



Afghans in Pakistan: Broadening the Focus

Afghans in Pakistan

This briefing paper draws on AREU's research findings in Pakistan to demonstrate that the refugee framework and its administrative and legal arrangements can no longer address the complex realities of a transnational community such as the Afghan population in Pakistan.

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Overview¹

The Afghan presence in Pakistan has a long history that the border of the modern nation state can do little to erase. During the two decades of conflict in their homeland from 1979, Afghans constituted among the largest groups of refugees in the world, with numbers hosted by neighbouring countries Pakistan and Iran peaking at around 6 million. The protracted nature of their displacement and the multiple reasons for their flight – including periods of conflict and drought, and economic pressures – have in recent years made it increasingly difficult for host countries and humanitarian assistance programmes to find solutions to this ongoing situation within the refugee framework.

The 2005 Census of Afghans in Pakistan confirmed that Pakistan hosts approximately 3.05 million Afghans today: this number reflects not only those who have chosen to stay and those who have returned to settle in Pakistan after repatriation, but also the natural growth of the Afghan population in Pakistan, further migration and the presence of labour migrants. The number of Afghans recorded as returning to Afghanistan through UNHCR's voluntary repatriation programme has increased in each of the past three years, with 430,000 up until November 2005; most have been those who left their country within the previous five years, while the majority of Afghans remaining in

About the research. Three qualitative case studies of Afghans living in urban centres in Pakistan – Quetta, Peshawar and Karachi – were conducted in 2004–05 as part of a long-term, three-country (Afghanistan, Iran and Pakistan) study of transnational networks undertaken by AREU. The research focussed on cross-border linkages, livelihood strategies, support networks and links with Afghanistan. The project is funded by the European Commission (EC), the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and Stichting Vluchteling.

About the authors. The Collective for Social Science Research, based in Karachi, is engaged in multidisciplinary social science research on development-related issues. Topics of ongoing and recent work include migration, urban governance, labour, gender, political economy and rural poverty.

¹ Data in this paper is sourced from the following documents:

Ministry of States and Frontier Regions (SAFRON), Population Census Organization (PCO) and United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees Islamabad (UNHCR), 2005, *Census of Afghans in Pakistan 2005*, Islamabad.

UNHCR, 2004, *Afghanistan: Challenges to Return*, Geneva.

UNHCR, February 2005, *Afghan Refugee Statistics*.

UNHCR, 2004, *Protracted Refugee Situations* (paper prepared for the 30th Standing Committee Meeting, September 2005), EC/54/SC/CRP.14, Geneva.

United States Committee for Refugees, 2001, *Afghan Refugees: Shunned and Scorned*.

Pakistan have been there for more than 20 years. The changed nature of cross-border movements since the mass influxes of refugees, and the lack of willingness to return of many of those who have stayed over the longer term, calls into question whether the rate of return can be sustained in the future.

Since the early years of the conflict and displacement from their homeland, one generation of Afghans has been born and grown into adulthood in Pakistan. Nineteen percent of Afghans in Pakistan are under the age of five and an estimated 55 percent, or over 1.7 million, are under 18. The current focus of both the Pakistani and the Afghan governments on how many Afghans intend to return does not reflect this reality.

It is increasingly difficult for host countries and humanitarian assistance programmes to find solutions to the ongoing situation of displacement and back-and-forth population movements within the refugee framework.

Research into Afghans living in three cities in Pakistan (Quetta, Peshawar and Karachi) exposes the extent of their transnationalism – deep-rooted systems of livelihood activities linking both sides of the border that have been used by Afghans in the region before, and more extensively during, the recent 25 years of conflict in their home country. The realities of life for Afghans residing in Pakistan (as well as for those moving back and forth for business, employment, health, family and reconnaissance reasons, and those using Pakistan as a base from which to go further abroad for work and send remittances back to relatives in Pakistan or Afghanistan) are revealed in the findings of this study, which points to the need for governments in the region to recognise the situation and work towards articulated and realistic policies for Afghan population movements between the two countries.

