RESEARCH REPORT

Mapping the Structure of Well-Being and Social Networks of Refugees

A Case Study of Syrian Refugees in Peshawar, Pakistan

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June 2017

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Acknowledgments

This case study was funded by U.S. Department of State Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration. The opinions, findings, and conclusions stated herein are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of the United States Department of State. We are grateful to them and to all our funders, who make it possible for Urban to advance its mission.

The views expressed are those of the authors and should not be attributed to the Urban Institute, its trustees, or its funders. Funders do not determine research findings or the insights and recommendations of Urban experts. Further information on the Urban Institute's funding principles is available at www.urban.org/support.

We also gratefully acknowledge expert research assistance, particularly during fieldwork, by Shiraz Hassan and Khurram Rasheed. Several staff members at the Pakistan Institute of Public Opinion, our survey partner, added tremendous value to our research, particularly Bilal Gilani, Nayema Hasnain, and Yahya Sheraz. Urban Institute colleagues Tim Triplett and Harvey Galper provided useful comments on instrument drafts and survey sampling strategy, and Charles Cadwell provided overall guidance at critical stages. An anonymous reviewer's comments were also used to improve the draft.

Cover photo by Metin Aktas/Anadolu Agency/Getty Images.

Executive Summary

Since the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979, Peshawar has hosted tens of thousands of refugees fleeing war, most of whom are ethnic Pashtun just like their host communities. Since July 2016, refugee returns have increased dramatically, likely stemming from a combination of factors including doubling of cash grants received upon arrival in Afghanistan, targeted campaigns by the Afghan and Pakistani governments urging refugees to return, and an end to document-free border crossings at Torkham. We found that the latter is a deal breaker for many refugees, most of whom want to maintain tribal or family ties in Afghanistan.

Based on an original household survey of 1,000 Afghan households residing in the Peshawar metropolitan area, we further explore structures and forms of refugees' social networks, linking them to economic well-being. We find that the vast majority are making a living, but mostly in low-value-added occupations such as street vending, with no significant among the two major ethnic groups, (that is, Pashtuns and Tajiks). While most earn more than Pakistani minimum wage, access to health care and educational attainment is particularly low. Refugees hardly ever participate in formal community organizations, and regular support from government or humanitarian sources is low.

We recommend supporting the creation of institutionalized collective action platforms that could further strengthen critical existing social ties, providing leverage for resource-constrained humanitarian actors. The national governments of Afghanistan and Pakistan, in coordination with UNHCR, must rearticulate a clear, mutually agreed policy position toward refugees so families have a more certain social and economic future in an environment free from harassment. Further research is needed to assess potential impacts of primary policy options, including a new visa regime for Afghan refugees currently under discussion in Islamabad.

Highlights

- The presence of Afghan refugees has altered the social fabric of cities like Peshawar despite strong ethnic, linguistic, and religious homogeneity across refugee and host populations. Broad geostrategic and global trends, such as the Cold War and the ongoing War on Terror, directly impact this 38-year-old crisis.

- Refugees rely on preexisting networks in the host country to gain critical information regarding settlement, find housing, and gain employment and financial or emotional support, though the size of this network is not significantly associated with economic outcomes, particularly income.
- Afghan communities are economically and socially integrated into Peshawar, though the extent and forms of this integration vary by individual or family circumstances and the evolving nature of refugees' relations with host communities and the Pakistani state.
- We recommend strengthening refugees' capacity to self-organize, including through formal collective association platforms. All stakeholders, including national and local governments, humanitarian agencies, and tribal leaders, must communicate to dissolve ongoing tensions and provide clarity to refugees regarding their own future.

