatriation figures for documented Afghans from Zahedan District and Sistan Baluchistan Province⁷⁷

Table 5 lists UNHCR-Iran’s estimates of the number of documented Afghans living in Sistan Baluchistan Province (in the districts of Chabahar, Iran Shahr, Khash, Nik Shahr, Saravan, Zabol and Zahestan) who repatriated to Afghanistan in 2004, against their year of arrival to Iran. The figures show that those resident the longest (more than 27 years ago) had the lowest repatriation rate in 2004 (572 people), and those resident for 4–9 years had the highest repatriation rate (34,693), followed by those resident for 19–27 years (14,233).

The data from this study’s rates of *intended* repatriation can be compared to the UNHCR-Iran data on 2004 actual repatriation rates of documented Afghans. The AREU report found that those resident for 16–20 years expressed least intention to repatriate, whereas UNHCR found the lowest repatriation rate among those resident the longest (over 27 years) followed by those resident the shortest (less than 4 years). Second, this AREU study found that those resident for 11–15 years expressed the greatest intention to return, whereas UNHCR found that those resident for 4–9 years followed by those resident for 19–27 years had the highest repatriation rate.

Around 76.7% or 46 respondents said that they as household heads made the final decision, 6.7% or 4 respondents said their father would make the final decision, and 3.3% or 2 respondents said the decision would be made in consultation with their eldest son. 10% or 6 respondents said the decision would be made in consultation with all family members. Some families were split on the decision about return. For example, one 60-year-old Pashtun man originally from rural Farah explained:

Yes, I want to go home to Farah because it is our place. Our father’s land (10 jeribs in the hands of respondent’s brother) is there. But my children [11 children aged 5–32] do not agree. It is not clear who might return or remain. They want to stay in Iran because they have good work [three work as hawkers, one is a grocer and two are students].

Two widows, an Uzbek woman from Baghlan and a Pashtun woman from Nimroz, mentioned that the decision to return would be made with tribal elders (*bozorg-e tayefeh*). Another respondent, a 34-year-old Tajik man from Kunduz whose family members did not want to return, said that his decision to return also depended on his other relatives in Zahedan: “If they stay, we stay. If they go, we go.” Most

⁷⁷ UNHCR-Iran data for Sistan Baluchistan 1/1/05

probably for reasons of physical and/or financial security, this respondent is reluctant to remain in Zahedan without other relatives.

Ethnicity also impacted on intention to return. Of those respondents who claimed that they intended to return to Afghanistan:

- 50% were Pashtuns
- 33.3% were Baluch
- 21.4% were Tajik
- 21.4% were Uzbek
- 16.7% were Hazara
- 5% were Seyeds

As religion cross-cuts ethnicity in Afghanistan (i.e. Hazara and Seyed are predominantly Shia) it can be said that Shia respondents were far less willing to return than their Sunni counterparts. Some Shia respondents in the Mashhad study referred to the need to eliminate ethnic and religious persecution as a prerequisite for return to Afghanistan. While Shia populations are represented in the current Afghan government's national parliament and cabinet, and religious tolerance is enshrined in the Constitution,⁷⁸ comments by Afghan Shia respondents about religious intolerance suggests either ignorance of politico-legal changes, or lack of trust in legislative change affecting public attitude.

One respondent made the point that decision-making is for the wealthy, and that poorer people do not have the luxury of decision-making and are only able to react to situations in which they find themselves. A 35-year-old Hazara widow and mother of three dependent daughters explained: "If you have money you can decide. When you do not have anything, there can be no decision." In other words, those without money can only manage to stay put and to struggle for the present day without planning or making decisions for the future. This widow spoke of her future, that is, whether she would return to Afghanistan or remain in Iran, in terms of "destiny": "it depends on our destiny". Amongst believers, the concept of destiny is linked to God's will, and the individual is considered to have little agency in this matter. A 32-year-old Baluch man said that he intended to eventually return to Afghanistan: "We will stay [in Iran] until there are problems [such as pressure or arrest]. If we return, we will return together, but God knows when." Similarly, a 60-year-old Pashtun man said: "Our destination is up to God."

A 66-year-old Uzbek man expressed the matter of decision-making differently, saying that Afghans in Iran are not in a position to make a decision about remaining in Iran because it is not their choice to make:

If they [Iranian authorities] force us to go, we have no choice but to return. But if they permit us to stay we will stay...in Iran we are happy. We do not want to return. [But] if there is peace and solutions to our problems [employment, electricity, water], we will return.

⁷⁸ The 35-member Constitutional Commission formed in Afghanistan in April 2003 included four Shias and broad ethnic representation. The new Constitution states that "followers of other religions are free to exercise their faith and perform their religious rites within the limits of the provisions of law". The Constitution allows sharia to be applied to cases dealing with personal matters involving Muslims. Additionally, Shia schools are permitted unrestricted operation (International Religious Freedom Report 2004, <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/irf/2004/35513.htm> accessed 6 September 6 2005).

One respondent did not want to wait until what he viewed as inevitable deportation, and preferred to return voluntarily: “God willing, we will return to our country. Iran is not our country. If we don’t return now, we will be forced to return later.” Another made reference to notions of belonging and acceptance which may not occur even after several generations in Iran: “We are migrants [in Iran] even if we are here for a hundred years. If the situation gets better we will return [to Afghanistan].”

Remaining in Iran

Around 33.3% or 20 respondents said that they intended to remain in Iran in the medium term. 40% or 24 respondents said that they had not yet made a decision to return to Afghanistan, which means that by not making this decision they are effectively deciding to remain in Iran – so the figure of 33.3% wanting to remain in Iran is probably higher. It should also be mentioned that in 37.3% or 22 households, the members of that household (usually wife and children) preferred to remain in Iran, and in a further 2 households (3.4%), the children (and not their parents) preferred to remain in Iran. Of those respondents who wanted to return to Afghanistan, 32% of male household heads and 7.7% of women-headed households (1 person) wanted to return to Afghanistan.

Households with single daughters of marriageable age tended to prefer to remain in Iran. 13.5% of families with unmarried daughters aged 10 years or more wanted to return to Afghanistan, and 30.4% of families without unmarried daughters aged 10 years or more wanted to return to Afghanistan. Fewer women household heads than men were willing to return to Afghanistan.

Many respondents mentioned that education was critical and they wanted to remain in Iran until their children had been educated. One divorcee whose children were aged 5–14 said that education facilities in Afghanistan were a prerequisite for her return (as well as housing). She wanted to remain in Iran “to extend our stay until my children are bigger”. Those households with upper secondary school-educated children were most willing to return to Afghanistan, followed closely by those households with primary-educated children. Households with non-literate children were very clearly least willing to return to Afghanistan. Of those households who wanted to return, the breakdown was as follows:

- 11.6% of households with non-literate children
- 31.2% of households with primary school-educated children
- 14.3% of households with lower secondary-educated children
- 33.3% of households with upper secondary-educated households
- 40% of households with high school-educated children (2 out of a total of 5 households)

Two respondents mentioned the need to acquit their debt or collect a debt from another person as something delaying intended return. One man whose brother had died in a car accident said: “When my court problems [in relation to his brother’s death] are solved, then I will return to Afghanistan.” Another was waiting for a loan to be repaid by an Iranian acquaintance.

