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THE AFGHAN REFUGEE CRISIS

CHALLENGES AND EVOLVING DYNAMICS

VERSO CONSULTING

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1. Introduction

Afghanistan's recent history has been littered with violent conflicts – both internal and external. Invasions from two superpowers within the last fifty years, and prolonged and inconclusive wars, have left the country in an extremely precarious situation. To escape conflict, millions of Afghans have constantly sought refuge in any country that has accepted them as refugees. Due to the violence and accompanying displacement of the local population, Afghans now account for over thirteen percent of the global refugee population. According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), with over 2.5 million Afghans registered as refugees worldwide, Afghanistan is the second largest country of origin for global refugees.[1] They are also one-fifth of the world's most protracted displaced people, accounting for more than half of the 4.1 million refugees in protracted displacement of twenty years or longer.[2]

Although more than eighty countries have accepted Afghan refugees at one time or another, Afghanistan's neighbors Pakistan and Iran host an overwhelming 91 percent of the total number of refugees. Half of the Afghan refugee population comprises children below eighteen years of age – highlighting the vulnerability of displaced communities and the need for provision of basic services such as education and health.[3] In addition to registered Afghan refugees, there are millions of undocumented Afghans as well. As per estimates provided by a UNESCO background paper, this number is between 1.5 and 2 million in Iran, and between 350,000 and 550,000 in Pakistan.[4] This is corroborated by one UNHCR report,[5] thought other studies estimate as many as 775,000 undocumented Afghan refugees in Pakistan.[6] The number of refugees – documented or otherwise – is only one issue among many in a multifaceted and complex phenomenon

1 UNHCR, UNHCR Global Trends: Forced Displacement in 2017, http://www.unhcr.org/globaltrends2017/
2 UNHCR, UNHCR Global Trends: Forced Displacement in 2016, http://www.unhcr.org/globaltrends2016/
3 UNHCR Support Towards Implementation of the Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees: Enhancing Resilience and Co-existence through Greater Responsibility-Sharing, 2018, https://reliefweb.int/report/afghanistan/unhcr-s-support-toward-implementation-solutions-strategy-afghan-refugees
4 UNESCO background paper prepared for the Global Education Monitoring Report: Inclusion of Afghan Refugees in the national education systems of Iran and Pakistan, https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000266055
5 "Refugee Policy Review Framework: Country Summary as at 30 June 2020," *UNHCR*.
6 "Pakistan: Situation of Afghan refugees: Country of Origin Information Report," *European Union Agency for Asylum (EUAA)*, May 2022.

1.1 History of Afghan Refugees in Pakistan

Afghanistan and Pakistan share a long history as well as a 2,640-kilometer-long border. For many communities on either side, it has often been considered a rather informal divider as families, cultures, and economies are used to traversing it at will. For over four decades, with Afghanistan a site of conflict and instability, this porous border has also been a point of contention, with security issues compelling governments on both sides to regularize it. And despite physical division through fencing, official border crossings, and regulatory processes, these four decades have tied Pakistan and Afghanistan inextricably together. After all, Pakistan has hosted millions of Afghan refugees and migrants, which has presented a significant and long-standing challenge for the governments of both countries, the international community, NGOs, and UNHCR.

The influx of Afghan refugees in Pakistan began in 1979. While numbers have remained high since then, they have fluctuated given the nature of conflicts in Afghanistan and policies regarding refugees in Pakistan. As a result, there have been periods of refugees entering the country, as well phases of their return to their homeland.

Thousands of refugees first entered Pakistan in 1979-80 when Soviet forces invaded Afghanistan. By the end of 1979, 400,000 refugees were already in the country. A report by the European Union Agency for Asylum (EUAA) notes that refugees were welcomed in the early years, and given the Cold War dynamics at the time, there was significant financial support from the international community. This enabled Pakistan to build refugee camps, and begin to accommodate a large number of people. While Afghans kept entering the country over the next decade, a new phase of refugee movement into Pakistan began after Soviet withdrawal in 1989. This was due to continued strife in Afghanistan, a civil war, and the rise of the Taliban.[7]

Several million Afghan refugees were living in Pakistan by the early 1990s, but estimates of their numbers are very varied. Support from international actors in this phase was significantly lower than before. The erosion of support is evident in the end of direct food assistance in Pakistan in 1995 by the World Food Program (WFP). It was around then that a large number of refugees also began to settle outside refugee camps in search of livelihoods.[8] And over a decade of refugee management and the accompanying social, political, financial, and security challenges meant there was significant pressure in the host countries to begin a process of repatriating refugees.

Following the post-9/11 war on terror and the fall of the Taliban regime in 2001, mass refugee return did take place. In 2002 alone, over 1.5 million refugees returned to Afghanistan, and the annual return of refugees in some subsequent years is estimated to have been between 300,000 and 400,000.[9] This was supported by policies from

7 "Pakistan: Situation of Afghan refugees: Country of Origin Information Report," *European Union Agency for Asylum (EUAA)*, May 2022.

8 Waqar Maroof Khan, "40 years of Afghan refugees in Pakistan," *The News*, September 04, 2019, https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/521786-40-years-of-afghan-refugees-in-pakistan

9 "Pakistan: Situation of Afghan refugees."

relevant stakeholders, as Pakistan, Afghanistan, and UNHCR agreed to enable voluntary return to Afghanistan in 2001. A new phase of refugee management and policy was thus beginning – and it is uncertain the extent to which repatriation was voluntary. For instance, it was reported that refugee camps in Pakistan began shutting down in 2005 in sites such as North Waziristan, Bajaur, and Kurram agencies in the former FATA region, displacing some 200,000 refugees, while camps in Balochistan and the erstwhile NWFP were also closed in 2007.[10]

According to a 2005 census of Afghan refugees in Pakistan carried out by relevant government ministries, 3,049,268 refugees were living in Pakistan that year. They were almost equally divided between men and women. Some 1.29 million (43.3 percent) were living in official refugee camps or villages, and 1.75 million (57.7 percent) outside the villages in urban and rural areas. Importantly, the census noted, a vast majority of the refugees, over 82 percent, had no intention to return to Afghanistan.[11]

Indeed, while there were periods of refugees leaving Pakistan after 2001, there were also phases of mass influx, as instability in Afghanistan never ended. Rather, the war on terror created multiple new challenges as the Pakistan-Afghanistan region was a primary center of conflict, facing intense global scrutiny and the rise of militancy. The border areas were major sites of unrest as allegations of terrorist safe havens and refugees being recruited by terrorist groups were important issues within the overall political and security discourses about refugees, guiding policies in Pakistan.[12]

In 2011, Afghanistan, Iran, Pakistan, and UNHCR initiated an agreement to cater to solutions for the Afghan refugees. Entitled the Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees (SSAR), it had three broad pillars: voluntary repatriation of refugees to Afghanistan, their sustainable reintegration in society, and preserving the protection space in host countries and enhancing support for the host communities.[13] In 2013-14, Pakistan embarked on a new policy for refugees together with Afghanistan and UNHCR, for voluntary repatriation. Host communities since then have also been supported through the Refugees Affected Hosting Areas (RAHA) initiative.[14]

For Pakistan, the last two decades have included two central questions about refugees – repatriation and management. Policies were devised for both, with the support of agencies such as UNHCR. After the events of 9/11, many countries withdrew support for Pakistan though some donor support for refugees continued. UNHCR remained the primary body for refugee assistance and coordination. It also worked with the governments of Pakistan and Afghanistan in repatriation, and some 4.45 million have re-entered Afghan society through this tripartite coordination.[15]

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10 Frédéric Grare and William Maley, "The Afghan Refugees in Pakistan," *Middle East Institute*, June 30, 2011.

11 "Census of Afghans in Pakistan 2005," *Ministry of States & Frontier Regions Government of Pakistan, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees Branch Office Islamabad, and Population Census Organization, Statistics Division, Government of Pakistan*

12 "Pakistan: Situation of Afghan refugees."

13 "Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees: Enhancing Resilience and Co-Existence through Greater Responsibility-Sharing," *UNCHR* (October 2018).

14 Muhammad Abbas Khan, "Pakistan's national refugee policy," *FMR 46,* May 2014, https://www.fmreview.org/sites/fmr/files/FMRdownloads/en/afghanistan/khan.pdf

15 Khan, "40 years of Afghan refugees."

1.2 Categories of Afghans in Pakistan

Side by side, regulatory systems in Pakistan have also been improving, with refugee registration an important aspect of the country's policy. There are now four categories of Afghans in Pakistan. There are registered refugees who are provided renewable Proof of Registration (PoR) cards that entitle them to certain rights and assistance – though the EUAA study notes they come with "officially no rights other than protection from refoulement." This process of registration and documentation only began in 2006-2007. Apart from the PoR category, Afghans in the country include holders of Afghan Citizens Cards (ACC), which have enabled unregistered refugees to be indefinitely legalized during their stay in Pakistan since 2017. In addition to these two official documents, there are valid visa holders and undocumented refugees.[16]

By 2020, around 1.4 million Afghan refugees had been registered as PoR cardholders, in addition to 840,000 million ACC cardholders.[17] An extensive Documentation Renewal and lnformation Verification Exercise (DRIVE) took place in the end of 2021, and concluded in February 2022, which verified and updated records of PoR card holders. The new registration cards are smartcards which can be scanned if needed at educational and health facilities, and by law enforcement agencies, and are thus supposed to facilitate access to basic services. While the PoR cards do not cover all Afghans in Pakistan, they do provide a degree of legal protection to a significant proportion of the Afghan population in Pakistan. POR card holders can also access legal assistance through UNHCR funded Advice and Legal Aid Centres (ALACs). In spite of these provisions, there are indications that protection is an issue for refugees (or PoR card holders) as well as other migrants, particularly undocumented migrants.

Estimates regarding unregistered and undocumented Afghans vary widely. Waqar Maroof Khan notes there are approximately a million un-documented refugees.[18] Different UNHCR studies quoted by the EUAA present between 500,000 and 775,000 as the numbers of Afghan refugees without PoR, ACC, or visas.[19] Yet another study by UNHCR in 2020 estimated 400,000 undocumented Afghans.[20]

According to UNHCR, as of May 2022, there are 1,282,901 registered Afghan refugees living in Pakistan. Over half of the registered refugees, or 52 percent, live in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP), almost a quarter are in Balochistan, followed by 14.4 percent in Punjab, while the rest are in Sindh and Islamabad.[21] Around 31 percent of the 1.4 million PoR holders are living in 54 formally recognized refugee villages in Pakistan, of which 43 are in KP, ten in Balochistan, and one in Punjab.[22] This is confirmed by

16 "Pakistan: Situation of Afghan refugees.

17 "Refugee Policy Review Framework: Country Summary as at 30 June 2020," *UNHCR.*

18 Khan, "40 years of Afghan refugees."

19 "Pakistan: Situation of Afghan refugees."

20 "Refugee Policy Review Framework."

21 https://data.unhcr.org/en/country/pak

22 "Refugee Policy Review Framework."

the June 2022 UNHCR data as well, which estimates around 1.3 million registered refugees.[23] The circumstances of refugees vary given the nature of refugee category and site of residence – i.e., whether the refugees are living in the official refugee villages or in some other urban or rural locality in the country. They also vary in different refugee villages. However, there is relatively little information on the status of Afghans who entered Pakistan post August 2021, after the Taliban takeover.

1.3 Structure of Report

Given the categories and numbers, it is not surprising that there are several interrelated issues when it comes to managing refugees. Among the constant major concerns, regulation and legal process, as well as access to health care and education remain the most important. The purpose of this report is to examine these three related and key areas when it comes to policies, trends, and perspectives of Afghans residing in Pakistan.

In the chapters that follow, these will be highlighted in some detail. Chapter 2 outlines international legal frameworks as well as Pakistani laws regarding Afghan refugees, highlighting the changes that have taken place and the current trends in practice. Chapter 3 deals with changes in health policies, and initiatives taken by the government and other agencies, as well as the most important challenges faced by Afghans. In Chapter 4, the focus is on education. Within each chapter, there is extensive review of government reports and other secondary literature, as well as interviews with Afghans in Pakistan, as well as recommended policies in order to better manage the policy of refugees and migrants in the country.

23 UNHCR. (2022). Country Data for Pakistan, https://data.unhcr.org/en/country/pak

2. Legal Framework

This chapter is concerned with the legal structures and concerns of the Afghans living in Pakistan. It lays out the legal framework for refugee protection in international law, as well as Pakistan's protection system which has been instituted with UNHCR assistance. It also discusses a range of protection issues confronting the Afghan community including encounters with law enforcement agencies, extortion while carrying out business and other economic activities, crimes against women and vulnerability to trafficking. The last section summarizes the discussion and delineates key recommendations regarding the legal framework.

Amongst the basic roles of a functional state apparatus is to guarantee fundamental human rights for its citizens, including physical security; access to justice; and the right to have law enforcement agencies provide stipulated services to protect life and property. With regard to refugees, however, international law has some specific requirements from host states (or those who are signatories to the relevant treaties). These requirements, plus systems put in place in Pakistan, include registration and documentation processes.

As noted in the introductory chapter, to be legally registered as a refugee in Pakistan, the Government issues Proof of Registration (PoR) cards as the primary identification documents for Afghans. The cardholders are entitled to temporary stay in the country as well as the freedom of movement without risk of getting arrested under the 1946 Foreigners Act.[1] Apart from PoR cardholders, some refugees also have Afghan Citizens Cards (ACC), which have been recognized since 2017.[2] These are the only two recognized categories of documented refugees – apart from these, Afghans in Pakistan are Afghan citizens who have been issued a valid visa from Pakistan, or undocumented migrants/refugees.

1 UNHCR Pakistan, Proof of Registration Cards (PoR), https://help.unhcr.org/pakistan/proof-of-registration-card-por/

2 "Pakistan: Situation of Afghan refugees: Country of Origin Information Report," *European Union Agency for Asylum (EUAA)*, May 2022.

While the Pakistan Citizenship Act of 1951 states that any person born in Pakistan is considered a citizen by birth, the law does not apply in certain instances such as if the person in question is a child of a diplomat, enemy alien, or a refugee.[3] This distinction in law excludes the children of Afghan refugees – even if born and raised in Pakistan – from obtaining Pakistani citizenship and thus enjoying the benefits that come with being a citizen of the country. Given that Pakistan is not a signatory to the UN Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees 1951, or its 1967 protocol, it has no obligation to extend citizenship rights to refugees. Therefore, Afghan refugees are usually discouraged from seeking citizenship, and extending citizenship to refugees is decided on ad hoc and case by case basis.[4]

2.1 Refugee Protection in International Law

The key international agreement requiring host countries to protect refugees is the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees (generally referred to as the Refugee Convention of 1951), and its 1967 Protocol.[5] The Convention's provisions on protection are summarized as follows.

Protection in the 1951 Convention

The Convention of 1951 provided a definition of the term "refugee" mainly in the context of the upheaval in Europe during World War II. The Protocol of 1967 updated the definition to apply in a wider context. The Convention clearly distinguishes between refugees (who are accorded a special status under international law) and economic migrants who may leave their countries of nationality for better work/life prospects, and who are free to return to their home countries whenever they wish to do so. The box below sets out the various categories of persons who may have entered host countries.

Box 2.1: Refugees, Asylum Seekers and Migrants

Refugee: A person who "owing to well- founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is out- side the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it." (Article 1 of the Refugee Convention of 1951).

Migrant: "An umbrella term, not defined under international law, reflecting the common lay understanding of a person who moves away from his or her place of usual residence, whether within a country or across an international border, temporarily or permanently, and for a variety of reasons. The term includes a number of well-defined legal categories of people, such as migrant workers; persons whose particular types of movements are legally defined, such as smuggled migrants; as

3 Farhat, Syed Nadeem, Citizenship Laws of Pakistan: A Critical Review. 2019, https://www.scienceopen.com/hosted-document?doi=10.13169/polipers.16.2.0059

4 Human Rights Commission of Pakistan, State of Human Rights in 2018. 2018, http://hrcp-web.org/publication/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/State-of-Human-Rights-in-2018-English.pdf

5 Downloadable at: https://www.unhcr.org/3b66c2aa10

well as those whose status or means of movement are not specifically defined under international law, such as international students." (Definition of migrant as per the International Organization of Migration or IOM).

Asylum seeker: A general term for a person who has not yet received a decision on his/her claim for refugee status. It could refer to someone who has not yet submitted an application or someone who is waiting for an answer. Not every asylum-seeker will ultimately be recognized as a refugee, but many will. (UNHCR).