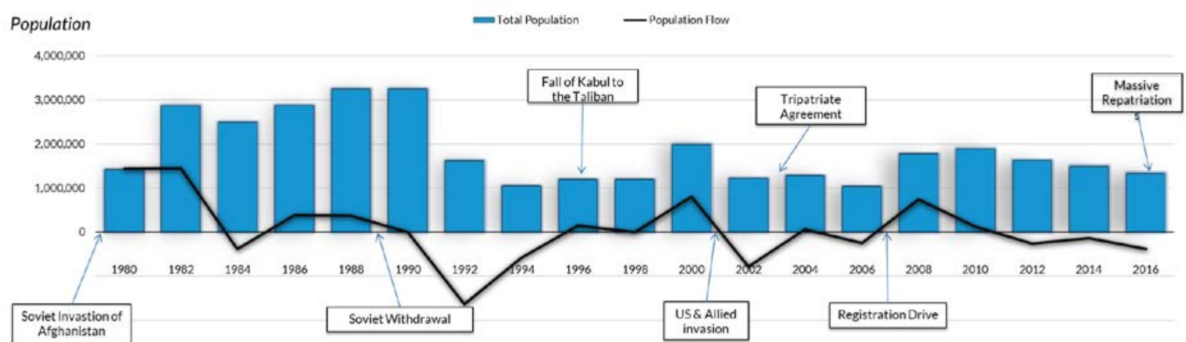
Mapping the Structure of Well-Being and Social Networks of Refugees: Peshawar Case Study

From Origins of Displacement to Recent Repatriations

According to The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), 1.35 million registered refugees and an estimated 1 million undocumented Afghans reside in Pakistan in December 2016, making it the second largest refugee population after Syrians residing in Turkey.[1] Located at the gateway to Afghanistan, Peshawar has served as their primary hub, both for transit and settlement since the late-1970s—significantly altering this ancient city's social milieu. In 2011, UNHCR's refugee census found that 29 percent of all Afghan refugees in Pakistan reside in camp and non-camp situations in the Peshawar valley. Due to deep ethnic, tribal and cultural ties, Afghans and Pakistanis have coexisted relatively peacefully, with refugees experiencing social and economic integration. Using an original survey of refugees in Peshawar, this policy brief evaluates how social ties have supported refugees' self-reliance and economic wellbeing, and offers policy recommendations to government and humanitarian stakeholders for improving their welfare.[2]

FIGURE 1

Refugees in Pakistan, 1980–2012



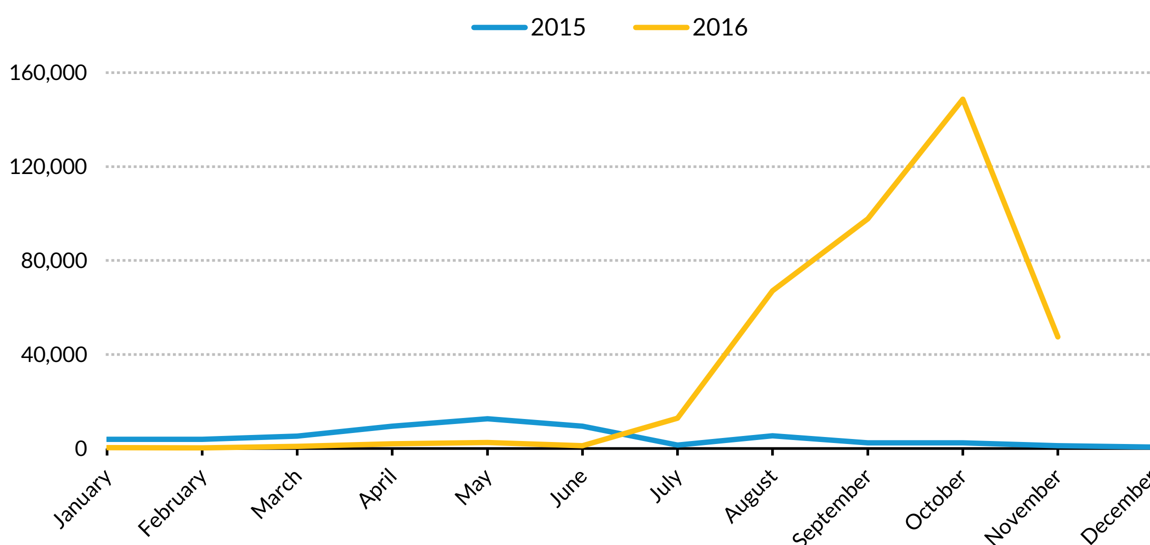
Source: UNHCR

Afghanistan has remained in a war-like situation since 1979 due to the Soviet occupation (1979-89), civil war (1990-96), the Taliban regime (1996-2001) and the ongoing US- and NATO-led war since then. Periodic fighting in and around major population centers has since displaced millions, including into Pakistan and Iran. The population of Afghan refugees in Pakistan has directly correlated with