While the government of Afghanistan seeks ways of ensuring sustainable reintegration for its returnee population, and continues to work with UNHCR to encourage voluntary repatriation wherever possible, the government of Pakistan should be assisted in gradually exploring ways – beyond the refugee framework and emphasis solely on voluntary repatriation – of achieving an openly declared and implemented policy on Afghans living and working within its borders.

I. The Reality of Afghans' Lives in Pakistan

The majority of Afghans currently living in Pakistan arrived during the Soviet invasion and the ensuing war of resistance: almost 2.5 million refugees were received between 1981 and 1990. By late 2001 the government of Pakistan speculated that there were approximately 3.3 million Afghans in Pakistan. During the height of the conflict years in Afghanistan, Pakistan and Iran provided asylum to some of the largest numbers of refugees in the world, receiving them on a *prima facie* basis and accommodating them with few restrictions. However, after the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan and the large-scale returns that followed the fall of the Najibullah government in 1992, the considerable international support Pakistan had received to help it address the refugee crisis diminished – leading to a strengthening of its determination to ensure repatriation of all Afghans.

Ongoing conflict saw new waves of displaced Afghans arriving in Pakistan during the 1990s. Prior to and during the US-led offensive in Afghanistan, there was an influx of 300,000 refugees preceding the 1.5 million who returned to Afghanistan after the fall of the Taliban regime. More recent movements of Afghans from their homeland have been prompted by the worst drought in 30 years; for some their reasons for flight have been exclusively this disaster, while for others it has been a combination of conflict, drought and economic imperatives.

From refugee camps to cities

Most Afghan refugees came initially to camps which were established in North West Frontier Province and Balochistan by the Pakistani government and supported by UNHCR. Almost 1.3 million Afghans continue to live in camps today, while 1.7 million live in rural and urban areas outside camps. There have been up to 300 refugee settlements throughout Pakistan; today only 145 remain.

The movement of Afghans from camps to cities has taken place since the 1980s, mostly in the search for employment and to supplement rations in the camps. This accelerated when urbanised Afghans began arriving in the 1990s because of factional fighting in Afghan cities, and also in 1992–95 when food aid to camps established in the 1980s was reduced. Urban life holds the promise of many of the same opportunities

that attract rural-to-urban migrants (both Pakistani and others) from all over Pakistan, and many later arrivals who never registered in camps at all came directly to the cities, often supported by ethnic links with those already settled there.

Ethnicity and integration

Prior social networks along the lines of kinship, ethnicity, religious sect or political affiliation have been key determinants in the choice of destination for Afghans, and have often made the move to a city feasible. The attraction of Peshawar to Pashtuns is obvious, as it offers the possibilities of joining the labour market as locals as well as using ethnic links to procure Pakistani identity cards. Quetta offered networks of support within which Afghans were taken under the protection of tribal leaders, offered land on lease for camps or illegal settlements in the city, and again assisted in acquiring identity cards. Ethnic Hazara refugees took cover under the patronage of local Hazara leaders in Quetta, moving into settlements such as Hazara Town where they established schools, clinics and means of income generation within their own communities. Ismailis in Karachi were provided with shelter and livelihoods by Ismaili institutions.

It should be pointed out that these kinds of networks are just as vital to Pakistanis who migrate to the cities. The depth and intricacies of these migrant community networks may be seen by government and policymakers to work against the development of an integrated, location-based identity, and research has shown that migrants tend to reinforce their ethnic and kinship ties in the communities they establish in their cities of settlement.

The case of Karachi offers valuable insights into how a migrant community makes a place for itself over time. The city, which at Partition in 1947 had a relatively small population, has come to be made up of hundreds of migrant community settlements that are based on place of origin, religion, ethnicity and caste of their inhabitants. Afghans have settled along similar lines in the city, with those from the same communities and ethnicities generally living in the same areas. The low level of economic and social integration among communities, and the lack of social and legal protection, is common to most migrant groups

in the city. Afghans are in this way just like the many other sharply defined migrant communities in Karachi – also mainly first-generation migrants from other parts of Pakistan and South Asia.