Rights to be accorded to refugees are enshrined in Chapter II (entitled Juridical Status) of the Refugee Convention of 1951. These include rights attached to personal status (specifically, the right to marry as per the laws of the host country); and at the minimum other rights which the host country accords to foreigners (or aliens). These include the right to acquire movable and immovable property (if indeed the host country gives this right to aliens); and the right to associate with non-political and non-profit making entities, including trade unions, again if such rights are accorded to aliens.

Specifically with regard to protection, the Convention of 1951 stipulates that refugees must have access to courts, and are entitled to the same treatment in the judicial system as is accorded to nationals. The same is true for labour legislation and social security – refugees are to be accorded the same treatment as nationals of the host country, although host countries may specify special provisions to pay benefits in cases where social protection is funded wholly through taxation of citizens. States who are parties of the Refugee Convention are also supposed to ensure that refugees hosted by them are issued identity documents, and even travel documents.

Article 31 of the Convention states that hosting countries who are parties to the Refugee Convention (or Contracting States as they are called in the Convention) shall not impose penalties for illegal entry or presence, on refugees coming directly from a territory where their lives were threatened. In addition, Article 33 prohibits *refoulement* or forcible return to the territory from which refugees have fled. In addition, Article 3 of the Convention Against Torture, of which Pakistan is a state party, prohibits parties from returning or extraditing a person to a State where he/she is likely to be tortured.

As the description above shows, the Refugee Convention 1951 includes a number of provisions for the protection of refugees in host countries. It emphasizes the need to accord basic rights to refugees on the same level as are accorded to other foreigners, and also stipulates that states issue the requisite documentation to allow refugees to live economically and socially active lives, and to travel if they need to.

UNHCR Executive Committee Conclusions

UNHCR's Executive Committee meets annually and advises the High Commissioner for Refugees on his/her functions. As per the Executive Committee, the fundamental rights defined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) 1948 are relevant to refugee protection as well. The fundamental rights as defined in the UDHR are given in the box below.

BOX 2.2: FUNDAMENTAL RIGHTS APPLICABLE TO REFUGEES

Right to life, liberty and security of person

Right to seek and enjoy asylum

Freedom from torture, or cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment

Freedom from slavery or servitude

Recognition as a person before the law

Freedom of thought, conscience, and religion

Freedom from arbitrary arrest and detention

Freedom from arbitrary interference in privacy, home and family

Freedom of opinion and expression

Right to be educated

Right to participate in the cultural life of a community

The UN recommends that all host states, including those who have not signed the Refugee Convention or its Protocol, ensure that these fundamental rights are accorded to refugees. This includes incorporating the concept of non-refoulement into national law, and ensuring that there is a transparent and fair procedure to enable asylum seekers to apply for short or long stays.

2.2 Refugee Management in Pakistan

Pakistan has dealt with Afghan refugees and migrants through an administrative approach rather than a policy approach. There is in fact no national policy on refugees and asylum seekers.

Foreigners Act 1946

Afghans who enter Pakistan are legally subject to the provisions of the Foreigners Act of 1946, as are all other foreign nationals in the country. The Act is mainly concerned with checking illegal immigration, and prescribes penalties (imprisonment of up to ten years and fine of up to Rs. 10,000) for entering the country illegally. The Act also includes a number of provisions on security, prohibiting foreigners from accessing classified information, visiting certain sensitive (from a national security point of view) sites, and generally regulating conduct to meet with security guidelines.

Refugee Status Determination

In the absence of a national legal framework, the mandate for Refugee Status Determination (RSD) in Pakistan rests with UNHCR Pakistan. This arrangement has been sanctified by a 1993 Cooperation Agreement between UNHCR and the Government of Pakistan. Historically, Pakistan has not raised objections to UNHCR's RSD decisions. Having said that, refugee status has not been granted to anyone since 2007 by UNHCR, and the Government of Pakistan has indicated that even if such status is granted, it will very likely not be accepted.

UNHCR has well documented procedures for RSD. In Pakistan, as in most other countries, the first step is to contact UNHCR either directly, or through two of its designated partner NGOs based in Islamabad (Society for Human Rights and Prisoner's Aid or SHARP) and Quetta (Society for Empowering Human Resource for SEHER)

respectively. Asylum seekers (defined as all those persons who fear returning to their country of origin for fear of persecution) can apply for registration with UNHCR to the agency directly or through the two partner NGOs. Registration involves giving one's basic bio-data, information on travel routes which brought them to Pakistan, and reasons for seeking asylum/refugee status. Once the registration process is complete, asylum seekers become part of the RSD process, and are scheduled for further interviews. This can take time, however – typically more than a year. If, as a result of the RSD interview, one's status as a refugee is confirmed by UNHCR, this confers certain privileges in terms of access to public services in the country of residence. At the very least, the conferral of refugee status does make it more difficult for the host country to press for repatriation.

2.3 Policy on Protection

The first imperative of protection is identification and determination of legal status. The key initiative taken in Pakistan in this regard is the issuance of identity documents since 2006.

Issuance of Identity Documents

UNHCR carried out a census of Afghans in Pakistan in 2005.[6] The census was the prelude to a registration drive wherein all Afghan citizens over the age of 5 years, resident in Pakistan, were to be issued Proof of Registration (PoR) cards by the National Database Registration Authority (NADRA), with the assistance of UNHCR. While the census of 2005 counted just over 3 million Afghans, the registration drive yielded much lower figures – only about 1.3 million Afghans registered with NADRA, and this number has remained more or less unchanged over the years.

The PoR cards, which were first issued in 2006, identify Afghans as "Afghan citizens living temporarily in Pakistan." The cards allow temporary stay in Pakistan, and also allow freedom of movement in the country. UNHCR has also assisted the Government in carrying out birth registrations, and issuing PoR cards to children when they turn 5. Until recently, PoR cards carried an expiration date, which was typically extended through government notifications, and not written on the card itself. However, NADRA, in collaboration with UNHCR, has recently carried out a Documentation Verification and Information Verification (DRIVE) exercise, wherein the particulars of all PoR cardholders were verified, and they were issued new smartcards, with a two-year validity beginning in 2022.

Although the PoR cards remain the primary means of identifying Afghans in Pakistan, the Government and UNHCR both recognized that many Afghans had not come forward for registration in the post-census drive in 2006. In 2017, the Government, in collaboration with the International Organization for Migration (IOM), started a new initiative to register Afghans who do not hold PoR cards. People registering in this drive were issued a new form of identification called Afghan Citizen Cards (ACCs). Like

6 Government of Pakistan (Ministry of States and Frontier Regions (SAFRON)/Population Census Organization) and UNHCR. 2005. Census of Afghans in Pakistan.

PoRs, these cards confer the right to legally remain temporarily resident in Pakistan, but unlike PoR cards, they do not carry an expiry date. To date almost a million Afghans have registered under this scheme.

The PoR cards and ACCs are the fundamental provisions for protection of Afghans in Pakistan, as they establish a legal identity for the cardholders. Holders of PoR cards or ACCs can establish their credentials with law enforcement agencies, businesses, banks etc.

UNHCR supported the Government of Pakistan in issuance of identity documents, but the agency has recently shifted its protection strategy from an individual, identity based one to a community-based protection strategy (CBP) as detailed below.

Community Based Protection Strategy (CBP) 2020-22

UNHCR issued its first CBP strategy in 2017, and followed that up with an updated version in 2020. The CBP 2020 has four strategic priorities. These include:

Strategic priority 1: Enhance outreach and communication. The objectives of this component are to have access to accurate and timely information on all socio-political matters concerning their presence in Pakistan, and that they also have opportunities to provide feedback to the Government and UNHCR.

Strategic priority 2: Ensure access to needed services. Priority 2 seeks to ensure that refugee communities are informed about access to basic services throughout Pakistan.

Strategic priority 3: Promote empowerment. Priority 3 seeks to promote empowerment and self-reliance in refugee communities by encouraging refugee community representatives to become actively involved in the planning, implementation, and monitoring of UNHCR and partners' protection activities, ad providing seed funding through community representatives to implement community projects among other initiatives.

Strategic priority 4: Strengthen partnerships and coordination. Priority 4 aims to work towards a 'community of practice' approach where key stakeholders on the refugee issue are linked through a series of collaborative initiatives, roundtables and regular dialogues.

As of October 2020, UNHCR had trained almost 1,500 outreach volunteers to work with refugee communities in Pakistan. UNHCR's CBP partners in Pakistan include four NGOs and one government agency.

BOX 2.3: UNHCR CBP PARTNERS

Society for Human Rights and Prisoners' Aid (SHARP)

Water, Environment & Sanitation Society (WESS)

Drugs and Narcotics Educational Services for Humanity (DANESH)

International Catholic Migration Commission (ICMC)

Commissionerate of Afghan Refugee Punjab (CAR/CDU)

2.4 Protection Issues in Pakistan

Protection is a very broad issue, and relates to legal status of refugees and migrants; preservation of their basic rights, and ensuring their security on the same level as that of ordinary citizens. For the purposes of this report, however, the focus is mainly on protection of Afghans with regard to their access to justice; vulnerability to trafficking, extortion and harassment, and their dealings with law enforcement agencies.

Perceptions About Afghans in Pakistan

The continued unrest in Afghanistan since December 1979 has undeniably had spillover effects in Pakistan. It is beyond the purview of this report to investigate all the impacts of regional instability on Pakistan. But suffice it to say that conventional wisdom and the mainstream media have, over the decades, linked the ongoing instability in Afghanistan to a number of social ills in Pakistan, including the spread of arms (and a "gun culture" that condones the use of arms to settle disputes); the spread of hard drugs, notably heroin; and last but not least, terrorism and militancy. In recent years, and particularly since 2007-08, when militancy began to take hold in Pakistan, attitudes towards Afghans in Pakistan appear to have hardened. This is borne out by some research studies, and also by a series of well-publicized incidents in the sports and entertainment worlds.

A perception survey in Chakdara, Lower Dir, in 2020 assessed how the local population perceived the presence of Afghans in their area, particularly in the wake of a deteriorating security situation.[7] Chakdara, a small town of about 29,000 people, is characterized by the presence of an Afghan refugee settlement with about 11,000 inhabitants on its outskirts. The survey was based on a sample of 379 (local) male respondents who were asked how the presence of Afghans had affected their lives. The major findings of the survey were eye-opening. About half (49%) of the respondents said that refugees were responsible for bringing weapons into the area, and the same proportion affirmed that refugees are involved in terrorist activities. Thirty eight percent of respondents said that refugees "share information" with terrorists in Afghanistan. Forty percent of respondents said that refugees are involved in local murders (motives cited included sectarian issues and "nationalism"). While the results of the perception survey clearly point to the hostility of local residents towards refugees, the manner in which the findings were presented was even more telling. Rather than emphasizing that this was a perception survey, the authors presented perception as fact, stating unambiguously that: "It is clear from the study that the refugees are wholly solely responsible for promoting Kalashnikov culture, drug trafficking and various other crimes in Chakdara. The study shows that the Afghan refugees are the main source of anarchy and sectarian differences among the local people of the study area."

A similar question was explored in another study in 2020.[8] This was based on a

7 Mulk, Jahan ul., Basit Ali and Attaullah. (2020). 'Impacts of Afghan Refugees on Security Situation in Pakistan.' Pakistan Journal of Society, Education and Language (PJSEL), Volume 6 (1). January.

8 Khan, Sarfaraz., Arsalan Ahmed and Sundas Ayub. (2020). 'Do Refugees Commit Crimes? Understanding Afghan Refugees' Involvement in Crimes in Quetta, Pakistan.' Pakistan Journal of Society,

survey of 150 (Pakistani) respondents in Quetta, who were asked about the possible involvement of Afghans in local crimes, specifically, a) terrorism, b) kidnapping, robbing and looting, c) killings, and d) drugs trafficking. The responses were recorded using a Likert scale (ranging from Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree). As in the survey in Chakdara, respondents in Quetta associated Afghans with terrorism (53% agreed or strongly agreed with the statement that Afghans are involved in terrorism in Quetta); other serious crimes like kidnapping and robbery (45% agreed or strongly agreed); and drug trafficking (60% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed). Once again, the authors of the paper failed to emphasize that the findings were based on perceptions and not statistics – instead, the paper concluded that Afghans are involved in crimes in Quetta.

A different approach was taken in a study based in Malakand division in KP the same year.[9] The broad objective of the study was to investigate socioeconomic problems in the integration of Afghan refugees in KP, but once again the hypothesis was that issues in integration were leading to the involvement of refugees in crime. The study was based on interviews of 80 male Afghans in jail in Malakand, Mardan and Peshawar. Afghan prisoners narrated their experiences of trying to integrate in Pakistani society, but were mostly of the opinion that they were consistently discriminated against and taunted. The study concluded that the inability of the Afghan diaspora to support their families and integrate in society was causing them to indulge in anti-social behavior.

Another study from Karachi questioned residents of Sohrab Goth, a predominantly Pakhtun area, about the impacts of the presence of Afghan migrants in their midst.[10] The survey used a mixed methods approach, and a small sample of just thirty respondents. The study found local Pakhtuns relatively less hostile towards the Afghan diaspora, but the two communities were not found to be socially integrated – rather they preferred to keep a distance from each other, and collaborated mainly on work and business rather than socially.

Encounters between police and Afghan (and other) migrants in Karachi were the subject of a research study by Zoha Waseem in 2022.[11] The author argues that the "securitization of migration and the criminalization of migrants and refugees" has allowed the police to bypass formal policing procedures, and allowed police harassment and abuse of migrants, including Afghans to be the norm. According to Waseem, the labeling of Afghans as "terrorists" in the media and in public perception has given the police a free rein to harass the community in the country's largest city.

While the involvement of refugees in crime is widely assumed, these assumptions are not borne out by data. According to a widely cited study, based on data from the Directorate of Prosecution of the Government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (GOKP), Afghans

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Education and Language (PJSEL), Volume 6 (2). July.

9 Khan, Wassem., Jamil Khan, Muhammad Humayun, and Arab Naz. (2020). 'Migration and Integration: A Dilemma in the Integration of Afghan Refugees in Relation to Crimes in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.' Clinical Social Work and Health Intervention Pages: 14 – 22.

10 Darabu, Fauzia., and Dr. Shahida Sajjad. (2021). 'The Perspective of The Residents of Sohrab Goth About the Afghan Refugees in Their Community.' Pak. Journal of International Affairs, Vol 4, Issue 4.

11 Waseem, Zoha. (2022). "It's like crossing a border everyday': Police-migrant Encounters in a Postcolonial City.' Journal of Urban Affairs, DOI: 10.1080/07352166.2022.2091448.

constituted the accused parties in only 1.3 percent of cases of serious crime that were sent to court, with 134 Afghans being implicated in serious crimes.[12] According to the Commissionerate of Afghan refugees, KP hosts just over 1 million PoR cardholders and ACC cardholders – those accused of crimes therefore constitute a negligible proportion of the total.[13]

Vulnerability to Trafficking and Smuggling

According to the United Nations Trafficking in Persons (UN TIP) Protocol,[14] "trafficking" refers to the "recruitment, transportation, transfer, harboring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation." Exploitation can refer to forced labor, sexual exploitation or different forms of modern slavery. The consent of the victim is immaterial as per international law, and trafficking is a serious crime.

Trafficking may or may not result in movement across borders. Migrant smuggling occurs when a person voluntarily pays an agency or person to illegally move him or her across an international border. Migrants who are being smuggled across borders may well have agreed to the activity, but they are highly vulnerable to trafficking and abuse. In addition to the TIP Protocol, Article 6 of the Convention on Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), to which Pakistan is a party, also requires member states to suppress all forms of trafficking in women within their borders.

Until a few years ago, Pakistani law dealt with trafficking as only a cross border issue. Investigations of trafficking offences were carried out under the Prevention and Control of Human Trafficking Ordinance (PACHTO) 2002, according to which trafficking was an inter-state crime. In 2018, the Government of Pakistan promulgated the Prevention of Trafficking in Persons Act (PTPA), which recognizes trafficking as a domestic crime also, and prescribes penalties both for trafficking for sex work and for labor. Penalties vary based on whether victims are men, women or children and the purpose for which the trafficking was perpetrated – thus trafficking for prostitution warrants more stringent penalties.