A few respondents had made the decision to return to Afghanistan, and after returning to Iran were waiting again for change. One such respondent was a 21-year-

old non-literate Uzbek man from rural Baghlan who worked as a building labourer and had a wife and an eight-month-old son:

We would like to stay in Iran for three or four more years. Life in Afghanistan is harsh. From 1985 until 2004 we have lived in Iran. Last year we returned [to Afghanistan] and lived there for three months but the difficult conditions forced us to return again to Iran.

In most cases it was probably a combination of several factors that influenced decision-making about return, including the attitude of children born and educated in Iran, the experiences of relatives who had returned, and the living conditions of the household as a whole. In summary, Afghan respondents in Zahedan remained in Iran to accumulate capital in order to purchase land in Afghanistan or to build a house on land they had purchased in Afghanistan, to continue their children's education, and to attend to financial and other matters in order to arrange their departure.

3.7 Returning to Afghanistan

Around 26.7% or 16 respondents said they intended to return to Afghanistan in the medium term. Of these, 12 respondents (20.3%) indicated that family members were unanimous in their decision to return to Afghanistan. However 98.3% of household heads claimed that if they did return to Afghanistan they would do so as an intact family. There is the possibility of tension in these two points: there is sometimes a discrepancy between the viewpoint of parents and children in relation to returning to Afghanistan, yet household heads claim that if the household returns, children and parents will return together.

A few respondents had substantial cultural capital and assets, but were discouraged by the lack of health services in Afghanistan. One such respondent worked as a teacher in Zahedan where he lived with his wife, three children, and his brother and brother's family. This respondent had been a high school principal and his wife a bank officer in Kabul prior to leaving in 1995. In Iran, the respondent had worked as a grocer, car painter and trader of sportswares between Iran and Pakistan. He had applied for refugee status to Canada: "but it was rejected; they [the UN] say that Afghanistan is now at peace". He had retained access to his father's house in Kabul and was currently arranging the renovation of this house prior to his own return. His wife's family had returned to Afghanistan and the respondent commented: "They are satisfied but it is not like Iran. It is however our country." He and his wife were in mutual agreement to return, but their three children aged 10, 13 and 14 and educated in Iran, were reluctant. He said that in Iran he had grown tired of suffering and homesickness and if Afghanistan could provide health facilities and employment opportunities, he would return with his family.

Other respondents claimed they would return if there was evidence of a "strong state". One such respondent was a 22-year-old Pashtun man from rural Helmand who had come to Iran with his family in 1991 to try to overcome poverty. His father had owned 2 *jeribs* of land and had worked as an agriculturalist. In Zahedan, he lived in a cluster of three households containing 15 family members: wife, mother, siblings, and siblings' children. This respondent claimed that he intended to return to Afghanistan when a government benefiting the people was established and a national army keeping the peace was formed. He said that if he returned and life

was difficult, he would first seek help from God, and only after that, return to Iran. Of Iran, he said:

I can't say here is good, who would say a life of fear is good...we want security, we are living in fear here. We want to be supported by our [Afghanistan] government here [in Iran] and there [in Afghanistan].

Other respondents were unconditional about their desire to return. For example, a 55-year-old female respondent whose five children aged 12–35 were all non-literate, said: “We want to be in our country, even if it means begging to get money to survive.” Another respondent, a Tajik man who arrived to Iran in 1983 aged 4 years old said: “I will return no matter what the conditions are, even if there is war.”

Strategy for return to Afghanistan

An inventory of assets in Afghanistan was carried out in order to explore the relationship between current asset ownership and people’s intention to return. Table 6 shows the data gathered on previous ownership and current access to assets (house, land and livestock, shop, workshop) in Afghanistan. While almost 39% or 23 respondents had owned land in Afghanistan, only 9 respondents had retained access to that land (currently in the hands of respondents’ brothers or the subject of *amanat*). 35% or 21 respondents said that they had owned their own house in Afghanistan, and 38.3% or 23 respondents 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, 6 respondents claimed that they had retained access to their house.

	House ⁷⁹	Land ⁸⁰	Livestock	Shop	Workshop
Owned	21 (35%)	23 (39%)	32 (54.2%)	4 (6.8%)	2 (3.4%)
Sold	2 (4.4%)	2 (8.7%)	20 (62.5%)	2 (50%)	0 (0.0%)
Lost access: (abandoned, ⁸¹ destroyed, stolen)	37 (82.2%)	12 (52.1%)	11 (34.4%)	1 (25%)	2 (100%)
Retained access	6 (10% of total respondents)	9 (15% of total respondents)	1 (1.6% of total respondents)	1 (1.6% of total respondents)	0 (0.0%)

Table 6. Assets in Afghanistan

There is an ambiguous relationship between current access to housing and land in Afghanistan, and intention to return. Of those respondents whose house in Afghanistan was subject to *amanat*, 33.3% intended to return. However of those respondents whose house in Afghanistan was destroyed, 41% intended to return. In other words, those respondents whose house had been destroyed were more willing to return than those whose house was the subject of *amanat*. Land ownership

⁷⁹ An additional 23 respondents (38.3%) 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 35%.

⁸⁰ 18 respondents owned 1–19 *jeribs* of land, 4 respondents owned 20–50, 3 respondents owned 51–70, and no respondents owned more than 71 *jeribs* of land.

⁸¹ As mentioned, the category “abandoned” or *raha shodan* is unclear. One of the interviewers who worked for this project in both Mashhad and Zahedan advised that a person may still have access to abandoned land if others have not subsequently occupied or appropriated that land. This being the case, the statistics for retaining access to land would be higher.

followed the same pattern: of those respondents whose land in Afghanistan was subject to *amanat*, 14.3% intended to return. However of those respondents whose land in Afghanistan was abandoned, 45.5% intended to return, and of those whose land had been sold, 50% intended to return. In other words, those respondents whose land had been sold or abandoned were more willing to return than those whose land was the subject of *amanat*.

Prior ownership of land had a clearer impact on intention to return: 35% of respondents who had owned land prior to leaving Afghanistan were willing to return to Afghanistan, while 22.2% of those who had not owned land prior to leaving were willing to return.

Apart from access to assets, income stream also impacted on returnee experiences of reintegration. Respondents were asked which members of the household would return, and which members of the household would remain in Iran. It was assumed that those remaining in Iran would remit money to support their family in Afghanistan. 98.3%, or all but one respondent, said they would return as an entire family to Afghanistan, and would not separate or leave family members behind in Iran.

