

Case Studies Series

**AFGHANS IN KARACHI:  
Migration, Settlement and  
Social Networks**

**Collective for Social Science Research**

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## About the Collective for Social Science Research

The Collective for Social Science Research is a private sector organisation based in Karachi, engaged in multi-disciplinary social science research on development-related issues. Topics of ongoing and recent work include migration, urban governance, labour, gender, political economy, and rural poverty. This report has been prepared by a team at the Collective who consisted of (in alphabetical surname order) Azmat Ali Budhani, Haris Gazdar, Ayesha Khan, Irfan Khan, Sumaira Khan, Hussain Bux Mallah, and Rashid Memon, who were all involved in drafting parts of the report. The main members of the fieldwork team were Azmat Ali Budhani, Hidayatullah Khan, Sumaira Khan, Zeenat Khan, Hussain Bux Mallah, and Mohammad Naseem. Irfan Khan assisted with the collection of secondary resource material, analysis of qualitative data, and editorial work on the draft report.

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

The Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit (AREU) is an independent research organisation that conducts and facilitates action-oriented research and learning that informs and influences policy and practice. AREU also actively promotes a culture of research and learning by strengthening analytical capacity in Afghanistan and by creating opportunities for analysis and debate. Fundamental to AREU's vision is that its work should improve Afghan lives. AREU was established by the assistance community working in Afghanistan and has a board of directors with representation from donors, UN and multilateral organisations agencies and non-governmental organisations (NGOs).

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## 1. Introduction

Cross-border migration between Afghanistan and Pakistan has a long and varied history. The prevalence of political crisis and armed conflict in Afghanistan since the late 1970s resulted in the framing of cross-border migration quite largely in terms of displacement and refugee movements. Changes in the political and military situation inside Afghanistan in the last three years have also resulted in policy changes with reference to people of Afghan origin in neighbouring countries. A better understanding of the qualitative aspects of the social and economic life of Afghan migrants is critical, however, for the formulation of realistic and forward-looking policies.

This report provides a case study of people of Afghan origin residing in Karachi. Its aim is to inform the current policy debate and thinking concerning migration and mobility between Afghanistan and neighbouring states.<sup>1</sup> The issues examined here include questions concerning conditions of migration, livelihood strategies, connections with Afghanistan, and linkages with local communities in Karachi.

The case study is based on fieldwork in a number of localities in the Karachi metropolitan area. The city and its surrounding areas were amalgamated into a single “city district” under the Devolution Plan of the Government of Pakistan in 2001. At the outset, the study treated the entire area covered by the city district – as well as some suburbs beyond – as one site. A number of sub-sites were then identified as areas with a high concentration of people of Afghan origin.

The report is divided into six substantive sections. This section describes the overall context – both in terms of national policy as well as the specific backdrop of the city of Karachi – within which the people of Afghan origin are situated. The methodology of the case study is provided in Section 2, as well as detailed community profiles of four specific localities with high concentrations of Afghan migrants. Thematic analysis of the fieldwork results are reported in Sections 3 and 4. These results fall under a number of themes including: migration, living conditions, livelihood strategies, access to social services, security and vulnerability, links with Afghanistan, repatriation, and gender. Section 5 provides an analysis of social networks of various types that are active and influence the living conditions, identities, and attitudes of people of Afghan origin in Karachi. The main conclusions of the case study are offered in Section 6.

The immediate context of the present study is informed by two salient sets of conditions: first, the time, and specifically the change in policy towards people of Afghan origin in neighbouring countries dating from late 2001; and second, the space, namely the city of Karachi and the broader conditions of migration, growth, politics and infrastructure in the city.

### 1.1 Policy change

National policy towards migration from Afghanistan and people of Afghan origin resident in Pakistan has been through a number of historical phases. From a position of relative openness and facilitation of migration and refugee movements from Afghanistan (from the late 1970s till around 1988), official policy went

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<sup>1</sup> This case study is part of a larger, long-term research project being undertaken by AREU, which is examining transnational networks and migration in Afghanistan, Pakistan and Iran. AREU contracted with the Karachi-based Collective for Social Science Research to carry out fieldwork in Pakistan, of which this report represents one site. Subsequent fieldwork in Pakistan will be undertaken in Quetta and Peshawar.

through a period of openness without facilitation (from around 1988 till 2001), to a posture of regulation and repatriation from 2001 onwards.

It is interesting to note that a shift towards regulation was already in evidence before the change in the political and military situation inside Afghanistan. In August 2001 the Government of Pakistan established the National Aliens' Registration Agency (NARA) under the Ministry of Interior.<sup>2</sup> NARA was a sister organisation of the National Database Registration Authority (NADRA), which was mandated to issue new computerised national identity cards (CNICs) to Pakistani citizens. NARA, in turn, was charged with registering non-citizen residents with the view of regulating those considered to be irregular or illegal migrants. While NARA was supposed to be responsible for all irregular migrants in Pakistan, its operations have remained restricted, so far, to the city of Karachi.

NARA's initial mandate included people of Afghan origin, many of whom did, indeed, register with the agency when it first started its work. NARA estimated that there were around four to five hundred thousand irregular migrants from Afghanistan residing in Karachi. It is not clear if these estimates are based upon a systematic survey, or if they represent guesswork. During the few weeks when NARA was responsible for registering Afghan irregular migrants, around 8,000 people came forward and were registered.

After the US-led war in Afghanistan and the overthrow of the Taliban government, however, government policy changed again, and NARA's domain of responsibility was restricted to non-Afghan foreign nationals. A new organisation called the Afghan Refugees Repatriation Cell (ARRC), set up under the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), was made responsible for dealing with people of Afghan origin in Karachi. ARRC has a main office as well as field offices in Karachi. This organisation registers people of Afghan origin for voluntary repatriation, and facilitates the process of repatriation by providing transport facilities at designated collection and transit points. According to official figures, 474,162 people opted for voluntary repatriation from Sindh Province (of which Karachi is part) between March 2002 and October 2004.<sup>3</sup>

It is important to state the implications for the change of policy for conditions of fieldwork among Afghan communities in Karachi. Although the official policy of the Pakistan government and international agencies (like ARRC) is that of voluntary repatriation, many people of Afghan origin feel vulnerable to the prospect of forced or involuntary repatriation. These fears and apprehensions are responsible for suspicion among Afghan migrants of official agencies and even non-governmental researchers. Many of the Afghans have acquired Pakistani identity documents, and claim to be migrants of long standing, or indeed, natives of Pakistan.

### **The received view: migration and repatriation**

An important objective of the case study is to provide insights into the appropriateness, relevance, and effectiveness of the current policy posture towards people of Afghan origin in Pakistan. What are the assumptions – explicit or implicit – about the conditions of migration, settlement, linkages, and aspirations of Afghan migrants behind the policy of registration and voluntary repatriation? To what extent are these assumptions valid?

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<sup>2</sup> National Alien Registration Authority's Website.

<sup>3</sup> UNHCR. 2004. *Operational Information Monthly Summary Report, March 200 -October 2004*. Kabul: UNHCR.

At one level the assumptions required for the current policy posture are simple enough. It can be argued that people of Afghan origin residing in Pakistan are irregular migrants – as was, indeed, explicitly understood by NARA before the change of regime in Afghanistan. They are “irregular” in the sense that the conditions under which they were permitted by the Pakistan government to enter and stay in Pakistan no longer apply. Even this rather legalistic approach, however, allows for two possible policy options – regulation and regularisation – both of which have been considered by the government at various stages.

Before the US-led military offensive and the fall of the Taliban government in Afghanistan, Pakistan government’s policy was moving in the direction of “regularisation”. NARA was to register Afghan migrants with the view of providing them with some legal cover. This was partly in light of the fact that the earlier “refugee” status granted to migrants who had arrived during the period of the Soviet military intervention was no longer viable politically, legally or economically. In principle, registration with NARA would have afforded some legal protection to people of Afghan origin to live and work in Pakistan.

After the fall of the Taliban government the policy changed sharply from “regularisation” to “regulation”. All people of Afghan origin were to be registered now, with the view, eventually, of repatriating them back to Afghanistan. Repatriation was to be voluntary, of course, but it was also clear that the option of “regularisation” was closed at least for the time being.

Policymaking with respect to Afghan migrants is not, obviously, motivated solely by narrow legalistic considerations of irregular residence. Concerns such as welfare, social development, political stability and economic growth are also important. It is necessary, therefore, to probe the implicit assumptions about these other aspects of the migration experience. The stress on registration and repatriation suggests that people of Afghan origin continue to be viewed, primarily, as refugees who were displaced through direct effects of war, and that the end of active hostilities might be sufficient inducement for a homeward return. This understanding of the migration experience lays great stress on severe and widespread, from the late 1970s onwards, armed conflict as not only the direct cause of migration, but also of continued residence in Pakistan. The removal or reduction in the main cause of migration ought, therefore, to resolve the “problem” of the presence of large numbers of people of Afghan origin in neighbouring countries.

While the conflict–refugee view might be appropriate for understanding the immediate causes of displacement, it does not necessarily provide a good vantage point on future policy options. The conflict–refugee view tends to de-emphasise other aspects of the migration experience. Some observations are salient in this regard, and were probed in the fieldwork conducted for the present study.

First, population movements between the neighbouring countries did not originate with the war and political crises in the late 1970s. In fact there was an older history to migration between Afghanistan and Pakistan. The outlook on people of Afghan origin in Pakistan needs to recognise migration as an ongoing process – even if war and political crises dramatically altered the scale and qualitative features of cross-border movements.

Second, war and political crises are likely to have affected Afghan people differently depending on their region, class, social position, gender, age, cultural identity and political affiliation. The migration experiences are also likely to have been highly heterogeneous. The conflict–refugee view tends to simplify what is often a complex situation.

Third, the migration and repatriation decisions of individuals and families are likely to be conditioned by the wider social linkages in Afghanistan as well as in Pakistan. The conflict–refugee view appears to lay great stress on individual or family agency. Moreover, migration is likely to be a continuous and two-way process rather than a one-off and unidirectional event. Social linkages established through long periods of settlement are likely to be regarded by migrants as instruments for lowering risk and uncertainty and requiring continuous investment and maintenance.

The present study provides an opportunity for a more nuanced view of the migration experience of people of Afghan origin, and therefore, for more realistic and welfare-oriented policy discussion.

## 1.2 City context

The city of Karachi is quantitatively and qualitatively distinct from many of the other locations to which migrants from Afghanistan went in Pakistan. Karachi is the country’s largest metropolis, with an estimated population of over 12 million. It is the industrial and commercial hub of the national economy. Karachi is also, historically, a city of migrants. The Afghan migrants who came here arrived in a place where a majority of the inhabitants were themselves either migrants, or first- or second-generation descendents of migrants.

### How many Afghans in Karachi?

The reported data of the population census, unfortunately, do not allow the identification (and therefore enumeration) of the people of Afghan origin. There is a section of the population census that deals with migrants, including people who arrived in Karachi from other countries. In 1998, it was reported that just over six hundred thousand residents of Karachi had arrived from outside Pakistan.<sup>4</sup> This figure does not include either people from abroad who came to Karachi after having resided elsewhere in Pakistan, or indeed, children of people who came from abroad. In principle, therefore, the census would leave out a large proportion of the population of Afghan origin.

Other estimates of the total number of people of Afghan origin in Karachi are also problematic. NARA estimates that there were some half a million people of Afghan origin in the city were based on a secondary survey<sup>5</sup> – various police stations in Karachi were asked by an official enquiry to provide their own estimates of the numbers of Afghans residing in their respective areas of jurisdiction. The fact that nearly half a million people were actually voluntarily repatriated from Sindh Province (mostly, presumably from Karachi) back to Afghanistan adds confusion to an already obscure picture. This confusion will doubtless be cleared up once results of the recently commissioned census of the Afghan population in Pakistan are known. In the meanwhile, it is prudent to work with the assumption that there are

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<sup>4</sup> Government of Pakistan. 2000. *Census Report of Pakistan 1998*. Islamabad: Population Census Organisation, Government of Pakistan.

<sup>5</sup> Shigri, A. *Report on Illegal Immigrants and Afghan Refugees in Pakistan*. Mimeo. 1998.



at least several hundred thousand, perhaps as many as half a million, people of Afghan origin currently residing in Karachi.

### Salient economic and social characteristics of Karachi as a destination

In comparison with much of the rest of Pakistan, and indeed Afghanistan, Karachi is economically well off, with a relatively sophisticated infrastructure and industrial base, a large service sector, and expansive and diversified demand for labour. In short, Karachi could offer a wide range of relatively remunerative economic opportunities to migrant workers.

While national economic statistics in Pakistan do not readily allow city-level disaggregation, it is possible to get some idea of Karachi's distinctive position by examining the data for "Urban Sindh" in comparison with the country as a whole.<sup>6</sup> Table 1 shows that the average household monthly income in urban Sindh was nearly three-fifths higher than Pakistan taken as a whole. In comparison with rural North West Frontier Province (NWFP), which might be taken as having conditions similar to some of the areas of origin of Afghan migrants, urban Sindh's average household income was some 80 percent higher. There was a sharp contrast also in the sources of income. In urban Sindh, wage and salaries accounted for over half of the total household income on average, compared with a third in Pakistan taken as a whole, and a quarter for rural NWFP. Another striking feature of the comparison is the reliance in the rural NWFP economy on remittances from within Pakistan and abroad, which accounted for around a fifth of average household income. This latter statistic is an indicator of the importance of migration as a livelihood strategy (in places similar to Afghanistan).

**Table 1: Average Household Monthly Income by Source (2001-2002)**

	Urban Sindh	Pakistan	Rural NWFP
Average monthly income (rupees)	11,116	7,167	6,334
<b>Source of income – percent</b>			
Wages and salaries	54.06	33.46	23.4
<b>Self-employment</b>			
Agriculture	2.62	22.97	20.70
Other activities	17.33	18.32	19.4
Property rental	2.30	2.84	3.8
Owner occupation	16.91	9.82	5.2
Social insurance	3.24	1.83	2.7
<b>Gifts and assistance</b>			
Gift assistance	1.70	2.69	2.8
Foreign remittances	1.58	3.12	7.5
Domestic remittances	0.16	3.97	12.6
Other source	0.10	0.96	1.9

Source: Table 19.20, Pakistan Statistical Yearbook 2004, based on Pakistan Integrated Household Survey 2001-2002

The sectoral distribution of the workforce offers another way of understanding Karachi's economic structure. Table 2 uses data from the Labour Force Survey 2003–2004 (also for urban Sindh) to generate rough estimates of the number of workers in particular sectors. The three largest sectors in urban Sindh in terms of employment were manufacturing, whole and retail trade, and community services,

<sup>6</sup> Karachi accounted for two-thirds of the entire population of urban Sindh (Census Report of Pakistan 1998).

each accounting for around one quarter of the employed workforce. If the proportions in Karachi were more or less similar to those found for urban Sindh, the employed workforce of the city would have been around 4.8 million people in 2003–2004.

Now, assuming that the Afghan population was around half a million people, and that the Afghans had similar rates of labour force participation and employment, there would have been around two hundred thousand Afghan workers in the city. Moreover, if as widely believed, Afghans were concentrated in three sectors – namely, construction, whole and retail trade, and transport<sup>7</sup> – and that their proportions in these sectors were similar to the workforce as a whole, they would account for around a tenth of the workforce in these three sectors. These calculations are, of course, highly speculative, but they do indicate that in a city of the size of Karachi, no single community is likely to entirely dominate any particular sector, even under conditions of specialisation and labour market segmentation.

**Table 2: Rough Estimate of Contribution of Afghan Workers**

	Proportion of workforce in urban Sindh	Approximate number of workers in Karachi	Rough estimate of Afghan workers in Karachi
Agriculture	3.9	186,084	
Manufacturing	25.6	1,228,158	
Electricity	0.9	43,093	
Construction	5.3	252,683	25,306
Whole, retail trade	26.4	1,266,354	126,826
Transport	10.0	477,943	47,866
Finance	3.5	167,476	
Community services	24.3	1,166,456	
Not defined	0.2	11,753	
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>4,800,000</b>	<b>200,000</b>

Source: Authors' calculations based on Labour Force Survey 2003-2004

The city is also highly diversified in terms of culture and ethnicity. According to the 1998 population census, which enquires about the mother tongue of individual residents, the largest single linguistic group in Karachi (Urdu speakers) constituted a bare numerical majority of the city's population. Around 15 percent of the population was made up of Punjabi speakers, and another 11 percent were people whose mother tongue was Pashto. While linguistic diversity was somewhat less pronounced before the main period of Afghan migration, it was still highly significant. Afghans arrived in a city that was already culturally heterogeneous, and therefore, presumably, were accustomed to the heterogeneity brought by fresh migrants. Moreover, Pashto, one of the main languages of Afghanistan, was already widely spoken in the city.