Vulnerability to Extortion

Afghan refugees have lived in Pakistan for decades, but legally face a number of restrictions. They cannot own property, vehicles, or businesses, and cannot get a driver's license. They have been allowed to open bank accounts only since February 2019. Not surprisingly, Afghans who have lived in Pakistan over the long term have found ways to circumvent these rules. Vehicles are typically manned without having

12 Khan, Ismail. (2017). 'KP prosecution data gives lie to claims against Afghan refugees.' Daily Dawn, January 15 2017.

13 "As of 27 January 2022, a total of 834,381 registered POR card holder's refugees and 307,647 documented ACC Card holders Afghans are living in KP." See website of Commissionerate of Afghan Refugees, KP: http://kpkcar.org

14 Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime. New York, 15 November 2000. Downloadable at: https://treaties.un.org/Pages/ViewDetails.aspx?src=ind&mtdsg_no=XVIII-12-a&chapter=18&clang=_en

the necessary documentation, and an elaborate system of payoffs is in place to pacify local traffic police. Property is rented, or in some cases, even bought, in the names of Pakistanis, and informal arrangements (often monthly payments) are put in place to maintain use of the assets. A small proportion of refugees who are in big business were also operating bank accounts using similar arrangements.

The downside of all this informal activity is of course that all business arrangements are based on word of mouth, and when and if disputes arise, the parties with no documentation are at a serious disadvantage.

Afghans have continued to face harassment at the hands of law enforcement agencies, ranging from being asked to show documents at checkpoints, to being arrested for vagrancy, to being rounded up when a serious crime, like murder or armed robbery, takes place in a nearby locality. The police have been known to use expired PoR cards as an excuse to extort funds from people, telling them that they will be taken to the police station as their identification documents are not valid. This was one reason for introduction of smartcards through the recent DRIVE campaign.

2.5 Key Informant Interviews

The nature of research for the legal issues of refugees and migrants was such that primary data collection was restricted to key informant interviews rather than large focus groups. The field data collection was undertaken keeping the essential principles of confidentiality and discretion in mind. Interviewees were contacted in their workplaces or homes – places where they felt comfortable and safe.

The important information obtained from the interviews, with regard to protection issues, is summarized below.

Encounters with Law Enforcement Agencies

All the interviewees, without exception, reported adverse encounters with law enforcement agencies (LEAs). Police have been known to randomly stop and question people, either on the basis of their facial features, or if they are found in the vicinity of localities where Afghans are known to live. Individual experiences can range from time wasted in questioning, to being threatened with imprisonment (most often for not carrying identification papers). The threats are, however, rarely carried through and the issue is most often resolved by paying a bribe. The interviewees were clear about the fact that Afghans with financial resources are able to skirt most forms of harassment by paying bribes. However, the poorest amongst the migrants, particularly men and boys, are particularly vulnerable, and can find themselves in police lockups, sometimes for a few days at a time.

Encounters with LEAs can also take a more sinister turn, particularly if there is a wave of crime in a particular city, or if a terrorist strike occurs. In such cases, LEAs are under pressure to arrest suspects, and in both such cases, the Afghan community is vulnerable. In recent weeks, for example, the Government of Pakistan had announced that 31st December 2022 was the deadline for return of illegal aliens to their home

countries, and after this date, the police would be checking for identification documents of all foreigners. In early January 2023, the police in Islamabad started a door-to-door search in areas of the city where Afghans are known to live, for example in sector G-9 and in Bara Kahu on the outskirts of the main city. Several people were arrested in this sweep, both from houses and flats where they were living as tenants, and from hotels (generally low-cost hotels and motels). Similar exercises were carried out in other cities. The interviewees claimed that the police did not have search warrants, and that their behavior towards women and children was discourteous in the extreme. As is the case in previous instances where large-scale arrests of the community have taken place, most people are allowed to go after a few days, and most often after paying a bribe, the amount of which can range from Rs. 500 to Rs. 5,000.

This vulnerability to questioning and harassment is partly responsible for the fact that Afghan migrants, particularly women, try to spend most of their time indoors in their place of residence. They typically miss out on employment opportunities even in the informal sector, as jobs which require travel on public transport or long walking distances render them vulnerable to police questioning. Many men who have, of necessity, entered the informal sector workforce through trades like pushcart vending, tea stalls etc., reported having to reach agreements with LEAs on regular payments to keep the latter at bay.

Registered refugees with PoR cards or ACCs are vulnerable to harassment as well. Until recently, PoR cards had old expiry dates printed on them (smartcards were only issued in 2022), and LEAs used this as an excuse to accuse refugees of staying beyond stipulated time periods. The key to relative security and protection is financial resources rather than legal status. Those who can afford to make financial arrangements with the local authorities are relatively safe, while others remain vulnerable, whatever their legal status.

Difficulties in Renting and Access to Services

Migrants, particularly those without updated documentation, find it extremely difficult to rent places to stay, or find room in low cost hotels. If they do not have PoR cards or valid visas, they are either refused tenancy or are asked for exorbitant rents. Landlords often claim that the “additional” rental income is needed to pay off the authorities who may otherwise question landlords or raid the property. However, when verification drives are launched, as in early 2023, these safeguards do not work and all migrants are vulnerable. Interviewees also complained that property agents have been known to have leases canceled after two to three months, so that they can find new dwellings for migrants, and once again make a commission.

The uncertain status of refugees also leads to issues with potential employers in the informal sector. According to one case cited by a key informant, a businessman employed twenty young migrants in a call center, but did not pay them. When they asked for salaries, they were fired and a new lot of persons was hired in their place.

As noted in a separate chapter in this study, access to services in government hospitals can be problematic without proper identification. In one case, an expecting mother could not get the delivery done in Islamabad’s main tertiary hospital, so she used another woman’s PoR card to gain entry to the hospital. The documents issued to the

newborn now carry this other woman's name.

Unique Circumstances of the Hazara Population

The Hazara are easily identified by their facial features, and as such tend to bear the brunt of harassment by LEAs. In addition, their affiliation with the Shia sect makes them vulnerable to harassment from madrassa students and other religious groups affiliated with hardline Sunni institutions. The Hazara were particularly prominent during the long-term protests that took place in Islamabad, outside the National Press Club, in the summer and autumn of 2022, when Afghan migrants were vocal about being granted the legal right to stay, or being facilitated to get visas to go to other countries. The protests provided an interesting insight into how the Afghan community is segmented. Pashtun migrants congregated on one side of the road, while Hazara migrants had set up tents on the other. While the demands of both groups were similar, their encampments were distinct.

In interviews with our researchers, the Hazara representatives said that they were forced to leave the protest site in Islamabad, while Pashtun protestors were allowed to remain. Seven male community members were detained by the authorities (although they were released after a few days). Some prominent Hazara women activists who protested against this detention were also sent to a women's lockup overnight. However, the local administration has a different view on this. They claimed that the Hazara community is more vulnerable due to the fact that they are easily recognizable. They can be a target for extremist groups, as they have been repeatedly in Quetta. It is for this reason that their camp was removed first.

Human Trafficking

When interviewees were asked about human trafficking, they pointed out that most of them had entered Pakistan by hiring traffickers who helped them get across the border undetected. Typically, migrants traveled from different parts of Afghanistan to Kandahar, and then entered Pakistan through Spin Boldak/Chaman (one of the last crossing points where the border fence has not extended). However, three interviewees, all of whom belonged to the Tajik community, had entered through Torkham. In most cases, they were helped by Pakistani traffickers who have connections on both sides of the border. Traffickers not only provide the service of getting people across the border, but also help in inland travel. Many migrants traveled from Quetta to Islamabad with the help of the same agents, typically paying Rs. 70,000 to Rs. 100,000 for a family of five to six persons.

However, helping migrants to cross the border and settle in Pakistani cities is not the only service that traffickers market. Interviewees also spoke of encounters with agents who claim to be able to help them to get visa extensions, or even visas to European countries. Some migrants have been defrauded of large sums of money having fallen prey to scams. More worryingly, some agents offer to send young women abroad for a fee, but say that male family members cannot accompany them. Afghan migrants are rightly wary of such offers. However, they were also able to cite instances of girls using this option to go to places like Dubai and Turkey. It is not clear what they are doing there, or how they are being treated. The community has also been approached with offers of girls being given scholarships to study abroad. Again, such offers are often

restricted just to girls and women, and are highly suspect. Interviewees also cited cases where women (particularly widows) have had to resort to prostitution, or are asked to provide sexual favors in return for monthly rations/food or waiving of rent. However, the community also mentioned receiving marriage proposals for women, albeit mostly from individuals who did not involve their families.

The potential for abuse is not limited to just girls and women, but extends to children as well, both boys and girls. Interviewees claimed that they know of cases where families have been offered money to give their children up for "adoption" with a higher price offered for fair skinned children.

The community also reported being approached by agents regularly with regard to being sent to Europe. Traffickers typically charge about $100,000 for a family of five or six to be sent across the border, and across Iran and Turkey to Europe. However, the Afghan migrants that our team spoke to were skeptical of these offers.

2.6 Conclusion

Refugee protection is a fundamental tenet of international refugee law. Pakistan is not a signatory to the Refugee Convention of 1951, and is therefore not bound by its requirements, but the country has tried to work within the spirit of the Convention in its management of Afghan refugees.

The first precept of protection is legal identity. Post 9/11, the country made an effort to establish refugee/migrant numbers, implementing a census in 2005, and issuing Proof of Registration (PoR) cards to all registered refugees. Subsequently, another form of identification, the Afghan Citizen Card, was issued in an attempt to cover Afghans who had not participated in the census. In spite of these efforts, which resulted in the registration of about 1.4 million Afghans, a number of Afghans remain undocumented. The number has only increased with the post August 2021 movements across the border.

Other elements of protection include freedom from harassment and degrading treatment, as well as from illegal detention. But vulnerability to such acts is tied in with the lack of legal identity. Migrants who cannot account for their status in the country are extremely vulnerable to all these forms of exploitation, as detailed in the sections above. While those with POR cards are at least entitled to legal representation in case of a run-in with the authorities, their position is also not entirely secure, as their status is subject to short term extensions. New migrants who have entered over the last eighteen months, many of whom have either entered without documentation, or whose visas have expired, are particularly vulnerable.

New migrants, particularly those with some financial resources, are also particularly vulnerable to traffickers and other disreputable "agents" who approach them offering a variety of "services" from travel to Europe to renting places to live in Pakistan. All sort of scams are being perpetrated, as recounted to our research team by the Afghan migrants themselves. Particularly worrying though, are the accounts of attempts to

lure women into prostitution or fake marriages, or to exploit children through illegal adoptions etc.

The Government of Pakistan needs to take steps to recognize the presence of Afghans migrants in this country, and to formulate a long-term policy to govern their stay, and the stay of other migrants, in the country. In the short term though, there is a need to ensure that all persons resident in Pakistan, whether legally or otherwise, are accorded basic human rights and treated with dignity. The fundamental rights applicable to refugees, as defined in the UDHR and the Refugee Convention 1951, should be accorded to refugees and migrants in Pakistan, regardless of the country's accession to the 1951 Convention. This is in the interest of Pakistan, as a responsible member of the international community.

3. Education of Afghans in Pakistan

The promise of the provision of free universal education, as in the constitution of Pakistan, makes it seem as if the education of its citizens – and indeed of all people living in its borders – is of utmost importance. But it is important to contextualize this through a brief overview of the state of educational services and literacy in Pakistan.

There is significant evidence that points to structural issues in the education system of Pakistan. Indeed, there are multiple parallel systems with their own separate issues. These include public schools, different kinds of private schools, schools run by NGOs, and religious schools or madrasas. While the Pakistani state has taken the responsibility in its constitution to provide free and compulsory education, it does not have the capacity or resources to do so. Indeed, with a crumbling public educational system, private institutions have filled the gap all over the country.

The adult literacy rate in Pakistan stands at 58 percent. A low, and rather stagnant statistic on its own, further analysis reveals deeper concerns. For instance, the literacy rate is skewed towards the male population, with adult male literacy rate standing at 69.2 percent while the female literacy rate is just 46.5 percent.[1] Similarly, there are wide disparities in education services, quality, and literacy rates across different parts of the country.

In Pakistan's context, literacy is defined as "the ability to read and understand simple text in any language from a newspaper or magazine and write a simple letter whereas numeracy skills refer to the ability to perform basic mathematical calculations (i.e., counting and addition/subtraction)."[2] This highlights the grave issue of a significant population that does not possess basic numeracy, reading, and writing skills. Moreover, the quality of literacy among those counted as literate may also be very low. While there are multiple factors that explain the structural issues behind the poor provision

1 Statistica.com, Pakistan: Literacy Rate from 2006 to 2019, total and by gender, https://www.statista.com/statistics/572781/literacy-rate-in-pakistan/#:~:text=The%20literacy%20rate%20measures%20the,than%2069.29%20percent%20of%20men

2 Pakistan Today, Promoting Literacy in Pakistan, 2019, https://archive.pakistantoday.com.pk/2019/01/22/promoting-literacy-in-pakistan/#:~:text=In%20Pakistan's%20context%2C%20literacy%20is,counting%20and%20addition%2Fsubtraction)

of educational services in the country, some notable reasons include poverty, socio-cultural norms for genders, quality of pedagogical skills, access to educational institutions, and insignificant budget allocation for the provision of education.[3] Low quality of teaching, high dropout rates, low enrollment, and infrastructural issues are all common.

In 2019, the World Economic Forum (WEF) ranked Pakistan 110 out of a total of 141 countries on its Global Competitiveness Index.[4] This index takes into account a plethora of indicators such as health, ICT adoption, infrastructure, and institutions. The WEF – in its Human Capital Report 2017 – had ranked Pakistan 125 out of a total of 130 countries in terms of education and skills development.[5] The report also highlighted the mean years of education in Pakistan to be 4.6 and labor force participation rate at 45.2 percent. This highlights the woeful state of education in Pakistan, which is likely much worse in rural settlements than the major urban centers.

Such serious issues have translated into Pakistan having the second highest number of out-of-school children – UNESCO reports that an estimated 22.8 million children between the ages of five and sixteen do not attend school.[6] This makes up a significantly high 44 percent of the total population in this age group. Of these, five million children are between the ages of five and nine, and 11.4 million children between ten and fourteen. A gendered analysis of the problem reveals further issues – 58 percent of the poorest school age girls in Sindh are out-of-school. This number rises to 78 percent for Balochistan. Therefore, while the intent behind free education provision for all – including for refugees – might be noble, there remain serious question marks over the quality of such education where it is indeed provided, and the associated benefits.

Given the abject state-of-affairs of education, it is understandable to assume that it is likely to be worse for the most marginalized communities. As for Afghan refugees, it remains challenging to come to an accurate estimate of the number of Afghan children availing educational services. There are varying estimates available, depending on the study in question. That said, it is certain that a significantly large number of Afghan migrant and refugee families do not put their children through educational institutions in the country. In 2017, the UNHCR estimated that a total of 39 percent of registered refugees in Pakistan (or 544,102 out of 1,402,180) were of school going age. Of these, only an estimated 22 percent were enrolled in formal educational institutions.[7] Furthermore, UNHCR estimated that the overall literacy rate of Afghans in Pakistan aged ten or above was only 33 percent. Estimates from 2022 show an even more dire picture, as some 80 percent of Afghan refugee children of school-going age in Pakistan

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3 UNESCO, Situation Analysis of the Education Sector, 2014. http://developyst.jellyfish.com.pk/files/article/1/National_Final_Report_Education_Policy_Analysis.pdf

4 Pakistan Slips Three Spots to 110th on Global Competitiveness Index, 2019. https://www.dawn.com/news/1509900#:~:text=Pakistan%20slips%20three%20spots%20to%20110th%20on%20global%20competitiveness%20index,-Tahir%20Sherani%20%7C%20AFP&text=Pakistan%20slipped%20by%20three%20spots,110%20out%20of%20141%20countries

5 Pakistan Ranked Worst Country for Education & Skills Development, 2017. https://www.learningall.com/pakistan-ranked-worst-country-for-education-skills-development/

6 UNICEF Pakistan, Education. https://www.unicef.org/pakistan/educationhttps://www.unicef.org/pakistan/education

7 This 22 percent does not reflect the total number as UNHCR conducted data collection from a sample of 25 high density Afghan refugee districts, 45 refugee villages, and schools operational within a 5 km of a refugee village. See: UNHCR, Mapping of Education Facilities and Refugee Enrollment in Main Refugee Hosting Areas and Refugee Villages in Pakistan, 2018. https://reliefweb.int/report/pakistan/mapping-education-facilities-and-refugee-enrolment-main-refugee-hosting-areas-and

are reported to be out of school.[8]

3.1 Regulations for Migrant and Refugee Education

Article 25A of the Constitution of Pakistan makes it the responsibility of the Government of Pakistan (GoP) to provide education for all – and it does not exclude any group from this responsibility. Therefore, refugees are also entitled to receive education between the ages of five and sixteen.[9] This commitment was further enforced through passage of the Right to Free and Compulsory Education Act 2012 – passed through the National Assembly in December 2012 – which states that "every child, regardless of sex, nationality or race, shall have a fundamental right to free and compulsory education in a neighborhood school" and "no child shall be liable to pay any kind of fee, charges, expenses, etc., which may prevent him from pursuing and completing the education."[10] This further ensures universal primary and secondary education to all children, including the children of Afghan refugees and migrants in the country.