Livelihood strategies and diversification

Without citizenship status or other permission to work in Pakistan, legally Afghans do not have access to “formal” employment – a major barrier to their economic security and upward mobility. Those with (counterfeit) Pakistani identity cards are in a better position to access secure work, but they are still vulnerable to being apprehended by authorities and must rely on the good favour of their employers.

Many Afghans piece together a livelihood through diverse marginal economic activities including rag-picking and waste recycling, daily wage labour and small-scale trading. More lucrative activities include carpet trading and transport as well legal and illegal cross-border trade. Some educated Afghans have found employment with NGOs that are working with their communities.

Afghan communities in Pakistan's cities are large enough for them to be significant suppliers as well as users of various types of labour and services. They have built their own clinics and schools, and provide a variety of services such as health, education, tailoring and hairdressing.

The diversification of Afghans' livelihood activities is an expression of the dynamic and responsive nature of the population, at least some of which (although probably the proportion that arrived with some assets and connections) have been able to move from being passive recipients of aid in refugee camps to active involvement in income generation and business activities. The refugee framework for managing the Afghan population in Pakistan is no longer relevant in many of these cases, and the absence of official policy and enforceable regulations that address them, points to the need for the government of Pakistan to explore ways of regulating such activities.

Youth

According to the 2005 Census, 19.4 percent of Afghans in Pakistan are under the age of five. It is estimated that over 55 percent of all Afghans in Pakistan are under the age of 18. By virtue of their numbers alone, these statistics establish that this section of the

Afghan population in Pakistan must be heard and considered by those involved in finding effective ways of managing the large numbers of Afghans living in Pakistan.

Field research suggests that there are significant intergenerational differences within families, and that the concerns of young people about repatriation differ substantially from those of their parents. For young Afghans, information about their country of origin is highly personalised and dependent on their own family experience, and young people may grow up with a deep fear of violence, or conversely an unrealistic nostalgia for a home they have never known.

Many young urbanised Afghans may not want, or have the skills, to return to the traditional economic activities of their parents' generation. Those born and brought up in the cities, and those who have been educated in Pakistan, are much more likely to aspire to formal sector employment. If indeed they intend to repatriate, it is often only after having acquired the English and computer skills necessary to access the jobs they have heard are available – for the few who qualify – in urban Afghanistan.

Recognition of educational qualifications

Higher education opportunities in Afghanistan are more difficult to access than in Pakistan, and Dari language skills are needed to qualify. Afghans raised in Pakistan only have those skills if they have studied in Dari (Persian) medium schools – most of those who are educated are more proficient in reading and writing Urdu. For those educated in Pakistan, there is also the need for their qualifications to be recognised by Afghan schools, universities and prospective employers. There are currently significant problems in Afghanistan with false educational documentation and qualifications from Pakistan, which the government of Afghanistan struggles to overcome. Although Afghanistan agreed to accord recognition to the educational qualifications of its citizens from Pakistan in the Tripartite Agreement, research suggests that the matter is still problematic, and some Afghans find that they cannot establish equivalency and recognition of their degrees, possibly prompting them to return to Pakistan.

Implications of lack of legal status

Afghans living in Pakistani cities cite police harassment and extortion as the greatest

threat to their security at present. This threat has grown in recent years with government pressure on Afghans to repatriate.

As a result of their lack of legal identity, many poorer Afghans are subject to insecurity of land tenure, as without a Pakistani identity card they cannot officially own property. Eviction is a constant threat to Afghans in illegal settlements, where often unfavourable lease agreements are made between landlords and Afghans irrespective of whether the settlement itself is in violation of the law. As a result of the lack of any way for these Afghans to feel secure in their dwellings, they are often forced to fall back on ethnic and social links, which, while offering some degree of protection and security, can put them in a potentially exploitative situation.

In contrast, Afghans who can afford to rent homes in established neighbourhoods such as Hayatabad in Peshawar do not live under threat of eviction or manipulation by the landowner. In Karachi, the apartment complex at Al-Asif Square is home to 20,000 people, over half of them Afghan. They rent apartments, and some among them who have been able to procure Pakistani identity cards have been assisted in purchasing their own homes by a property dealer who has close ties with local police and political parties.