Linguistic plurality is but one aspect of Karachi's cultural and social diversity. While the vast majority of the city's population is Muslim by faith (though there are sizeable non-Muslim minorities), most of the major schools and sects of Islam – such as Bralevi Sunni, Deobandi Sunni, Isna'Ashari Shi'a, and Ismaili Shi'a – have a

<sup>7</sup> This requires the extreme assumption that Afghans were entirely excluded from jobs in manufacturing and community services, as well as all the other sectors except the three mentioned here.

significant presence here. This factor ought to be considered as being of some importance, since many of these religious affiliations have corresponding communities in Afghanistan.

The level of the social infrastructure in Karachi, including educational institutions and health facilities – while poor and under-developed by the standards of many developing countries – is nevertheless higher than in most other parts of Pakistan and much of Afghanistan. Given that public provision has been weak, and the private sector is unrestricted, Karachi offers a wide range in terms of quality and price. For those with purchasing power, a relatively sophisticated level of social services is available. For migrants from Afghanistan (as indeed from parts of Pakistan) the availability of a relatively sophisticated (albeit costly) social infrastructure is likely to be an important consideration.

Limited public sector activity and a relatively unrestrained private sector response also characterises the provision of essential urban infrastructure such as housing, water, sanitation and transport. It is estimated that around half of the population of the city resides in irregular settlements known as *katchi abadis*. The growth of *katchi abadis*, most which are located on illegally occupied state land, is closely correlated with successive waves of internal and international migration. *Katchi abadis* are thought to have lowered the cost of migration into the city.

The preponderance of informal sector provisioning – and the weakness of the formal machinery of the state – has had longer-term institutional and political implications. Informal provisioning of irregular facilities cannot take place without some level of public corruption and private enforcement. Both have been present in Karachi, and in the context of weakly present state machinery, private enforcement acquired a level of social legitimacy. Informal provisioning also requires the presence of strong social networks – often based upon kinship, ethnicity or religious sect – for the mobilisation of effective collective action. It is not altogether surprising that private enforcement and group-based identity became important factors in the political evolution of Karachi.

People of Afghan origin have been active participants – as protagonists and victims – in this political evolution. From the viewpoint of city-wide politics, the Afghans have often been portrayed as a homogeneous category, and frequently identified uniquely as Pashtun. They became conspicuous as a group in the late 1980s when it was alleged that Afghans were involved in a range of irregular and illegal activities including land-grabbing, weapons trade and dealing in narcotics and contraband. At the other end of the social spectrum, Afghans are associated in popular perceptions with poverty, backwardness, and low-wage unskilled and unpleasant labour. In fact, as this study hopes to reveal, these caricatured images do little justice to the complex and varied realities of the lives of people of Afghan origin in Karachi.

### **The received view: history and politics**

Before discussing the design and results of the fieldwork, however, it is useful to briefly recount dominant received views on people of Afghan origin in Karachi. In terms of popular perceptions, Afghan migrants began arriving in large numbers in Karachi in the 1980s. They were thought, predominantly, to be ethnic Pashtuns, who had entered Pakistan either from Balochistan or the NWFP/FATA<sup>8</sup> borders with Afghanistan. The main concentration of these arrivals was in the outskirts of the city along the main Karachi-Hyderabad highway, close to an old village called

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<sup>8</sup> Frontier and tribal areas.

Sohrab Goth. Makeshift camps and squatter settlements appeared on state-owned land.

In fact, the land around Sohrab Goth had been used by seasonal migrants from northern Pakistan and Afghanistan to set up camp during the winter months, well before political and military crises overtook Afghanistan in the late 1970s. These migrants were mostly pastoralists or semi-nomadic people who sought seasonal work in Karachi – and in other parts of the country – and then returned to their homes in the spring. The barren area around Sohrab Goth, located some 25 km from the city centre, also had a burgeoning market for imported and smuggled goods, called the *bara* market, which was run by Pashtun traders belonging to the tribal areas of northwestern Pakistan. The *bara* market was tolerated by the authorities outside the city limits, and had acquired a semi-legal status.<sup>9</sup> Sohrab Goth, therefore, was already an area where the authorities turned a blind eye to irregular land possession and semi-legal trade.

The conspicuous change in the 1980s was the fact that previously seasonal camps of semi-nomadic migrants became a perennial feature of the landscape. It was thought that refugees and migrants from Afghanistan, including many who had registered themselves in refugee camps in the north and west of Pakistan, had settled down in Sohrab Goth in order to take up economic opportunities in Karachi.

In the late 1980s ethnicity became a significant factor in the political life of Karachi. This was partly due to a long period of military government and the suppression of ideological political parties and movements. In part, however, the emergence of ethnic politics could be seen as an outcome of a weakly active state within a context of large-scale in-migration. Collective action for essential urban services had been organised around parochial communities based on kinship, ethnicity and religious sect. At the same time private enforcement in the informal sector had legitimised the use of violence by a range of non-state actors.

A major conflict erupted in the late 1980s between Afghan migrants and activists of the Mohajir Quami Movement (MQM),<sup>10</sup> a party claiming to represent the interests of the Urdu-speaking “Mohajir” community that had migrated to Karachi from India at the time of independence. The MQM, which was established in 1984, managed to gain political support in the Urdu-speaking community on the grounds that the Mohajirs had been marginalised in national politics as well in the city of Karachi by other ethnic groups. Within Karachi the MQM leadership was most concerned, at one stage, about the influence of ethnic Pashtuns in various localities and sectors of the economy. In terms of ethnic politics, Afghans and Pakistani Pashtuns were seen as one consolidated community.

Tensions between the MQM and the Pashtuns flared up in 1986 when an MQM political demonstration passing by the Sohrab Goth area came under fire. After this incident, violent clashes took place in a number of localities where Pakistani Pashtuns and Afghans lived in closed proximity to Urdu-speaking communities. Many lives were lost in the violence and there was some migration within the city as members of particular ethnic groups began to cluster around each other for mutual protection and security.

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<sup>9</sup> This market was a counterpart to similar markets located outside Peshawar, where local traders made use of the ambiguous legal status of tribal areas to conduct untaxed cross-border trade.

<sup>10</sup> Subsequently renamed “Muttahida Quami Movement”.

The explicit politicisation of the presence of Afghan migrants in Karachi led to several measures on the part of state authorities. One highly visible intervention was the dismantling of some Afghan settlements located close to the main road in Sohrab Goth in a police operation against the drug mafia which had a strong base there. This move led to the relocation of Afghan migrants to similar *katchi abadis* further away from the main road. Many Afghan families also started to take up residence in a newly constructed apartment complex nearby. The *bara* market was also evicted, though many of the traders moved into newly constructed shopping malls and plazas in the vicinity, while others established themselves in the city itself.

Although violent ethnic politics continued to dominate Karachi for a number of years after this first set of clashes, it is interesting to note that the Afghans were not conspicuous protagonists in future developments. For all intents and purposes, Afghan migrants became a distinct but accepted part of the mosaic of linguistic, cultural and ethnic communities constituting Karachi.

People of Afghan origin gained some prominence again in the political life of the city after the terrorist attacks in the United States on September 11, 2001. The Afghan communities in Karachi included individuals, groups and organisations that supported different factions inside Afghanistan. The Pakistan government responded to American requests and changed its policy vis-à-vis the Taliban government of Afghanistan from support to opposition. The Pakistan government argued that many of the mosques and *madrassas* (religious schools) in the country, particularly those serving people of Afghan origin, were centres of support for the Taliban regime. Religious-minded opponents of US-led military action in Afghanistan also started to mobilise opinion as well as military help around these mosques and *madrassas*. The heightened political and security concerns around the Afghan migrant communities quickly subsided, however, after the fall of the Taliban government. The fears of violent confrontation failed to materialise in Karachi.

### **The received view: economy and society**

It is useful to summarise the received view about the economic and social conditions of people of Afghan origin in Karachi before confronting this view with evidence from fieldwork. A number of livelihoods strategies have become associated, in popular perception, with Afghan communities in Karachi. These include low-wage unskilled manual labour in sectors such as construction, market portering, and waste collection and recycling. In addition, Afghans are thought to be involved in irregular and illegal economic activities such as cross-border smuggling, trading in small arms, and dealing in contraband substances such as opium, marijuana and heroin.

The labour market in Karachi – as elsewhere in Pakistan – tends to be highly segmented by social grouping. The fact that Afghans are associated with particular types of activities is neither atypical nor surprising. In the construction sector, for example, labour market studies have shown that various skilled and unskilled activities – such as digging, masonry and plastering, etc. – are all associated with particular ethnic and/or caste groups.

Afghan labourers are known, in particular, for the physically demanding work of manually hauling building materials around a building site, and the removal of debris. The work is generally undertaken on a lump sum basis by a team of workers. A similar physically demanding activity is the manual loading and

unloading of vehicles at the main vegetable and fruit wholesale market (Sabzi Mandi) which has recently shifted close to Sohrab Goth. This work is also thought to be a near-exclusive preserve of Afghan labourers.

Another low-wage and physically demanding activity that is associated with Afghans is the recycling of waste – mostly rag-picking – by boys aged as young as eight years. Teams of rag-pickers can be seen scouring busy commercial and industrial areas looking for discarded cloth and fabrics that are collected and taken to sorting warehouses. The work is unpleasant and potentially hazardous, since it involves the children handling material dumped into open rubbish tips.

While the above activities can all be regarded as marginalised ones in the economic sense – being among the lowest paid and most physically demanding work – it is widely presumed that other important livelihood strategies of Afghans include socially and legally marginalised activities. The *bara* market on the outskirts of Karachi was a prime example of semi-legalised trading in smuggled imports. The fact that this market operated quite openly, however, implies that state authorities were, at the very least, complicit in these activities.

It was with regard to other illegal but also socially harmful trades – in arms and contraband substances such as opium, marijuana and heroin – that Afghans were tainted as a community. These popular perceptions were instrumental in mobilising opinion against Afghan migrants during moments of ethnic conflict in the city. It is clear, of course, that even if some Afghan migrants were involved in illegal and anti-social activities, this could not have been done without the consent and support of state agencies in Pakistan. The perceived association of Afghan migrants with such activities, however, is likely to have conditioned the economic and social opportunities available to people of Afghan origin.

As mentioned in the discussion with reference to city politics above, the Afghans as a whole were generally perceived as being ethnic Pashtuns. Differences within the Afghan communities along regional, linguistic and ethnic lines came to be recognised and understood only gradually with the passage of time. It was widely presumed that Afghan migrants were closely related to Pakistani Pashtuns not only in terms of their language, but also with respect to their religious affiliation (Deobandi Sunni) and social organisation and mores. In particular, Afghans, like the Pashtuns, were regarded as having strong tribal networks and conservative attitudes with respect to patriarchy and education.

## 2. Methodology and Community Profiles

### 2.1 Study methodology

The research methodology was qualitative, based on tools selected for their appropriateness to the duration and location of the fieldwork. These qualitative research tools included:

- Community profiling
- Social mapping
- Focus group discussions
- Key informant interviews
- Informal group discussions
- Detailed interviews and short interviews
- Interactions.<sup>11</sup>

The selection of communities within Karachi for field research was based on prior information at the Collective about the ethnography of the city. After identifying which localities contained large concentrations of Afghan-origin residents, field researchers then conducted preliminary visits to the localities to determine their ethnic configuration.<sup>12</sup> Based on a combination of population size and ethnicity, three localities were selected for fieldwork: Al-Asif Square in Sohrab Goth, Metroville 1 in north Karachi, and Bilal Colony in Landhi. Data from a fourth community, Jhangabad in Gadap Town on the outskirts of the city, are also included here for analysis although these were gathered prior to this research project in the summer of 2004. Since the Collective Team was already interested in many of the issues suggested by the AREU study, the Jhangabad data fit into the analytical framework nicely.

The communities represent the kinds of Afghan migrants sought after in the research. That is, they had large portions of Afghans who had arrived in the last few waves of refugee migration, during and after the Taliban rule. The communities also represent a range of ethnic backgrounds, including Pashtun, Tajik, Uzbek and Hazara, and sampling of religious beliefs and sects within Islam. The team interviewed both men and women of different ages (see Table 3), as well as second generation migrants who were born in Pakistan but caught in a dilemma about whether to move to Afghanistan or not. In addition, the researchers conducted three interviews with staff of the government-run ARRC.

*Table 3: Types of interviews conducted in three locations in Karachi*

Type of Interview	Sohrab Goth		Metroville		Landhi		Total
	M	F	M	F	M	F	
Interaction	0	5	2	2	0	0	9
Key informant interview	1	1	1	2	1	1	7
Short interview	6	3	2	4	2	10	27
Detailed interview	4	0	5	1	6	0	16
Informal group discussion	0	1	0	1	0	1	3
Focus group discussion	2	0	1	2	0	0	5
<b>Total interviews male and female</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>67</b>

<sup>11</sup> See Appendix A for a brief description of the field research tools.

<sup>12</sup> The total list of sites covered in the initial scoping were: 1) Sohrab Goth: Al-Asif Square, Jhangabad, Qayoomabad, Mohajir Camp (Jadeed) 2) Metroville 1: Aga Khan Flats, Metroville general, Zia Colony, Baloch Goth 3) Landhi: Bilal Colony, Sherpao Colony.

## 2.2 Community profiles

The research sites represent the diversity of the Afghan migrant experience in Karachi and no one community can be said to be representative of the “Afghan migrant” experience in this vast city. The fact that these communities contrast with one another politically, ethnically and economically suggests that it will be impossible for policymakers to design a uniform policy scheme to manage Afghan migrants in the future.

Below is a comparative discussion of the four communities. They are first introduced in terms of their location and ethnic/linguistic configuration. They are then discussed with regard to the settlement types, community histories and their home ownership/security of tenure.

### 2.2.1 Al-Asif Square, Sohrab Goth

Al-Asif Square is in northeast Karachi on the left side of Super Highway in the direction of Hyderabad. All contiguous localities including Al-Asif Square are generally known by the name of the old village “Sohrab Goth” which is very close to Al-Asif Square. There is a main bus station in front of this plaza for travel to interior Sindh, Punjab, NWFP and Afghanistan.

Al-Asif Square houses an estimated 20,000 people; almost 60 percent are Afghan and the remainder from Pakistan’s provinces. In particular, among the Pashtuns the residents are from the Pakistani Akakhel tribe. Almost half of the Afghans who live in Al-Asif fled the Taliban to come to Pakistan; they include Tajiks, Pashtuns and a smaller number of Uzbek origin. A sub-ethnic group of Tajiks known as Kasabi (of a butcher caste) make up another distinct ethnic community here. The Urdu-speaking Mohajirs who moved to the area subsequently left because of their conflicts with the Pashto-speaking community. Most Afghan migrants here do not have a Pakistani ID card and are not included on the voter lists. About one quarter of them have some documents, including an ID card, passport and/or gun license.

### 2.2.2 Jhangabad, Sohrab Goth

This area is named after the jungle because it used to be covered in shrubbery and uninhabited until Afghan refugees developed it into a residential area over 15 years ago. The locality is situated on Super Highway, the main transport route out from the city of Karachi. Jhangabad consists of 300 households, all Afghan. The residents represent a mix of Afghanistan’s ethnic groups, including Pashto-speaking Yousufzai and Mughal tribes (160 households) and Persian-speaking Tajik refugees from north of Kabul and north of Mazar-i-Sharif (60 households). Many of these residents came to Jhangabad from a large refugee camp in Mianwali, Punjab, when international and Pakistani support for Afghan refugee camps dwindled in the aftermath of communist leader Najibullah’s fall in 1992 and dispersed refugees to Karachi, Quetta and Peshawar.

A minority community of ethnic Baloch Afghan refugees from the Mengal tribe settled here after leaving Mianwali refugee camp. Out of 300 who left Mianwali and came to Karachi, 15 households are in Jhangabad.

The residents obey tribal restrictions regarding with whom they can have disputes inside and outside the community. During the conflicts in Karachi between Urdu-speaking Mohajirs and Pashtuns, some of the Afghans in Jhangabad were mistaken for Pakistani Pashtuns and killed.



### 2.2.3 Aga Khan Flats, Metroville 1

The Aga Khan Flats are located in north Karachi in an area called Metroville 1. The total number of flats is 880, housing a population of approximately 30,000. Afghan refugees who are followers of the Ismaili faith occupy 330 of these flats, while the remainder are owned or rented by Ismailis who have migrated from Pakistan's northern areas. The total number of Afghan Ismailis is estimated at 10,000 at present. Afghan refugees used to make up half of the total population in the Aga Khan Flats, until they began to repatriate three years ago.