This promise of free universal education for all is however contradicted by other legislations passed by the Government of Pakistan that place restrictions on those who are eligible to receive free education. For example, Article 12 of the Right to Free and Compulsory Education Act 2012 clearly states that, "For the purposes of admission to a school, the age of a child shall be determined on the basis of the Form-B of NADRA and birth certificate issued as prescribed."[11] Therefore, this adds layers of complication for Afghan refugees who only hold PoR cards. Furthermore, migrant families and refugees who never obtained legal documentation from the GoP are also excluded from availing free education in the country. This in turn explains why institutions such as madrasas are educating Afghan refugees in such large numbers as they may not require comprehensive documentation for admission, if they require any documentation at all.

As it is, Afghan refugee children can obtain admission in public schools as the educational institutions work around the requirements stated in the Article 12 above. However, to be eligible for admission, the prospective students must produce a PoR card or an ACC. But since documentation of Afghan refugees remains a significant challenge and many are without a PoR or ACC, tens of thousands of refugee children are unable to access educational services in Pakistan. This is also true for second- and third-generation refugee children who were born in Pakistan, do not hold ACC, and are unable to get a PoR.[12]

Primary and Secondary Education for Afghans

There are multiple sources of educational services available to Afghan refugees and

8 https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/940987-statelessness-keeps-young-afghan-refugees-away-from-education

9 The constitution of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan. https://www.pakistani.org/pakistan/constitution/part2.ch1.html#:~:text=25A.,may%20be%20determined%20by%20law

10 The Gazette of Pakistan. 2012. http://aserpakistan.org/document/learning_resources/2017/Right-to-Education-Provincial-Legistlation/Islamabad-Free-and-compulsory-Education-Act-2012.pdf

11 Right to Free and Compulsory Education Act 2012. https://portal.mohr.gov.pk/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/Civil-Political-and-Economic-Rights-Federal-The-Right-to-Free-and-Compulsory-Education-Act-2012.pdf

12 Statelessness keeps young Afghan refugees away from education, 2022. https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/940987-statelessness-keeps-young-afghan-refugees-away-from-education

migrants in Pakistan – which are the same sources available to Pakistani citizens: (a) Government-run primary and secondary schools, (b) private-run primary and secondary schools, (c) non-formal educational institutions like community schools, (d) NGO/multilateral-run schools, and (e) religious schools i.e., madrasas. Given the lack of data from private institutions, there is not much evidence available of Afghan refugees availing private schooling in Pakistan. But presumably, due to cost and access considerations and given the socio-economic conditions of the Afghan refugees in Pakistan, they are unlikely to be enrolled in any significant numbers in elite private schools. Overall, according to a UNHCR study from 2016, some 21 percent of Afghan schoolchildren in Pakistan attend private schools, 25 percent attend public schools, and 53 percent study in madrasas.[13]

NGOs/Multilaterals Run Schools

As noted before, UNHCR helps maintain 54 refugee villages across Pakistan, where 31 percent of Afghan refugees reside. UNHCR has set up fully funded schools in these villages to offer educational services to refugee children. There are currently 153 such operational schools across Pakistan providing free primary and, in some cases, secondary education to Afghan refugee children. Additionally, UNHCR also operates 48 satellite classes, 55 home-based girls' schools given the socio-cultural need to organize educational activities keeping in mind the gender concerns, and thirteen early childhood education centers in the refugee villages. In total, some 57,000 children receive education through this organized setup across Pakistan.[14] Where possible, UNHCR also facilitates refugee children in accessing nearby public schools to not only avoid parallel systems of education but also encourage peaceful co-existence of refugee population and host communities. One way of doing so is through routing Refugee Affected and Hosting Areas (RAHA) resources towards improving existing public educational facilities within accessible distance to refugee villages.

The registration and enrollment of Afghan refugee children in the refugee village schools is reported to be quite straightforward. While the children are required to have valid PoR cards, there are no other significant enrollment requirements. The schools are also tasked with raising awareness regarding education among the refugee population, and encouraging parents to enroll their children in schools through formation of Parent-Teacher Committees.[15]

The Asia Displacement Solutions Platform (ADSP) conducted a study in 2021 to understand the barriers to access education for Afghan refugees in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP), where most refugees reside.[16] The study provides insights into the state of educational services in the province, and the refugees' ability to access these services. It reports that as of June 2021 UNHCR operated 100 primary schools across the 44 refugee villages in KP. Through these schools, a total of 31,266 Afghan refugee

13 UNHCR data quoted in: Asifa Jahangir and Furqan Khan, "Challenges to Afghan Refugee Children's Education in Pakistan: A Human Security Perspective," Pakistan Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences, Vol 9 No 3 (2021): 594–604.

14 UNHCR Pakistan, Education. https://www.unhcr.org/pk/education

15 UNHCR Pakistan, Education. https://www.unhcr.org/pk/education

16 ADSP Study: Barriers to Access Education for Afghan Refugees in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan. https://adsp.ngo/news/adsp-study-barriers-to-access-education-for-afghan-refugees-in-khyber-pakhtunkhwa-kp-pakistan/

children – among which 65 percent were boys and 35 percent girls – were receiving an education. The refugee children were offered free enrollment in these schools, and were also provided with books, stationery, workbooks, school bags, and uniforms without any charge. The ADSP study concluded that the teachers at the school appeared to be qualified and were trained by the Provincial Institute for Teacher Education (PITE). The teachers were also offered continued support through the Elementary and Secondary Education Department of KP. Barring some exceptions, most schools had the basic essential facilities such as drinking water, toilets, and electricity. In areas that suffered from power shortages or did not have access to electricity, UNHCR had provided solar panels and batteries.

The ADSP study also highlights that refugee village schools were usually easily accessible as they were located at a short distance from the refugee housing and existed in the same residential neighborhood. The routes to and from school were reported to be safe in terms of security, hence providing safe passage to refugee children. The schools also recruited teachers from local Pakistani or Afghan communities, and thus were able to build trust with the refugee population. Lastly, the certificates of graduation issued by refugee village schools were easily accepted for further education by the local public schools in Pakistan as well as by Afghan public schools and schools registered with the Afghan consulate.

In addition to primary and secondary schools in refugee villages, as of August 2021 UNHCR has also been running eighteen Accelerated Learning Program (ALP) centers at the primary level in various districts within KP.[17] These ALP centers offer educational services to out-of-school girls who: (a) dropped out of school, or (b) never attended schools, or (c) were no longer eligible to attend public schools, or (d) had challenging access to schools. An estimated 457 girls were enrolled in these centers. Each center was run by a female teacher and had an average size of 25. Due to the prevalent socio-cultural gender norms, the refugee community generally preferred to send their daughters to schools with female teachers and thus these schools had a high acceptance among parents of refugee girls. One drawback of these centers however was reported to be the lack of state licenses for teachers as these institutions were not considered to be a part of the formal educational infrastructure. These schools adopted the Japan International Cooperation Agency's (JICA) Accelerated Learning Program (ALP) curriculum.[18] This comprises three packages, namely package-A (eight month curriculum that is equivalent to nursery to grade 1), package-B (eight month curriculum that is equivalent to grade 2 - grade 3) and package-C (fourteen month curriculum that is equivalent to grade 4 - grade 5).[19] Through this curriculum adopted from JICA, the ALP centers focused on equipping female students with functional literacy, numeracy, and some basic technical skills. UNHCR had reached an understanding with the Elementary and Secondary Education Department (ESED) of KP to issue equivalence certificates of grade 5 for girls who completed package-C.

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17 ADSP Study: Barriers to Access Education for Afghan Refugees in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan. https://adsp.ngo/news/adsp-study-barriers-to-access-education-for-afghan-refugees-in-khyber-pakhtunkhwa-kp-pakistan/

18 UNHCR, 'Operational Update Pakistan: January-June 2021,' UNHCR, June 2021. https://reporting.unhcr.org/sites/default/files/Pakistan%20operational%20update%20Jan-June%202021.pdf

19 Advancing Quality Alternative Learning Project (AQAL) in Islamic Republic of Pakistan: Project Completion Report, 2020. https://openjicareport.jica.go.jp/pdf/12345831.pdf

As for the teachers running the ALP centers, the ADSP study notes that 56 percent (ten out of eighteen) were Pakistani citizens and the remaining were Afghan nationals. While the availability of Afghan teachers was usually a challenge, the ALP centers tackled this by recruiting Pakistani teachers from local communities who could more easily build a rapport with students from refugee communities.[20]

We conducted ten FGDs with Afghan refugees/migrants across three cities in Pakistan, the details of which are in a separate section below. The primary research findings highlighted an important shift in the policy of the Government of Pakistan with regard to Afghan refugees' education in the country. Until 2019, UNHCR schools were teaching the Afghan curriculum in their schools with the medium of instruction being Dari and Pashto. However, the Government of Pakistan took the decision to introduce Pakistan's education curriculum in these schools and changed the medium of instruction to Urdu. There were two important reasons behind this decision: (1) The policymakers expressed some concerns regarding the Afghan curriculum and believed that the Pakistan curriculum was more in line with educational goals, and (2) it was envisaged that teaching the Pakistan curriculum in the national language would facilitate Afghan refugees in availing higher education in the country. This is done to mainstream Afghan children in the Pakistani society. Some other literature, however, suggests that the policymakers also harbored concerns regarding the Afghan curriculum and believed it to be 'anti–national.'[21]

In addition to the initiatives and projects above, there are other educational programmes from NGOs and multilateral agencies as well. For instance, Relief International (RI) works with the United States Government's Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration (BPRM) to improve educational outcomes for vulnerable children in Pakistan through improving their access to, and enrollment in, primary education in Pakistan's public schools.[22] With a specific focus on girls' education, RI supports 45 public schools across the country, in areas such as increasing enrollment rates and improving retention rates. RI has been more active in KP. According to the ADSP report on the barriers to accessing education for Afghan refugees, RI operated in Swabi, Nowshera, and Peshawar districts in KP, and extended support to faculty and pupils in seventy public schools. These schools were located within a three-mile radius of various refugee villages run by UNHCR. In addition to targeting higher enrollment and retention, the schools also conducted awareness raising campaigns to stress the importance of education, explain the different procedures that needed to be undertaken for enrollment, and to address the socio–cultural concerns of refugee parents.

Public Schools

Outside of refugee villages, registered Afghan refugee children also have access to the government run public schools. These schools generally accept Afghan refugee children for admission, though the children are required to fulfill the eligibility criteria for admission which include the necessary documentation. The enrollment is also subject to schools having capacity to enroll additional students. Once enrolled, the

20 ADSP Study: Barriers to Access Education for Afghan Refugees in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan. https://adsp.ngo/news/adsp-study-barriers-to-access-education-for-afghan-refugees-in-khyber-pakhtunkhwa-kp-pakistan/

21 "Country of Origin Information Report: Pakistan – Situation for Afghan Refugees," *European Union Agency of Asylum (EUAA)*, May 2022, https://euaa.europa.eu/news-events/euaa-publishes-report-afghan-refugees-pakistan

22 Relief International, Pakistan: Overview. https://www.ri.org/countries/pakistan/

Afghan children enjoy equal access to school facilities, are taught the same curriculum as local students, and go through same examination procedures to test knowledge and gain promotion to higher grades. A UNHCR study from 2016 claims that a quarter of all school-going Afghan refugee children attend public schools.[23]

Madrasas

Madrasas are religious schools from different schools of thought that primarily provide religious education to enrolled students, and most such institutions also provide boarding space and food. There are different levels of madrasas – while many might simply be small rooms next to mosques where some children from the neighborhood gain basic Islamic knowledge, other larger ones are affiliated to a madrasa board. Increasingly, there is also oversight by the state.

While there are several large madrasas offering higher degrees, many modern madrasas with a mix of religious and secular education, there are also many thousands of madrasas all over the country which only provide religious education. While those madrasas affiliated with an official madrasa board follow a specific curriculum, there are countless smaller spaces, colloquially referred to as madrasas where students might only gain basic Islamic knowledge, as well as the ability to recite or memorize the Quran. One might expect students from some of the lowest social and economic classes of the country to be part of some such institutions.

That said, the official educational system in Pakistan does offer equivalence to primary and secondary education if the students achieve certain milestones through getting education at madrasas. The religious education in these institutions can be accompanied by functioning literacy and basic numeric skills. Though many madrasas are registered with the Government of Pakistan, a significant number of madrasas across the country are locally owned and run, and do not have the necessary procedures in place to be registered with the authorities. Many madrasas' primary source of funding is through charitable donations from the general public. The type of education offered by these schools, alongside lack of patronage by state authorities, make them informal education institutes. This form of schooling is also favored by Afghan refugee communities as there are no costs attached to registration and enrollment. After all, religious education is imparted as a form of worship. Additionally, refugee children can also be guaranteed food and shelter through these institutions while gaining basic literacy and numeracy skills. Moreover, given the socio-religious dynamics, these institutions are also favorably looked upon as they can instill religious education and values in children. There is thus a significant population of refugee children who only attend madrasas for education. And many students who are enrolled in more formal educational institutions also pursue religious education through madrasas.

Since many Afghan students are in unregistered madrasas, and indeed the data from registered madrasas is also inadequate, their numbers are difficult to estimate with certainty. But according to a 2016 UNHCR report, as many as 53 percent of Afghan refugee children getting an education choose madrasas, among which some cater

23 UNHCR data quoted in: Asifa Jahangir and Furqan Khan, "Challenges to Afghan Refugee Children's Education in Pakistan: A Human Security Perspective," Pakistan Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences, Vol 9 No 3 (2021): 594–604.

primarily to Afghan students.[24] Some Afghan refugees also note that they have no option but to send their children to madrasas since they lack the necessary documentation – as a result, madrasas are the most popular source of education to Afghan children in Pakistan by default.[25]

3.2 Challenges in Accessing Education

While there are multiple options available for children of Afghan migrant and refugee families to avail educational services in Pakistan, access to education for these families, especially girls, remains a major challenge. As mentioned earlier, a 2017 survey conducted by UNHCR established the Afghan refugee primary net enrolment rate at 22 percent. Another earlier survey from 2011 provides the primary net enrolment rate for refugee girls at just eighteen percent, which is less than half the rate for boys (39 percent).[26] These statistics indicate an abysmal state of affairs as far as the provision of education services to Afghan refugees in Pakistan is concerned. It is worthwhile thus to briefly discuss some of the key barriers that these families might face in this regard.

The first major barrier specific to Afghan refugees is the issue of documentation. Without PoR cards, they are unable to access public schools.

There are multiple socio-economic factors that may inhibit both Pakistani citizens and Afghan refugee children from accessing education in Pakistan, such as: poverty, prohibitive costs of education, early/child marriages that prevent children from pursuing education, the economic incentive for parents to send their children for paid employment as opposed to schools, structural issues such as limited number of middle schools for girls, poor transportation infrastructure, and lacking quality of teachers.

As per the ADSP study on barriers to education access for Afghan refugees, the provision of education facilities – specifically in KP – are mostly targeted at male children.[27] Separate girls' primary schools are not available in certain districts of the country where refugee villages are established. There is sufficient evidence of parents being uncomfortable sending their daughters to co-education schools due to the prevalent socio-cultural norms. While there appears to be a realization – specifically amongst the civil society – for a need more inclusive educational infrastructure for female students, the gender disparity in provision of education is still evident.

After the onset and spread of the COVID-19 pandemic, educational institutions remained closed for a prolonged time. For refugee children specifically, remote learning options were not available or accessible in many areas of the country. There was no access to the right equipment to avail remote learning opportunities either. This lengthy

24 UNHCR data quoted in: Asifa Jahangir and Furqan Khan, "Challenges to Afghan Refugee Children's Education in Pakistan: A Human Security Perspective," Pakistan Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences, Vol 9 No 3 (2021): 594–604.