Several respondents intended to save sufficient funds to purchase land prior to returning to Afghanistan. One such respondent was a 25-year-old Hazara man originally from rural Uruzgan (where his father's house and land was in the hands of his paternal uncle), who intended to purchase land in Herat and build a house there before returning to Afghanistan. He characterised Herat as: "a clean city that is close to Iran, and more compatible to us culturally [i.e. in terms of Shia population]." Another respondent, a 27-year-old Hazara man originally from Jaghuri in Ghazni Province where his father still owned a house and 2 *jeribs* of land, lived in Zahedan with his wife and sons in a household that included his own parents and siblings. At the time of interview, the respondent's father was in Herat making the necessary arrangements for the family's return. "My father first returned to Afghanistan in 2003 and bought land [in Herat]. The second time in 2004 he went to build a house on that land."

Respondents were asked if they returned to Afghanistan, which region they wanted to return to, and the reason for this decision.⁸² The following cities were nominated:

- Kunduz: 18.3% or 11 respondents
- Baghlan: 16.7% or 10 respondents
- Nimroz: 13.3% or 8 respondents
- Kabul: 11.7% or 7 respondents
- Kandahar: 8.3% or 5 respondents
- Herat: 6.7% or 4 respondents
- Farah and Helmand: 5% or 3 respondents each
- Lashkar Gah: 3.3% or 2 respondents
- Mazar-i-Sharif: 1.7% or 1 respondent

⁸² UNHCR-Iran data reveals that of those Afghans remaining across all districts of Sistan Baluchistan Province as of 1/1/05, there are particularly high numbers or clusters of people remaining from the some provinces and districts in Afghanistan. Ranked in terms of relative population remaining, these include: Farah Province, Farah District; Baghlan Province, Baghlan District; Kandahar Province, Kandahar District; Kunduz Province, Kunduz District; Farah Province, Anar Dara District; Helmand Province, Lashkar Gah District; Balkh Province, Mazar-i-Sharif District; Herat Province, Herat District; Nimroz Province, Zaranj District.

Note that 8.3% or 5 respondents said they had not decided on their return destination. The most obvious patterns to emerge were the absence of rural-to-urban migration and the clear preference to return to the place of origin. One respondent, a 33-year-old Baluch man originally from Herat who intended to return to Herat explained:

*We will return to Herat because we have land and family there.
[Additionally] the other places of Afghanistan apart from Herat are
foreign to me in the same way that Iran is.*

The respondent's sense of belonging is fairly parochial and limited to his birthplace which he left aged 9. Further, his sense of belonging does not follow nationalist lines, as he claims the rest of Afghanistan (in which his birthplace is located) is as foreign as the neighbouring state of Iran. In a similar vein, a 54-year-old Seyed Shia originally from urban Kandahar said he would return to Kandahar: "because we do not have a language problem there: it is our homeland."⁸³

All respondents originally from Nimroz, Herat, Kunduz, Kabul, Helmand, Mazar-i-Sharif and Lashkar Gah intended to return to these places. A handful of respondents preferred to return to cities. The single respondent from northern Afghanistan and both Farah respondents intended to return to Kabul, and both Uruzgan respondents and the single Ghazni respondent intended to return to Herat. Those respondents undecided about the place of return were from Farah, Kandahar, Parwan and Samangan. Reasons for returning to the places of destination included:

- birthplace: 43.6%
- relatives and acquaintances resident there: 21.8%
- house there: 7.3%
- land there: 7.3%
- proximity to Iran: 7.3%
- capital city with facilities: 5.5%
- security and welfare: 3.6%
- better cultural situation: 3.6%

Proximity to the Iran–Afghanistan border allowing asylum in the event of threat was mentioned by 6 respondents, although it should be said that some of these respondents did originate from border provinces. For example, a widow originally from Nimroz said she would return to Nimroz "[because] it is near the [international] border. If something happens, we can return [to Iran] quickly."

Place of origin	Desired destination – not certain (%)	Desired destination – same place (%)	Desired destination – other place (%)	No. of respondents
Farah	16.7	33.3	50.0	6
Baghlan	0.0	83.3	16.7	12
Nimroz	0.0	100.0	0.0	4
Herat	0.0	100.0	0.0	1
Parwan	50.0	50.0	50.0	2

⁸³ This is somewhat of an anomaly as a Seyed from Kandahar having lived in Iran might be expected to be fluent in both Dari and Pashto.

Kunduz	0.0	100.0	0.0	9
Kandahar	18.2	45.5	36.3	11
Kabul	0.0	100.0	0.0	3
Helmand	0.0	100.0	0.0	3
Mazar-i-Sharif	0.0	100.0	0.0	1
Uruzgan	0.0	0.0	100.0	2
Ghazni	0.0	0.0	100.0	1
Lashkar Gah	0.0	100.0	0.0	1
Unknown province (northern Afghanistan)	0.0	0.0	100.0	1
Samangan	100.0	0.0	0.0	1
Total	8.6	70.0	13.4	58

Table 7. Afghan households in Zahedan: desired destination in the event of return

A sequence of three questions was presented to respondents to elicit data on strategies for reintegration. The first question posed to respondents was if they returned to Afghanistan, who would accommodate them initially, and what was their relationship to that person. Around 88.3% or 53 respondents had relatives remaining in Afghanistan, and 71.7% or 43 respondents said no-one could provide them with accommodation. Most respondents who expressed that no-one could accommodate them explained that their relatives' economic position was as weak as their own. One respondent expressed this: "Nobody in Afghanistan can help anybody else." Those who indicated that they could be accommodated mentioned:

- brothers: 10%
- sons of maternal aunt/uncles: 5%
- sister and father: 3.3% each
- father-in-law, son, son of paternal uncle, mother: 1.7% each
- one respondent mentioned that they anticipated the UN would provide them with accommodation

The second question asked of respondents was if they returned to Afghanistan and experienced financial difficulty, who would assist them, and how were they related to that person. 83.3% or 50 respondents said that no-one would be in a position to provide assistance, while 13.5% said assistance would be provided by family members including: brothers (6.7%), brother-in-law, sons of maternal uncles/ aunts, son, father-in-law, and son of paternal uncle (each mentioned by 1 respondent). Two respondents mentioned that they anticipated financial assistance from the UN. These responses relating to social capital indicate that the majority of Afghan household respondents in Zahedan have either lost, or have significantly diminished, social support networks remaining in Afghanistan.