The dominant ethnic group in Metroville is Pashtun, from either side of the border. In Metroville as a whole, i.e. not including the Aga Khan Flats, there is a shared dominant Pashtun ethnicity that allows Afghans and Pakistanis to accommodate one another and work side by side. They do not, however, inter-marry across their tribal limits. Another ethnic group, the non-Ismaili Hazaras from central Afghanistan, are dispersed in small numbers in Metroville and their interaction with both Pashtuns and the residents of the Flats is limited.

But in contrast the dominant Afghan ethnicity in the Flats is Afghan Hazaras from Baghlan, Bamiyan and Kabul. Ismaili Pakistanis from Chitral, Gilgit and Swat also live in the Flats, having religion, if not ethnicity, in common with the Afghans. They do inter-marry and may even share the same flat. They refer to each other as "deeni-bhai", i.e. brothers in faith. They differ in languages, with the Afghan residents speaking Persian and Hazargi dialects, and the Pakistani migrants speaking their local languages of Gilgiti and Chitrali, Urdu and some Pashto. Persian is the language of instruction in Afghan schools here. Most Afghan men, and educated boys and girls, are also fluent in Urdu.

### 2.2.4 Bilal Colony, Landhi

Bilal Colony, with an estimated 3,000 households and population over 40,000, is in southeast Karachi and is administratively part of Union Council 2 of Landhi Town. The colony itself is an illegal settlement, or *katchi abadi*, surrounded by other similar colonies. But only Bilal Colony and one other nearby settlement, Muslimabad, are densely populated with Afghan migrants. During the last local elections there were 27,000 registered voters from Bilal Colony: 5,000 belonged to Urdu-speaking residents, 20,000 to Pashtuns from both Pakistan and Afghanistan, and less than 2,000 to a mix of other ethnicities.

The dominant language here is Pashto, followed by Shaarri, spoken by remote mountain tribes in Afghanistan's border with Pakistan's NWFP. Shaarris are akin to Pashtuns but somewhat distinct in culture and language. Only a small group of the Afghan residents are Persian speaking. Residents explain that the Pashto-speaking community failed to win local government elections because of internal conflicts among its groups, implying that the linguistic affiliation could have suggested a political alliance that was subsequently undermined by deeper divisions. These were both national and ethnic, since the Pashto-speaking community is grouped into Afghans and Pakistanis and then further into associations based on place of origin, ethnicity, religion and political affiliation. The Afghans are presumed to remain loyal to their warlords or tribal leaders in Afghanistan, and their respective political parties. Therefore the colony has a Dostum group, Karzai group, Hikmatyar group, and so on, mirroring the political landscape of Afghanistan.

The neighbourhoods in Bilal Colony are segmented according to yet another category of identification – religion. Out of a total of six mosques in the colony,

three fall under the influence of the Barelvi sect of Islam and three fall under the Deobandi sect. Whereas most Afghan Pashtuns who arrived here were originally Barelvi in orientation, a great number were converted by Pakistani Deobandi religious organisations in Karachi. Those who are Deobandi live around the Deobandi mosques and similarly Barelvi followers live near their mosques. In fact, the mosque names are used to identify the addresses of their homes. The colony has no non-Muslim or Shi'a Muslim residents.

Family, religious, linguistic and political affiliations all converge in the case of the 100 Shaarri-speaking Afghan Pashtun households that surrounded one Masjid Aqsa. These households are all linked through ties of kinship. Their clan are followers of one Hazrat Ali, a military commander in Karzai's government. He facilitated and supported the return of his followers to Afghanistan by organising jobs in the police for the men as well as land and housing. Up to 60 households have repatriated. Other Shaarri-speaking Afghans are not being offered the same encouragement to return by Hazrat Ali.

### 2.3 Types of settlements

The four sites where in-depth fieldwork was carried out for this study – Jhangabad, Al-Asif, Metroville, and Bilal Colony – broadly correspond with a wide range of living conditions in terms of housing and urban infrastructure. Two of the sites – Jhangabad and Bilal Colony – are *katchi abadis*. The other two sites – Al-Asif and Metroville – are regular developed residential areas, predominantly apartment complexes. While these four sites are not representative in a statistical sense of the population of Afghan origin in Karachi, they do correspond broadly with the range of living conditions that might be expected in the city.

Jhangabad is the least developed site in terms of physical infrastructure and the quality of housing. Formal ownership of the land is vested with the government and the residents are irregular occupants without legal title. The settlement is accessible by road, but the streets and lanes within Jhangabad are not lined or surfaced. There is no proper drainage or sewerage, and residents have to buy water from tanker operators. There are electricity connections. The quality of the housing stock is generally poor and most houses are built of non-durable material such as mud and thatch. There are no social services such as schools or health facilities within the settlement, though such facilities are available a short distance outside.

Bilal Colony, which is also formally a *katchi abadi*, is much better endowed with basic infrastructure and has considerably higher quality housing stock than Jhangabad. Apart from some parts, the colony appears to be reasonably well planned, with straight-lined streets, and covered minor drains running into an open main sewerage channel. The site has several schools, mosques and health facilities. Houses are built of concrete, and are connected to a water supply. All houses have electricity and gas connections.

The Al-Asif site consists of several blocks within a large apartment complex. Although originally designed exclusively for residential purposes, the ground floor apartments, as well as many on higher floors, have been converted to commercial or non-residential use. The Al-Asif residents have access to modern urban amenities such as water supply, drainage, electricity, gas, as well as social services such as schools and at least 20 health facilities. The apartment blocks were originally envisaged as housing for middle-class families. Their current use, however, with

overcrowding and the conversion of residential properties into commercial use, has implied that living conditions in Al-Asif correspond more with lower-middle class neighbourhoods. The market streets are paved, as are those in the Plaza blocks, although some are broken. The drainage system is out of order because these flats are constructed on a lower elevation than the main road. The cleaning system is not well managed because of the crowded markets in the Plaza and people are seen dumping their waste on mezzanine floors.

The main ethnic groups send their children to school, although Pashtuns from Kabul and Uzbeks are more reluctant to do so. Retention of girls after age ten is low, particularly among Pashtuns. This occurs despite the wide range of options in Al-Asif; although there is no government school inside Al-Asif Square there are more than 15 private schools, language and computer centres providing diploma and other degree certificates. Five schools are registered and monitored by the Ministry of Education of Afghanistan. They are bound to use Persian as the medium of instruction and are allowed to use English, Urdu, Pashto or any other language as a source language. One resident's comment was, "The rich in our community send their children to school while those who are poor cannot afford the cost of private education. Government schools are too far away from this area." The best option for the poor are *madrassas*, but it has become increasingly difficult for Afghans to gain entrance into the system because it is under scrutiny against foreign infiltration.

There are two types of housing in the Metroville survey site. Part of the survey was conducted in an apartment complex owned and managed by the Ismaili Muslim community. Other parts of Metroville have private self-contained residential houses on individual plots of land, typically three storeys high, and divided into several apartments. The Metroville neighbourhood, including both the Ismaili apartments as well as the self-contained houses, is the most developed locality among the survey sites included in this study. The Ismaili apartment blocks are well managed, and have retained their residential character. The physical infrastructure available here is of a high overall quality, and is on par with upper-middle income housing elsewhere in Karachi. The same is true, in general, of the private self-contained housing areas within Metroville.

The Aga Khan Flats have their own school in the compound, with Persian as the medium of instruction, their own *Jamiat Khana*, shops and playground. The services available to them are provided by FOCUS, an international non-governmental association affiliated with the Aga Khan Foundation that serves Ismailis around the world in need of emergency support. Focus also provides basic health facilities at discounted rates, as well as access to the Aga Khan University Hospital network of labs and clinics in the city. It even manages the water supply to the flats for basic charges. Residents were also provided with electricity and gas facilities over the last decade with the help of other charity groups. Local residents' committees look after the streets, pavements and drainage in the Flats, and maintain a high standard of hygiene.

## 2.4 Settlement and migration history

The quality of living conditions has almost no correlation with the migrants' duration of stay. The two *katchi abadis* are actually older, and house migrants with a longer history in Karachi than the two regular sites. Bilal Colony was established in the 1960s, and remains a *katchi abadi*, while Jhangabad, settled in the late 1970s and early 1980s, continues to give the impression of a makeshift camp. It is

possible, however, to discern patterns of mobility and change among people of Afghan origin in Karachi, in terms of their living conditions, security of tenure, and their socio-economic status.

Bilal Colony is one of the oldest settlements of people of Afghan origin in Karachi. The area grew from a village to an urban settlement in the 1960s when industrial growth in Karachi pulled in migrant workers from various parts of Pakistan and beyond. During the same period there were even some Afghan migrants to be found here, in search of work after a stint with the Pakistan Army. The colony sprang up on government land adjacent to an industrial zone. In the 1980s, the same area evolved into a settlement that now includes not only the factory labour but Afghan refugees as well. The changing social, ethnic and economic profile of the area reflects the manner in which so many localities in Karachi have evolved over the last 50 years, as different waves of migrants to the city have transformed its demography. A shared Pashtun ethnicity originally facilitated the migration of Afghan Pashtuns to the settlement inhabited by Pakistani Pashtuns. Today Pashtuns remain the dominant ethnic group in Bilal Colony. Over time, the initial makeshift squatter settlement in Bilal Colony gained a greater sense of permanence. Private entrepreneurs (land-grabbers according to some) played an important part in the expansion of the colony. These informal developers ensured that house plots, lanes, and streets were laid out according to a rational plan, in anticipation of the eventual supply of formal public services.

Jhangabad also had an Afghan Pashtun presence that predated the onset of war in Afghanistan because traders from the Pak-Afghan border region had established a smuggler's market on the outskirts of the city. There was also a history of semi-nomadic families from Afghanistan (and parts of Pakistan) establishing seasonal camps in this area during the winter period. With the onset of armed conflict in Afghanistan, these settlements acquired a perennial character, as large numbers of migrants settled here indefinitely. Many of the newcomers had already been through official refugee camps established in the north and west of Pakistan, and began to refer to the new settlements such as Jhangabad (and others around Sohrab Goth) also as "refugee camps".

There was some continuity between Jhangabad and other Afghan *katchi abadis* in its neighbourhood, and the pre-war Afghan/Pashtun presence in the area. The residents were a mix of the extremely poor semi-nomadic rural people, and people who had gained considerable experience in cross-border trade. Jhangabad and its neighbouring *katchi abadis* acquired the reputation for illegal activities due to their link with the *bara* market. The arrival of refugees led to the rapid expansion of Jhangabad and other *katchi abadis* in the area. Many of the refugees had already been registered in UNHCR-run refugee camps in the north and west of Pakistan, and therefore had contact with the various political factions operating in those camps and inside Afghanistan. A new dimension was, therefore, added to the Afghan settlements around Sohrab Goth.

The Sohrab Goth settlements became a focus of attention as a result of emerging political conflict within Karachi. It was alleged that the *bara* market and the adjoining migrant communities were a source of insecurity. Some of the settlements were evicted, and many of the inhabitants – Afghans as well as Pakistani Pashtuns – moved into the newly constructed Al-Asif apartment complex in the early 1980s. Some of the people who moved into Al-Asif were, obviously, from among the more prosperous of segments of the former dwellers of the *katchi abadis*.

The residents of Al-Asif represent the waves of residents and migrants that characterise Karachi's growth. The first owners or tenants of property here were Muslim and Hindu families from rural Sindh or villages around Sohrab Goth. Later, Urdu-speaking Mohajirs and Akakhel Pashtuns from NWFP purchased flats in this plaza. The apartment residents' association – or union – became an important source of local political leverage, and groups vied with one another for control over the union. During the early 1980s a follower of Gulbadin Hikmatyar's *Hezb-i-Islami* became leader of the union, and he settled incoming Afghan refugees from a nearby camp in the complex and its suburbs. Later that decade the union came under control of the Pakistani religious political party *Jamiat-e-Islami*, and by 1994 the Pashtun Akakhel tribe controlled it.

In Metroville, a main concentration of the people of Afghan origin is in apartments owned and managed by the Ismaili Muslim community of Karachi. FOCUS, an Ismaili organisation working for refugee welfare, took the lead in assisting Ismaili migrants from Afghanistan to settle here, alongside other Ismaili internal migrants from Pakistan's northern areas. Once registered with FOCUS, Afghan families were provided living quarters – usually self-contained apartments – on concessionary rates.

There were, moreover, significant numbers of Afghan families residing outside the apartment complexes in Metroville, in private self-contained houses. Many of these were also Afghan Ismailis who had been helped by FOCUS to obtain houses on rent, on account of the fact that not all migrants could be placed in community-owned apartments. There were also many others, however, who did not belong to the Ismaili community but had taken up residence in Metroville, encouraged by the existing presence of Afghan nationals in the area.

When the load of migrants and refugees increased dramatically after the rise of the Taliban, and Ismailis from central Afghanistan fled to Karachi, it was not possible for them to be settled exclusively in Ismaili housing schemes. Some families were settled in nearby localities where the dominant population was Pashtun, including Afghan and Pakistani. Tensions between the two communities became serious as each alleged the other was responsible for atrocities, and FOCUS had to accommodate some families under threat within hours at the Aga Khan Flats. As a result, some flats house two to three families together.

The contrast between the experiences of people of Afghan origin residing in the four survey sites is instructive. In all four sites there were prior social networks of various types operating before the arrival of the refugees. In Bilal Colony and the Sohrab Goth area (taking Jhangabad and Al-Asif together), there were groups of Afghans – some of them naturalised Pakistanis – who had a settled presence. Wartime refugees had a base in Karachi through kinship, and in some cases, political affiliation. In Metroville, by contrast, there was no prior Afghan base, but a strong support system operated by the Ismaili community for low-income migrants belonging to the community from outside Karachi. Further, the development of the four survey sites turns out to be closely linked to the history of migration from Afghanistan and into Karachi.

## 2.5 Home ownership and security of tenure

A useful indicator of the security and aspirations of migrants is their investment in home ownership or secured tenure. In the four survey sites covered by the present study, residents enjoyed various forms of ownership status, titles and tenure. In

the Metroville apartments, for example, the Afghan families were all tenants supported by the Ismaili community organisation FOCUS. It was the norm for more than one family to share an apartment. Apartment sharing was also common in the Al-Asif complex, where too, many of the Afghans were tenants and not owners. Flat ownership, however, was also not uncommon among Afghan families in Al-Asif. More than 20 estate agencies deal in the property business of the locality and enjoy influence with the local police and political parties. Anyone with an ID card and guarantees may buy property here through a dealer. Prices dropped during the conflicts with Urdu-speaking locals, as a result of which the locality is predominantly Afghan today.

In both Bilal Colony and Jhangabad, home ownership was relatively widespread but reflected low levels of investment and even security. Given that these two settlements were *katchi abadis*, home ownership did not necessarily mean full property rights. Although both Bilal Colony and Jhangabad were irregular settlements in the strictly legal sense, the former had acquired some degree of official acceptance, and therefore permanence. Home ownership in Bilal Colony was partly regularised, and even the informally acquired title could be bought and sold with some security. Nonetheless, residents have no legal property documents so they cannot access government housing loans, phone services, or even provide surety in court. Residents of Jhangabad were even less secure in terms of title because they were unsure to whom the land legally belonged. Here houses are not made of cement, due to the fears of residents that they may get evicted and/or forced back to Afghanistan.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Because residents have not got Pakistani identity cards and are not officially registered refugees at present, they claim they are victims of organised extortion by the police. The local police station has a checkpoint on the main road adjacent to the locality, which residents believe has been set up just to extort money from them. After sunset they police are authorised to search any pedestrian, and then they keep whatever money they find. In case an Afghan refuses to pay up, the police will file a case against him for being an illegal alien and he will have to pay a bribe to obtain his release. Police also need to be bribed to allow entry to the trucks of mud and scrap that come and go from the houses.

### 3. Thematic Issues

This section provides a thematic analysis of the qualitative data generated by the case study from the four sites described in Section 2. Cross-site and cross-community comparisons are made here in order to highlight salient patterns as well as contrasts.

The following analysis is based on 74 interviews of Afghan refugees and migrants settled in three localities in Karachi. These migrants belong to various ethnic groups, have migrated at different times due to different reasons and have had different experiences during the migratory process.

In general, four waves of migrants can be distinguished. The first wave came in 1979–1988 during the period of the Soviet military intervention and Afghan resistance to it, the second between 1988–1996 during the mujaheddin internecine fighting, the third between 1996–2001 during the Taliban’s reign and the fourth after the American invasion in 2001. It merits mention that a trickle of migrants has existed from before 1979, but these movements were limited in magnitude, and the bulk of migrants came during the four periods mentioned above.