25 www.thenews.com.pk/print/940987-statelessness-keeps-young-afghan-refugees-away-from-education

26 UNESCO background paper prepared for the Global Education Monitoring Report: Inclusion of Afghan Refugees in the national education systems of Iran and Pakistan. https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000266055

27 ADSP Study: Barriers to Access Education for Afghan Refugees in Khyber Pakthunkhwa, Pakistan. https://adsp.ngo/news/adsp-study-barriers-to-access-education-for-afghan-refugees-in-khyber-pakhtunkhwa-kp-pakistan/

absence of education provision had an adverse impact on children of school going age. Furthermore, once the schools did reopen, many restricted admissions of additional children due to concerns around further spread of the virus, thus depriving additional children from accessing education. And in the initial phase of reopening, the schools opened for a limited number of hours, covering a limited curriculum. The quality of education thus suffered. Such gaps in education provision affected all children, but impacted the marginalized communities more than others, including the children of Afghan refugee and migrant families.

As mentioned earlier in the report, the supportive work of NGOs is crucial in plugging the gap in education provision for Afghan refugee and migrant families. However, the overall environment for INGOs operation in Pakistan is becoming less conducive, with the government and specifically the Ministry of Interior not allowing ease of operations in the country.[28] This takes shape primarily in non-provision of permissions for NGOs to keep operating in the country. This also acts as a barrier for many Afghan refugee children to access basic education in Pakistan.

The state of services in Pakistan is such that there is shortage of power generation throughout the country. The power shortages are often reported to be longer in sub-urban and rural areas where most Afghan refugee communities are located. This also adds to the problems in accessing education. UNHCR did try to rectify this through provision of solar panels and batteries for its refugee village schools, but there are maintenance issues with this equipment.[29]

ADSP, in its report on barriers to education, highlighted the high teacher-student ratio in schools in KP which places extra pressure on the teachers to manage large classes and meet students' individual academic needs.[30] Subsequently, the quality of teaching also suffers. The ADSP also reports insufficient number of refugee village schools with respect to refugee populations there which further compounds the problem in these specific settings.

As stated earlier, post 2019, the Government of Pakistan has mandated schools to teach the Pakistani curriculum to Afghan refugee children with the medium of instruction set to be Urdu. While the long-term benefits of such a policy are appealing, it must be noted that linguistic barriers – as Afghan refugees typically speak Pashto or Dari – may pose some short-term challenges to Afghan children and their ability to access education in the country. This has encouraged some Afghan families to enroll their children in non-formal educational institutions (such as privately run community schools) where they can be taught in their first language i.e., Dari or Pashto. This was also evident from the fieldwork and interviews with Afghans.

3.3 Higher Education for Afghan Refugees

28 Pakistan Orders 29 INGOs to leave the country within 60 days, 2017. https://tribune.com.pk/story/1583668/pakistan-orders-29-foreign-ngos-leave-country-within-60-days

29 ADSP Study: Barriers to Access Education for Afghan Refugees in Khyber Pakthunkhwa, Pakistan. https://adsp.ngo/news/adsp-study-barriers-to-access-education-for-afghan-refugees-in-khyber-pakhtunkhwa-kp-pakistan/

30 ADSP Study: Barriers to Access Education for Afghan Refugees in Khyber Pakthunkhwa, Pakistan. https://adsp.ngo/news/adsp-study-barriers-to-access-education-for-afghan-refugees-in-khyber-pakhtunkhwa-kp-pakistan/

Afghan students are studying in public and private universities all over Pakistan. Many universities, and the Higher Education Commission (HEC) in Pakistan, offer special scholarships for Afghan students. Students include registered Afghans in the country, as well as those on visas.

The Commissionerate of Afghan Refugee (CAR) education cell – through support from UNHCR – provides support to PoR cardholders to join formal and technical public and private institutions at college and university level. Admissions for higher education are granted on seats allocated by the HEC for Afghan refugees.[31] As per the Australian Government Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade's (DFAT) country information report on Pakistan, a limited number of PoR cardholders have access to a limited number of places in Pakistani universities even though only a small number of Afghan refugees can afford to attend them.[32] Educational institutions in Pakistan have the liberty to design policies on quotas independently. KP and Balochistan – the two provinces that host the bulk of Afghan refugees in Pakistan – have established such quotas specifically for Afghan refugees. This is also true for some universities in other parts of Pakistan, including in Karachi and Islamabad.

According to the ASDP report, every public educational institute reserves a quota of two seats for Afghan refugees and only PoR cardholders are eligible to apply to these seats.[33] An outdated webpage of Government of Punjab's Punjabi CAR also confirms that there are "reserved seats for Afghan students in MBBS [Bachelor of Medicine, Bachelor of Surgery], Engineering and MBA [Master of Business Administration] every year."[34] The United States Department of State (USDOS) in its annual reported published in March 2021, reported that access to education for elderly students, specifically girls, remained a challenged in Pakistan.[35] Media reports also suggest that the Allama Iqbal Open University (AIOU) enrolled a number of Afghan refugees in Balochistan in study programmes in April 2021, which confirms the access of Afghan refugees to higher education in Pakistan. AIOU reportedly provides them with learning facilities in the refugee villages – books are provided to students through use of postal mail, and tutors are arranged to visit the students inside the camps. The examinations are also conducted in these camps to ensure students' access.[36]

While the PoR cardholders have some opportunities to avail higher education in public institutions, the DFAT's 2022 country report notes that holders of ACCs cannot access public institutions.[37] Holders of ACCs are allowed to temporarily stay in Pakistan, but they do not enjoy the same benefits as those holding PoR cards. Private institutions are generally hesitant in offering admissions to undocumented Afghan refugees as that

31 ADSP Study: On the margins: Afghans in Pakistan. https://www.acbar.org/upload/1562673003902.pdf

32 Australia, DFAT, DFAT Country Information Report Pakistan, 25 January 2022. https://www.dfat.gov.au/sites/default/files/country-information-report-pakistan.pdf

33 ADSP Study: On the margins: Afghans in Pakistan. https://www.acbar.org/upload/1562673003902.pdf

34 Pakistan, CAR Punjab, Frequently Asked Questions. https://car.punjab.gov.pk/faqs

35 USDOS, Pakistan 2020 Human Rights Report, 2021. https://www.state.gov/reports/2020-country-reports-on-human-rights-practices/pakistan/

36 AIOU enrolls Afghan refugees, 20 April 2020. https://dailytimes.com.pk/853984/aiou-all-set-to-establish-regional-office-in-afghanistan/

37 Australia, DFAT, DFAT Country Information Report Pakistan, 25 January 2022. https://www.dfat.gov.au/sites/default/files/country-information-report-pakistan.pdf

might force the authorities to implement some disciplinary measures against these institutions. That said, the ADSP does report that holders of ACCs can possibly access private education institutions, though the costs might be quite prohibitive for refugees to be able to enroll. There are examples of private institutions run by Afghan nationals, following Afghanistan's curriculum, and are registered with Afghanistan consulates. These may be more affordable options for holders of ACC for higher education, though the recognition of degrees issued by these institutions within Pakistan remains questionable.

UNHCR also extends academic scholarships to Afghan refugees through financial support offered by the Albert Einstein German Academic Refugee Initiative (DAFI).[38] Pakistan is one of the top five countries in terms of number of students receiving the DAFI undergraduate scholarships. The scholarships can be available across a range of disciplines including medical and health sciences, commercial and business administration, engineering, social and behavioral sciences, education science, and teachers training.[39] The average profile of DAFI scholarship holders is between the ages of 17 and 30 years. It was reported that of 536 students were awarded these scholarships in 2019, of which 90 (17 percent) were female students.

Finally, the HEC has a Self-Financing Scheme (SFS) for foreign students through which foreign students or holders of dual nationality can enroll in public universities across four disciplines (medicine, dentistry, pharma, and engineering) upon payment of an enhanced fee.[40] While the scheme excludes refugees from applying for this scheme, some refugee students have been able to avail the scheme through obtaining documents that hides their refugee status. Given that PoR holders are often viewed with suspicion in Pakistan – at times, triggering extensive security checks into their backgrounds – refugees students, who could afford enhanced fee, are increasingly attempting to avail the SFS.

3.4 Vocational and Technical Education for Afghans

UNHCR has established an Urban Cohesion Hub for Pakistani youth and Afghan refugees.[41] This hub is envisioned as a community center and a safe space for students of diverse ethnicities and backgrounds to come together to avail educational and livelihoods opportunities and participate in social events. The Center offers trainings three times a year and the objective of these trainings is to empower refugees and host the youth in skills development and livelihoods. Recently, 122 students graduated in the Center's first ever graduation ceremony, among which 62 were Afghan refugees.

In 2020, UNHCR, in collaboration with the National Vocational & Technical Training

38 UNHCR, Albert Einstein German Academic Refugee Initiative (DAFI): Most Frequently Asked Questions. https://www.unhcr.org/protection/operations/40dbee984/albert-einstein-german-academic-refugee-initiative-fund-dafi-frequently.html

39 UNHCR, 'DAFI Annual Report 2019 – Refugee students in higher education, 2019. https://www.unhcr.org/ 5f5a7b784.pdf

40 Admission for Foreign & Dual Nationality Holder Pakistani Students under Self-Finance Scheme. https://www.hec.gov.pk/english/services/students/SFS/Pages/Intro.aspx/Read

41 Eager for career opportunities, 122 youths graduate from skills training programme, 2022. https://reliefweb.int/report/pakistan/eager-career-opportunities-122-youths-graduate-skills-training-programme

Commission (NAVTTC), designed multiple three-to-six-month trainings for Pakistanis and Afghan refugees.[42] These technical skills trainings were offered to 2,500 students across a number of NAVTTC recognized training institutions. Upon completion, students were provided certificates of completion and an accompanying toolkit to allow them to put into practice the skills they had acquired through the trainings. This was a continuation of a previous project in 2018 where 3,500 Pakistani and Afghan refugee students were trained across multiple skill areas such as heavy machinery operation, wielding, plumbing, mechanics, computers, electrical wiring, and cooking.[43] There were trainings specifically designed for women as well in skill areas such as fashion design, beautician's courses, and machine embroidery. These trainings were carried out at centers in eighteen cities, including Islamabad, Karachi, Peshawar, Quetta, and other regions with known refugee concentrations in KP and Balochistan.

In 2017, UNHCR also partnered with the Ministry of States and Frontier Regions (SAFRON) to launch a skills development program to empower Pakistani and Afghan youth across Pakistan. The program was valued at USD 300,000 and was rolled across all four provinces of Pakistan. Through this program, up to 700 youth – of no more than 25 years of age – were offered three-month long skills development trainings. The trainees were provided with a small monthly stipend as well as toolkits to enable them to start earning their livelihoods right after the completion of these courses.[44]

While the NAVTTC trainings are on a relatively large scale, UNHCR's NGO partners have been carrying out skill development courses at a relatively smaller scale in the refugee villages as well. These trainings can include skills such as motorcycle, cellphone and UPS repairs, and handicrafts production.

3.5 Issues of equivalence

Afghan refugees attending public schools do not require any equivalence certificates. However, refugees who graduate from other schools – including UNHCR run refugee village schools, or private Afghan schools teaching the Afghan curriculum – need to obtain equivalence certificates from the Inter Board Committee of Chairman (IBCC). Once the equivalence is successfully obtained, the refugees become eligible to apply to public educational institutions to pursue further education.

3.6 Gradual Closure of UNHCR Refugee Village Schools

As noted above, UNHCR has managed key interventions across Pakistan – and specifically in areas where there is a large concentration of Afghan migrants – regarding

42 UNHCR Supports technical training for 2,500 Pakistanis and Afghan refugees, 2020. https://www.unhcr.org/pk/6450-unhcr-supports-technical-training-for-2500-pakistanis-and-afghan-refugees.html

43 UNHCR Supports technical training for 2,500 Pakistanis and Afghan refugees, 2020. https://www.unhcr.org/pk/6450-unhcr-supports-technical-training-for-2500-pakistanis-and-afghan-refugees.html

44 UNHCR Pakistan, Skills training for Afghan and Pakistani youth, 2017. https://www.unhcr.org/pk/3297-skills-training-for-afghan-and-pakistani-youth.html

education for Afghan refugee and migrant children. Aside from education, UNHCR has also provided critical services in protection, health etc. since 1980 when the first wave of Afghan refugees arrived in Pakistan. UNHCR run refugee village schools remain a primary source of education provision to Afghan students in Pakistan at the primary and secondary levels of education.

The UNHCR Pakistan Refugee Education Strategy 2020-2022, however, marks a shift in its approach, as it aims to gradually reduce the refugee village schools in Pakistan.[45] The objective behind this change in strategy is to facilitate transition into nearby public schools for Afghan refugees and avoid the ongoing parallel education systems. In theory, having access to established public schools should also result in better quality of education and utilization of the school's facilities, while also encouraging peaceful co-existence between Afghan migrant and host communities.

3.7 Fieldwork Findings

A total of ten FGDs were conducted in Quetta, Peshawar, and Islamabad with Afghans who are here as refugees/migrants, and also those who had recently crossed over from Afghanistan after the Taliban takeover in August 2021. A total of four FGDs were conducted in the Peshawar area, two for men and two for women participants. One set of FGDs was organized in Khalil Town, UC 36 Peshawar, while the other two were conducted in Kababyan area near Warsak Road, Peshawar. Similarly, four FGDs were also conducted in Quetta, two for men and two for women. Two FGDs were conducted in Tehsil Kuchlak and two were arranged in Quetta city. In Islamabad the FGDs were conducted at the protest camp of Afghans refugees/migrants in front of the National Press Club.

The respondents were asked a number of questions, including on access to education, preferences as to public or private schooling, preferences on curriculum, and attitudes towards girls' education in particular. Amongst other things, the responses varied by the socioeconomic status of the respondents as well as by length of stay in Pakistan. The key issues discussed are highlighted in the following sections.

Policy Issues

As mentioned earlier in this report, UNHCR is funding some schools in refugee villages, under the aegis of the Commissionerate for Afghan Refugees in the provinces, which are managed by different NGOs, who are registered as UNHCR/Commissionerate partners. Until 2019, these schools were teaching in Dari and Pashto, were following an Afghan curriculum, and were conducting examinations as required by the relevant authorities in Afghanistan. Post 2019, however, the policy has changed, and all schools funded by UNHCR are required to switch to the Pakistani curriculum, and teach in Urdu and English as is the norm in Pakistani government schools. This change was warranted by two things, firstly, the Government of Pakistan had some reservations about the content of the Afghan curriculum, and secondly, a policy decision was made to mainstream

45 'Refugee Education Strategy – Pakistan 2020-2022', UNHCR, February 2020. Available at: https://data2.unhcr.org/en/

Afghan children in Pakistan, and encourage them to enter the Pakistani school system to enable them to continue their studies at higher levels, and to ensure that there was no scarcity of schools for them.

In addition to the UNHCR funded schools, a number of private schools run by Afghan refugees or migrants were also operational in Pakistan until recently. These schools, which were affiliated with the Afghan Ministry of Education, and which taught the Afghan curriculum, numbered about 260 in 2016, and were located mainly in urban areas, mostly in Peshawar and Quetta.[46] Although there is no clear official policy on this, reports from the field suggest that most private Afghan schools have ceased to operate because of the Government of Pakistan's reservations on the teaching of the Afghan curriculum and also because, as of August 2021, it is no longer clear that these schools will be able to award diplomas, and that they retain their affiliations with the relevant government bodies in Afghanistan. During the fieldwork for this report, the researchers were not able to identify any functional Afghan private schools.

Schooling as Discussed in FGDs

In interviews in communities near Warsak Road Peshawar, the team was told that children go to a Dari language school run by a family which was previously managing a UNHCR funded school in the refugee village. This was obviously an informal arrangement, as Dari language schools are no longer being supported by UNHCR. In general, in groups in Peshawar, some respondents were sending children to school, either in government schools or in UNHCR schools in refugee villages. However, many others said that their children were not studying. A number of reasons were cited for this. Amongst new migrants, the problems lay with documentation – they do not have PoR cards or any other form of residency status, and this is typically required for school admissions. Some respondents who had PoR cards reported that they are discouraged by government school personnel from enrolling their children there. In fact, they cited instances of government school principals providing them information on private schools which enroll Afghan students, and "advising" them to take their children there. There was general agreement that private schools are easier to get into, as they often are willing to waive documentation requirements, however costs can be prohibitive. Amongst Afghans who have been in Pakistan for many years, and who carry documentation (mainly PoR cards), there are examples of boys in particular who have completed high school and even attended college. Such examples are much lower in number for girls, though.

Similar responses came from women respondents. In an interview in Board Bazar Peshawar, where many new migrants have recently arrived, women respondents said that the nearest UNHCR school is six kilometers away, while private schools (which, they said, charge an average of Rs. 2,000 per month) are too expensive for them. Like other new migrants, they said they would be happy to let their children study in Pakistani government schools, but these require the parents to have documentation of some sort, which they do not have.