hostilities, featuring waves of incoming displacements and outgoing repatriations. During the Soviet occupation, according to UNHCR, it grew steadily to cross 3 million in 1987 and remained high until 2 years after their withdrawal. Despite civil war, post-Soviet optimism stimulated massive repatriations between 1992 and 1994. The relative political stability of the Taliban years in the mid- to-late 1990s brought no major changes. The US and Allied invasion in 2001 caused major displacements, but were followed by repatriations following the fall of Kabul in November. Since then, despite statistical adjustments following the 2006-07 registration drive, the refugee population had remained relatively stable at around 1.5-1.7 million until mid-2016.

FIGURE 2

Repatriations of Afghan Refugees by Month



Source: UNHCR.

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What Explains the Recent Upsurge in Repatriations?

As shown in figures 1 and 2, after years of sluggish repatriations averaging 56,839 people per year since 2009, between July-November 2016 alone at least 369,580 documented refugees and an estimated 200,000 undocumented Afghans returned home.[3] While not unprecedented in the historical context, this dramatic increase in 'voluntary' repatriations has triggered an international debate on its causes and consequences. In February 2017, a Human Rights Watch (HRW) report alleged "Pakistan's coercion" and "UN complicity" in forcing a "mass forced return of Afghan refugees" based primarily on 115 interviews with returnees in Afghanistan and refugees staying in Pakistan. UNHCR's regular

reports based on exit interviews with a sample of returnees provides a more comprehensive socioeconomic picture of repatriating families, besides analyses of the “push” and “pull” factors influencing decision making. Though we are unable to assess the magnitude or validity of any of these hypotheses, our analysis of social ties offers a fresh perspective to this debate.

We found four potential contributing factors explaining repatriations, all of which are either directly or indirectly discussed in HRW and UNHCR reports. First, starting July 1, 2016, UNHCR doubled the cash grant for registered returning refugees from $200 to $400 per person—that is, $2,880 for an average household comprising 7.2 individuals.[4] Given the local custom of multiple households communally sharing resources and their income poverty, this represents a significant economic incentive, though only applicable to registered refugees. However, in UNHCR’s exit interviews, only 16 percent identified this as a major “pull” factor toward return[5] whereas a recent Human Rights Watch reports alleges that the agency did this only under pressure from the government of Pakistan.[6]

Second, as part of the National Action Plan[7] for counterterrorism, on June 1, 2016, the government of Pakistan began formal border controls at Torkham, meaning they no longer allowed the cross-border movement of people without valid travel documents. In interviews with Afghan community leaders we found that the inability to freely attend key social events in Afghanistan is a “deal breaker” for many, tipping their decision toward permanent repatriation despite poor security and economic conditions. This is reflected in UNHCR’s exit interviews as well, where 53 percent identified joining family members in Afghanistan as one of the “pull factors” impacting their decision to repatriate.

Third, the Afghan government, through its diplomatic mission in Pakistan, launched a multipronged effort in encouraging repatriations—the first in over two decades. As part of a public campaign dubbed “Gul Watan Khpal Watan” (the grass is green in my land), social ties were used for more targeted persuasion through interventions by respected tribal elders. Refugees were assured best possible facilitation by Afghan authorities upon return and large groups of returnees were warmly greeted by public officials that received widespread positive media coverage. Our fieldwork lends support to this hypothesis, including the continuation of this pull through returnee family members, most of who remain in contact forming an important feedback loop.