Each wave can be differentiated on the basis of the existing and potential threats faced by migrants at that time, and informative correlates can be made between ethnicity, gender, the reasons for migration and the geographical location of their settlements in Karachi. The diversity of ethnicities and threats faced by migrants of different eras also implies an equally diverse cluster of kinship and political networks that has aided and abetted different migrants at different times.

#### 3.1 Reasons for migration

While war does at first seem to be the predominant cause of migration into Pakistan, the actual dynamics of movement are much more nuanced. And within a general category of displacement due to war, the reasons for migration can be classified into three broad categories:

- (i) Physical effects of war and the disruption of traditional livelihoods
- (ii) Political and ethnic repercussions of war
- (iii) Economic fallout of war.

This categorisation does not in any way impart mutual exclusion to any category and all three are closely interconnected. Neither does it underplay the other reasons for migration that cannot fit neatly into these classifications.

##### **Physical effects of war**

The physical effects of war were a manifestation of the actual bombing and street fighting. While the loss of relatives, neighbours or community members precipitated fear of personal physical safety, human loss combined with the destruction of assets broke the victims’ association with their traditional way of life. The latter perhaps provided the larger impetus for the actual movement of refugees, and it is difficult to disassociate the economic fallout of war with the physical effects of war. The loss of male members in general, and earning members in particular, increased the economic and social vulnerability of the people, especially women. And where no actual losses were experienced, the potential threat of such an occurrence warranted movement.

This correlation of physical effects and the economic fallout was most obvious in two field sites: Al-Asif and Bilal Colony. Both sites were home to Pashtun migrants who had predominantly migrated to Pakistan in the 1980s during the Soviet occupation.

Bilal Colony had also experienced migration waves in the 1960s and 70s, and perhaps provides a clue as to why these early migrants report physical effects of war and economic fallout as two sides of the same coin. Bilal Colony experienced migration mainly from the Jalalabad area, and the genesis of this movement can be traced to the period prior to the Soviet invasion. The earliest Afghan migrants to Bilal Colony were those who were either recruited by the Pakistan army in the early 1960s or who were sent to Karachi to work by companies, particularly construction companies based in Peshawar, i.e. those who were sure of finding work. Once these migrants settled here, their relatives followed; their stay was made permanent by the job availability in the nearby textile mills. These flows, though limited in magnitude, provided the kinship and community networks that paved the way for the much larger refugee inflows later.

Abdul-Samad, a resident of Bilal Colony, for example, fled the violence in Jalalabad in 1981. He crossed over Torkham into Peshawar, but he did not stay there for long. There were many people from his village who were settled in Bilal colony in Karachi and he came to join them.

Interestingly, however, the refugees this network helped settle were not limited to the next of kin. In fact, merely hailing from Jalalabad was enough reason to be accommodated in the community. Many people like Ahmad Mir, for example, came to Karachi for the first time in 1981 with no prior contacts in Pakistan. He also crossed over Torkham, but he did not stay in Peshawar: he knew there were people from Jalalabad who had settled in Karachi, and he came to Bilal Colony and settled down next to them. There were also others who stayed in Peshawar for a while but could not find employment. Their move to Karachi was essentially to find a job, but once here they could find residence easily in Bilal Colony.

A particular segment of the Afghan refugees also constituted people who had been living in Karachi earlier but had returned to Afghanistan prior to the war. Their entry was facilitated by their own prior experience of living in Karachi and social connections created during their stay allowed them to settle down and acquire housing.

For example, Salar Khan, resident of Bilal Colony, came to Pakistan in 1978. He had already spent two years in Pakistan, working at the Gul Ahmed textile factory in Bilal Colony but had gone back to Afghanistan to get married and settle down. In 1978, when he anticipated that the Soviets would attack Afghanistan, he re-migrated to Pakistan where he joined Gul Ahmed again. Later on, the factory administration decided they could only provide jobs for Pakistani nationals and Salar Khan was laid off because he did not have an ID card.

By that time, however, Salar Khan's extended family had already migrated to Pakistan and settled at Bilal Colony. In fact, in due time, 60 households from Salar's village had settled there. While factory jobs were not forthcoming for all of these people, there were ample avenues elsewhere and Sabzi Mandi provided a good source of employment for many people.



Syed Feroz's story, as narrated by his son, also reflects similar dynamics. Feroz arrived in Karachi in 1962 and joined the Pakistan army. He remained in service until 1978 and then went back to Afghanistan. He re-migrated to Karachi and joined Al-Karam textiles six months later and went back to Afghanistan in 1984. Finally, in 1988 when his village was bombed, he migrated permanently, this time with his family, and joined Al-Karam again.

Part of the Pashtun community at Al-Asif also has a similar history. These families, usually of rural background, had traditionally migrated into Pakistan (Karachi) in the winters when cultivation in Afghanistan was not possible. In Karachi, they would often obtain employment in the construction sector or would employ themselves in menial jobs such as garbage collection. Once the winters were over, they would go back to their fields.

With the onset of the Soviet invasion and the threat of human and asset losses due to resistance, seasonal migrants decided to stay for good. Their initial settlements consisted of makeshift housing on the fringes of Karachi, in Jhangabad. In the early 1980s, mujaheddin leaders such as Gulbadin Hikmatyar, Ahmad Shah Masood as well as the *Jamiat-e Islami* all had their offices at Al-Asif and through political and ethnic affiliation people from Jhangabad were settled at Al-Asif. These initial settlements then encouraged other Afghans who shared some common social, political or ethnic features to settle at Al-Asif. These migrants were not only coming directly from Afghanistan but also from refugee camps situated in other parts of Pakistan, such as Mianwali.

### **Religious, political and ethnic repression of war**

With the departure of the Soviets arose the issue of control over the country, and as the different political and ethnic groups warred amongst each other, violence based on ethnicity became marked during the period.

In essence, the effects of political and ethnic repression were the same as the jihad against the Soviets: physical and economic. The difference was that particular segments of the society faced the brunt rather than the larger Afghan community, and people were targeted on the basis of ethnicity and political affiliation. This spree of ethnic humiliation also included sexual abuse and many women were raped.

Because politics was closely linked with ethnicity, violence and displacement rose dramatically. With the arrival of the Taliban, the additional feature of religion was also discriminated against. The ethnic implication was that barring few exceptions there seems to be a positive correlation between being Pashtun and following the Taliban's version of Islam.

This said, one would have expected all major ethnicities to experience some discrimination, at least before the Taliban. Fieldwork, however, does not bear this out and none of the Pashtuns interviewed reported ethnic tensions as a cause of migration while a good number of Tajiks, Uzbeks and particularly the Hazaras did. This is partly due to the fact that a good number of the Pashtuns interviewed came before the mujaheddin. Interestingly, while Pashtuns do not cite ethnic discrimination as a cause of migration, many report the same as an alibi for not wanting to return to Afghanistan.

While the manifestations of this war were in many ways similar to those during the Soviet jihad, accounts of migrants suggest that the tools of repression diversified

further to include loot and plunder, forceful evacuation of people from their houses, sexual humiliation of women, interrogation and jail. During the Taliban period the list went further to include forced labour as well. While these ideas came out clearly during discussions with the community, proper evidence was available only for the Taliban period, and was forthcoming mainly from the Hazara communities.

Fehmida, originally a Hazara woman from Kabul and a resident of Lasbela, came specifically to Metroville to meet the research team and narrate her story of religious and gender-related victimisation during the Taliban reign. The fear inspired in her by this regime far superseded the loss of her father and brother during the mujaheddin era. This fear mainly emanated from the breakdown of community and neighbourhood-based social networks that occurred once the Afghan conflict took an ethnic turn. Life became unbearable when one's own neighbours could not be trusted. The situation was in a sense exacerbated by the Taliban policy to de-militarise Afghanistan. Since at places, this de-militarisation was also accompanied by looting and at times rape, the environment of paranoia this created was unmatched, particularly for women, as noted by one respondent:

*People would spy and tell them about those who had ammunition in the house...We were not thrown out; we ran away fearing for our lives.*

It merits mention that this breakdown of communities started during the mujaheddin times, but the fieldwork unfortunately does not include many people who came here during this time and so cannot shed much light on this. There is, however, ample secondary evidence that suggests this was the case.<sup>14</sup>

According to some respondents, the Taliban were also very strict with young non-Pashtun men who were trying to escape Afghanistan. Many were taken prisoner, and released on the payment of *tawan* or after having rendered labour services. While this was considered a positive departure from the earlier practice of forced recruitment in the armies of different factions, it was still disruptive.

Karim and his family, for example, are Hazara Ismailis from Baghlan who fell into Taliban hands when Pul-e Khumri fell. There were no militiamen in the family; all of them were civilians but could nevertheless be taken as prisoners of war under Taliban law. The Taliban had separate jails (*zندان*) for men and women, and the entire family was kept in these until they paid around Rs 2000 [US\$35] per person.

While Karim was at least not forced to work during his imprisonment, Ali Muhammad, an ex-mujahid, had to do manual labour for a year. Ali Muhammad was kept in the *zندان* for interrogation due to his links with the mujaheddin, and was then released. It is not clear whether he had to pay *tawan* as well. Interestingly, Ali Muhammad reported that he was paid regularly for his work.

The practice of degrading a particular ethnic group through sexual humiliation of their women also continued during the Taliban period:

*Stories of Hazara females being raped and physically victimised by the Taliban were very unnerving. So scared was I that whenever the Taliban raided my house I would rub coal on my face to look like an old woman.*

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<sup>14</sup> See for example, Khan, A. "Afghan Refugee Women's Experience of Conflict and Disintegration." *Meridians*. Fall 2002. 3(3) and Marsden, P. 2001. *Afghanistan: Minorities, Conflict and the Search for Peace*. London: Minority Rights Group.

The Hazaras of Bamiyan, Baghlan and Balkh were badly hit by the Taliban. Within this group, those from Balkh underwent particularly difficult times. These had fled after the fall of Mazar-i-Sharif in 1998.

### **Economic fallout of war**

While many refugees migrated due to the physical and political/ethnic effects of war, these movements have occurred within the context of a long-running tradition of economic migration. And while the prevalent economic conditions were partly fallout of the war, certain environmental and demographic changes, independent of the violence, were also responsible for economic migration.

It is also important to note the weakening condition of the state within which these economic, environmental and demographic changes were occurring. Within the context of the weakened state which amplified the effect of all income shocks, the predominant driving force for economic migrants was drought. Agriculture has traditionally been the major source of employment in Afghanistan, and any productivity shocks would have far ranging repercussions. The drought in Afghanistan started in the mid-1990s, and continued through 2004. This implies that migration due to drought would have taken place post-1995. Many respondents who had come earlier have also reported unprofitable agriculture without specifying details. One can only infer from the general conditions that prevailed in Afghanistan at that time that the impact of war on agriculture was through the disturbance of transportation networks and the disruption of trade. The inaccessibility to inputs and output markets would then have driven down productivity.

The reasons some communities provide for “not returning” may also be interpreted in order to understand the agricultural sector in the 1980s and 90s. Many communities belonging to the northern provinces of Badakhshan, Kunduz and Balkh, for example, report that agriculture is only possible during summer months. Some of these migrants used to migrate to Pakistan during the winters before the war; therefore, one may safely assume that this seasonality would also have contributed to the migrant stream.

Besides the agricultural sector, the limited industrial and services sectors were also deeply affected. The weakening of the state, in particular its revenue collection ability, paired with the immediate necessity of military expenditure, implied that employees of the public sector such as teachers and police officers could no longer be paid. Quite a few respondents reported not having been paid for up to six months before they finally quit and left for Pakistan. The fate of the private sector was also similar, and some factory workers were reported to have been laid off as factories closed down.

These issues were compounded by rising inflation. Field evidence relates to inflation during the Taliban period only when one informant from Metroville, Murad Khan reported that “one stale meal cost Rs 1000 [US\$18]”. Since structurally the economy did not change in the 1990s, it is logical that inflation had been a persistent problem from before the Taliban came into power. Combined with the general reduction in the earnings capability of many, as reported by many respondents, this added to the list of economic problems of the Afghan community.

A severe blow came from the Taliban’s ban on women to seek employment. Although the impact of this policy was restricted geographically to Kabul, the livelihoods of a large number of female-headed households, particularly those of

widows, were drastically jeopardised. Sabira Bibi was one such widow. After the death of her husband and brothers, she used to work in Kabul. When the Taliban came to power, they banned her from working but allowed her to draw on a pension scheme for widows. The local officials, however, blocked payment in an attempt to pressurise her to re-marry. Sabira Bibi opted to migrate to Pakistan rather than marry.<sup>15</sup>

Interestingly, this gender bias also had ethnic ramifications. This edict was most applicable to Kabul's working women, the majority of who were non-Pashtun. Almost all women that reported Taliban-induced unemployment as cause of migration were Hazara Ismaili, while some were Tajik. Uzbek women often reported a patriarchal family set up that did not encourage female employment.

Finally, some respondents reported that many people who had neither the means nor the connections to move used the services of human traffickers to migrate (see Box 1).

#### **Box 1: Human trafficking**

Karachi is believed to be a hub for human trafficking towards Gulf and western countries. Recently, dozens of people are coming from Badakhshan, Kunduz and northern regions of Afghanistan every day to enter Iran. Al-Asif Square, Banaras and Lee Market are the main markets for transit points developed by human traffickers.

The traffickers have tripartite networks among Afghanistan, Pakistan and Iran. There are human smugglers groups in Afghanistan who usually visit downtrodden areas to motivate people to work in Iran. People who are living hand-to-mouth and are ready to take risk usually sell property such as goats, mortgage lands or get loans to pay their travelling expenses to trafficking agents. The agent group in Karachi arranges transport for arranged groups of workers in Kabul. Those buses or vans are using the route from Kabul to Torkham to Landhi Kotal to Peshawar and Sukkur to Karachi. The Kandahar, Spin Boldak to Chaman Quetta route is more far-reaching and expensive. From the Torkham border each person has to pay the border police 10 to 20 rupees [US\$0.20–0.35] and from Spin Boldak about Rs 1,000 [US\$18] per person.

There are three Afghan restaurants and tea shops in Al-Asif Square where Afghan workers in transit wait. People with traditional thick dresses, shoulder bags, and long torn shoes are typically busy counting and collecting money. Those groups consisting of more youngsters, some minors and older people wait for another destination. Nimroz and Herat borders are in use but now those entering points are hazardous or more expensive for human traffickers, therefore third party traffickers in Makkran Balochistan have settled "mandai" sale purchase markets in Bullo and Panjgoor. This party sells groups of workers at the rate of 2 to 2½ lacs Iranian tomans per person to another party of human smugglers in Iran, who are responsible for border crossing as well as finding work opportunities for trafficked workers.

Workers who intend to go Iran need Rs 3,000 [US\$54] to reach at Karachi and Rs 15,000 [US\$268] from Karachi to their final destination Iran. Among them some who are interested to enter in Iran but cannot afford Rs 15,000 usually stay in Karachi for some months to save the required amount to go to Iran. Afghan workers who are determined to go Iran do not prefer to stay in Karachi for a long time because of constraints in getting work and low wages. The workers who are being trafficked were relaxed, despite knowing that they may be killed or abducted by the border army or other trafficking groups for bonded labour. It is because wages in Iran are six times higher than in Pakistan that they can easily return the bond amount to traffickers and send earnings home.

<sup>15</sup> While the fieldwork yielded only a few cases, the experiences of such women have been documented in detail by Khan, 2002, and Shah, N. *The War Against Women*. Newslines, April 1998.

## 3.2 Karachi as destination and transit

The choice of Karachi as a destination has predominantly been determined by economic opportunity and existence of networks, whether ethnic, religious or kinship.

The cases of those Afghan communities that had prior exposure to Karachi have already been discussed. These have mainly been the Pashtun and the Shaarri communities of Jalalabad. Ethnic Uzbeks and Tajiks who were seasonal migrants to Karachi prior to the Soviet invasion have also been discussed. These migrants really did not need the support of any kinship networks in Karachi and some merely took on the jobs they had left behind earlier. At times, as in the case of Bilal Colony, the employers have encouraged these communities to construct *katchi abadis* near the employment site. Presumably, these employers have also helped them to receive utilities such as combustion gas and electricity through their own linkages with the concerned departments.

Once this initial stream of migrants was settled, their extended families followed suit. Salar Khan, for example, a Shaarri Afghan settled in Bilal Colony, invited his three brothers to join him some time after he had migrated. In due time, 60 households from his village joined Bilal Colony.

At a higher level, the state itself has also been party to encouraging Afghan communities to settle in Karachi. A respondent from Metroville, a Pashtun Afghan who entered Pakistan during the 1980s, explained that General Zia-ul-Haq had invited Afghans to Pakistan. All government institutions were bound to facilitate all Afghan Muhajirs and these were particularly facilitated in Karachi. He noted that whereas Afghans were restricted within camps in Punjab, they were free to seek employment in Karachi. In fact, the state was very much party to the smuggling business Afghans, particularly of Pashtun origin, helped to initiate. These smugglers were provided government warehouses in the city centre to store smuggled material. The government was also lenient towards the issue of the national identity cards to these migrants.