Amongst respondents in Peshawar, there was general agreement that they would be

46 See news item: https://khybernews.tv/afghan-schools-face-closure-in-pakistan-due-to-crackdown-on-refugees/

willing to, and in fact wanted to send their children to school, but were hampered by finances, and documentation issues (mainly for new migrants). They did not cite cultural barriers for girls' education, for example, although the low enrolment figures for girls suggest that these barriers do exist. In general though, they felt that if they had access to free schooling near their place of residence, where their children could safely go, they would be willing to send children to school. Having said that, they were skeptical about how their children would gain from higher education, given the limited job prospects for Afghans in Pakistan and the restrictions on them with regard to government jobs and owning businesses.

In Kuchlak, near Quetta, respondents were drawn mostly from refugee villages, and they reported that children who were in school were studying in UNHCR funded schools. However, there were also some examples of children studying in non-formal primary schools and government primary schools. A few girls were also admitted in madrasas. The respondents said that government schools had varying policies – some gave admissions to Afghan children without any documentation requirements, while others demanded PoR cards or passports. Some government schools demanded local domicile certificates. Afghans in Balochistan seemed more conservative in that they were clear that girls would not be allowed to study beyond primary school, as per their customs and traditions.

The Afghan community in Balochistan could hardly cite any examples of members of their community (boys or girls) going for higher education. In Peshawar the researchers came across Afghan migrants who had studied in college, and even in professional and technical universities. The process of admission is not dissimilar to that for Pakistani students – Afghans can apply on open merit where that system is available, otherwise they can apply against reserved seats in public universities. On an average, each public university offers up to five reserved seats every year for Afghan refugees (i.e., PoR card holders, Afghan Citizen Card holders are not eligible for these seats).

Additional Information

The respondents interviewed in Balochistan were primarily from low-income households, with access to either public education or at the most, low-fee private schools (although even these were considered too expensive, as they are charging on average Rs. 1,500 to Rs. 2,000 per child per month). In Peshawar, the research teams encountered a few young men who had studied in "elite" private schools also, like Beaconhouse School. However, there was a general view that enrolments were becoming more complicated as even private schools are wary of taking Afghan students, for fear of being harassed by law enforcement agencies. This applied to those Afghans who are living in Pakistan with documentation – those who are undocumented are not entertained by any schooling systems.

New migrants are in a particularly difficult situation as they are largely undocumented (many of those who had entered on visas reported that their visas have expired).

4. Health Issues for Afghans in Pakistan

In addition to issues of education, which are focused mostly on children, the concerns about health care provision are more complex since these need to cater to all Afghans in Pakistan. Research around health has also, predictably, explored a range of subjects – such as disease trends, provision of services, private and public service providers, women's health, children's health, occupational hazards, and so on.

Some researchers noted in the early years of the war on terror that as a result of the refugee influx there were changing patterns of diseases in Pakistan, such as the alteration in local disease profile of malaria, which shifted from the south and east of the country to the north and west.[1] Others around the same time highlighted the prevalence of specific diseases such as hepatitis B in Balochistan among the refugee population.[2] An early study in 2006 also pointed to the concerns about mental health of refugees at a camp in Karachi, pointing to the anxiety and stress of life as refugees, and noted that social coping mechanisms within families and camps would lead to the most effective ways for mental health improvement.[3]

Such analyses were often limited to certain regions or camps, and were likely only marginal in the development of policymaking regarding refugees. The primary focus of refugee management was on ideas of security and provision of shelter, food, and other forms of basic support. But these studies show how health needs of refugees were also impacting their host communities and bringing new sets of health challenges, requiring extensive and holistic policies.

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1 Ali Jawaid, Abdul Mueed Zafar, Syed Faisal Mahmood, "Impact of Afghan refugees on the infectious disease profile of Pakistan: beyond economy," *International Society for Infectious Diseases*, Vol 12 No 6 (December 2008): 131-132, http://ecommons.aku.edu/pakistan_fhs_mc_med_med/566

2 Arshad Quddus, Stephen P. Luby, Zahid Jamal, Tariq Jafar, "Prevalence of hepatitis B among Afghan refugees living in Balochistan, Pakistan," *International Society for Infectious Diseases*, Vol 10 (2006): 242-247.

3 Azaad Kassam & Anar Nanji, "Mental health of Afghan refugees in Pakistan: a qualitative rapid reconnaissance field study," *Intervention* (2006): 1-9.

There does not appear to be a comprehensive or consistently clear health policy for refugees from the government that incorporates the different categories of PoR cardholders, ACC holders, or unregistered refugees. Access to national healthcare programs and private setups is available to registered refugees, and not legally outside the reach of unregistered ones either. After all, a large number of Pakistanis avail private health care service providers in any case, where treatments come at a cost. On the other hand, there are policies in collaboration with the UNHCR and NGOs when it comes to refugee villages, where a large number of registered refugees reside.

UNHCR has been the primary supporting agency for the health care provision of refugees in refugee villages. Its overall assessment of the healthcare systems and programming in Pakistan is thus worthwhile in the context of its support to refugees. In a 2014 study, it praised Pakistan for its "efforts in the past few decades to improve its Primary Health Care (PHC) system in terms of access, coverage, and availability of services." Pakistan had made slow but measured progress in a range of health outcomes, including a reduction in child, infant, and maternal mortality. The provision of reproductive health services had been significantly enhanced, while full immunization rates had improved and the prevalence of preventable diseases such diarrhea decreased.[4]

But despite these improvements, the study noted there were also several continuing issues of concern as far as the health of Pakistanis and their access to services were concerned. Under-five mortality rates were among the highest in South Asia, and there were many disparities in terms of gender and urban or rural areas. In addition, communicable diseases were not covered by public health programmes, pneumonia was the leading cause of child mortality, and most deaths of children were occurring due to issues of access to a treatment facility. Polio had still not been eliminated, and tuberculosis was common and accounting for over five percent of the total burden of disease, affecting some 1.5 million people. Half a million people were annually afflicted with malaria according to official figures, but it was estimated conservatively that the actual number could be between 2 and 2.5 million. After all, about 70-80 percent of the Pakistani population accesses health care through the private sector, and the relevant data did not exist. In addition, the UNHCR report continued, Pakistan faced an increasing burden of non-communicable diseases, which caused 46 percent of all deaths in the country in 2011. Coronary heart disease was common, with some 27 percent of the adult population suffering from it, while Pakistan had a significantly high 5.2 million people living with diabetes. Moreover, an estimated 200,000 people suffered from cancer annually, of which only a quarter or so were being treated by oncologists. Overall, the report concluded, there was a lack of public awareness and a concern about availability of diagnostic and treatment facilities for non-communicable diseases particularly at the district level.[5]

In addition to the government's initiatives, several donor agencies and NGOs have also played a part in Pakistan's health sector. Health initiatives have been supported through the RAHA program, which include infrastructural development and the provision of equipment in the BHUs. These were meant for the Afghan refugees as well as

4 "Health Sector Strategy For Afghan Refugees Living in Pakistan, 2014-2018," *UNHCR.*

5 Ibid.

Pakistani citizens. Donors to health and nutrition programs, such as the USAID and DFID were contributing to multiple government and non-government organizations, focusing on different areas of health services. For instance, the World Bank was focusing more on maternal and child health, HIV/AIDS program and public health surveillance. In addition, a Multi-Donor Trust Fund (MDTF) had been operationalized for 41 border regions in the west of the country, in KP, the former FATA, and Balochistan since August 2010.[6]

4.1 UNHCR and Health in Refugee Villages Until 2014

As noted above, refugees had access to health care through Basic Health Units (BHUs) and other services within refugee villages. But this accounted for the basic health needs of only some 40 percent of the registered refugees, who also needed to visit public or private health care providers outside the BHUs in refugee villages for many of their health requirements. In addition, the majority of refugees – those registered refugees not living in refugee villages, as well as unregistered refugees – were also utilizing the regular healthcare system in Pakistan.

Given that Pakistan's healthcare system is accessible to Afghan refugees, interventions from RAHA have sought to invest into the public health sector of the country. Its work includes infrastructure development and equipment in health units and hospitals, developing community healthcare facilities, training of staff, awareness-raising, and constructing labor room and providing equipment to Basic Health Units.[7]

Until a new five-year health policy and approach was designed by UNHCR and the Pakistani government in 2014, UNHCR had been providing support for essential health care services in refugee villages. At the time, these villages housed 40% of registered Afghan refugees in Pakistan. They provided health care through 62 Basic Health Units (BHUs), of which 48 were in the refugee villages in KP, thirteen in Balochistan, and one in Punjab. The services provided in the BHUs were diverse, including primary health care, preventative care, and medicines. The remaining 60 percent of the refugees in Pakistan were however using the national health care system in the country for their basic health needs. In addition, secondary and tertiary healthcare services within the national health system were also accessible to all refugees in government and private hospitals.[8]

UNHCR noted at the time that this approach had been very successful in its maternal and child health and other preventative programs. Refugee women and children were regularly visiting the BHUs and other programs within the refugee villages, and there was high coverage in ante- and post-natal care, as well as in immunization. But the utilization of Out-Patient Departments (OPDs) at the BHUs was regarded to be quite low. This was since 40-70 percent of the refugees in refugee villages were using health care providers, such as private and public clinics and hospitals, other than BHUs supported by UNHCR. In addition, some health services were being provided more informally in the refugee villages, such as through around 300 Afghan doctors registered with Office of the Commissioner for Afghan Refugees

6 Ibid.

7 Some examples of RAHA interventions can be seen at: "Health: 10 Years of RAHA in Pakistan," *UNHCR*, https://www.unhcr.org/pk/wp-content/uploads/sites/103/2021/04/RAHA-Factsheet-Health.pdf

8 "Health Sector Strategy For Afghan Refugees Living in Pakistan, 2014-2018."

in KP.[9]

While Pakistan has been assisting Afghan doctors through trainings at hospitals in KP in order to improve health services in Afghanistan,[10] the situation of Afghan doctors in Pakistan is more complicated. In 2013, the KP government began scrutinizing the documents of Afghan doctors in the province (including the erstwhile FATA region). Following concerns about illegal clinics and unqualified doctors, it was decided that all medical practitioners would need verifications from the Pakistan Medical and Dental Council (PMDC) in order to continue practicing. One of the places where Afghans were said to have established clinics was Board Bazaar in Peshawar, and a process of some months was started then to verify the credentials of the Afghan doctors, including raids on clinics.[11] Afghan refugees who manage to go through the process of becoming a qualified doctor within Pakistan's education and health systems, are not eligible for permanent public jobs. Their medical practice is limited to private work or joining hospitals as consultants.[12] There are cases of Afghan refugee doctors – including female doctors – opening clinics that cater to other refugees as well.[13]

In 2013, according to UNHCR, the operating budget for its health programming in Pakistan was USD 4.4 million. A majority of this, some 80 percent of the allocated budget, was utilized by the UNHCR's implementing partners for salary payments and operating costs. Only 18 percent was spent on supplies, medicines and vaccines, while the remaining 2 percent was used for capacity building. In addition, the resource allocations for the health services in Balochistan, KP, and Punjab also presented discrepancies. For instance, the per capita cost of providing health care services to refugees in Balochistan was twice that in KP, and 1.5 times higher than KP in Punjab. In concrete terms, the UNHCR calculated that a refugee in Balochistan was provided health care in the refugee villages at an average of USD 7.6, followed by USD 5.4 in Punjab, and USD 3.6 in KP. Similarly, this was also the trend in the average cost to operationalize a BHU in refugee villages in the three provinces. The average cost for a BHU was USD 110,000 in Balochistan, USD 101,000 in Punjab, and a significantly lower USD 56,000 in KP. This was also since the underutilization of health facilities in some BHUs had resulted in the higher unit costs for each consultation in that particular site.[14]

According to UNHCR, by 2014, its health initiatives had led to "steady improvement of infant and under-five mortality rates and lower maternal mortality ratios, improved diagnosis of tuberculosis, higher immunization coverage rates and increased prevention of malaria and other communicable diseases." It also added that the refugee population was experiencing lower incidences of communicable diseases, reproductive health problems, and malnutrition, and that malaria, which used to be the leading cause of mortality among refugees living in refugee villages, had ceased to be so. Instead, it was now non-communicable diseases, such as heart issues, injuries, and respiratory infections that had become the leading causes of

9 Ibid.

10 Ashfaq Yusufzai, "Bilateral co-operation allows Afghan doctors to get helping hand from Pakistan," *Pakistan Forward,* February 1, 2019, https://pakistan.asia-news.com/en_GB/articles/cnmi_pf/features/2019/02/01/feature-01

11 Noorwali Shah, "Verifying credentials: Afghan doctors come under govt scrutiny," Express Tribune, February 21, 2013, https://tribune.com.pk/story/510260/verifying-credentials-afghan-doctors-come-under-govt-scrutiny

12 For instance, see one case study at: https://www.unhcr.org/asia/news/stories/2022/3/6226b9df4/afghan-refugee-psychiatrist-offering-care-in-local-community-in-pakistan.html

13 See: https://www.unhcr.ca/news/afghan-refugee-doctor-dares-women-girls-dream/

14 "Health Sector Strategy For Afghan Refugees Living in Pakistan, 2014-2018."

deaths for refugees in the refugee villages.[15]

A 2011 survey of refugees conducted under the aegis of the Ministry of States and Frontier Regions (SAFRON), the Office of the Chief Commissioner for Afghan Refugees, and UNHCR noted that Afghan households spent as much as eleven percent of their income on health-related issues. Only a quarter of the refugees were estimated to have access to safe drinking water. And even more importantly, given the requirement for access to effective health services, some 3.5 percent of the refugee population was suffering from chronic or life-threatening conditions. Diseases such as hepatitis (affecting some 31 percent of the refugees), asthma (28 percent), diabetes (20 percent) and heart diseases (19 percent) were some of the most pervasive conditions. Women were more susceptible to different diseases. As the survey noted, of the 6,154 women who reported pregnancies over the previous two years, 24 percent did not have any medical check-up and only 13 percent had help from a skilled attendant during deliveries. However, the survey adds, 83 percent of the households lived within thirty minutes of a medical facility, so access to a health care center was not likely to be the major issue.[16]

The survey also noted that while 83 percent of the refugee households had a healthcare facility in less than thirty minutes, only 10 percent have access to a facility within their communities. Among the most accessible cities for healthcare facilities are Haripur, Quetta, Chakwal, and Rawalpindi, where over 90 percent of the households have a health facility less than 30 minutes away.[17]

Whle UNCHR and partners have been providing health care in refugee villages to the registered refugees, essential healthcare services for refugees in urban areas as well as secondary and tertiary healthcare, is provided by the national health system of Pakistan. For registered refugees this can be free of charge as well, depending on the service. The UNHCR notes that disaggregated data for refugee health is not available, and the national reporting system does not record or identify refugee data separately. But outside of the refugee villages, it describes some problems faced by the registered refugees face. Access to healthcare facilities due to long distance, as well as cultural and social issues such as low literacy, low female mobility, and language issues are some concerns. And there are further challenges for refugee women's access to healthcare outside of the refugee villages as well.[18]

4.2 UNHCR Refugee Policy 2014–2018

The UNHCR and Pakistan embarked upon a five-year health sector strategy for Afghan refugees for the period between 2014 and 2018, with the key objective of minimizing mortality and morbidity, and improving the refugees' quality of life. This was based on the idea that the same health strategy had lasted for over three decades for some 40 percent of registered refugees living in the refugee villages, and was running parallel to

15 Ibid.

16 "Population Profiling, Verification and Response Survey of Afghans in Pakistan 2011," *Ministry of States and Frontier Regions, the Office of the Chief, Commissioner for Afghan Refugees and UNHCR.*

17 Ibid.

18 "Refugee Policy Review Framework."

the national health program.[19] This strategy was designed with the aim "to responsibly disengage from provision of blanket health assistance in refugee villages [and move] towards more cost-effective and sustainable targeted assistance for vulnerable refugees." Interventions in this regard meant that the Basic Health Unit model being practiced in refugee villages was to be phased out. Instead, the idea was to enhance communities where refugees were living. initiatives such as lady health visitors (LHVs), higher coverage of vaccinations, and community health workers providing essential mother and child healthcare would be promoted. For complicated diseases, public hospitals could be visited by patients. In order to implement approach, UNHCR sought to improve and enhance collaboration with the government, disengage from BHUs, develop a pool of refugee health professionals, and maintain activities such as mother and child health care and immunization. It was also expected then that by 2018, most refugee villages would be served by a Mother and Child Health (MCH) Center or a nearby health facility.[20]

The new strategy sought to focus more on maternal and child health including pre-natal and post-natal care and safe deliveries. In addition, it wanted to increase immunization in line with Pakistan's immunization program, and to develop programs for the prevention and control of some key communicable diseases. These include tuberculosis, malaria and HIV. Effective referral systems were also to be put in place. Through these goals, the idea was also to pay attention specially to the health needs of vulnerable groups, women, and children.[21] UNHCR also sought in 2014 to explore the use of government health insurance schemes for refugees in KP, and contribute to the scheme in financial and other ways.[22] It is unclear whether any headway was made in this regard.