The third question asked respondents what sort of work they anticipated and/or aspired for themselves and their children upon their return:

- 23.3% or 14 respondents were not certain and indicated that it depended on the conditions in Afghanistan
- 15% or 9 respondents said they were disabled or aged and could no longer work
- 18.3% or 11 respondents mentioned agriculture and/or animal husbandry

- 11.7% or 7 respondents mentioned tailoring or embroidery
- 6.7% or 4 respondents mentioned either labouring or trade
- 3.3% or 2 respondents mentioned weaving
- 1.7% or 1 respondent mentioned the following occupations: watchmaking, driving, tiling, masonry, welding, shoe-making, panel beating and government officer

In relation to the prospects for their children, 24.6% or 14 respondents said they did not know, and 42.1% or 24 respondents wanted their children to continue their education.

Third-country resettlement

Respondents were asked whether they aspired to migrate to another country, and to disclose which country they had considered migrating to. Only 12 respondents (20%) said they had aspired to migrate to another country. The countries listed included:

- Germany: 33.3% or 4 respondents
- Saudi Arabia: 25% or 3 respondents
- Canada: 16.7% or 2 respondents
- Pakistan and Turkey: 8.3% or 1 respondent each
- “Arabic or European country”: 8.3% or 1 respondent

Of those respondents who sought resettlement in another country, 54.5% or 6 respondents had relatives living in that country. Single respondents had one of the following living in that country:

- acquaintance
- maternal uncle
- son of maternal uncle
- son of maternal aunt
- sister’s husband

44.4% had learned about that country from friends, while 33.3% had learned from their own family members and 22.2% had learned from the internet. Regarding information about this country, respondents mentioned “better welfare and standard of living” (63.6% or 7 respondents) and “acceptance of migrants including Afghans” (36.4% or 4 respondents). 63.6% or 7 respondents had taken no action to apply for asylum in one of these countries, and 36.4% or 4 respondents had sent a letter to the UNHCR.

Asked why they chose that country, respondents mentioned:

- “better welfare and standard of living”: 36.4% or 4 respondents
- “migrants are accepted and Afghans are not deported”: 18.2% or 2 respondents

Box 1. 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.

- “family there”, “freedom”, “opportunity to continue education”, “same religion” and “making Haj [to Mecca, Saudi Arabia] and being proximate to God’s house”:1 respondent (9.1%) each

One respondent who claimed to want to resettle in Pakistan said that she had heard from her friends that the Pakistani authorities did not deport Afghans.

A Seyed shoemaker who had owned substantial property in Kandahar before coming to Iran in 1980 aged 30 had relatives living abroad. His maternal aunt’s son lived in Germany, his maternal uncle’s son lived in the Netherlands, and his sister’s children lived in Canada. This respondent had aspired to resettle in Germany, the Netherlands or Canada – countries which the respondent claimed allowed their population to live unrestricted and without physical and spiritual limitations. The respondent had applied three times to UNHCR but had been rejected. At the time of interview, this respondent claimed that he and his family wanted to return to Afghanistan but would not do so: “[until] the problem of housing is resolved...plus there are many other problems that we cannot resolve.”

4. Transitory Afghan labour migrants in Zahedan

Part 4 focuses on Afghan labour migrants in Zahedan who are single and usually move backwards and forwards between Afghanistan and Iran. This respondent group tends to live at their place of work, or share rooms with friends, co-workers or family (mainly brothers, cousins or uncles). The data here is drawn from an open-ended questionnaire (40 questions) that specifically targeted the migration experience of single labour migrants. Interviews with 15 labour migrants were undertaken in Zahedan.

4.1 Profile of labour migrant respondents

- Average age: 28 years
- Provinces of origin:
 - Kunduz: 40%
 - Baghlan: 20%
 - Kabul, Wardak, Balkh, Kandahar, Helmand, Jawzjan: 6.7% each
- Rural or urban area: rural (53.3%), urban (46.7%)
- Ethnicity:
 - Uzbek: 53.3%
 - Hazara: 20%
 - Tajik: 13.3%
 - Pashtun and Tajik Shia (Farsi-speaking): 6.7% each
- Religion: 73.3% Sunni, 26.7% Shia
- Year of arrived in Iran: 1979 (1), 1980 (2), 1982 (1), 1984 (1), 1992 (2), 1993 (1), 1995 (1), 1996 (2), 1997 (1), 1998 (1), 1999 (1), 2002 (1)
- Marital status:
 - 73.3% (11 respondents) married
 - 26.7% (4 respondents) not married
 - 11 respondents had children
- Education:
 - 5 non-literate
 - 7 had elementary school education

- 2 had secondary school education
- 1 had completed 12 years of school or high school diploma

4.2 Context of labour migration

Respondents were asked about their decision to migrate in relation to their family's integration within horizontal and/or vertical support networks. The assumption underlying this line of questioning comes from Stigter and Monsutti's proposition that access to resources (such as finances, goods and credit) from horizontal support networks is available only when families have sufficient means to be able to reciprocate, or when vertical redistribution networks (on the basis of ethnicity or other commonalities) provide sufficient protection. It is when this situation exists that men are able to migrate as the remaining members of their families are taken care of.⁸⁴

One respondent, a 20-year-old Uzbek man from Baghlan said that his wife lived in his parents' household comprising his three brothers and seven sisters, and that three of his mother's brothers and one of his father's brothers also lived near his family household. 13 respondents (86.7%) had brothers living with or near the household of his parents in Afghanistan:

- 7 respondents had 1 brother
- 1 respondent had 2 brothers
- 1 respondent had 3 brothers
- 1 respondent had 4 brothers
- 3 respondents said that "all of their" brothers lived with or near their family in Afghanistan

Additionally, 7 respondents said that they had at least one maternal or paternal uncle living with or near the household of the respondent's family in Afghanistan, and 8 respondents said they had no uncles living with or near their household. When asked about the impact of the respondent's migration on the family, 6 respondents mentioned that their brother(s) were looking after the family in his absence. One mentioned sister's husband and another mentioned his eldest son.

The size of the respondents' households in Afghanistan ranged from 6–15 people, with the mean size being 8.6 members. Most households comprised extended families with 12 respondents claiming their parents lived with them, and 3 other respondents claiming that 1–5 other relatives lived with them.

5 respondents (33.3%) claimed that they or their siblings or parents owned land: 2 respondents owned 3 *jeribs*, and single respondents owned 7, 20 and 80 *jeribs* respectively. 7 respondents (46.7%) said their families in Afghanistan owned their own house, and 8 (53.3%) rented their housing in Afghanistan.

Labour migrant respondents had worked in the following occupations in Afghanistan prior to coming to Iran:

- agriculturalist: 6 respondents
- baker: 1 respondent
- panel beater: 1 respondent

⁸⁴ Stigter and Monsutti 2005, p.5

- labourer: 1 respondent

Additionally, 3 respondents were born in Iran, 1 had been a student in Afghanistan, and 2 had been unemployed.