Such ideas are not documented in any literature, so one may suspect the authenticity of such claims. However, these are feelings that are shared by a sizeable community of Afghans as well as local people. And while the actual extent of state involvement in settling Afghans in Karachi may not be known, the state through its lax policy of housing schemes in Karachi and relaxation in policing illegal trade in heroin and drugs did clearly play a role.

The state was also party to settling Afghans in Karachi through their tolerance of the direct presence of Afghan political parties in Karachi. The parties of Gulbadin Hikmatyar and Ahmad Shah Masood, for example, maintained offices at Al-Asif, and were instrumental in settling Pashtuns, Uzbeks and Tajiks in those areas. Once a critical mass of communities was settled, others naturally followed through kinship and ethnic links.

It is worth mentioning that Afghans settled by Hikmatyar and Masood did not necessarily come directly to Karachi. In fact, the administration of refugee camps in Punjab and NWFP was such that all incoming refugees had to register through some political party. This went on irrespective of whether refugees had any political affiliation whatsoever. Political links forged during their stay in the camps

however provided invaluable when refugees wanted to resettle elsewhere, in this case Karachi.<sup>16</sup>

Many Afghans also moved to Karachi due to economic motives, without any networks in Karachi. Hamida Gul, who lives in Bilal Colony, generalises the experience. She and her husband came to the Haripur camp in 1990 where they lived for some time. The camp facilities provided for the bare minimum, and her husband thought they could live a better life if he found a job. He thought Karachi would be a good place to start searching even though they did not have any relatives here. He finally found a job in Gul-Ahmad textile mill and settled in Bilal Colony.

While some refugees left for Karachi while the camps were still functioning, some left when camp assistance dried up in the mid-1990s. In fact, Bilal Colony was entirely composed of Afghans from Jalalabad who had migrated either because of prior links with Karachi, or because once camp assistance dried up they knew they could go join the Jalalabad community there. It must, however, be born in mind that once rations dried up, the main concern for these people was employment. Many areas where camps were located – for example, Haripur, Mianwali and Peshawar – are areas that are themselves migrant sending regions, especially to Karachi. The perception that Karachi is the city of opportunities therefore must have been clear. The presence of a community one could link to then merely facilitated the movement.

Another level of networking was that based on religion. There is only one example of such a network but it is sizeable and worthy of mention. FOCUS has been instrumental in locating Hazara Ismailis in Karachi. This community therefore did not need to go through the regular UNHCR camps. Groups of migrants were formed in Kabul, who would then move in the shape of a caravan to Peshawar and then directly to Karachi. FOCUS itself chose Karachi to settle these people because of a significant Ismaili community present in the city. Furthermore, FOCUS was already involved in settling Ismailis from the northern parts of the country, such as Hunza, in Karachi. The Hazara Ismailis therefore just needed to be accommodated in the same framework.

FOCUS has also enabled the Hazara Ismaili community to use Karachi as a transit point for onward resettlement in the west, particularly Canada. Other communities have also used Karachi as a transit point, but mainly to go to Iran either on their own or through human trafficking agents (see Box 1), as explained earlier.

### 3.3 Livelihood strategies

The survey revealed a wide range of livelihood strategies on the part of people of Afghan origin in Karachi. These ranged from socially marginalised activities such as begging and scavenging, to unskilled manual labour, skilled blue-collar work, owning and managing businesses of different scale, and professional employment such as teaching. This range bears close correspondence to the complexity of economic life in the city in general. In contrast to popular perceptions about being limited to economically and socially marginalised sectors, the Karachi Afghans turn out not to be very different in their livelihood strategies from any other population group. The range of livelihood strategies found in the survey sites is documented

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<sup>16</sup> Khattak, S. *Refugee Policy Politics: Afghans in Pakistan*. Paper presented at Conference of Scholars and Other Professionals Working on Refugees and Displaced Persons in South Asia, Rajendrapur, Bangladesh. February 9-11, 1998.

here. The implications of being foreign nationals for labour market participation are also examined.

There were interesting contrasts between the survey sites in the distribution of livelihood strategies. Some activities, such as factory labour and small-scale self-employment, were present in all the survey sites. Bilal Colony in Landhi had actually emerged as an outgrowth of the neighbouring industrial area. There was also a large concentration of factory workers, however, in the Metroville apartments. It was suggested that the Afghan workers from Metroville were mostly employed in Ismaili-owned factories in the city. Al-Asif appeared to have some, but fewer factory workers.

The differences between the survey sites were quite instructive. The Afghan community in the Metroville apartments appeared to be relatively homogeneous in economic terms. The core economic activity appeared to be factory work. In addition there were people involved in self-employment activities such as tailoring and running small shops. The residents of Bilal Colony had access to less remunerative activities than their counterparts in Metroville, but here too, the economic profile was relatively homogeneous. Besides factory workers, Bilal Colony had a concentration of unskilled labourers working in the main fruit and vegetable wholesale market (Sabzi Mandi). Al-Asif, on the other hand, housed families relying on marginalised activities – such as scavenging – as well as people who were traders, owned properties as well as businesses such as restaurants, and employed several workers. In this regard Al-Asif was quite distinct from the other two sites.

### **Marginalised activities**

There were several cases of people being involved in marginalised activities in Sohrab Goth and Bilal Colony, but not in Metroville. The most conspicuous among these were two cases of women from the Sohrab Goth *katchi abadis* who came to Al-Asif to beg for alms. One of them started begging following her husband's inability to work due to ill health. The other is the main adult in her family, and her young son supplements her income with casual wage labour.

There were many more cases of male children working in waste recycling activities in both Sohrab Goth and Bilal Colony. In Bilal Colony, it was found that many children work as scrap metal collectors for dealers who own warehouses. The children were from Persian-speaking Tajik families, whereas the dealers were mostly Pakistan Pashtuns. In Jhangabad as well as Al-Asif in Sohrab Goth, children were found to be involved in collecting plastic and fabric waste for recycling.

The situation of the child workers in the waste-recycling sector was explained by MB, a 13-year-old Shaarri boy who worked in this sector in Bilal Colony:

*There are 20 Kabar Khana [junkyards] in Bilal Colony. Swati Pashtuns are owners of all these junkyards. About 100 Afghan boys are working for them. The junkyard owner known as the hawaldar pays an advance to the boys to go and procure scrap metal and stale bread. The boys are obliged to sell what they acquire to the same hawaldar as they have taken a loan from him. They go in groups to different neighbourhoods scavenging for waste material. It is hard to make more than 70 rupees [US\$1.25] a day from this work.*

It is worth noting that young Afghan boys are associated with collecting waste material regardless of the type of material. In Bilal Colony the main types of waste

processed are scrap metal and stale bread. Stale bread is collected from households and is converted into animal feed. Plastics and fabrics are recycled in Jhangabad and other Sohrab Goth *katchi abadis*. The fact that Afghan children (and not others) are involved in different aspects of the waste disposal trade – in activities that might be regarded as “dirty” – suggests that: (a) Afghans are particularly poor and therefore willing to take part in work that might otherwise be considered socially repugnant, and (b) many Afghan families in Karachi see little economic value in schooling.

Both considerations have some merit. It was reported that poor Afghans (particularly Persian speakers) were willing to undertake activities normally avoided by other workers (or normally undertaken by people considered to be at the bottom of the Pakistani social hierarchy) for want of alternatives. One common explanation for child work in the recycling trade was this was not physically demanding enough to prevent very young boys from participating, and that as soon as a boy was physically able, he was put to more strenuous manual labour.

### **Participation in labour markets**

Like other workers in Karachi, workers of Afghan origin faced a segmented labour market. At the lower end of the spectrum, there was relatively open access to the casual labour market – for example, around Sabzi Mandi and petty vending. Formal sector jobs, however, were highly restricted and there had been a decline in such opportunities over time.

Afghan workers from Bilal Colony had suffered a major setback some years ago, when their previous employers in textile factories stopped offering them jobs on the pretext that they did not possess Pakistani National Identity Cards (NICs). This was a significant development because workers of Afghan origin had actually been working in these factories since the 1960s. The arrival of new refugees and migrants during the war period led to greater awareness on the part of the Pakistan employers about the legal status of Afghan workers.<sup>17</sup> Ismaili workers from the Metroville apartments continued to have access to formal sector (though possibly not permanent) blue-collar jobs in Ismaili-owned factories.

Another important difference between the Metroville Ismailis and other Afghans was the participation, among the former, of women workers in the labour market. It was considered quite normal for Afghan Ismaili women to take up jobs in factories, whereas in other Afghan communities women were mostly restricted to their homes.

## **3.4 Access to social services**

The experience of Afghan migrants with respect to social services – notably education and health – is likely to be significant in shaping their outlook. Many of the people of Afghan origin in Karachi arrived in the city via official refugee camps in the north and west of Pakistan where national and international agencies provided social services in health and education. In Karachi, the Afghan communities have had access to both public as well as privately supplied social services.

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<sup>17</sup> Employers in Karachi industries have switched, progressively, to sub-contracting, and have shed formal sector jobs. It is possible that the employers of Afghan workers used the NIC issue as a pretext to fire people who had previously held permanent jobs.



## Education

There are broadly four types of educational facilities in Karachi. First, there are government schools that charge nominal fees where schooling is considered to be of low quality, and the medium of instruction is Urdu. Second, there are fee-charging private schools that range widely in quality. Many of these schools offer English-medium instruction. Some are of a high standard and prepare their pupils for higher education abroad, whereas others provide basic schooling of a minimal standard. Third, there are schools run by voluntary or community organisations where the costs of schooling are subsidised and the quality of education is generally better than the low-end, fee-charging schools. Fourth, Islamic schools or *madrassas* impart religious education and training and are often subsidised to the extent that pupils receive free board and lodging (see Box 2).

### **Box 2: *Madrassas – a source of livelihoods***

Mujaheddin groups ran offices in Peshawar and Quetta to monitor and invoke militancy in Afghanistan during the civil war. The militant organisations had both military training schools and *madrassas* (spiritual training institutes) in Pakistan to generate warriors for their jihad.

The Afghan migrants in Pakistan are strictly committed to their faith, barring some level of conversion among sects. The prayer congregations in neighbourhood mosques are main sources of migrants' social integration. In Karachi almost every Jama Masjid (mosque for Friday prayers) has a Quranic education section called the *madrassa* run by contributions of locals and other sources. Pashtuns in particular prefer basic religious education for their children. They are the most reluctant to educate their girls, even in *madrassas*, whereas other ethnic groups are more relaxed about female education. The Hazara Afghans run their own religious and formal educational institutes inside their community, as they are Shi'a and also impose fewer restrictions on girls.

Youngsters who matriculated from Afghanistan's schools or passed their examinations from Pakistan-based Afghan registered schools are not recognised for jobs by either government or private sectors in Pakistan. They tend to work in factories, shops, vegetable markets, and hotels. Previously they had the option to complete a religious education in a *madrassa* in Karachi, but after 9/11 the Government of Pakistan passed a resolution in which it is strictly forbidden to enrol any Afghan in a *madrassa* or recruit any one as a teacher.

Afghan migrants are being refused admission in *madrassas* partially due to the Pakistan government restriction but also due to *madrassa* administrators in Karachi, who have no interest in enrolling poor Afghans to whom they will have to provide food and shelter. Afghan parents allege that these *madrassas* are dominated by Pashtuns who discriminate against Persian-speaking Afghans. The change in policy has been a loss for many Afghans, whose sons at least were guaranteed some sort of employment in a *madrassa* after completing their Quranic learning. The *madrassa* education was not only a source of employment and security, but respondents say that it kept the religious spirit alive in the young generation and gave them hope for their futures in Pakistan.

Children of Afghans in Karachi have access to all of these four types of schools to which entrance is largely governed by the parents' ability to pay. In addition, however, there are several schools that are specifically meant for Afghan children and teach the curriculum prevalent in Afghanistan in the Dari Persian language. These schools are regulated by the Afghanistan Ministry of Education through its representative office in Peshawar (see Box 3). Community schools run by FOCUS for Afghan Ismailis also teach a curriculum in Dari.

**Box 3: Syed Jamaludin Afghani Shaheed School**

There are six Afghan schools in Karachi registered with the Afghan Ministry of Education (*Wazarat-e-Taleem*): Abdul Rehaman School, Ibn-e Seena School, Boo Ali Seena School in Al-Asif and Mahatab Toheed in Gulshan-e-Iqbal and Jamat-Al Afghan in Indus Plaza. They use Persian as the medium of instruction and are allowed to use English, Urdu, Pashto or any other language as a source language.

Mujaheddin-approved textbooks were used until 2001, but over the last three years new textbooks are being used with some changes in content. The textbooks are prepared under Sunni sect regulations enforced in Pakistan. During the mujaheddin government, students were getting textbooks free of cost but now students have to purchase books from the market.

The enrolment of students in Syed Jamaludin Afghani Shaheed School increased during the Taliban regime because of the exodus from Afghanistan. At that time there were 750 pupils, about 40 percent of whom were girls. After the fall of the Taliban the repatriation process started and about 350 pupils went back with their families. Today the total number of students is 350, out of which 135 are girls. There is no admission fee in this school. Monthly fees range from Rs 100-150 [US\$2–3] per month. The school administration has arranged tuition classes in English, which cost as much as the tuition fees. Teachers who work in the morning shift from 8 am to 11 am are paid Rs 1200 to 1500 [US\$21–27] per month and those working both shifts from 8 am to 2 pm are paid Rs 2000 to 2800 [US\$35–50] per month.

Some parents are against co-education and stop their daughters' studies after age 10 or 12. Schoolteachers usually visit households and arrange meetings with parents to motivate them to educate their girl children. Despite this counselling, the dropout rate of girl students after ages 10–12 in the Pashtun Afghan community is very high. Pakistani Pashtuns, on the other hand, do not prefer to enrol their children in this school because of the Persian medium of instruction. The three main ethnic groups enrolled in this school are Tajiks, Kabuli Pashtuns and Uzbeks. The majority of students are from Kabul and Kunduz. There were some Hazara Shi'a students until they repatriated a year ago.

The school administration has had disagreements with local community leaders in the past. Because the school administration used to provide female fieldworkers to UNHCR, community leaders accused them of supplying young girls to NGOs for sex work. But this dispute was resolved in local meetings before it affected the school's functioning.

The segmented profile of schooling – i.e. the co-existence of several types of mutually exclusive education systems – is actually typical of the education system in Pakistan in general. The heterogeneity is also reflective of social distinctions within the wider Afghan community both at home and in Pakistan. All the various types of schools listed here (except, of course, the Pakistan government schools) have a strong Afghan dimension. Most of the Islamic religious schools, for example, are popular among both Afghan and Pakistan Pashtuns, and are closely associated with the Deobandi Sunni sect of Islam. It is interesting that the Afghan government schools have a relatively higher rate of participation from among the Persian-speaking groups – possibly owing to the use of the Dari Persian language as a medium of instruction.

These various schools have implications not only for the future integration of Afghan communities into Afghanistan and Pakistan, but also for the possibility of social integration between Afghan communities (at home and abroad). By opting for English-medium schooling, Afghan families claim to be opening up opportunities for their children not only in Pakistan or Afghanistan, but also, potentially, in other countries.

## Health

As in the case of schooling, the health system in Karachi has multiple types of suppliers of varying quality and price. The key issue cited by Afghan respondents with respect to health services is the possibility of accessing high quality health care – even if this is obtained at a high price – in Karachi. In comparison, health facilities in their places of origin in Afghanistan are relatively less developed, with a more limited presence of the private sector.

### 3.5 Security and vulnerability

While Afghan migrants have often been portrayed as sources of insecurity, crime and violence in Karachi, the case study reveals them very much as victims of the same. An important factor in the vulnerability of Afghan communities is their foreign nationality. The fact that many people of Afghan origin – as well as their descendents – remain vulnerable to victimisation due to their uncertain legal status in Pakistan suggests a dual failure of the existing policy framework. These policies have been ineffective both in dealing with irregular migration, as well as in providing legal protection to migrants who have been in the country for a long time.

#### Police harassment

There is a clear hierarchy among people of Afghan origin in terms of their vulnerability to harassment from Pakistani state agencies such as the police. The Afghans have also gone through various periods of relatively less and more vulnerability. The period during the Soviet military invasion of Afghanistan is regarded as a time when Afghan migrants enjoyed a high degree of protection and even support from the Pakistani authorities. It is noteworthy, however, that much of this protection was mediated through specific groups within the Afghan community, notably the political factions that were represented in official refugee camps in Pakistan. This influence of Afghan factions was also felt in Karachi, as manifested in the survey site of Al-Asif, where the residents' union was controlled by one of these factions.