Fourth, there were reports of police harassment and other intimidation pushing refugees to return home, resulting in many families feeling either unwelcome or unsafe in Pakistan. Throughout the first half of 2016, Pakistani and Afghan media outlets reported such incidents which both the Afghan government and some Pakistani political parties formally relayed to authorities.[8] However, the fear of arrest or deportation was cited in only 8 percent of UNHCR exit interviews before July 2016 and 37

percent by November 2016. In our survey, only 6.9 percent of respondents expressed plans of moving out of their home in the next 6 months. Within this group, only 4.3 percent cited discrimination, xenophobia or fear of crime or harassment in the top 3 reasons for wanting to move out.

During interviews with Afghan community representatives in November 2016, we found that many families continue living in a state of readiness for repatriation, with final decisions resting on ongoing feedback they receive from recently repatriated friends and family members, besides potentially additional pressure from Pakistani authorities or communities.

Official Policies toward Refugees

Since the 2003 tripartite agreement between Pakistan, Afghanistan and UNHCR on repatriation of Afghans, Amnesty International reports that "nearly four million" registered and unregistered refugees might have returned.[9] Under this agreement, which was signed in the post-Taliban optimism and hope for regional stability, all parties agreed to facilitate repatriations of registered refugees based on "volunteerism" and "gradualism." It also affirmed that refugees would return in safety and dignity, have freedom of choosing their destinations within Afghanistan, be allowed to maintain family unity, and will receive financial support and other protections from both the government of Afghanistan and UNHCR. The agreement also triggered re-registrations of all refugees and has since provided a comprehensive data base which is still being updated through repatriations and natural growth in refugee populations.

In recent years, the government of Pakistan has imposed and extended deadlines for expiration of refugee registration cards, which now stands at March 31, 2017.[10] While such extensions provide temporary relief, refugees are living in highly stressful circumstances being forced to relocate to an unstable and economically depressed home country. Having lived in Pakistan for many years, as is the case of 74 percent of refugees, they have limited social or economic ties in Afghanistan other than via recently returned community members. Latest exit interviews with refugees indicate that the lack of shelter and land, dearth of health care facilities and deficiency of opportunities are their three biggest concerns, while joining other family members is their biggest attraction.

On the Pakistani side, while the government remains adamant that all Afghans must eventually leave, multiple regional parties with support bases in the Pashtun dominated Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province are more sympathetic. In the absence of empowered local governments, the provincial and federal governments continue to drive the policy agenda mostly without meaningful consultations with stakeholders such as host communities and civil society organizations. Given the geo-strategically significant and turbulent diplomatic Pakistani-Afghan relations, major decisions related to refugees are made at the highest level of government in Pakistan, i.e. the federal cabinet led by the Prime Minister.

Pakistan is now considering a new visa policy for Afghan refugees, reportedly intending to provide legal coverage to students, business persons and other temporary residents—though the potential economic impact of such a policy has not yet been studied.

The Peshawar Refugees Survey

In this section, we outline our research methodology and highlight key finding forming a basic demographic and economic profile of the surveyed population.

Survey Methodology

We conducted a household survey of 1,004 adult Afghan refugees living in the Peshawar valley, 28 one-on-one interviews with purposively selected refugees; and key informant interviews with experts, local and humanitarian workers, and Pakistani authorities.[11] The survey sampling was based on UNHCR's 2011 census of refugees, which provided Union Council (UC)–level Afghan refugee population data which we used as sampling clusters for randomly selecting households. For example, if the census reported that 5 percent of Peshawar's Afghan refugee populations were living in a given neighborhood, we ensured that 50 of our targeted 1,000 respondents were surveyed there. Given low response rates due to the coexistence of refugees and local populations in densely populated neighborhoods, and our interest in surveying only post-2001 arrivals for better recall memory, every randomly selected household was asked to refer up to 3 additional refugee families living in the vicinity. In addition to successful interviews, survey teams also made 1,290 unsuccessful attempts due to screening out after initial contact, no answer at the door, or refusal to participate in the study.