10 respondents (66.7%) had experienced debt in Afghanistan, borrowing money for such things as:

- illness: 5 respondents
- daily living costs: 2 respondents
- brother's marriage, buying a shop, migrating to Iran and buying wood: 1 respondent each

8 respondents had borrowed money from family (including from a maternal uncle and a cousin), and 1 respondent had loaned money from a neighbour. Reasons for seeking work in Iran included:

- unemployment in Afghanistan: 4 respondents
- Soviet occupation: 5 respondents
- mujahedin civil war: 1 respondent
- Taliban: 5 respondents

4.3 Pre-established transnational networks

Five respondents had family members who had migrated to other provinces in Afghanistan for the purpose of work. They had migrated to Kandahar, Kabul and Kunduz provinces for work including labouring, welding and bicycle making.

All but one respondent had relatives in Iran, and 10 respondents had several relatives there. 7 mentioned paternal uncle and paternal uncle's son, 5 mentioned mother's brother. Other relatives mentioned included: mother's sister's son, mother's brother's daughter, father's sister, grandfather. 26.7% or 4 respondents chose their destination in Iran based on having relatives there, 13.5% or 2 respondents chose their destination because of friends or acquaintances there, and 33.3% or 5 respondents chose the first province of arrival because of the availability of work and higher wages.

Respondents were asked a sequence of questions that elicited information about the extent to which they utilised their own social networks to facilitate their migration. In relation to those people involved in the respondent's decision to migrate to Iran, 7 mentioned parents, 2 mentioned their mother specifically, 3 mentioned their father specifically, 2 mentioned older brother, 1 mentioned grandfather and 1 mentioned his wife. Respondents were asked which member of their household had assisted with their journey to Iran. Half of the respondents had received help from family members to make the journey to Iran. 5 respondents mentioned father, and single respondents mentioned brother, mother's brother, grandfather and eldest son. In summary, the decision to migrate and facilitation of the migration journey was not taken at the individual level, rather it occurred at the level of the nuclear family (horizontal support network). Particular members (usually parents, grandfathers and male siblings) take responsibility for providing financial support, and also benefit as recipients of remittances.

Around 86.7% (13 respondents) had used smugglers to enter Iran, with 1 respondent claiming that he had migrated legally. This respondent, a 25-year-old Uzbek man

from Kunduz had entered Iran legally the first time, but he had subsequently returned to Afghanistan four times (1997, 1999, 2001, 2004) and had used smugglers for each subsequent re-entry. He mentioned that he had experienced the theft of all of his possessions on one trip. 11 respondents who used smugglers said they faced difficulties: 35.7% or 5 respondents mentioned the loan they were required to take out to pay the smuggler fee, and 3 respondents mentioned fear of arrest and deportation. One respondent mentioned “fear of the police and fatigue from heavy walking” and another mentioned the dangerous condition of the road taken.

Respondents were asked with whom they lived once they arrived in Zahedan. 7 respondents lived with family including 2 with their brother, while 5 lived alone and 3 lived with friends. In terms of the place of residence, 6 respondents lived in an independent household, 4 shared a common household with other single men, 4 lived in their workplace, and 1 lived in a family member’s house. Family members helped 11 respondents to find their current place of living including: brother, maternal uncle and son of paternal uncle.

Several respondents had previously lived in Zahedan with their family, and had remained in Iran after their family had repatriated to Afghanistan. One such case is that of a 42-year-old Uzbek man originally from Kunduz. He had lived with his wife and 7 children in Zahedan for 23 years prior to his family’s repatriation to Afghanistan in 2004. (The respondent had been deported several times prior to taking his family back to Afghanistan.) He returned with his family to Afghanistan, and then came back alone to Iran where he works as a builder, living in the household of his wife’s mother. The respondent said that his own brother and father-in-law were looking after his family in Afghanistan while he was in Zahedan. He earns 5,000 *Tooman* (US\$5.50) per day, spends 5,000 *Tooman* weekly, and sends 180,000 *Tooman* (US\$200) to his family in Afghanistan every 2–3 months. He explained that his family in Kunduz owned neither house nor land, and were

Box 2. Transnational networks facilitating migration

*A 23-year-old Hazara Shia arrived in Iran in 1998, aged 16, and at the time his father had planned to take his entire family to Iran to flee the Taliban occupation of Kabul. “The Taliban were harassing us and we decided to come to Iran. We even loaned money for the trip, but my father changed his mind and I was sent alone to Iran to look for work.” The respondent traveled to Iran via Pakistan using smugglers, and settled in Zahedan. He explained that he settled there because his paternal uncle’s son was working there, and because regulations for the bakery industry at that time allowed Afghans to work. He learned the trade of baking and has been employed as a baker continuously for seven years, barring a three-month period of unemployment in 2004. He was introduced to his current employer by a relative and is accommodated in the bakery. He has been deported several times and has expended a large amount of money returning to Iran. His daily salary was 4,000–5,000 *Tooman* (US\$4.50–6.70) and he spent 15,000 (US\$16.70) *Tooman* weekly, meaning that based on a six-day working week, he had a savings capacity of about 60,000 *Tooman* (US\$66) monthly. He remitted 200,000 *Tooman* (US\$220) every 3 months via “a reliable person” to his family, who spent the money on daily living costs including rent of their house in Kabul. At the time of the interview he was working in an illegal bakery located in a private house that employed Afghans. He said for Afghan migrants, any public movement in places such as Zahedan city risked deportation even if the person held documentation. The respondent’s brother took responsibility for the welfare of their parents and the respondent’s own wife in Kabul, and the respondent was in regular phone contact with them. This respondent had no immediate plans to return to Afghanistan, but said that he preferred to remain in Afghanistan if he could find work.*

currently living in a rented house. The respondent intended to return to Afghanistan in 2005 as he was sick and unemployed at the time of the interview. If he could not find work in Kunduz he would go to Kabul or Kandahar to look for work.

Most respondents had come to Iran as young single men, supported by their parents and other relatives. The following case provides an example of the transnational networks that facilitate migration from the place of origin.

4.4 Remittances and savings

Respondents listed the following occupations as their first job in Iran:

- labourer: 7 respondents
- baker: 3 respondents
- panel beater: 2 respondents
- mason, tailor and mosaic maker: 1 respondent each

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

- labourer: 8 respondents
- baker: 3 respondents
- welder: 2 respondents
- mason and security guard: 1 respondent each

The occupations of labourer and baker remained constant for labour migrant respondents in Zahedan. The length of time respondents had been employed in their current job ranged from 2 months to 25 years, with 4 respondents in their current job for less than 12 months, and the average being seven years.

Unemployment was an ordinary experience among respondents: all respondents had experienced periods without work.