After the end of the Soviet invasion, the protection enjoyed by Afghan communities became more diffused, and even more dependent on connections with particular social networks and groupings. Many residents and small traders in the Sohrab Goth area reported, for example, that Afghans were vulnerable to police extortion simply by the virtue of being non-nationals. The local police officials extract bribes (*bhatta*) from Afghans against threats of filing charges of illegal stay in Pakistan. Pakistani as well as Afghan informants concurred that Afghans tend to pay higher bribes to the police than their Pakistani counterparts. Some Pakistanis saw this as an unfair “advantage” to the Afghans, in the sense that the police were more responsive to the latter due to the expectation of higher payments.

The insecurity faced by Afghans moreover had real implications for their quality of life. In Jhangabad and surrounding *katchi abadis* in Sohrab Goth, residents explained their failure to upgrade their houses with reference to the persistent threat of eviction from the area.

The Ismaili community organisation FOCUS exemplified some of the more organised and systematic channels through which a social network afforded protection to the Afghan migrants. Afghan Ismaili refugees registered with FOCUS were issued the organisation's own identification cards and these provided adequate security from

arbitrary arrest and police harassment. There was, obviously, an agreement between FOCUS, or the leadership of the Ismaili community, with higher echelons of the Pakistani government, that FOCUS-issued cards would be regarded as sufficient proof of identity. While this particular form of protection was highly organised, it was not essentially different from the informal protection through political factions, ethnic groups, or religious affiliation accessed by other Afghans.

### **Crime**

The issue of crime was an important one for some respondents in Sohrab Goth, particularly Al-Asif. This area had acquired a reputation for lawlessness, and Afghan migrants were generally portrayed by the popular media as the sources of illegal weapons and narcotics trades. While the involvement of influential Afghan individuals and groups in such activities was confirmed by informants in Al-Asif, the complexity of the situation was also made clearer. Afghan-controlled gangs were indeed active in the area, but they were reputed to have worked in close collaboration with Pakistani partners, including corrupt individuals in the police force. Moreover, ordinary Afghans were the primary victims of the criminal activities carried out around Sohrab Goth.<sup>18</sup>

### **Political violence**

There were two conspicuous moments of threats of political violence in the experience of the people of Afghan origin in Karachi. The first related to ethnic violence, when the Afghans found themselves caught up in the wider ethnicisation of political life in the city in the 1980s. There were tangible implications for Afghan communities. The *katchi abadis* around Sohrab Goth, as well as the communities in Al-Asif and similar apartment blocks, became a focus of attention of city authorities, and even the national security agencies of Pakistan. Police action in the area led to the eviction and re-settlement of many families, and left the *katchi abadis* under a constant threat of insecurity.

The second significant threat occurred during the late 1990s when many Karachi-based Afghans and Pakistani Pashtuns became involved in the civil war between the Taliban and other Afghan factions. During this period tensions between Taliban supporters and non-Pashtun ethnic groups such as the Tajiks, the Hazaras and the Uzbeks heightened in Karachi. There were isolated incidents of violence, but less acute forms of harassment were more widespread. The non-Pashtun communities felt particularly targeted at times when news would be received in Karachi of a local Taliban supporter who had been killed, injured or taken prisoner in a battle with the opposition. Many of the non-Pashtuns moved home from previously ethnically mixed neighbourhoods to find protection among their own groups. The Ismaili community organisation became active in re-housing Afghan Ismailis.

### **Negotiation and conflict management**

While incidents of violence and insecurity become conspicuous, it is perhaps not always acknowledged that, in general, the people of Afghan origin have lived in conditions of relative peace in Karachi. Given the political tensions within Pakistan, and the prolonged periods of acute conflict and violence inside Afghanistan, the experience of the Afghan communities in Karachi is perhaps remarkable. Despite all the odds, the people of Afghan origin in Karachi not only maintained mostly peaceful and secure relations among themselves but with other

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<sup>18</sup> The case of a reputable Afghan physician who was murdered by a gang for refusing to pay protection money was one conspicuous instance among many.

communities at large. While many remained restricted, economically, to the lower spectrum of the labour market, others did experience economic as well as social mobility. The ability of communities to manage conflicts and to negotiate peaceful outcomes out of potentially explosive situations remains one of the less noticed features of Afghan migration into Karachi.

## 4. Links with and Perceptions of Afghanistan

The return migration calculus appears to be much more complex than that for the initial migration. It cannot be assumed, for example, that a simple reversion of the threats to physical safety is reason enough to repatriate. The discussion on the reasons for migration has illustrated that there were many other factors besides physical threats that prompted migration. Social, ethnic, religious and economic tensions played an influential role in the decision to migrate, and many of these tensions remain to this day. Furthermore, the decision to return cannot be looked at in isolation from the experience of the Afghan community in Pakistan, their links with Afghanistan during their stay, and the local socio-economic and political networks to which they have latched onto. The relative perception of Afghanistan vis-à-vis Pakistan these links and experiences have generated also have instrumental influence on the decision to repatriate. Finally, it also needs to be understood that a whole generation of Afghans was born and raised in Karachi. This generation has minimal physical, and almost no emotional, connection with Afghanistan. These members of the community have very different aspirations and goals to those of their parents and may not consider repatriation a viable option.

It is in order to first describe the communities who have indeed returned to Afghanistan. The subsequent discussion then looks at the perceptions and aspirations of those who are still here, and the complex repatriation decisions they face.

### 4.1 Repatriated Afghans

The fieldwork suggests that the majority of the people who have gone back are Tajiks, Uzbeks and Hazaras, i.e. ethnic non-Pashtuns. UNHCR,<sup>19</sup> however, reports that the Pashtuns are the largest ethnic group to have repatriated. A possible reason this finding has not precipitated from the fieldwork is that while in magnitude Pashtuns may constitute the largest ethnic group to repatriate, this is not true in terms of proportions – i.e. the proportion of Pashtun Afghans that have repatriated is much less than the proportion of non-Pashtuns that have returned, hence it is less visible. Also, the UNHCR reports that the largest flow of Pashtuns into Afghanistan is from FATA/NWFP, suggesting that not many of those Pashtuns settled in Karachi may have repatriated.

Among those who have repatriated, an interesting case is that of the Shaarri community, a large proportion of which has returned. It is not clear whether these people are Pashtuns or not but both they and their Pashtun neighbours identify them as Shaarri. This community hails from Jalalabad and they came to Pakistan very early, during the Soviet invasion. In fact, migratory links of this community predate the 1970s, and many Shaarris migrated due to economic reasons in the 1960s and 70s. The advent of war merely dramatised the flow of people from Afghanistan, and the presence of Shaarri networks in Karachi implied that these people did need not to route their journey through refugee camps or other cities. They came directly to Bilal Colony. Respondents reported that more than 60 percent of the households had migrated back to Jalalabad during Karzai's government.

The Shaarri community is being facilitated in Afghanistan by Hazrat Ali, the Shaarri commandant of Jalalabad. These Shaarris are being provided access to land and

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<sup>19</sup> UNHCR, 2004.

housing in Jalalabad City, as well as public sector jobs, particularly in the police force. Interestingly, however, some Shaarris who are not Hazrat Ali's close relatives are not being accommodated, suggesting that job and land rationing is very strict and limited.

The Tajiks and the Uzbeks also have a similar representation in the present administration, particularly in Kabul, and the northern provinces of Afghanistan. While explicit detail on this group is not forthcoming, respondents clearly suggested that those who had migrated were being facilitated by the Afghan government in terms of employment, land and housing. This finding is also confirmed by UNHCR statistics which show that the majority of Tajiks and Uzbeks have repatriated to Baghlan, Badakhshan, Kunduz and Balkh.

The third major repatriating community, the Hazara Ismailis, provide a different twist to this story. The organisation that settled them in Pakistan in the first place, FOCUS, requires all Hazara migrants to leave by the end of 2006. FOCUS has never encouraged the acquisition of forged identity papers, and has already repatriated approximately 60,000 Hazaras to Afghanistan to date. It is important to note that the Kabul office of FOCUS facilitates these repatriates in settling down. In particular FOCUS negotiates with the Afghan government to return the Hazaras' ancestral agricultural land back to them.

The cursory evidence that is available on repatriated communities suggests that networks and representation in the administration particularly has motivated repatriation. While this is generally true, analysis of the issues raised by respondents still in Karachi reflect the complexity and the multi-dimensionality of the decision to return.

Perhaps the strongest effect repatriated Afghans have created has been by those who have returned to Pakistan after repatriation. Many respondents are of the view that not less than half of all repatriates come back to Pakistan. These returnees usually have three complaints. First, even if they are provided jobs, wages are not necessarily paid regularly. Afsar Khan, for example, who obtained a teaching position in a university in Kabul, returned to Pakistan when he did not receive his wages for three months. During this time, he was sustained by his own savings. Second, many returnees claim that UNHCR does not provide all the benefits it promises in Pakistan. This is particularly relevant with respect to access to residential land and housing. Third, incidents of ethnicity-based looting during the return migration journey also increase the resolve of Karachi's Afghan community to stay here.

## 4.2 Links with Afghanistan

### Physical links

The links Afghans have with their country have had important effects on their perceptions of Afghanistan, which partly reflect in their decision to return. These links have been particularly important for Afghans born in Karachi because it can give them a sense of what their parents left behind.

All communities of Afghan origin, irrespective of their ethnicity, have maintained active links with their country, and apart from certain exceptions have often visited Afghanistan. Many Afghans have relatives in Afghanistan and there seems to be a constant crossing of the border to maintain contact.

The Pashtuns, particularly of Al-Asif, perhaps have the strongest links with Afghanistan even though most of them came to Pakistan two decades ago. They have been actively visiting Afghanistan except for when war was still raging. It is possible that this mobility increased significantly during the Taliban times when most of the Pashtun belt of Afghanistan was in relative peace. If nothing else, the richer Pashtuns ensure that their dead are buried in their native village, and this provides an opportunity to visit Afghanistan. Their links have also had an economic element and the trade of goods (discounting smuggling) has been fairly large. So frequent have been their visits that trans-national financial links have been through relatives rather than through the Hawala system.<sup>20</sup>

The Ismaili Hazaras of Metroville appeared somewhat different. Very few respondents reported having visited Afghanistan since arrival in Pakistan, but this is probably a sample issue; many Hazaras have returned, and the majority of the Hazara population in Pakistan are settled in Quetta, thus creating a possible bias. This said, it is nevertheless clear that this community is one with the strongest emotions about not repatriating, as embodied in the words of Farah from Metroville:

*We'd [rather] throw ourselves in the sea and commit suicide because there is death for us in our own country also.*

The Hazaras have with all due probability experienced the worst of the Afghan conflict, being at the heart of the ethnic and religious tensions from the time of the mujaheddin until the US invasion.

This desire not to return appears to contradict FOCUS' policy of ensuring repatriation or resettlement as well as the actual repatriation figures provided by UNHCR. It would seem then that those who have had active links with Afghanistan and the desire to return have already left, leaving behind those with lesser interest in repatriation. Many of those left behind are also endeavouring to seek resettlement, particularly in Canada and are being facilitated by FOCUS in doing so.

### **Financial links**

Interestingly, the incidence of sending money through the Hawala system (see Box 4) was much greater in the Al-Asif area compared with Bilal Colony and Metroville. The residents of Bilal Colony, who are mostly poor labourers, explained that they do not have much money to send anywhere, and that Hawala was used mostly by businessmen. So, once in a while, when some money needed to be sent, it was sent through a relative or colleague visiting Afghanistan. The residents of Metroville who are not very well off, as well as the poorer communities of Al-Asif, shared the same characteristic. The relatively richer people, particularly who were involved in trade, used Hawala. These could usually be found in Al-Asif. Nevertheless, these people too often relied on relatives to take goods to Afghanistan, sell them there and then bring goods back to Pakistan to sell again. Essentially, the evidence of this fieldwork does not support the hypothesis that people in Afghanistan sent part of their families to earn in Pakistan and send back remittances. Furthermore, where this does occur, and the financial link between families in Afghanistan and Pakistan is strong, it creates the will to stay back, diversify income risks within the family and continue remitting rather than to repatriate.

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<sup>20</sup> It is possible, however, that with the current crackdown on the Hawala system, respondents have deliberately underplayed the role it plays in their financial transactions.



**Box 4: Use of Hawala/Hundi system**

The Hawala or Hundi system is an informal channel of remitting money that has been used in South Asia for centuries. It is often used by South Asians to remit money between the USA, Canada, the Middle East, Pakistan, India and Afghanistan.

This system provides a confidential, convenient and rapid service that modern banks cannot facilitate. The process is based on faith and trust in which the moneychanger or Hawala/Hundi operator plays the part of middleman between two parties. In the case of Pakistan and Afghanistan, the Hawala/Hundi operator is usually, but not limited to, a shopkeeper who has shops in both countries. The Pakistani branch receives the money and the Afghan branch pays the recipient in Afghanistan (or vice versa). The two branches settle their accounts between themselves, usually by sending goods to be sold in the other country. From Pakistan they usually send toys and electronic equipments to sell in Afghanistan and from Afghanistan they send dry fruits and other general store items to sell in Karachi and its suburbs and rural areas.

The money sender fixes a secret code such as area name, caste name or any number during a phone conversation with the Hawala operator. This code is also shared with the transaction recipient in the other country. That recipient has to go in person to pick up the money from the Hawala operator, and money is released only on the explication of the pre-arranged code. If the recipient is a female she is allowed to send someone from her family. The cost of the transaction depends on the amount, place, distance and currency, but usually adds up to ten percent of the amount transferred.

In practice, very few Afghan families residing in the research sites use the Hawala/Hundi system except some families who have well-off relatives in western countries, or who are themselves rich enough to send remittances to their families in Afghanistan. In the rare occasion that money does have to be sent across the border, relatives and friends travelling there physically transfer the money. Hawala/Hundi may, however, be used in cases of emergencies such as illness or death.

The most extensive use of Hawala is found among businessmen who have such large businesses in Pakistan and Afghanistan that money has to be transferred so frequently that friends/relatives cannot be of assistance.

### 4.3 Perceptions of Afghanistan

#### Perceptions regarding land and income generation

The physical and financial links expounded above have been instrumental in generating perceptions of possible sources of income generation among refugees of Afghan origin.

The first concern is regarding the link between infrastructure and the agricultural sector, to which many people of Afghan origin belonged before entering Pakistan. Many Afghans, particularly from the southern provinces, perceive Afghanistan as a country that does not have the infrastructure, in terms of roads and water availability, to support a vibrant agricultural sector. This feeling has withstood some respondents' observations that foreign donors are actively involved in water-related infrastructure schemes, particularly in Jalalabad.

Secondly, while some Afghans do have family members looking after the land they left behind, many do not. In the absence of clearly defined property rights, they cannot be sure of whether they will have access to their own land or not. And third, family demography has changed significantly since they left their land. Where a man and wife may have entered Pakistan 20 years ago, they now have a

line of children and grandchildren, and people are unconvinced whether their initial land endowment will be able to support such an increased dependence. Finally, many Afghans from the northern provinces such as Badakhshan, Balkh and Kunduz realise that agriculture is only possible in the summer months. Many of these families engaged in seasonal migration to Pakistan long before the Soviet invasion. The incentives to repatriate for these families are obviously very weak.

### **Perceptions regarding employment in the non-agricultural sectors**

The only alternative in this scenario is to have a vibrant trade and services sector. As far as trade is concerned, two concerns have emerged: assets and security. The establishment of trade (mainly shops) requires some amount of capital, which many Afghans do not possess. And even if they do possess capital, they are uncertain of the means to protect it from looting.

Hakim Khan, for example, reports of a relative who sold his shop in Karachi and went back to Afghanistan. He lost all his savings to local gangs who extorted money from him, threatening abduction if he did not comply.

In the absence of capital, it is reckoned that skill could enable a man to thrive in Afghanistan, particularly Kabul and Jalalabad. Ahmad Gul of Metroville is envious of his cousin who was a mechanic here and repatriated to Kabul where he has a workshop. But Ahmad Gul does not possess any such skill, and he feels that there is not much opportunity for a daily wage labourer like him.

Some Afghans also feel that had they been educated, they would have been able to repatriate and be part of the administration. Others, however, strongly feel that public sector jobs are rationed on the basis of family or political connections and their own/family's lack of representation in the ruling elite therefore precludes their entry in the public sector. Fears of this sort are partly created, and partly worsened, by parochial incidents such as the Shaarri repatriation discussed earlier.