Planning for the future

Afghans in Pakistan assess their future options in terms of how best to reduce their vulnerability, and how best to increase their security, achieve economic stability and improve their livelihood opportunities. They consider return a possibility (18.2% according to the 2005 Census) only if peace and security is assured in their proposed destination in Afghanistan. The clear presence of economic opportunities – not only jobs, but access to land and the promise of sustained livelihoods that employment presents – makes the decision to return more likely. For those who have not chosen to repatriate, or who have

Afghan refugees in Pakistan ready to return home if facilities better

[Report by Afghan independent Tolo TV on 2 November 2005. Source: BBC Monitoring Selected Stories from the Afghan Media, 7 November 2005]

[Presenter] A number of Afghan refugees living in Pakistan have urged the government of Afghanistan to provide better education facilities for refugees so they can return to their own country. They complain about the present condition of their lives and say they cannot return to Afghanistan because they have no place to live. Those who have returned home from abroad are also facing the same problems.

[A young man] We cannot go to Afghanistan due to certain problems, including the lack of a proper education system and facilities. The fact that we do not have homes or shelter is another problem. Otherwise, every Afghan wants to live in his own country.

[Another boy] We expect the government to take practical measures and help the people.

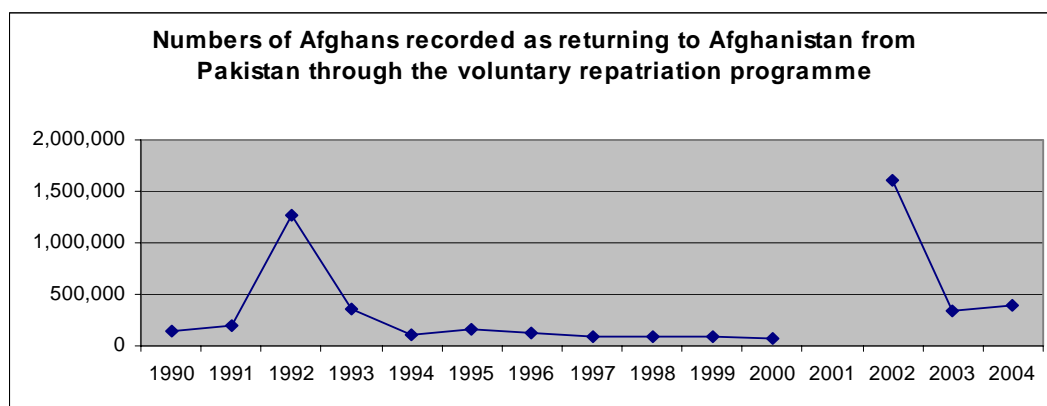
[A man] We wish to go to our own country and rebuild it. Our children are uneducated. They should go to school in their own country, study in their own language. I drive a rickshaw and I cannot pay the rent on the house in which we live.

returned to Pakistan after an attempt at repatriation, it is because one or more of these terms has not been met in Afghanistan.

Furthermore, many Afghans have significant concerns about lack of rule of law, particularly based on ethnicity, and have heard of violence against women and other crimes being committed with impunity.

The benefits of urbanisation may be the factor that tilts the balance in favour of remaining in Pakistan. Despite some variation in quality and affordability, Afghans are able to access health and education services in Pakistan that are unavailable to them in their home country, and women in particular report that they must have access to these basic services for their families if they are to return. Women also report that they fear the restrictions on their mobility and a “conservative environment” if they return, citing anecdotes of incidents in their home villages or provinces to substantiate their claims.