- 1 had experienced 2 years' unemployment out of 13 years of work
- 1 had experienced 1 month in 13 years
- 1 had experienced 5–6 months in 10 years
- 1 had experienced 1 month in 6 years
- 2 had experienced 3 months in a 12-month period
- 1 had had 1 day of work for every 2 days without work over a 3-year period

During the period of unemployment, 3 respondents said they lived from their savings and 2 respondents said they made pilgrimage to the Shrine of Imam Reza in Mashhad to pray for assistance in getting work. One respondent, a 25-year-old Uzbek from Kunduz had trained and worked as a tailor until four months prior to the interview when he had become a building labourer. He had once experienced a month of unemployment and had located himself in a *falake* area and waited: "For almost one month I sat in the square and I returned home [to Afghanistan] because there was no job." Again he returned to Iran but it would be the last time. Next time he returned to Afghanistan, he intended to settle in Herat and look for work there.

Respondents claimed that they earned 4,000–6,000 *Tooman* (US\$4.50–6.70) daily. The mean daily salary was 6,000 *Tooman* (US\$6.60); a weekly income of 36,000 *Tooman* (US\$40) can be 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 claimed that they spent 2,500–40,000 *Tooman* (US\$3–44) weekly with the mean weekly expenditure 15,000 *Tooman* (US\$16.70). It should be pointed out that those migrants spending small amounts on weekly expenditure tended to live in subsidised accommodation – in other words, they received in-kind assistance. Deducting expenditure from income, and triangulating this with figures for remittances, weekly savings capacity was calculated to be 2,000–32,000.⁸⁵ Mean average weekly savings capacity was 26,000 *Tooman* (US\$29).

The mean average of money remitted yearly to Afghanistan was 970,000 *Tooman* (US\$1,008). 46.7% (7 respondents) sent regular remittances to their family in Afghanistan. 4 respondents sent remittances via *hawala* only, 2 sent via both acquaintances and *hawala*, and 2 sent via acquaintances only. 2 respondents mentioned they had experienced difficulty sending remittances: 1 said the *hawaladar* had not passed on his money to relatives in Afghanistan, and the other said his acquaintance had died en route. Of those 8 respondents who sent remittances, 4 sent to their father, 3 to their wife, and 1 to their son.

8 respondents (53.3%) said they regularly submitted remittances to Afghanistan. Of these:

- 2 respondents mentioned every 2–3 months
- 2 respondents mentioned every 3–4 months
- 1 respondent mentioned every 6 months
- 2 respondents mentioned annually
- 1 respondent said “when it is requested [by family in Afghanistan]”

Box 3. Remittance practices

Example 1. A 20-year-old single Tajik man originally from Baghlan arrived in Zahedan in 2002 where his paternal uncle’s son was working. He found work as a house builder and had remained working in that occupation. His three brothers lived with his parents in Afghanistan. The respondent had worked in Zahedan for 18 months and returned to Afghanistan where he was unable to find work, and six months later he returned again to Zahedan. He had not recently remitted any money to his family as his work was intermittent: “one day work, two days without work”, and he claimed that he could not even afford to fund his return trip to Afghanistan.

Example 2. A 34-year-old Tajik Shia man from Kandahar remitted regular money to his household in Afghanistan consisting of his wife, his parents, his four children and his siblings including two brothers. This man first arrived in Zahedan (where his paternal uncles worked) for the purposes of work in 2002. He had returned to Afghanistan in 2003, and had returned again to Iran in the same year. He earned about 40,000 *Tooman* (US\$44) weekly from his welding occupation, and claimed that he remitted between 700,000 and 1,000,000 *Tooman* (US\$780–\$1,010) every six months, for the purposes of rebuilding the family house.

⁸⁵ This figure does not take into account the respondent who claimed to earn 20,000 *Tooman* daily.

Every respondent mentioned that remittances were used by their family in Afghanistan for the costs of daily living. 2 respondents also mentioned capital invest, namely for the purchase of a house.

Table 8 shows labour migrant respondents' occupation, employment status in Iran and place of origin in Afghanistan, against return intention and future migration plans.

<i>Age and marital status</i>	<i>First arrival to Iran</i>	<i>Current occupation</i>	<i>Unemployed period</i>	<i>Place of current residence in Afghanistan</i>	<i>Return to Iran?</i>	<i>Place of future migration in Afghanistan</i>
23, M	1998	baker	3 months in 2004	Kabul	conditional ⁸⁶	Kabul
31, M	1992	mason	1 month	Kunduz	conditional	Pakistan
26, S	1980	mason	unemployed during illness	Kunduz	no	Kabul or Kandahar
42, M	1980	labourer	yes, unspecified	Kunduz	conditional	where there is work
32, M	1995	welder/watchman	5–6 months	Kunduz	conditional	where there is work
20, S	2002	mason	two out of three days	Baghlan	conditional	where there is work
34, M	2002	welder	2 years	Kandahar	conditional	Kandahar
35, M	1993	labourer	yes, unspecified	Kunduz	conditional	Kandahar
25, M	1979	labourer	yes, unspecified	Baghlan	no	Puli Khumri
20, S	1997	baker	yes, unspecified	Behsood	yes	Iran
20, M	1984	labourer	Yes, unspecified	Baghlan	no	Baghlan
26, S	1999	labourer	1 month	Kunduz	conditional	Pakistan
25, M	1982	tailor/labourer	1 month	Kunduz	no	Herat
40, M	1996	labourer/watchman	6 months	Helmand	no	Helmand
23, S	1996	baker	2–3 months	Mazar-i-Sharif	no	Mazar-i-Sharif

Table 8. Labour migrant respondent profile

4.5 Future migration intentions

13 respondents (86.7%) claimed that their lives had improved since they had migrated, and 2 respondents (13.3%) said there was no change. Several positive aspects of migration were mentioned:

- 4 respondents mentioned “learning a trade” and “education”
- 6 respondents mentioned “working”
- 3 respondents mentioned “improving culturally” [becoming urbane]
- 2 respondents mentioned “pilgrimage”

Two respondents said there were no positive aspects to their migration experience.

⁸⁶ The answer given was, “No, but it depends on whether or not there are work opportunities available to me in Afghanistan. If there are none I may be forced to return to Iran.”

Respondents were also asked to list negative aspects of their migration experience:

- 11 mentioned being detained and abused and deported by police
- 1 mentioned being distant from family
- 1 mentioned being robbed
- 1 said that the main negative aspect was: “we live in Iran illegally”, implying that they live with the constant threat of arrest and deportation

2 respondents said they there were no negative aspects to their migration experience.

8 respondents (53.3%) mentioned that their family had faced difficulties in their absence, including:

- illness: 3 respondents
- financial problems: 2 respondents
- missing (yearning for) respondent: 2 respondents
- 1 respondent’s brother had been arrested by Taliban soldiers

Respondents were asked about their cross-border movement:

- 13 respondents (86.7%) had returned to Afghanistan since coming to Iran
- 10 respondents (66.7%) had returned once
- single respondents had returned twice, four times and five times respectively

Three respondents (20%) said they did not know when they would return to Afghanistan, and 6 respondents (40%) specified a time between several months and 12 months’ time. Significantly, 6 respondents or 40% said they would prefer to remain in Iran if the government permitted them to do so.