### **Gender issues**

Physical and emotional links during their stay in Pakistan have been particularly weak for the women and children of Afghan origin. While in certain cases entire families have been able to visit Afghanistan, it is the men usually who have maintained physical links with areas of origin. The result of the lack of the breakdown of physical links has not unambiguously translated into a comparable breakdown of emotional links with Afghanistan.

Some women and children of Afghan origin who have never visited Afghanistan and are well settled in the local socio-economic milieu perceive their country as an undeveloped and unsafe backyard with no modern facilities of health, education and sanitation. They have not seen Afghanistan and given the accounts of their relatives and neighbours, and do not feel the need to do so either.

There are others, however, who yearn to go back and see their own country. For the young men in particular, it is often an interest in reconstructing their country and playing a role in its development that attracts them.

In a similar way, those who have had physical contact with Afghanistan have not necessarily cultivated an emotional link with it. This is particularly true for women who have very clearly felt the importance of access to health and educational

services for their children. The case of Hamida from Bilal Colony presents the crux of the argument:

*I didn't like the country. There is no electricity and the children were always crying. My children became sick and the doctor was quite far from that area. The doctor was also not competent either. I stayed there for seven days and returned to Pakistan.*

The other sentiment generated by physical links has been that of rapturous yearning, as expressed by this woman in Bilal Colony:

*The sweet sand is calling us although now we are like aliens there.*

Even if not rapturous, some women have certainly associated Afghanistan with open lands, fresh air and water and increased mobility.

It is also difficult to associate these opposing sentiments with ethnicity or the period of arrival or even gender. In fact, during the same trip to Afghanistan, husband and wife have developed opposite perceptions. There have been some cases where men wanted to go and help rebuild the country and women did not and vice versa. There is a possible correlate with the men's perceptions and their access to income-generating resources in Afghanistan, but emotional attachments to Afghanistan or sub-conscious fears cannot be easily ruled out. These differential considerations within the family unit have further complicated the decision to repatriate.

#### 4.4 The decision to repatriate

##### **Weakness of the state and resource distribution**

Given the perceptions of the Afghan community in Karachi, a prime concern for those who are considering return to Afghanistan is the weakness of the state. Many respondents, particularly Pashtuns and Shaarris, were uncertain of the political conditions and the general law and order, particularly outside of Kabul. But beyond concerns of political stability were more immediate and personal concerns regarding access to sources of income generation such as land and employment and other facilities, in particular, housing. Many respondents felt that they did not have enough representation in the current administrative system in Afghanistan, and did not have the political representation to ensure egalitarian access to social and economic resources.

While many respondents across ethnicities reported this, it was only the Jalalabad community who made a conscious effort to actually organise collective action through a community-based organisation called the Khyber Anjuman. Membership in this organisation was open to all Afghans from Jalalabad, irrespective of their ethnicity or religious affiliation.

The representatives of the Khyber Anjuman met the mayor of Jalalabad and requested that the Karachi-based community be settled in Jalalabad City, i.e. they should have access to residential land. Individual members of the Anjuman took the responsibility to construct their own houses if land was provided.

This collective effort does not merely reflect the need for urban housing that the Jalalabad community faced. It also reflects that the individual members of this

community are afraid to go it alone. Their networks in Afghanistan are weak while they have cultivated a stronger one in Karachi; they share the identity of being Jalalabad Afghans in Karachi and feel they will be aliens in Jalalabad. Furthermore, the instance of some members of the Shaarri community being resettled in Jalalabad suggests to them that jobs and facilities are being allocated on parochial lines, hence their desire to hook on to the Jalalabad administration as a collective entity.

### Urbanisation

At a more basic level, this group action underscores the Afghan communities' realisation that they have over the two decades of being in Karachi become urbanised in many ways. This experience itself has been multidimensional, as is evident from the excerpts below:

*We were villagers...Here we have become civilised. Here we pray in congregation, there we prayed alone. Our children are educated, theirs [in Afghanistan] aren't. Our children speak English and Urdu, theirs don't. We even dress differently.*

– Khuda Dad Khan, Landhi

*My father used to cultivate land...But I don't know how to do it.*

– Gamma Khan, Al-Asif

It is interesting to note that the Afghans in Karachi – barring those from Kabul – predominantly come from rural areas. But having lived in Karachi for some time, they are unwilling to go back to those areas. If they do have to return, they would rather go to an urban city such as Kabul or Jalalabad. In fact, these considerations dominate the perception [of many] that Afghanistan is a free and liberated country under Karzai.

The requirement of urban services such as education and health are particularly important for women and the younger generation. And apart from the few individuals that romanticised repatriation, these people considered access to health and education as pragmatic issues to be resolved before movement. It needs to be said here that during their stay in Karachi, the Afghans, noticeably the non-Pashtuns, have been characterised by an overarching interest in education, particularly that of the English language. Many private general tuition and English language centres, often owned and operated by Afghans themselves, have opened up in the city. Therefore in some sense, Afghans are looking for access to education per se and not necessarily publicly funded education. Similarly, the concern in the health sector is not necessarily public sector health provision since many Afghans visit private clinics in their locality.

In theory therefore, if a private sector in the health and educational sector were to develop in Afghanistan, the pressure to stay in Karachi would be relieved. This is easier said than done, since the range of health and education solutions provided in Karachi are a reflection of a market that has evolved due to Karachi's huge population of 13 million, of which the Afghan community is but a small part. Such a vibrant private sector cannot be expected to develop in Afghanistan, even if the entire Afghan community were to repatriate.

## 5. Social Networks

The sustaining social networks that give Afghan migrants in Karachi a livelihood and sense of community can be both positive and negative. The following sections attempt to map these and trace what impact they may have on the long-term future of Afghan migrants in the city. The discussion is based on social networks mentioned by the respondents themselves or observed directly by the field researchers. These are many, but of course not all, of the networks operating among Afghans, but they will most likely prove to be common among migrants in other parts of the country as well.

### **Disintegration of camp support structures**

Respondents chose to come to Karachi for various reasons. One commonly cited explanation is that support in refugee camps dried up in other parts of the country, prompting whole groups of refugees to come to the city in search of work. Residents in Jhangabad, for example, came here after the food ration support system in refugee camps in Mianwali came to an end following the end of Soviet occupation. Afghans of diverse tribal and linguistic backgrounds moved to Jhangabad. Although they maintained a shared interest in terms of how to pursue a livelihood, within the Jhangabad settlement they still assert their different kinship and tribal identities, which prevents a deepening of their shared experience in a new city.

Al-Asif Square, although it became a major centre for Afghan refugees as early as the 1980s when many fleeing the war came directly to the city, has evolved to become a home for various waves of refugees and migrants from Afghanistan. Among them are refugees who left camps in Peshawar and Mianwali when the United Nations began to encourage resettlement after 1992. While these Afghans still had no land or homes in Afghanistan they chose to come to Karachi in search of work; they included Pashtuns and other ethnic groups from the camps.

A kind of social network, therefore, grew out of the shared experience of losing camp support in Pakistan, and drove large numbers of Afghans into the city in search of livelihoods. It appears that their communities reorganised in Karachi, however, on the basis of older kinship and ethnic ties that predated the camp experience. It could be argued, then, that refugee living in camps was an opportunity to forge a new sense of community along alternative lines – i.e. in terms of bonds other than religion, ethnicity, kinship or tribe. That this did not turn out to be the case in the long run will no doubt be the subject of much inquiry in the years ahead as Afghans wrestle with the problems of becoming a nation.

### **Ethnicity and kinship**

It is obvious that ethnic ties are a vital link for Afghan communities, both inside and outside their country, and they depend greatly on these linkages for survival. In Karachi ethnic bonds have been social supports in numerous ways, and it is interesting for the purposes of future research to note that ethnic ties facilitate other migrant communities in very similar ways. The Afghan experience has one added dimension, however, which is that ethnicity is also closely linked to political affiliation, and that in turn changes the complexion of the migrant experience in Karachi.

Ethnic and kinship ties have largely determined who has come to Karachi and who has not. Pashtuns from Afghanistan lived in this city even before the Soviet

occupation in 1979, and some of their kin from the eastern provinces came directly to the city and bypassed refugee camps altogether because they knew they had the support of fellow Pashtuns to depend on in Karachi. Tribal leaders from within Afghanistan moved whole populations to Pakistan, and brought their communities to Karachi under their supervision as well. Ismailis report coming to Karachi directly from central Afghanistan upon the instruction of their tribal leaders. Residents of Al-Asif (Tajik, Uzbek, or Hazara in origin) describe how they have summoned their relatives to the city and fellow villagers from Afghanistan over the last one or two decades of their stay in Pakistan. The ties remain so strong that today migrant families living in Al-Asif speak of bringing brides from their villages or clans to Karachi to marry off with their sons and brothers. These same ties are economic as well, as respondents have described how their earnings flow both ways across the border – e.g. a brother earning cash in Karachi during the harsh winter months will send the money home to his brother in Afghanistan, and the reverse will be true on occasion as well.

Ethnic and kinship networks also form the basis for livelihoods and community organisation among migrants in Karachi, and this is not unique to Afghans at all. Not only do migrants from the same ethnicity and tribe try to live near one another if possible (and this is not always possible in Al-Asif Square) but they frequent each others' shops, employ each other and inter-marry as a priority. The result is that Al-Asif Square appears to be a microcosm of Afghanistan itself, with its social organisation, shops, recreation areas, schools and even eating places organised in terms of the ethnic and social structures that existed with Afghanistan before migration took place.

There are limits to the possibilities and types of integration, however, when ethnicity and kinship are the bedrock of social support to migrants. At present there appears to be no urgent need to redefine the key social support structures because they are working to the advantage of Afghan migrants. But there are areas of tension already apparent, where Afghans are beginning to resist some of the limitations placed on them by these structures. For example, second generation migrants, Afghans of different ethnic backgrounds who were born from refugee parents in Pakistan and have grown up in Karachi, do not necessarily share the same intense identification with their ethnic or tribal group. Young respondents occasionally showed themselves to be immensely proud of their versatility, their ability to negotiate the complexities of Al-Asif's social structures, speak multiple languages of Afghanistan due to the encounters they had with people of different ethnicities, and also to manage the city of Karachi like a native with fluency in Urdu. The exposure and diversity allowed to residents by urban living is testing tribal customs, gender boundaries, and questioning self-identities.

## Politics

It appears that political networks largely mirror ethnic allegiances, since the dominant political parties in Afghanistan were along these lines during the years of conflict and they operated with support inside Pakistan as well. Therefore, Afghan Pashtuns were predominantly supporters of Hikmatyar's *Hezb-e Islami* party in the years of mujaheddin resistance, and later supported the Pashtun-led Taliban movement as well. Similarly, Hazaras were predominantly supporters of the *Hezb-e Wahdat* party that operated in central Afghanistan, and were later victimised by the Taliban on ethnic and religious grounds and fled to Pakistan. In Karachi, however, political parties from Afghanistan were helped by the Pakistan government and local religious political parties to establish a presence. Residents

of Al-Asif Square remember the offices of the main political figures in Afghanistan that were in their midst, and the history of control over the union also reflects dominance by distinct parties.

Another aspect of political networks, however, emerges in the current context and will have long-term consequences for Afghan migrants in Karachi. There is one example of an elected Union Council Nazim (Metroville 4) who is an Afghan Pashtun. He sits alongside Pakistanis of different ethnicities on the Union Council, the lowest tier of government recently empowered by the Pakistan government to manage local development. It is safe to assume that being Pashtun facilitated this man's entry into local politics, and that he must have significant support among local political players and ethnic groups to be allowed to occupy such an important seat. His story suggests that the Afghan migrants in Karachi may be entering a new phase of their experience in Pakistan, one in which they identify themselves as settled migrants with an interest in accessing the power structures of their environment. Not surprisingly, the Nazim is accused of favouring his own people by supplying them more water pipes, but this may well just be one example of how some migrants are beginning to see themselves as more than transient residents of Karachi.

Ordinary migrants are also caught up in the storms of world politics, such that post-9/11 an Afghan Pashtun in Karachi is automatically under suspicion for being a Taliban sympathiser, or allied with a domestic religious political organisation that encourages sectarian violence, or even being a member of al-Qaeda. Since Karachi has been the scene of some bloody encounters between law enforcement agencies and suspected al-Qaeda militants over the past few years, the international reputation of this city has also been negatively affected.

There are myriad implications of this for Afghan migrant workers. One is that the Pakistan government is keen to regularise them through registering all alien workers in Karachi with NARA. A NARA card enables a foreign migrant to live and work here for a three-year period, even if he is here illegally. Also, for the first time Afghan Pashtuns are not fully protected through ethnic, tribal or political connections in Karachi. The political support provided by the Pakistan government to refugees during the 1980–90s has officially stopped, and the Pakistani political religious organisations that gave monetary and other support to mujaheddin parties and the Taliban are also now doing so covertly if at all.

## Religion

Ties based on religion have been important factors in both the decision to migrate, and also the ability to sustain livelihoods in Karachi. The fact that both the Pakistani and Afghan populations were predominantly Muslim cannot be ignored in understanding how migrants have managed to sustain themselves in Pakistan. Since the war against Soviet occupation took only the complexion of a jihad, this bond was further accentuated. However, religious networks operated in distinct ways and were also intertwined with political agendas. The field research uncovered some unique ways in which religion is a key instrument of social networking.

Hazara Afghans are predominantly Shi'a, and among them are Ismailis, followers of the Aga Khan. When an Ismaili sought to leave his country, particularly during the years of religious persecution under Taliban rule, the entire process was facilitated by the organisation FOCUS. Ismailis migrants to Karachi, including those from Pakistan's northern areas, are supported by FOCUS as they settle in to their new

lives in the big city. While the Afghan Ismailis are encouraged, and subsequently assisted, to return to their home country, the decision-making process itself is made easier because FOCUS assists in planning their journey back and finding them ways to earn a living in Afghanistan. The result is that a social network based on religion, which has given rise to a formal aid organisation, is a vital lifeline for one group of Afghan migrants to Karachi. In fact, interview material from Metroville suggests that some Hazara migrants became Ismailis at some point during their migration history. Further research is required to determine if this is true and in what proportions.

Religious ties in this case have facilitated the formation of social networks and identities beyond ethnic, linguistic and kinship ties. Residents of the Aga Khan Flats in Metroville are all recipients of the same support from FOCUS, based on their religious identity alone. Respondents say they do marry within their Ismaili community, but across national or ethnic differences.

In Bilal Colony, Landhi, where Pashtun migrants are in a majority and belong to the first wave of refugees who came to Pakistan, there is segmentation of the community according to Deobandi and Barelvi schools of Islam. In Pakistan powerful religious political parties who supported the mujaheddin resistance in Afghanistan are mainly Deobandi. It appears that many Pashtun Afghan migrants who came to Karachi years ago were originally Barelvis but they subsequently converted to Deobandi Islam after moving here.

These conversions may be a result of the overlapping of political and religious identities that characterised many of the groups fighting in Afghanistan and also their political supporters in Pakistan. It also serves as an example of what kind of integration, if any, is taking place between Afghans and locals. However, the conversions to Deobandi Islam do not necessarily imply any change in ethnic or tribal identity, and do not suggest that Afghans began to inter-marry with Pakistani Pashtuns who were also Deobandi.

### **Closing observations**

The first form of social networking discussed in this section was camp support, for the reason that this was the first shape of a community for Afghan refugees in Pakistan and it also reflected the experience of most refugees. But it also represents one of the only neutral spaces in which Afghans were collected together not on the basis of their religion, ethnicity, language, or kinship ties, but because of their common political identity as Afghans. Once they left the camps and came to Karachi, or indeed once some migrants arrived directly to the city from Afghanistan, it appears that they did not derive any support from this political identity again. They certainly did nurture social networks based on many other commonalities, including membership in Afghan political parties, but none of these networks is free from bonds based on blood or faith.



## 6. Conclusions

This case study of people of Afghan origin residing in Karachi forms part of a wider study of Afghans in neighbouring countries. The conclusions of the Karachi case study, as well as some wider policy implications of these findings, are offered here. This discussion on policy implications remains preliminary, however, given that the proper domain for policy discussion is broader than Karachi or even Pakistan, but encompasses the entire region.

It is useful to recall some of the starting points in the present case study. Policy options regarding Afghan migration – especially since late 2001, but also before then – have tended to be framed within a “conflict–refugee” perspective. This perspective presumes that Afghan refugees arrived in Karachi (and elsewhere) in order to escape from conflict, and that they will return once the conflict is over. Once in Karachi, the received view concerning the people of Afghan origin was that they are located on the geographical, economic and social margins of city life.

The present study attempted to break from the received view by approaching the subject more broadly from the perspective of “migration” rather than within a “conflict–refugee” perspective. At the outset, it was considered that people of Afghan origin who had been away from their country for eight years or longer would be treated as settled migrants, while those who arrived in the last eight years would be treated as potential returnees. Moreover, the methodology of the present study emphasised the documentation of the economic and social conditions of Afghans within the context of the experience of other migrant communities in a migrant-dominated city. The study acknowledged, but did not impose a prior view, therefore, on the social and economic marginalisation of the people of Afghan origin.