II. The Policy Context



Source: UNHCR, Refugee Statistics, February 2005

The government of Pakistan has, throughout its years of hosting several million Afghans within its borders, continued to maintain its position requiring the eventual repatriation of all Afghans. At various times during the Taliban years of 1994–2001, Pakistani government officials stated that Afghans no longer qualified as refugees because they had come to Pakistan to escape the Soviets and the Taliban had brought adequate security to the eastern provinces to allow refugees to return there. When 170,000 new arrivals came fleeing conflict and drought in 2000, the government refused to allow their registration, concerned that this would encourage more Afghans to enter Pakistan. In February 2001, the *de facto* exemption from the provisions of the Foreigners' Act that Afghans had enjoyed since the mass influxes of the early 1980s was called into question by a policy directive indicating that all those not in possession of refugee cards or visas would from then on be treated as illegal immigrants. This resulted in Afghans being more susceptible to police harassment, especially in urban areas, though no systematic or large scale deportations took place.

Against this background, in August 2001 UNHCR and the Pakistani government established a Screening Agreement which applied only to new arrivals from Afghanistan in new Jalozai and new Shamshatoo camps, and the established camp of Nasir Bagh (which was scheduled for closure). The exercise had only just started when it was

suspended indefinitely following the events of September 2001. When the internationally backed Afghan interim administration came to power in December 2001, the largest ever wave of Afghan refugees returning to their country – 1.93 million from Iran and Pakistan – was triggered.

In 2003 the governments of Afghanistan and Pakistan signed a Tripartite Agreement with UNHCR to once again facilitate the voluntary return of Afghans, which had earlier started in 1990. The current Tripartite Agreement contains provisions for screening the residual Afghan population after the end of the UNHCR-assisted voluntary repatriation agreement, in accordance with the refugee definition established in the Screening Agreement of August 2001.

The Tripartite Agreement reflects Pakistan's original policy approach to Afghans – as refugees who have fled to Pakistan because of ongoing conflict in their country – and it follows from this that all Afghans are expected to eventually repatriate. However according to the Agreement, the principles of voluntary repatriation must be adhered to, refugees will not be forced to leave against their will, and they are to return under conditions of safety and dignity. Field research suggests that the notion of full repatriation that the refugee framework implies does not match the reality of the situation of Afghans living in, and travelling frequently to and from, Pakistan.

III. The Need for Clear Policies on Afghans in Pakistan, and Issues to Consider

Pakistan's Foreigners' Act of 1946 provides the overall legal framework for its immigration policy, requiring all persons entering the country to carry a valid travel document, and if necessary a visa. Pakistan is not a signatory to the 1951 Convention on the status of refugees, although its actions with respect to Afghans have largely been guided by the principles of international refugee law since the start of mass arrivals of Afghans at the beginning of the 1980s. The Pakistani government accorded Afghans *prima facie* refugee status in the early 1980s, but this was not formalised by any legal instrument, and strictly speaking the Foreigners' Act still applies to them. The status of Afghans in Pakistan is in this way effectively governed by policy and administrative measures, which are subject to change as demonstrated by the events of 2000 and 2001.

Cross-border movements, even at official crossing points, are not formally accounted for by either government, since in practice Afghans are not required to show or carry identity or travel documents when entering or leaving Pakistan. Under the Foreigners' Act, non-Pakistanis who do not carry valid travel documents are liable to arrest and deportation, yet this provision is rarely enforced. The overwhelming majority of Afghans in Pakistan do not possess authentic identification documents, and it is not possible to determine their movements between Afghanistan and Pakistan since the existing policy framework and arrangements do not regulate them.

In exploring ways of addressing policies that will benefit the state and individual actors involved in this complex, ongoing problem, there are number of issues that must borne firmly in mind.

Issue to consider #1: Transnationalism and remittances

The Afghan population has, by virtue of the number of years of conflict in its homeland as well as drought and lack of economic alternatives, become a transnational one. Those networks facilitating financial and

Political relations between Pakistan and Afghanistan and the security environment within Afghanistan tend to dominate current perceptions about migration between the two countries. Improved security and economic regeneration in Afghanistan will certainly encourage repatriation of Afghan nationals to their homes, and will have important positive effects on poverty in Afghanistan as well as Pakistan. In the longer term, however, some attention will need to be paid to historical patterns of migration and the de facto integration between segments of Afghan and Pakistani societies and economies. As in the case of Gulf migration from Pakistan, migration issues will eventually need to be placed within the context of overall regional economic cooperation and integration.