Most respondents claimed they would return to the place where their household was currently located in Afghanistan, with some indication of movement towards Kabul and Herat (1 respondent in each case). Reasons given for returning to these places included:

- birthplace: 33.3% or 5 respondents
- family there: 33.3% or 5 respondents
- location of land/house: 6.7% or 1 respondent
- “more work”: 20% or 3 respondents
- “Shias are there”: 6.7% or 1 respondent

Respondents were asked in the event of their return to Afghanistan whether they intended to migrate again to Iran:

- 6.7% (1 respondent) said he would migrate again to Iran
- 53.3% (8 respondents) said it was not clear and depended on their situation in Afghanistan
- 40% (6 respondents) claimed they did not intend to migrate again to Iran

Of those respondents who said they may not return again to Iran, there was negligible intention to go to Kabul: only one respondent not originally from Kabul planned to go to Kabul to look for work.

One respondent, a 32-year-old Uzbek, had returned to Afghanistan with his wife and parents and two sons in early 2005, after living in Iran for 25 years. He had then left them behind in Kandahar, and returned to Zahedan using smugglers in March 2005. He said that when he returned to Afghanistan, he would return to his village in Kandahar “because I do not have money...if I have money I will go to Kabul.” This respondent explained that he would return to Iran again if necessary, and if this was not possible, he would seek work in another neighbouring country such as Pakistan or Tajikistan.

Few respondents were interested in seeking work abroad. 9 respondents (60%) said they were not interested, 2 mentioned Pakistan, 2 mentioned Dubai, and single respondents mentioned Austria and the Netherlands. Reasons for interest in these countries included:

- work availability
- good income
- security
- family
- proximity of Pakistan to home province in Afghanistan

5. Conclusion

5.1 Afghan households in Zahedan

Reasons for household decision-making about return

The data from this research indicates a correlation between Afghan households' length of residence in Iran and their lack of willingness to return to Afghanistan: respondents resident in Iran for 16–20 years were clearly least willing to return to Afghanistan. However, those respondents resident in Iran for the shorter duration of 8–10 years also expressed considerable unwillingness to return. This may correlate with the respective stages of households: long-duration households may comprise adult children who have been raised, educated and socialised in Iran, while shorter-duration households may comprise younger children whose education and health needs are being met – to some extent at least – in Iran, discouraging return to Afghanistan.

Return intention has a gender dimension: four times as many male-headed households compared to female-headed households intended to return to Afghanistan in the medium term. Some widows claimed that their decision to return would not be taken independently, but would be made by (non-family) tribal elders. Additionally, those households with daughters of marriageable age were more than twice as unwilling as other households to return to Afghanistan.

Respondents' assessment of their economic situation influenced their attitude to remaining in Iran or returning to Afghanistan. Respondents who assessed their household's economic situation to have deteriorated in Iran were almost three times more willing to return to Afghanistan as those respondents who assessed their economic situation to have improved. Those respondents who claimed their situation was unchanged were significantly least willing to return.

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 perceived social and economic marginalisation in Iran. Respondents felt that their differentiation and discrimination as non-Iranians would persist into the future, and this acted as encouragement for them to return to Afghanistan.

In Iran, access to housing and facilities such as electricity, gas and running water, and access to welfare facilities, particularly health and education, motivated households to remain in Iran in the medium term. However, the living conditions of Afghans in Zahedan were significantly more basic than in both Tehran and Mashhad. In particular, 15% of households did not have running water and spent a significant portion of income on the purchase of water for daily needs. This mirrors the living conditions of Iranians, as only 53% of residents of Sistan Baluchistan have access to safe water compared with 83% nationally.

The majority of Afghan respondents in Zahedan were non-literate. Households with non-literate children were clearly least willing to return to Afghanistan, while households with upper secondary school-educated children were most willing to return to Afghanistan, followed closely by households with primary-educated children. This may be due to a perception that the competitive labour market in Afghanistan would privilege literate applicants, and that non-literate young people would be more likely to find employment in Iran.

Respondents' decision-making to return to Afghanistan appears to be affected primarily by the experiences of their relatives who had returned from Iran to Afghanistan. The proximity of Zahedan to the international border is reflected in the fact that two thirds of respondents or their family members had visited Afghanistan, with almost half visiting Afghanistan during 2002–04. Additionally, most respondents had relatives who had repatriated to Afghanistan, and most received first-hand, updated news about the conditions for returnees.

Respondents with relatives who had returned satisfactorily were more than seven times more likely to be willing to return to Afghanistan than those respondents whose relatives had not returned satisfactorily. Several households had returned to Iran from Afghanistan after a failed attempt at reintegration due to problems finding work. The belief that only returnees with capital and/or assets could manage to return and stay (that is, experience sustainable return) was widely expressed.

Afghan perceptions of their long-term future in relation to Afghanistan

The impact of property ownership in Afghanistan on decision-making was unexpected. Those respondents whose house or land had been sold or abandoned were more willing to return than those whose house or land was the subject of *amanat*. This apparent anomaly suggests that the category of “abandoned” needs better understanding, that is – whether in practice landowners are managing to reclaim housing and land that they categorise as “abandoned”. Second, the category of “*amanat*” needs better understanding, that is – the difficulties faced by returnee landowners in reclaiming housing and land subject to *amanat*.

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, whereas the lack of security, disarmament and lack of welfare (education and health) and housing in Afghanistan were mentioned as factors that discouraged their return to Afghanistan in the medium term.

In relation to proposed destinations in Afghanistan, Zahedan respondents preferred to return to their place of origin. Unlike those in Tehran and Mashhad, there was a marked absence of rural-to-urban migration, suggesting a stronger parochial orientation than the other study groups. Ties were found to be first and foremost to places of origin, and other places were mentioned as “foreign” despite their location within the boundaries of the Afghan nation-state. Reasons given for wanting to return to places of origin included:

- presence of family members
- property ownership (house and land)
- proximity to Iran (allowing for better access if return was necessary)
- better infrastructure and welfare facilities

Afghan livelihood strategies in Zahedan

In Zahedan, it appears that there is no system of informal property ownership like that which exists in Mashhad and enables more secure tenancy and a sense of being settled. Despite lengthy Afghan residence in Zahedan and sub-standard housing, informal property ownership is not apparent, and only a couple of respondents “owned” their own house.

Those Afghans interviewed in Zahedan were able to find employment (80% employed at the time of interview), and 90% of respondents had entered 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. Some upward mobility in the employment sector was apparent, with some respondents moving from labouring to more skilled areas; however opportunities for this movement were fewer than in Tehran and Mashhad – reflecting the comparatively lower level of industrialisation in Zahedan.