Broadly, this strategy was meant to empower and capacitate refugee households to manage their own health needs through community-based health programming rather than relying on UNHCR. It also sought to provide access to alternative health care service providers, and develop linkages between the refugee health systems in the refugee villages and those of Pakistan. After all, informal collaborations already existed between the two systems, as refugees used public health facilities while locals used UNHCR services too.

4.3 Current Health Situation of Afghans in Pakistan

In 2019, UNHCR reported another effort together with the Health Ministry of Pakistan to improve healthcare for both Afghan refugees and their host communities, with the goal of ensuring healthcare for all.[23] By 2020, the UNHCR noted that refugees' access to the national health services in Pakistan, as also evidenced during the early months of the

19 "Health Sector Strategy For Afghan Refugees Living in Pakistan, 2014-2018."

20 "Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees: Enhancing Resilience and Co-Existence through Greater Responsibility-Sharing," *UNCHR* (October 2018).

21 "Health Sector Strategy For Afghan Refugees Living in Pakistan, 2014-2018."

22 Ibid.

23 "Health ministry, UNHCR join hands to improve healthcare for Afghan refugees and host communities," *UNHCR*, 4 Jan 2019, https://reliefweb.int/report/pakistan/health-ministry-unhcr-join-hands-improve-healthcare-afghan-refugees-and-host

COVID-19 response, was on a par with Pakistani nationals. Registered refugees were included in national vaccination programme as well. And PoR cardholders have access to national health services at primary, secondary, and tertiary hospitals – including sexual and reproductive health services and COVID-19 related services. This gives them the same access to services as Pakistani nationals, though this access is not based on a specific policy or legislation.[24] Successful initiatives have also included the inclusion of refugees in multiple preventative health programs of the government.[25]

Every province has a Commissionerate for Afghan Refugees (CAR) working under the Ministry of SAFRON, and looks after the Afghan refugees, their camps, registrations, UNHCR projects, and coordination with government bodies and NGOs.[26] The KP Commissionerate for instance also provides health services in the refugee villages in the province.[27] Similarly, at the Afghan refugee camp in Kot Chandna in Punjab, there is a health wing that works with CAR Punjab and has the technical guidance of UNHCR and implements the health programme through a Central Health Unit for emergency needs. There is a Senior Medical Officer responsible for district and provincial level activities and also coordinates with UNHCR, the government departments and NGOs. Patients also have access to different essential tests for a very low cost, while a labor room is also available. Complicated Gynae and Obstetric cases however are referred to DHQ Hospital Mianwali, and free transport is provided for high-risk refugees at the camp.[28] One can expect similar processes in comparable refugee villages.

A 2019 study also notes that some half of the refugees suffer from respiratory tract infections. As for maternal health among refugees, infant mortality rate was recorded at 8.21 per 1000 live births, and neonatal and maternal mortality rates at 2.33/1000 births and 13.70 per 100,000 births, respectively. The same study also noted though that the refugees were vaccinated against multiple diseases including Tuberculosis (BCG), Measles, Polio, DPT, Tetanus, Diphtheria, Pertussis (whooping cough).[29] However, Afghan refugees – as a study in Peshawar concluded – suffer from malnutrition as well.[30]

Most Afghan refugees are able to access health care services in times of need. But free healthcare services are tied to registration status – for instance, registered refugees with PoR and ACC status have the same access as Pakistani citizens. Registered refugees are also included in government health programmes such as immunization campaigns, tuberculosis control, and HIV prevention and treatment.[31] Despite this, access to quality health care for refugees remains a concern. And the situation is likely to be worse for undocumented refugees – according to a June 2019 study, while they are provided with consultations in

24 "Refugee Policy Review Framework."

25 https://www.unhcr.org/pk/health

26 Commissionerate Afghan Refugees, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Peshawar, http://kpkcar.org/about/introduction

27 http://kpkcar.org/projects/health

28 Details of the health facilities can be viewed at: Commissionerate for Afghan Refugees, https://car.punjab.gov.pk/health_wing

29 Muhammad Suleman Malik, Muhammad Afzal, Alveena Farid, Fati Ullah Khan, Bushra Mirza and Mohammad Tahir Waheed, "Disease Status of Afghan Refugees and Migrants in Pakistan," *Frontiers in Public Health*, Vol 7, Article 185, (July 2019), https://doi.org/10.3389/fpubh.2019.00185

30 Anum Saeedullah, Muhammad Shabir Khan, Simon C. Andrews, Khalid Iqbal, Zia Ul-Haq, Syed Abdul Qadir, Haris Khan, Ishawu Iddrisu, and Muhammad Shahzad, "Nutritional Status of Adolescent Afghan Refugees Living in Peshawar, Pakistan," *Nutrients* 2021, 13: 3072. https://doi.org/10.3390/nu13093072

31 https://www.unhcr.org/pk/health

public healthcare facilities, they need to purchase medicines from markets. It has also been suggested that undocumented Afghans commonly borrow PoR cards or ACCs to gain access to healthcare.[32]

The health situation varies in terms of both gender and refugee location. For instance, as one study notes, the crude death rates (CDR) for male Afghan refugees at 7.24 was much higher than that for females at 5.7. And a region such as Karachi East with a CDR of 8.92 is lower than that at Haripur, demonstrating the likelihood of poorer health services in the former.[33] There are also likely some afflictions facing refugees more than local communities due to lifestyles. For instance, some occupations common among Afghan refugees are more disproportionately affected by certain diseases, such as a large number of carpet weavers who suffer from hepatitis (affecting 37 percent of them), asthma (25 percent), and sight difficulties.[34]

Some organizations such as the International Medical Corps also provides gender-based violence prevention and response services in some refugee villages, as well as mental health and psychosocial support. It is estimated that some 24 million Pakistanis need psychiatric assistance but the country only has 0.19 psychiatrists per 100,000 people, and that mental health conditions have worsened in recent years and affected Afghan refugees as well. It is suggested that there are many conditions of depression, anxiety, substance abuse, and gender-based violence in refugee villages. Moreover, refugee women faced many challenges including inappropriate treatment even by the support staff at voluntary return centers. Issues of mental abuse and distress are pervasive, and there are few outlets for support as perceptions of mental health are also unclear among residents.[35]

During the COVID-19 pandemic, Afghan refugees also faced significant issues, as only PoR cardholders had access to UNHCR support. In May 2020, some 20 percent of refugees received a one-time amount of PKR 12,000 from UNHCR. But ACC holders and unregistered refugees did not have any formal support in such programmes, though they could access other healthcare facilities. During the pandemic, Afghan refugees faced significant barriers such as those regarding quarantine facilities and vaccinations, though testing was quite accessible. Awareness regarding the pandemic was also low in the initial months. Overall, the pandemic also led to economic loss as well as issues of mental health, and domestic violence.[36] Pakistan did include registered Afghan refugees within the list of the vaccination programme, and they began receiving vaccines by May 2021. In August, the Sindh Health Department also announced everyone, including undocumented refugees were eligible for the vaccine in Karachi.[37]

4.4 Medical Tourism

Afghan citizens can also apply for medical visas to visit Pakistan for health care, but

32 See: "Pakistan: Situation of Afghan refugees."

33 "Population Profiling, Verification and Response Survey of Afghans in Pakistan 2011."

34 Ibid.

35 "Rapid Mental Health and Psychosocial Support Needs Assessment in Haripur, Mansehra and Lower Dir Afghan Refugee Villages of Pakistan," *International Medical Corps*, 2021.

36 "Barriers to accessing COVID-19 related healthcare for Afghan refugees in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP), Pakistan," *Asia Displacement Solutions Platform*, April 2022.

37 "Pakistan: Situation of Afghan refugees."

there are many delays and concerns regarding the process of visas as well. As per the website of the Directorate General of Immigration and Passports, Afghan PoR holders can also be granted a medical or treatment visa if they surrender their PoR cards and apply through the proper channel. Moreover, Afghan citizens can obtain a three-month visa on arrival at the Torkham border if there is a serious illness or injury, and pregnant women may also be allowed with one attendant. There is no medical visa facility for ballistic wound cases, however. If Afghan citizens apply for visa with the Pakistan Mission in their country, they may be granted a six-month treatment visa for complicated or long-term illnesses such as cancer, cardiac diseases, liver and kidney diseases, etc. along with one attendant. While in Pakistan, they can apply for extension in this visa with the recommendation of the relevant doctors and hospitals.[38] Obtaining a visa officially however comes with many hurdles.[39]

In 2018, Pakistan issued a total of 61,731 medical visas to Afghan citizens – out of around 500,000 visas overall. It was estimated by the Pakistani Ambassador that around 100,000 Afghans seek medical treatment in Pakistan every year. While the visa itself is free, the process is long and arduous, and depending on the disease, the medical treatment in cities such as Peshawar is not cheap.[40] It has been suggested that Pakistan is the preferred destination for medical treatment for Afghan citizens due to the cultural and linguistic comforts, but given the hurdles involved in the visa process, Pakistan has been replaced by India since 2016 as the most visited country for Afghans' medical tourism. This was largely since Pakistan tightened its visa policy, leading to a drastic drop in Afghans seeking medical care, dropping the number to only 50 per month.[41]

It is pehaps because of this that Pakistan recently started its visa-on-arrival facility at Torkham in June 2022, and sought to ease the way for medical tourism. After all medical tourism brings revenue to the country, and specially to hospitals in Peshawar where more complicated treatments are carried out, in addition to district hospitals which Afghans also visit for healthcare.

In this regard, the KP government in 2019 also sought to offer incentives to Afghan patients under its new medical tourism initiative. Private hospitals in KP saw a drop in Afghan patients due to stricter visa policies, and the government planned to focus more "on 'periphery' hospitals rather than on tertiary ones, with a health policy that is more people-friendly and district facilitated rather than a centrally focused one." By equipping district hospitals, the aim was to reduce the number of patients they were referring to Peshawar. While district hospitals were not equipped with adequate facilities, this policy noted, the entire burden of the province's medical services was on three hospitals in the provincial capital. Revenue generated from Afghan medical tourists, it was hoped, would improve the district hospitals as well.[42]

38 https://dgip.gov.pk/visa/afghan-visa.php

39 "Afghans Say Black Market For Pakistani Visas Thriving," *Gandhara,* June 14, 2022, https://gandhara.rferl.org/a/afghanistan-black-market-visas-pakistan/31898158.html

40 Stefani Glinski, "Patients sleep under the stars in long queue for medical visas," *Guardian,* June 12, 2019, https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2019/jun/12/patients-long-queue-medical-visas-afghans

41 Gareth Price and Hameed Hakimi, Reconnecting Afghanistan: Lessons from Cross-border Engagement, Chatham House, July 8, 2019, https://www.chathamhouse.org/2019/07/reconnecting-afghanistan/5-medical-tourism

42 "Pakistan province targets Afghan medical tourists," June 4, 2019, https://www.laingbuissonnews.com/imtj/news-imtj/

It was also reported in 2019 by the KP Health Minister, following the inauguration of a Healthcare Referral Facility at the Torkham border, that Pakistan plans to establish a healthcare city in the Khyber district. As part of the desire to promote medical tourism, the KP government planned to provide healthcare through public-private partnerships.[43]

There are also more technologically advanced ways in Pakistani doctors are providing treatments to Afghan citizens, such as consultancies through telehealth businesses.[44] While the improvements in visa processes, the medical tourism has increased from its low numbers in 2016, but it is unclear whether it has reached the same level as before, or whether Pakistan has once more become the most visited country for Afghans seeking treatment.

4.5 Women's Health

One of the primary concerns of the UNHCR, the Pakistani government, and NGOs in the health of Afghan refugees is maternal and child health. This was one of the major aspects of the health policy as well. There are some positive assessments regarding this. For instance, according to the UNHCR, women in the refugee villages "have good access to reproductive health (RH) services with over 85 per cent antenatal coverage and 60 per cent deliveries by trained attendants," while they also have e relatively easy access to external health facilities.[45]

Maternal health has long been a subject of concern, and the 2011 Ministry of SAFRON and UNHCR survey of registered refugees had also gathered details about it. Of the 6,154 females who had given birth over the previous two years, they survey noted, 13.5 percent had no medical check-up during pregnancies and 21.79 percent had stopped breastfeeding their babies. Moreover, 75.5 percent of the pregnancies were overseen by unskilled individuals, and skilled birth attendants were only present in 13.24 percent of the deliveries over the previous two years. Encouragingly though, 45.66 percent did have during-pregnancy check-ups and 37.37 percent were still breast-feeding. The infant and child mortality rates per 1,000 births of refugees, at 60.47 and 13.21, respectively, were somewhat lower than the national Pakistani rates at 62.36 and 32.31, respectively.[46]

Some studies have however noted that maternal deaths are higher in refugee camps. For instance, a 2011 study in Peshawar concluded that nearly 70 percent of these deaths are preventable, and refugee mothers have a higher risk of low birthweight. But in many aspects, there were little differences between the refugee mothers and Pakistani women in general. However, Afghan refugee mothers in the tribal areas are disadvantaged by distances and less

pakistan-province-targets-afghan-medical-tourists/

43 Abuzar Afridi, "Govt plans healthcare city on Pak-Afghan border," Express Tribune, September 15, 2019, https://tribune.com.pk/story/2056765/govt-plans-healthcare-city-pak-afghan-border

44 Imran Ayub, "Reaching out to the needy across borders through telehealth," *Dawn,* March 7, 2022, https://www.dawn.com/news/1678688/reaching-out-to-the-needy-across-borders-through-telehealth

45 https://www.unhcr.org/pk/health

46 "Population Profiling, Verification and Response Survey of Afghans in Pakistan 2011."

likely than Pakistani mothers to register pregnancies.[47]

It is also noted that investment in maternal and child health leads to relatively quick and significant results. One 2009 study has highlighted the results of the International Rescue Committee's (IRC) work regarding maternal health care and awareness among Afghan refugees in the Hangu district in KP. Through BHUs and emergency obstetric care (EmOC) centers, the IRC trained community members on different aspects of maternal health, pregnancy, skilled attendance, and estimated that its work resulted in significant improvement among the Afghan refugee women's health. The maternal mortality rate among the refugees in the region was 291 per 100,000 live births in the year 2000, but had decreased to 102 per 100,000 live births in 2004. And the proportion of refugee births being attended to by skilled staff was 67 percent in 2007, up from just 5 percent in 1996. Similarly, complete prenatal care coverage had increased from 49 percent in 2000 to a high 90 percent in 2006, while postnatal coverage had increased from 27 percent to 90 percent in the same time period. It was thus concluded that the provision of improved services, awareness raising, community involvement, and effective systems had led to significantly reduced maternal mortality among Afghan refugee women in Hangu.[48]

4.6 Fieldwork Findings

A total of 10 FGDs were conducted in Quetta, Peshawar, and Islamabad with Afghans who are here as refugees, and also those who had recently crossed over from Afghanistan after the Taliban takeover in August 2021. In addition to the FGDs, a number of key informant interviews (KIIs) were also carried out with the representatives of Afghan refugees, illegal Afghan migrants, Afghans on various visa categories living in Pakistan, staff of local and international NGOs working with Afghan refugees, and other relevant stakeholders.

A total of four FGDs were conducted in the Peshawar area, two for men and two for women participants. One set of FGDs was organized in Khalil Town, UC 36 Peshawar, while the other two were conducted in Kababyan area near Warsak Road, Peshawar. Similarly, a total of four FGDs were also conducted in Quetta, two for men and two for women. Two FGDs were conducted in Tehsil Kuchlak and two were arranged in Quetta city. In Islamabad, the FGDs were conducted at the protest camp of Afghans refugees/ migrants in front of the National Press Club.