Haris Gazdar, CSSR, "A Review of Migration Issues in Pakistan", presented at the Regional Conference on Migration, Development and Pro-Poor Policy Choices in Asia, Bangladesh, 2003

physical links between Afghans in Afghanistan and the wider diaspora have developed over time, and kinship networks in the countries of destination often provide the patronage and financial support to make the move there possible.

It is a key livelihood strategy for many, and an acknowledged source of a very significant amount of foreign income that contributes directly to Afghanistan's reconstruction, that family members are sent to work in Pakistan and Iran, as well as in the Middle East, Europe, Australia and North America, to support their households back in Afghanistan. In the search for sustainable and effective livelihoods strategies, Afghans differ little from other communities in the region which seek to improve their lives.

Issue to consider #2: Cross-border movements are varied in type, and are likely to remain frequent

The original reasons for many Afghans' asylum-seeking journeys do not capture the complexity of their lives in the region today. Over the last 25 years of conflict and insecurity, Afghans have built upon and developed patterns of cross-border movement that have seen marriages take place across borders, active trade networks maintained, and remittances financially link Afghan communities living in different parts of the region. Regular visits to Afghanistan are made by family members, and money is often taken back to relatives personally rather than using the *hawala* system. Protection of land is a critical element of livelihood strategies for

those who own property in Afghanistan, and this is managed by repeated visits to cultivate land, reclaim lost land or resolve land disputes that have arisen in the household's absence. For Afghans settled in Quetta or Peshawar, travel entails little expense and short trips back are easy to make.

Business and trade links between Afghanistan and Pakistan are active, and a trade route links Quetta, Karachi and Peshawar with markets in Afghanistan, Iran and Central Asia. Afghans have found jobs such as truck-driving in this sector, while smaller trading companies often use young, able-bodied Afghans to carry small quantities of goods across the border by bicycle to avoid custom duties.

Aside from trade and family visits, cross-border movement allows Afghans to assess the reality of conditions inside Afghanistan. Visits made to places of origin provide first-hand information about peace and security, the extent of government control outside Kabul, and the ability of the government to provide basic social services – supplementing information reported in the media and issued by UNHCR.

Issue to consider #3: Changes in population movements

While simply moving from a camp into an urban area does not imply loss of refugee status, it is clear that not all Afghans in Pakistan are refugees. Some are in transition; their movements are in response to their situation, and in many cases are undertaken to actively improve livelihood opportunities. Many Afghans who arrived as refugees have subsequently moved from camps to cities, while others have come directly to Pakistani cities from Afghanistan (as new arrivals or returnees moving onto migrant labour), attracted by urban livelihood opportunities and services.

A significant number of Afghans have undergone the rural-to-urban transition for the first time in Pakistan, benefiting from the same education and economic opportunities that continue to attract other domestic migrants from Pakistan's rural areas to its cities. Pakistani cities are sometimes only transit stops for some Afghans, who move on to the greater economic opportunities available in Iran, the Gulf and countries in the west.

IV. Ways Forward

Economic and social factors have largely if not completely replaced conflict and insecurity as the main obstacles to return to Afghanistan. Many Afghans have found livelihood opportunities in Pakistan that they would be unable to replicate easily in Afghanistan. Access to social services is easier and more extensive.

It is likely that the number of Afghans currently unable to return because of political persecution and other factors defined under the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees is limited, however due process under international refugee law is required to remove *prima facie* refugee status. This can only be done in the event of a declaration of cessation of refugee status (which implies that UNHCR has no reservations about the enduring and fundamental nature of change in political, economic, human rights and security circumstances in Afghanistan) or by an individual status determination exercise (which is not logistically or financially feasible for a population of 2.5 million people).

The conclusion that can be drawn is that the refugee framework and its administrative and legal arrangements can no longer address the complex realities of the Afghan population in Pakistan, their migratory movements of different kinds, or the continuing poverty in Afghanistan which is now the main (if not the only) determinant of decision-making about repatriation or departure for Pakistan.