The main conclusion of the present case study is that there is value in acknowledging the complexity of experience of people of Afghan origin in Karachi. The “conflict–refugee” perspective fails to do justice to the range of circumstances in which people migrated, or factors that facilitate or prevent repatriation. Similarly, simplistic received views about the background and social and economic conditions of Afghan communities come in the way of a more nuanced and realistic policy towards these migrants in their country and city of destination. More detailed conclusions are organised here under four themes: migration, social and economic conditions, social networks, and repatriation and links with Afghanistan. Implications for policy are offered at the end.

### **The migration process**

The reasons for migration from Afghanistan cannot be easily reduced to direct exposure to warfare, though the prevalence of armed conflict was a crucial factor in the migration experience. There were many different ways in which the prevalence of conflict and an unsettled political situation impacted on individuals, families and communities, and this diversity of experience is richly present in Karachi. The people of Afghan origin in Karachi include substantial communities that arrived in the city even prior to 1978. Yet these families and individuals retained active links with Afghanistan and played an important part in facilitating the waves of migration that occurred with the outbreak of war. The city also hosts people who were made vulnerable, or were economically threatened, during the many different twists in the recent Afghan history, including the Soviet occupation, the civil war, ethnic violence and the US-led invasion.

While armed conflict provided the backdrop to migration from the late 1970s onwards, the precise ways in which people were affected varied between individuals, families and communities. The decision to migrate, moreover, was not unrelated to some prior economic expectations about the destination. A large number of Afghans arrived in Karachi, for example, after assistance in official refugee camps located in other parts of Pakistan dried up. Others followed prior routes of economic migration southwards – routes and channels that have been historically traversed by Afghans as well as communities in the north and west of Pakistan bordering Afghanistan.

It is not easy to classify Afghan migrants by the period of migration (e.g. whether the migration took place within the last eight years) alone – it is common to observe complex patterns, including repeated migration and repatriation. There were examples in the fieldwork of communities that had arrived within the last eight years – e.g. many Ismaili families – but had not retained any strong connections with the places of origin. There were yet others – such as the Shaarris from Jalalabad – who had presence in Karachi going back to the 1960s, yet retained active links with Afghanistan.

Migration, moreover, was not a one-off or unidirectional event. Many cases were documented of people travelling back and forth between Karachi and their places of origin in Afghanistan, before the war as well as during it. Another related finding was the use of Karachi as a point of transit *en route* to Iran, the Gulf countries and even the developed industrial countries. Migration, therefore, was an ongoing phenomenon.

The people of Afghan origin in Karachi were undergoing different types of transition. Most were integrated into settled communities – even if those were primarily Afghan communities. Some of the Afghan communities were no different – in effect – from migrant communities in Karachi from other parts of Pakistan. They were making a transition into permanent settlement in the city, but with active links with their places of origin. Others, however, were in transitions of different types – either to return to Afghanistan, or to move on to other countries.

### **Social and economic conditions**

Pre-conceived notions about the geographical, social and economic clustering of Afghans go only part of the way in describing the actual conditions of the people of Afghan origin in Karachi. Afghans are present in large numbers within but also outside well-known localities such as Sohrab Goth and its surrounding areas. These Afghan localities are of different ages, and with varying degrees of permanence. There is no close correlation between the age of a settlement and the security of tenure of its residents. Afghan (and non-Afghan) migrants of long-standing in areas such as Bilal Colony in Landhi continue to face some level of vulnerability in their terms of tenure. Residents of settlements near Sohrab Goth, which date back to the late 1970s still feel insecure about their homes, and desist from making long-term investments in their housing stock. Other, more recent migrants, such as the Afghan Ismailis, enjoy better and more secure housing conditions.

While the received view of the clustering of Afghans in particular economically and socially marginalised activities – such as market portering, construction labour, and illicit trade – are true to some extent, these preconceptions provide only a very partial picture. There is profound economic and social integration, to the extent and in the mode that it generally takes place in the segmented labour market and society in Karachi. The integration is both as individual Afghans being part of the

wider city economy and society, but also takes the form of the Afghan communities having developed close economic and social ties within themselves and with other communities.

The Afghan presence in Karachi is large enough to sustain diverse economic activities including business, professions, trade, retailing, factory work, home-based work, skilled and unskilled labour. In other words, the size of the Afghan population implies that it is both a significant supplier as well as demander of labour services of various types. The Afghan communities in Karachi are diverse not only in terms of ethnicity, religious sect, political affiliation and regional background, but also in terms of economic class, education and skill levels. Consequently, the Afghan economy in Karachi is not simply a marginalised segment of the Karachi economy, but a thriving economy in itself.

Social development among people of Afghan origin mirrors the types of segmentation that exists in Karachi in general. There are diverse educational establishments including religious schools, government schools, and private schools of different prices that are utilised by the Afghan communities. There are, in addition, Afghan-government recognised schools that impart instruction in Dari Persian and teach curricula approved by the Afghanistan education ministry.

There are, of course, many ways in which the experience of the people of Afghan origin is also distinct from that of other migrants into Karachi. A city like Karachi where the informal sector is very important for the provision of services also requires some amount of political capital for successful access to public services, infrastructure and even markets. Afghans feel vulnerable to police extortion by virtue of being foreign citizens. This feeling is more widespread among non-Pashtun Afghans or those who are not expressly protected by community organisations. This vulnerability is reported as a factor in explaining the poor housing conditions in parts of Sohrab Goth. Afghans also have felt rationed out of formal sector jobs due to their uncertain legal status.

### **Social networks**

The existence of prior social networks – along the lines of kinship, ethnicity, religious sect or political affiliation – has been a critical factor in both the migration as well as the sustenance of people of Afghan origin in Karachi. All of the main migrant communities investigated during the fieldwork had some prior link in the city or went where they did due to some group support. Such social networks are important even for migrants from within Pakistan, and it is hardly surprising that the Afghans have also relied upon them. Many of these networks bind Afghan migrants with their counterparts among Pakistani citizens, and this provides a strong source of protection and support. These social networks might be informal ones, such as those among various Pashtun groups, or they might be formal ones such as those organised by the Pakistani (and international) Ismaili community.

While social networks have been critical in protecting, facilitating and sustaining people of Afghan origin in Karachi, there are possible long-term effects on community life in Afghanistan as well as abroad. There are few focal points of an “Afghan identity” that might counter or complement the parochial and segmented group identity nurtured by the existing social networks. Afghan government-recognised schools are just one example of an Afghan-wide entity.

## Links with Afghanistan and issues in repatriation

There is asymmetry in the reasons people give for having come to Karachi and the reasons they give for staying back. Moreover, the reasons for returning to Afghanistan (for those who are prepared to go) are not simply the inverse of the reasons for leaving the country. The decision to stay away from Afghanistan or to return is taken under a very different set of circumstances. Indeed, the experience of migration itself has transformed the migrants – they have different expectations and aspirations from those that they first brought with them.

Going back to Afghanistan makes sense for those people who have connections with specific centres of political power and influence in Afghanistan. This is starkly illustrated by the experience of the Shaarri community from Jalalabad, residing in Bilal Colony, who were able to find public sector jobs in Afghanistan through a prior political connection. Many of the Afghan Ismailis, similarly, might feel positively about returning to Afghanistan under conditions of support and protection extended by their community organisations. There is great uncertainty about livelihood opportunities in the place of origin, particularly with respect to property rights over agricultural land. Such uncertainties can also be overcome through political connections in the country. Broadly speaking, it appears that ethnic non-Pashtuns have a higher propensity to return to Afghanistan in comparison with their Pashtun counterparts. Perceptions about the balance of power within Afghanistan colour the perceptions of various groups.

The decision to return is conditioned by perceptions of life in Afghanistan, and perceptions of life in Afghanistan are conditioned by existing active links with places of origin. Most communities except the Ismailis retain active physical connections – e.g. frequent visits, money transfers, marriages, family ties – with places of origin. Visits to Afghanistan give rise to different perceptions among different types of people, and these differences are not always correlated with ethnicity or gender: perceptions about life in Afghanistan can be highly individual.

An important feature of Karachi Afghans is that they need or expect to receive modern social services such as schooling and health – even if provided by the private sector – and this is an important point of contrast between life in Karachi and in the place of origin in Afghanistan. Afghans in Karachi are urbanised, and would not like to return to their rural place of origin – return to Afghanistan would be more attractive if they could have opportunities in urban centres in Afghanistan. Young people do not wish to return to the traditional economic activities of their parents' generation; for them, positive economic opportunity means formal sector employment.

Finally, it is widely understood by Afghans in Karachi that there is demand for skilled work in Afghanistan, and these opportunities exist regardless of prior social and political connections.

Many cases were encountered of people who had gone to Afghanistan and then returned to Karachi for various reasons. For some the trip back to Afghanistan was simply to observe firsthand the developments there in order to make an informed decision about repatriation. Others returned to Karachi because they felt that conditions in Afghanistan were not conducive for the life they had become accustomed to. It is likely that those who have gone to Afghanistan as well as those who have stayed in Karachi will each prefer to retain connections in both places.

## Policy implications

The policy implications offered here are preliminary, and fall short of actual recommendations. They are indicative, however, of the directions towards which the policy paradigm might shift in response to the findings of the present study.

The current policy paradigm of “regulation” – i.e. registration and voluntary repatriation – serves the needs and welfare of only a segment of the population of Afghan origin in Karachi. The “conflict–refugee” perspective that informs the current policy paradigm is far too simple a formulation to incorporate the multiple dimensions and complexity of the Afghan migration experience. It is unrealistic to expect that a complete cessation of all conflict and political uncertainty within Afghanistan will automatically lead to the unequivocal return of the people of Afghan origin to Afghanistan. It is more realistic to expect migration between Afghanistan and Pakistan (or in this case, Karachi) to be an ongoing historical phenomenon, which will continue even in the absence of military and political crises.

Policy approaches, therefore, need to move away from binary positions – “regulation” versus “regularisation”, “unequivocal repatriation” versus “unequivocal settlement in Pakistan/Karachi” – and pay more attention to the actual experience of Afghan communities. Unrealistic policy approaches become difficult to implement, and lead to greater uncertainty. Such uncertainty is deleterious for people of Afghan origin in Karachi, as well as for the wider national communities in Pakistan and Afghanistan.

## Appendix A: Field Research Tools

1. **Community Profiling:** A detailed social, economic and political profile of each locality selected for fieldwork, prepared on the basis of interviews, observations, and background information on the sites.
2. **Social Mapping:** An introductory exercise conducted by at least two field researchers with a small group of randomly selected community members. The purpose is to map out with marker and paper the salient details of the locality, its meeting places, areas of female mobility, and other information pertinent to the research goals. The exercise also helps the researchers to break the ice with community members and begin to select potential interview respondents.
3. **Focus Group Discussions:** A formal scheduled recorded discussion with a group of 5-10 community members, purposefully selected on the basis of certain homogeneous characteristics chosen for the research goals, e.g. sex, age, ethnicity, length of time in Pakistan. The discussion was conducted by two or three researchers, one of whom moderated and another took notes.
4. **Key Informant Interviews:** A formal discussion of 1–2 hours, based on interview guidelines developed for the focus group and other interviews, but generalised to encourage information about the community as a whole. The interview is with a member of the community or locality that has extensive knowledge of the research community and can help to identify new issues for researchers to follow up. The interview is conducted by one to two field researchers and notes are taken.
5. **Informal Group Discussion:** This tool is an adaptation of the above-mentioned FGD, but has been found to be a flexible and useful alternative in a complex field situation. It is also usually scheduled in advance, and brings together up to five respondents and one to three field researchers for approximately half an hour. The interview guidelines form the basis of the discussion and notes are taken.
6. **Detailed Interview:**<sup>21</sup> This is a scheduled one-on-one interview of approximately one hour. A second field researcher may be present to assist in note-taking.
7. **Short Interview:** This scheduled interview follows the same format as the above detailed interview but is on average half an hour long.
8. **Interaction:** This unscheduled short interview is less than 20 minutes in duration, conducted by one field researcher who takes notes. The formal documentation of chance encounters in the field forms a vital part of the research data.

Field research in Jhangabad took place before this research project was designed (July 2004), so the research tools were somewhat different from those listed above used in the three main communities under study. The tools included a community profile, an informal male group discussion and four household profiles.

### Research Respondents

Field researchers relied on individual interviews as the most frequently used research tool. Key informant interviews and focus groups discussions are by definition fewer in number and broader in their content, and they too yielded a significant amount of the data. In Landhi it was decided not to conduct any focus group discussions because the community was predominantly composed of Afghans

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<sup>21</sup> The role of detailed, or in-depth interviews, was deliberately under-emphasised in this study for two reasons. First, it was felt that the research goals and limited time-frame of the study required that we establish overall patterns and trends of behaviour among Afghans, for which group discussions were most useful. Second, it was felt that there existed a large enough body of case histories and individual testimonies of Afghan refugees in Pakistan and the team wanted to take this work further (see Khan, 2002, etc.).

who arrived as refugees during the resistance to Soviet occupation. However, scattered individual cases were found for interviews. In some communities, such as Sohrab Goth (Al-Asif Square), it was logistically difficult to gather a group of women for a formal focus group because the Afghan respondents were dispersed throughout a complex of 1800 flats and there was no neutral location available for a gathering. The total number of detailed interviews with men (17) is much more than with women (5) due to the decision after fieldwork to divide individual interviews into two distinct groups, depending on their length. For details on the respondents, see Appendix B.

## Appendix B: Respondents' Details

Sohrab Goth

	Type of interaction	Age	Sex	Education	Ethnicity	Marital Status
Male	Individual	48	M	Middle	Pashtun	Married
	Individual	24	M		Uzbek	Married
	Individual	40	M		Pashtun	Married
	Individual	45	M		Tajik	Married
	Individual	40	M		Tajik	Married
	Individual	28	M		Tajik	Unmarried
	Individual	38	M			Married
	Individual	20	M		Pak-Pashtun	Unmarried
	Individual	23	M		Persian	Unmarried
	Individual	45	M		Persian	Married
	Individual	42	M		Safi Tajik	Married
	FGD	14-16	M		Pashtun	-
	FGD	14-20	M		Pashtun	-
Female	Individual	45	F	Middle	Uzbek	Married
	Individual	19	F		Pashtun	Married
	Individual	30	F		Tajik	Married
	Individual	38	F		Tajik	Married
	Individual	60	F			Widow
	Individual	19	F		Pashtun	Unmarried
	Individual	50	F		Tajik	Widow
	Individual		F		Uzbek	Married
	Individual	39	F		Tajik	Married
	FGD	15-20	F			-

Metroville

	Type of interaction	Age	Sex	Education	Ethnicity	Marital Status
Male	Individual	38	M		Hazara	
	Individual	35	M		Hazara	
	Individual	32	M		Tajik	Married
	Individual		M		Pashtun	
	Individual	45	M		Pak-Pashtun	Married
	Individual		M		Hazara	
	Individual		M		Hazara	
	Individual	27	M	8	Hazara	Married
	Individual	40	M		Hazara	
	Individual	60	M		Hazara	Married
	Individual	18	M		Hazara	Married
FGD	30-40	M		Hazara	Mix	
Female	Individual		M		Pashtun	
	Individual	30	F	Diploma	Tajik	Married
	Individual		F		Hazara	
	Individual		F		Hazara	
	Individual		F		-	Married
	Individual	17	F		Hazara	Married
	Individual		F		Hazara	
	Individual	60	F		Hazara	
Individual	45	F		Hazara	Widow	



	IGD		F		Hazara	
	FDG	35-45	F		Hazara	

**Landhi**

	Type of interaction	Age	Sex	Education	Ethnicity	Marital Status
<b>Male</b>	Individual	45	M		Pashtun	Married
	Individual	45	M		Pashtun	Married
	Individual	30	M	B.A	Pak-Pashtun	Unmarried
	Individual	65	M		Pashai	Married
	Individual		M		Pashai	Unmarried
	Individual		M		Pashi	Married
	Individual	55	M		Pashtun	Married
	Individual	23	M		Pashtun	Unmarried
	Individual	30	M		Pashai	Married
<b>Female</b>	Individual	22	F			Married
	Individual	40-45	F	Nil	Pashtun	Married
	Individual		F			
	Individual		F	12	Pashtun	Married
	Individual		F			Widow
	Individual		F			Married
	Individual	35	F			Widow
	Individual	30	F			Married
	Individual	20	F			Married
	Individual	30	F			Married
	Individual	35	F		Pashtun	Married
	IGD		F			
IGD		F				

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