About the FGD Locations

Kababyan, Warsak Road, Peshawar

There used to be a big Afghan refugee camp at Kababyan area, Warsak Road which is now closed. However, despite officially closing the camp, there are still a large number of Afghans residing in this area. Most Afghans in the area live in mud houses. They have

47 Sareer Badshah, Linda Mason, Ken Mckelvie, Roger Payne, Paulo J.G. Lisboa, "Maternal risk factors in Afghan-refugees compared to Pakistani mothers in Peshawar, NWFP Pakistan," *Journal of the Pakistan Medical Association*, Vol. 61, No. 2 (February 2011).

48 Susan Purdin, Tila Khan, and Roxanne Saucier, "Reducing maternal mortality among Afghan refugees in Pakistan," *International Journal of Gynecology and Obstetrics* 105 (2009): 82–85.

been living peacefully in this area for the last many years, and there were no reported tensions between the local community and the Afghan refugees/illegal migrants. Some families also reported intermarriages amongst Afghans and locals. This area now also hosts a large number of Afghans who came to Pakistan after the Taliban takeover, as they had linkages here and most people had either family or friends already living in this area for the past many years.

Khalil Town, Board Bazar Peshawar

There is a large presence of Afghans in Board Bazar, and they have been staying here for more than two to three decades. New Afghan migrants/refugees have also moved to this area from Afghanistan over the last one year. The new refugees/migrants are more comfortable moving into areas with a large number of Afghans living there, which helps them settle in more easily and helps them make a new start in Pakistan. Most of the houses are made of mud, and large families of around seven to eight people are living in small houses, which typically have only one or two rooms. There are around 300 Afghan families living in this area, in close proximity with locals, and no friction has been reported between the locals and Afghans in this locality.

Press Club, F6, Islamabad

The Afghans camped outside the press club in Islamabad comprise Pashtuns, Tajiks, and Hazaras. They are living in makeshift tents which are set up across the road, and right opposite the press club's main gate. Most of the people here are living with their families, which include young children. Most of them were urban, educated workers in Afghanistan, including schoolteachers, international aid organization workers, ex-government servants, and doctors. When asked how they are managing food and other necessities here, they reported that various well-to-do Afghans and Pakistanis send them food, and they rely on informal channels to access government health facilities in Islamabad. They also reported that they have agreed to Rs 15,000 per month arrangement with a nearby mosque for use of their toilet facilities. The Hazara community also reported that there are some sectarian tensions between them and the mosque and adjoining madrasa. They also said that in a few instances they were referred to as kafir (infidels) by the local madrasa students, which is right next to their camps. The community also reported being approached by human traffickers, who offer to take them to European countries via Iran for around Rs 300,000 per person. In addition, there are people also approaching them to marry off their daughters to people in Pakistan and Afghanistan, in exchange for some form of financial compensation.

Kili Sharif, Tehsil Kuchlak, Quetta

The Afghan community interviewed reported living in this area for the last 40 years, and most of them had come in after the Soviet invasion. However, some Afghans families had also migrated to this locality after the Taliban takeover of Afghanistan in August 2021. Most of the houses in this area were small, and made of mud; most had either one or two rooms which was inadequate for a family of 6 to 7 people.

Some participants reported that they frequently visit Afghanistan, and cross over through illegal border crossings close to Chaman. However, they did report that with increased security on the border, it is becoming increasingly difficult for them. Most men reported being day laborers, while some reported that they were able to bring in goods such as blankets, clothes, etc. from Afghanistan and sell them in Pakistan.

Ghous Abad Satellite Town, Quetta

This settlement has been here for the last 40 years, and most of the Afghan families here initially came after the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. The members of the community reported however that there was an influx of new refugees after the Taliban takeover, and most of them subsequently returned to their homes in Afghanistan. Currently, there were around 20 to 30 families of new Afghan refugees/migrants left in this area. Most of the houses were made of mud, and other makeshift materials with not enough room to adequately accommodate a normal-sized Afghan household.[49]

In this locality, in addition to men working as laborers in nearby businesses, women also reported working as domestic help in the nearby homes, which earns them Rs. 10,000 to 12,000 per month. Due to proximity of the locality to the city, it was easier for women to travel and help in supplementing the income of their households. Some women also reported weaving carpets for a living and also stitching clothes at their homes, and selling them in the local market.

Madina Market, Mashriqi by-pass, Quetta

Most of the houses belonging to the Afghan community in this area were made of mud, while only a handful of concrete and cement houses were present. The locals confirmed that some new Afghan families, with ties to the Afghans already living here, had moved in after August 2021. Most of the new migrants, like the old ones, are laborers and some have set up small roadside stalls to earn livelihoods. A large number of respondents reported that they have very good relations with the locals, and most of them prefer working as laborers for the local shop owners, rather than heading to the main city (Quetta) for work. When asked how often they go back to their homes in Afghanistan, most reported that they no longer cross the border to visit friends and families in Afghanistan as they are uncertain if they would be able to come back or not.

Livelihoods

Most of the Afghans who were part of the FGDs, reported either working as laborers, or having their own small businesses/roadside stalls. Those who had migrated from Afghanistan after the recent Taliban takeover, reported that one of the major reasons for migration was the lack of opportunities to earn a livelihood in Afghanistan. They reported that after the withdrawal of foreign companies, and contractors and the economic difficulties, they had no choice but to migrate to Pakistan. The community reported that those amongst them who have PoR cards, can move around with relative ease. However, those who do not have any form of identification tend to stay close to their homes when looking for work. They complained that the harassment by law enforcement agencies is one the major reasons why they do not venture too far out from their locality, even if there are better earning opportunities available a little further away. Those amongst the community who had attained higher education reported that they had trouble finding jobs in Pakistan, as people are reluctant to hire even those Afghans who have PoR cards. They mentioned that those who have PoR cards are able to find menial work easily, and are hired by local businesses.

When asked about the remuneration for work in comparison to the local workers, most

49 The median household included seven household members. See the World Bank's Operational Data Portal: https://data2.unhcr.org

of the respondents mentioned that there was a difference in the amount paid to locals and wages paid to Afghans who are illegally living in the country. It was mentioned that illegal migrants get half of what is paid to locals and PoR cardholders in Pakistan. In Quetta, it was reported that the local labor rate these days is Rs. 1,500 per day, however, illegal migrants are paid Rs. 750 by the locals. However, there was no difference in remuneration between locals and those Afghans who have PoR cards.

When asked how they find work in Pakistan, mostly mentioned that their relatives and friends who are already living in Pakistan refer them to locals, who then hire them as labor. Amongst the new refugees/migrants, some reported that they had to sell their assets in Afghanistan for the trip to Pakistan, and when they finally reached here, they had no money to even feed their children. They ended up taking small loans from their relatives and friends in Pakistan to start up small shops and roadside stalls in their respective areas.

Most women interviewed were housewives and only a handful of women mentioned stitching clothes to support their families. Some women in Quetta mentioned working as house help in nearby houses, and also weaving carpets to supplement their household income.

Harassment of Law Enforcement Agencies

One of the major issues reported by Afghans across the country is harassment by police and other law enforcement agencies. Even those Afghans who have PoR cards, are stopped at local checkpoints and asked for money. Under the law, PoR cardholders have the right to reside in Pakistan and cannot be arrested as per the 1946 Foreigners Act or other preventive laws, however, due to their vulnerable position they are an easy target for the police and other law enforcement agencies. Some people in the meetings mentioned that they were detained/arrested by the local police, and ended up either involving a local influential to get released or paid heavy bribes. This continuous fear of being arrested ends up affecting many aspects of an ordinary Afghan migrant's life. They reported that they avoid going to areas further away from their homes to look for work, as they are afraid no one would come for help if they get arrested or detained. Similarly, in some cases medical check-ups have been postponed or delayed, out of fear of being stopped at check posts. Afghans reported that they only seek medical help if there is an emergency. This was particularly true for Afghans living in Balochistan.

Travel into Pakistan

When the new migrants were asked how they crossed the border, some of them mentioned that they had valid visas and were easily able to cross the border, but now their visas have expired and they are living in the country illegally. When asked about the visa process it was reported that the entire process of getting the visa to Pakistan was very expensive, and they had to pay around $ 1,000 for the entire process, from issuance of passport to finally getting their visas stamped. Due to very high cost involved in trying to acquire visa, a lot of people were contacting human smugglers to get them through the border and into Pakistan.

Most of the interviewees mentioned that they sold some or all of their assets in Afghanistan and paid local agents to help them cross the border. Due to fencing across

the Pakistan-Afghanistan border, most people are using routes which are still open, and near Chaman to enter the country. The migrants/refugees in Peshawar mentioned that they first moved to Quetta, then Islamabad, and then reached Peshawar. It was reported that the entire journey cost them around Rs. 30,000 to Rs. 35,000 per person.

Some refugees mentioned that they were able to cross on a medical visa, which is valid for three to six months, but this is now getting increasingly difficult. Moreover, it takes on average two months to get if they apply through Pakistan's embassy or the consulate. Some members of the community mentioned spending around Rs. 100,000 for medical visas and crossing over. In addition to time and money it was also reported that they need a reference either inside the embassy or someone influential in Pakistan to get their visas processed.

Human Trafficking

Human trafficking has come up as a major issue during our discussions with Afghan refugees. The Afghans who are currently in Pakistan are being approached by human traffickers to relocate them to a third country. In our interview with Afghan refugees/ migrants in Islamabad, it was reported that they were approached by people who offered to take them to Europe via Iran and Turkey on payment of Rs. 200,000 to 300,000 per person. Some people even reported being approached by some agents wanting to know if they would be willing to marry off their daughter to men located in Pakistan and abroad for a particular sum of money. The current situation opens up Afghans, and in particular women and young girls, to abuse and exploitation.

Access to Health Facilities

Government Health Facilities

Afghan refugees in Balochistan and KP reported that those who did not have PoR cards were now unable to use government health facilities, but could visit private clinics and hospitals. Those Afghans who had PoR cards mentioned that only their checkup with the doctor is free, for any other procedure or medicines they are charged by the hospitals. Some people during the interviews in Quetta even mentioned that doctors at government hospitals charged them for OPD, and then asked them not to come to the hospital and visit them at their private clinics. Some Afghan PoR holders also mentioned that there is reluctance in some cases to admit Afghan patients for procedures or surgeries at government hospitals, and they are told to continue their treatment at private hospitals. The refugees in KP who had PoR cards also reported that they do not have access to Sehat Cards, which if provided can prove very beneficial for them. They also noted that they would prefer private hospitals but their costs are prohibitive; in addition, they are able to get appointments and consultations based on their PoR cards, but are not allowed to access free medicines. However, those without PoR cards were simply told to access private setups, where no proof of registration is required.

There were a lot of complaints regarding the behavior of the staff at government facilities, more in Quetta in comparison to Peshawar. The community members reported being insulted and abused at the government health facilities. When asked if they thought this was due to them being Afghans, they felt that this was the case.

In Islamabad however, things were a little different. Most people camped outside the Islamabad Press Club reported they were able to afford medical treatment even in some private hospitals. During our interviews at the camp, it was revealed that one of the migrants in the camp was a medical doctor, who was able to treat others for basic medical problems. They also had some links with doctors at the Pakistan Institute of Medical Sciences (PIMS) hospital and Polyclinic Hospital, who would also agree to check the Afghan refugees for free, but informally. For major medical treatments they had to either get admitted to a government hospital informally or opt for a private medical facility in Islamabad. As the Afghans in this camp were unregistered, they are not allowed access to public health facilities, and only do so with the help of locals.

Private Hospitals

Those who do not have PoR cards have to use private clinics and hospitals, which are expensive and difficult, given that even routine visits can end up costing up to Rs. 5,000. In general, respondents had a positive view of private hospitals, as they were treated respectfully and looked after really well. However, due to steep increase in the cost of treatment and overall inflation, very few people were able to afford medical care at private hospitals, and they only go to these in case of emergencies.

Visiting Karachi for Medical Treatment

During interviews in Quetta, it was also mentioned that due to the lack of facilities in Quetta, they often travel to Karachi if they are suffering from complex ailments. The respondents mentioned that since there is a large number of Afghans already in the city, it is easy for them to stay in Karachi and get better treatment from both government and private hospitals. However, reaching Karachi by road is an issue, as they not only have to pay for the transport, but also have to pay bribes at various checkpoints to reach the city.

Women and their Health Issues

Women participants mentioned that due to high costs for medical treatment, there are a lot of routine checkups, even during pregnancy, that they are unable to afford which leads to complications further along the pregnancy.

Women mentioned that since they are no longer able to use the government health facilities, they end up going to small private clinics at the time of childbirth, which are not adequately equipped and are not manned by well-trained staff. In one of the interviews in Kuchlak, women reported that good medical facilities were available in the city, but their husbands or men of their household were unable, and in some cases unwilling to spend so much money for better treatment in the city. Very few women reported having had routine checkups during pregnancy.

One of the major issues in Balochistan is the distance and time taken to reach good hospitals in the province. A woman in Kuchlak, Quetta reported that she went into labor at 10 pm and her family could not find any affordable transport to Quetta. They were asked to pay Rs 10,000 for the trip by a private transporter, which they could not afford. By the time they found affordable transport, and reached the hospital after a one-hour drive, her child had died, and she then she had to undergo emergency surgery to manage the complications. The family were then forced to take loans and sell their

livestock to settle the hospital bills.

Transportation and other Costs

Another problem that was highlighted, in particular in Balochistan, was the cost of transportation to and from the medical facility. The respondents mentioned that they on average have to spend Rs. 500 to 1,000 on transport to reach the doctor or specialized health facilities in the first place. They mentioned that after transportation if they had to pay Rs. 1,500 to 2,000 fee to the doctor, then one round trip ends up costing them around Rs. 4,000, which they are unable to afford. While travelling to the hospitals, in Quetta in particular, they mentioned being stopped at various check-posts and they also end up paying money to the law enforcement agencies, which further adds to their costs.

Immunization and Covid-19 Vaccines

The respondents mentioned that their children were being vaccinated by the government, and lady health workers (LHWs) visit their localities to administer the relevant vaccines to their children. Even the children of newcomers are also being covered under the immunization program, and no documents are needed by the parents to get their children vaccinated. Others reported that in case there are no visits by LHWs in their areas, they can visit the nearby government health facilities to get their children vaccinated, and normally they do not face any problems during the process. The communities also reported that their children were being given polio drops and teams regularly visit their areas to administer these.

When asked about Covid-19 vaccines, they reported that those Afghans who do not have PoR cards are not being administered Covid-19 vaccine by the government. This leaves a large number of people in different localities vulnerable to the virus.

VALVAR AND AFGHAN REFUGEES

Members of community who were interviewed in Quetta were also asked about their expenses on medical treatments in the year and how they financed it without access to government hospitals and other facilities. In one of the FGDs for females in Quetta, women mentioned that if they are short of money, they sell their household goods, take loans and if they have no way to access any more money, they sell their young daughters, which is called “Valvar” by the community. In Valvar, they agree to marry their young daughter off to someone, for a particular sum of money which is to be paid to the bride’s family. In many cases once the girl leaves the house of her parents, the parents are no longer able to keep a track of her, which opens up the child to abuse and violence.

5. Conclusion

As the chapters above show, the circumstances of Afghans in Pakistan are complex. Often, when commentators study issues regarding the Afghanistan-Pakistan relationship, the focus tends to be on politics, economy, and terrorism. In recent years, with the return of the Taliban in Afghanistan, questions about a regional approach to bringing peace in the country and the changing nature of Pakistani politics become further concerns. While these are essential aspects of the last two decades, the extensive focus on them takes the attention away from arguably the most pressing and everyday issue facing millions of people: the daily lives of migrants and refugees.

As the chapters above have shown, millions of Afghans have stayed for a number of years in Pakistan. Beyond politics, there has been a requirement to manage – logistically as well as socially – the affairs of minorities. Together with the support of some international actors, including the continued leadership of the UNHCR, the Pakistani state has over time worked on the registration, health, and education needs of Afghans living in the country. And these are complex areas requiring the active roles of multiple departments and regions.

One of the primary areas where Pakistan, and UNHCR – began work early on was the development of refugee villages. Over time, these are no longer the primary sites for refugee and migrant management. A second important aspect in this regard has been the registration and documentation of Afghans through institutions such as the Proof of Registration cards and Afghan Citizen cards (ACCs). Finally, policies have been designed for the provision of health and education services. In addition to these regular aspects of the management of Afghan affairs in Pakistan, there are questions regarding access to legal support, medical visas, and a range of other services for which the state requires regular support and comprehensive policy making. In the different chapters in this report, an attempt has been made to highlight these complex but important issues. The evolving situation in Afghanistan means that these questions need to be regularly revisited.


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