The findings of AREU's research into Afghans living in Pakistan represent a complex challenge to the governments of Afghanistan and Pakistan and the international agencies working on the situation. With more knowledge about Afghans' decision-making processes, governments will be able to establish differentiated policies which respond to the reality of this large and diverse group of people living away from their homeland. A constructive response to the high number of Afghans remaining in Pakistan who can no longer be realistically managed as refugees will take note of the following issues.

1. Recognition of the diverse needs of Afghans in Pakistan. Rather than continuing to view the current situation solely through the refugee framework, which is clearly not having the desired effect as the number of Afghans in Pakistan remains high despite the encouragement to repatriate, policymaking should take into account that regional population movements will undoubtedly be an ongoing reality – as it is for people throughout South Asia who travel within their countries or over borders in search of better lives. It should also be recognised that there are many Afghans living in Pakistan who will not choose to return to their homeland voluntarily. The following groups in particular deserve attention:

- **Second-generation Afghans**
A growing proportion of the Afghan population in Pakistan was born and raised in the country of their parents' exile, and it follows from this that there are some who will never choose to move to Afghanistan. This group will form the future Afghan community in Pakistan, as have many other migrant communities from other parts of South Asia before them. They will not necessarily intermarry or integrate socially with other ethnic or religious communities in the country – this is not uncommon for migrant communities – but they will make their place in, and their contribution to, its multicultural fabric. To respond to this reality, a solution will eventually need to be found that addresses the difficulties caused by the ambiguous status and circumstances of Afghans in Pakistan, perhaps giving them a level of economic and social rights, and establishing a system of education and work permits that are renewable on a regular basis (in return for certain obligations, such as payment of tax and permit fees).
- **Migrant labourers**
The existing policy of voluntary repatriation does not take into account the reality of regional labour migration, both long-term and seasonal. If Afghans were able to register with the National Aliens Registration Authority, they could receive legal working papers – regularising their presence in

the country and reducing their vulnerability to police harassment. For Afghans themselves, it would reduce the risks involved in repatriation by allowing families to legitimately diversify their livelihood opportunities on both sides of the border. Afghans are already using this strategy, and the Pakistani government could, to its own benefit, facilitate this while documenting and exercising some control over the migrant labour force and reducing the cost of the law enforcement required to detain or deport Afghans without passports, visas or refugee documents.

- **Vulnerable refugees**
There are Afghans who remain eligible for protection as refugees, and who may continue to do so even if a more predictable and secure Afghanistan encourages repatriation and continues to reduce the total number of Afghans in Pakistan. The existence and recognition of other categories of Afghans in Pakistan does not mean that the category of “refugee” will cease to be relevant.

- 2. Set realistic targets for repatriation, in light of the limited capacity of Afghanistan to absorb the several million Afghans living in Pakistan, Iran and further abroad.** Given current conditions in Afghanistan it is unrealistic to expect the country to be ready to receive all returnees even if they did decide to repatriate. Afghanistan's capacity for re-absorption of its refugees may grow over the coming years as infrastructure and development progress, but even this is unlikely to keep up with its own population growth as well as that of returnees.
- 3. Facilitate the educational and professional opportunities of Afghan youth.** Both Pakistan and Afghanistan stand to gain from making a simple and consistent procedure for recognising the educational qualifications from each other's schools and colleges. It should be a priority for both governments to ensure that Afghans are educated and equipped to support themselves, and to participate, if they choose to return to Afghanistan, in the reconstruction of the country.

The Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit (AREU) is an independent research organisation that conducts and facilitates action-oriented research and learning that informs and influences policy and practice. AREU also actively promotes a culture of research and learning by strengthening analytical capacity in Afghanistan and by creating opportunities for analysis, thought and debate. Fundamental to AREU's vision is that its work should improve Afghan lives.

AREU was established by the assistance community working in Afghanistan and has a board of directors with representation from donors, UN and multilateral agencies and NGOs.

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