Respondents participated actively in regional social networks that functioned as safety nets. Most had family members and/or acquaintances in their current neighbourhood of residence. Furthermore, most respondents had borrowed money from, and loaned money to, family in times of need. Illness accounted for almost half of those needs defined as urgent by Zahedan respondents. Female-headed households expended one third less than other households – substantiating a hypothesis that basic household expenditure is inversely correlated to vulnerability. Widows and divorcees able to utilise horizontal networks (male siblings, nephews) fared better than those who did not.

Iranians also featured in Afghan livelihood strategies in Zahedan, with some undertaking illegal actions on behalf of an Afghan neighbour, or mediating on an Afghan's behalf. Baluch ethnicity, which straddles the international border, can mean that, depending on the context, being Baluch in ethnicity is sometimes more advantageous than being Afghan or Iranian in nationality.

An unexpected result of the study was the extent of transnational networks among Afghan respondents in Iran with the West (mainly Europe, Canada and Australia) versus the extent of remittances from relatives in these places to Afghan respondents. Half of the respondents had family members living overseas, and most had direct communication with their relatives. However, only 5 out of 60 respondents disclosed that they had ever received financial assistance from their relatives living overseas.

Also unanticipated was the frequency (half of respondents) of arranged marriages between Afghan families of brides in Afghanistan, and the Afghan families of grooms living in Iran. Additionally, one quarter of respondents had been directly or indirectly involved in arranging marriages between the families of Afghan women living in Iran, and the families of Afghan men living abroad. In addition to the practice of women travelling abroad for the purpose of marriage, one fifth of respondents aspired to migrate to another country, although only 4 out of 60 had approached UNHCR for resettlement.⁸⁷

Data from this case study challenges the notion that in the event of return, some families would leave a member behind in Iran to remit money to help finance the family's reintegration in Afghanistan. All except one household respondent in Zahedan intended to return as an intact household to Afghanistan, not separating or leaving family members behind in Iran. However, some households had returned intact and then sent a member back to Iran. Several labour migrant respondents who were currently living as single men in Zahedan had previously lived with their

⁸⁷ Afghan asylum-seekers to industrialised countries fell by 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.

families in Zahedan. After accompanying their families back to Afghanistan in the past two years, these men had returned alone to Zahedan to work and support their household in Afghanistan through remittances.

Links to Afghanistan

Most respondents living in Zahedan participated in transnational networks spanning Pakistan, Afghanistan and further abroad, sustained by direct contact via letter, phone and internet. However, just one quarter of respondents had sent money to relatives in Afghanistan once (some for the purchase of land on behalf of the respondent), and very few specified that they regularly remitted money to relatives in Afghanistan. Remittances tended not to be a regular arrangement to cover daily living expenses of families back in Afghanistan, but were sent in response to relatives' demands for specific or urgent needs, and sent via acquaintances travelling back to Afghanistan.

Most respondents mentioned that their own household's economic situation in Zahedan was too weak to be supporting relatives in Afghanistan. Two respondents had received financial support from their relatives in Afghanistan, however this was unusual and Afghans in Iran were perceived as "wealthy" by those in Afghanistan. Remittance patterns of single labour migrants in Zahedan were radically different to those of households – both in terms of amount and frequency.

In spite of 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 in Afghanistan to be even weaker than their own, and unable to support (accommodate and/or financially assist) the respondent in the event of their return.

5.2 Transitory Afghan labour migrants in Zahedan

Reasons for becoming migrants

This study substantiates the hypothesis that the existence of horizontal networks determines migration to Iran by spreading risks within the household or between households. All but two labour migrant respondents had brothers living in the household of their parents in Afghanistan, with almost half of the respondents also having at least one uncle living in proximity to their parents' household – ensuring that the family would be looked after in the absence of the labour migrant.

Respondents described migration as a coping strategy that allowed their family to receive remittances to pay for daily needs and to resolve debts. While one third of respondents' families owned land, most had borrowed money for illness and/or daily living costs and had become indebted.

Experiences of Afghan migrants in Zahedan

All but one respondent mentioned they had relatives in Iran at the time of migrating, mainly maternal and paternal uncles and their sons. This fact supports the notion of pre-established transnational networks facilitating 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 migrants' parents and brother(s) involved in the decision to migrate. Additionally, most migrants' journey to Iran, and initial settling-in period (finding accommodation and work), were facilitated by brothers, maternal uncles and paternal uncle's sons.

An unexpected finding from this research (and substantiating the data on migrants in Tehran) was the extent of unemployment among Afghan labour migrants in Zahedan. Respondents reported substantial periods of unemployment with the highest level reported as two days unemployed for every day employed, and the lowest one month over thirteen years. Despite periods of unemployment, respondents still claimed that they remitted an average of 970,000 *Tooman* (US\$1,008) annually. This money was remitted mainly to respondents' fathers or respondents' wives in Afghanistan, and it was usually sent via *hawala* as well as acquaintances.

The frequency of respondents' return to Iran (all except two had returned to Afghanistan at least once) suggests that unemployment has not dissuaded them from subsequently migrating again. Although government regulations make the employment of Afghan nationals without work permits illegal,⁸⁸ labour migrants are still being employed, with many gaining employment through recommendations or introductions by relatives or friends.

Future intentions in terms of return/mobility

Afghan labour migrants in Zahedan preferred not to return again to Iran for work. In the event of remaining in Afghanistan, respondents expressed a clear preference for returning directly to the place of their family household and land, and making secondary onward movement only if there was no work locally and they had financial needs. This preference by single labour migrants followed the pattern of household groups in Zahedan who also preferred to return to their place of origin. Baghlan, followed by Kabul and Kandahar, were seen as potential destinations by those seeking work but not intending to return to Iran. Most labour migrant respondents expressed no intention to seek work in another country. Those who did express interest mentioned the UAE (Dubai) and Pakistan, followed by European countries (Austria and the Netherlands) for reasons relating to good income, family, work opportunity and security.

Labour migrant respondents did not disclose definite plans about returning to Afghanistan. Following the practice by Afghans of making their move in the warmer months of spring and summer, one third of respondents claimed that they would return to Afghanistan in the summer period (June to September). One anomaly should be mentioned: all except one respondent stated that when they returned to Afghanistan, they intended not to return again to Iran if they could find employment in Afghanistan. Yet in response to another question, six respondents stated that they would like to remain in Iran if they were permitted. Whether they imagined their families joining them in Iran, or they imagined remaining in Iran as single migrants, was not explicit.

⁸⁸ 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.

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Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit
Charahi Ansari (opposite the Insaf Hotel and Popolano's)
Shahr-e Naw, Kabul, Afghanistan
mobile: +93 (0)79 608 548 email: areu@areu.org.af website: www.areu.org.af