Within each UC, the selection of random starting points was done using a landmark selection grid method within constituent census blocks. Survey teams first hand sketched all major landmarks such as bus stands, mosques and hospitals, before randomly selecting them one-by-one. Teams then followed the random walk method, attempting to interview every third house on the right-hand side until the target of 10 successful interviews was achieved. Depending on locations, referral based interviews were attempted either immediately after, or the following day. All fieldwork was closely supervised by professionals, and multipronged quality assurance processes were put in place, including accompaniment, random checks and phone follow-ups by quality monitors.

TABLE 1

Sampling Frame Based on Union Councils

Union Council	Percentage of Afghan refugee population	Estimated Afghan refugee population	Total surveys
Khalsa	3%	11,160	30
Mera Kshori	7%	26,040	71
Urmar Bala	22%	81,840	222
Nahaqi	1%	3,720	10
Hazzar Khani	1%	3,720	10
Khazana	5%	18,600	51
Shahi Bagh	1%	3,720	10
Badaber	8%	29,760	81
Heryana Payan	2%	7,440	20
Nothia Jadeed	3%	11,160	30
Bahadar Kalay	1%	3,720	10
Terai Payan	1%	3,720	10
Mahal Teri	2%	7,440	20
Takhal	12%	44,640	121
University Town	13%	48,360	131
Pawaka	1%	3,720	10
Sufaid Dheri	2%	7,440	20
Regi Lalma	1%	3,720	10
Hayatabad 1	4%	14,880	40
Hayatabad 2	5%	18,600	51
Nasit Bagh	4%	14,880	40
Total	**100%**	**368,280**	**998**

Having said this, we note two shortcomings of our methodology, implying that survey results are not representative of the refugee population. First, due to local cultural constrains and despite having female enumerators in field teams (6 out of 14), we failed to get adequate numbers of women respondents. This is particularly important since social networks are gender-dependent. Second, the majority of our respondents were referral based and thus not randomly selected. This decision was dictated by resource constraints due to extremely low response rates found during piloting, potentially due to the movement of target populations since the 2011 census. Third, most if not all respondents were heads of households and the survey did not include a household member roster. While the intention was to gather as much information as possible about economic activity, this inadvertently inhibited female participation which potentially skews our results toward male responses.

Demographic Profile of Surveyed Population

Despite these shortcomings, the survey provides a rare direct glimpse into refugees' social networks, demographic realities as well as economic circumstances including asset ownership and future aspirations. While much of this was comprehensively reported by UNHCR's 2011 census, given the

transit nature of displaced populations this provides a useful fact-check for policymakers and humanitarian agencies. Since by definition the census comprehensively maps most if not all refugees, we benchmark our survey's descriptive results discussed here with census data through comparisons and contrasts.

TABLE 2

Demographic Information of Sample Refugee Population

	Male	Female
Sex (%)	84.4	12.6
Age (years)	42.8	37.5
Primary education or less (%)	30.5	51.2
Pashtun (%)	79.0	96.1
Sunni Muslim (%)	99.5	100
Duration as refugee (months)	138.1	130.8
Registered (%)	59.1	96.5

While the census indicated a near equal number of men and women, for reasons discussed earlier we were only able to interview 126 women. Despite targeting heads of household, at average ages of 42.8 years for men and 37.5 for women, the surveyed population is youthful with no differences between Pashtuns and Tajiks. The census reported a similar trend, with nearly half of the entire refugee population being younger than 15. Having been in refugee status for an average of over 11 years, our surveyed population has spent much of their adult lives in Pakistan and thus has significant social ties within host communities—a fact reconfirmed during one-on-one interviews.

This population is highly homogenous in ethnic terms (81.2 percent Pashtun, 18.5 percent Tajik) and consists almost completely of Sunni Muslims (99.6 percent) with not a single non-Muslim respondent. The domination of the Pashtun population reflects Afghanistan's own demography and is fully in-line with the census' finding of 82 percent refugees being Pashtun, despite our sample being geographically skewed toward urban Peshawar. This homogeneity in fact extends to the host population, likely supporting refugees' social and economic integration, and stands in stark contrast to the highly diverse refugee populations in places such as urban Nairobi.

Refugees on average are highly uneducated with 30.5 percent of men and 51.2 percent of women reporting having less than primary school or no formal education at all. Only 0.7 percent report having completed secondary school and almost none have completed university education (0.1 percent), though nearly all reported having some income-generating skillsets. Due to ethnic homogeneity and the historic cross-border links between the two countries, 80.8 percent are fully proficient in Urdu or

Pashto, the two dominant local languages. In contrast to other urban refugee contexts such as Nairobi and Gaziantep, this is potentially a major advantage for social and economic integration. However, the level of English proficiency, a pre-requisite for high income professional service sector jobs that generally correlates with educational attainment, is extremely low with less than 1 percent claiming to be fluent.

Economic Well-Being and Resilience

The survival of refugee populations depends, in a large part, on their economic resilience including their ability to generate regular income or open businesses to sustain livelihoods. Fully understanding refugees' economic circumstances (e.g., jobs or savings) and related vulnerabilities (e.g., access to basic services) is essential for drawing policy relevant conclusions, as economic factors are highly intertwined with social network structures.

TABLE 3

Income, Savings, Debt, and Remittances

	Percent
Making an income	83.3
Savings more than four weeks	40.7
Receives remittances	22.3
Debt incurred during journey	69.4
Income more than minimum wage	63.7

With 83.3 percent of respondents earning a living through the formal or informal sector, refugees appear fairly well integrated into the local economy despite vulnerabilities associated with low incomes and job insecurity. Within income-generating refugees, the most commonly reported occupations are sales related (48.9 percent), food preparation and serving (13.3) and office and administrative support (12.4) with lowest categories including the likes of production (0.2 percent), education, training and library (0.1 percent) and business and financial operations (4.7 percent). Unsurprisingly, only 22.3 percent receive regular remittances from outside Peshawar and more than two-third is burdened by debt of some sort. On the other hand, a healthy 40.7 percent have savings that could cover at least a month of household expenditures and 63.7 percent earn more than Pakistan's official minimum wage. Savings are a particularly important factor in families' repatriation decisions as they face uncertain conditions back in Afghanistan. This emerging economic picture, particularly in terms of income and savings, is somewhat healthy and positively impacts refugees' self-reliance.

TABLE 4

Basic Needs

	Percent
Haven't experienced homelessness	78.6
Haven't faced hunger	79.8
Haven't had health needs unmet	85.0
Have adequate seasonal clothing	87.8
Have access to basic utilities	58.9

Nearly all respondents live in non-temporary housing situations, with the bulk residing in free standing housing (86.9 percent) and apartments (12.4 percent). The vast majority (78.6 percent) report not having experienced homelessness in the past six months and none are currently homeless, likely an artifact of our methodology of conducting interviews at respondents' homes. Since refugees are legally not permitted to own property in Pakistan, they all live in rented properties and the average monthly rent ($36.4 per household) forms 23.1 percent of average reported monthly expenditures. But given complex family and tribal living structures and inconsistencies with our definition of households (sharing kitchen), the rent-as-percentage-of-income calculations are somewhat unreliable.

Living in regular albeit mostly low-income urban neighborhoods, access to basic services is the same as host communities, which also is another indicator of their integration. Their usage levels for natural gas/electrical burner (67.8 percent), electricity connection (94.8 percent), pit latrine or "improved sanitation" (76.8 percent), and piped water connection (87.5 percent) are fairly high, particularly by local standards. Overall, we found that 58.9 percent have access to 4 out of 5 basic utilities. Further, they perceive that they are living under secure conditions, with 89.6 percent feeling either completely or somewhat physically safe while at home, with no significant differences across the two sexes. In terms of asset ownership, just over a quarter own livestock, a car or motorbike, or a desktop or laptop computer at home, while TV (60.5 percent) and radio (68.5 percent) ownership rates are significantly higher. However, smartphone ownership (17.2 percent) remains low, limiting humanitarians' ability to use smartphone apps for information dissemination or data collection.

While the census reported one-third of all refugees in Peshawar have to take care of an individual with some form of physical or mental disability, in the survey only 21.8 percent reported needing to care for family members (of all ages) due to disability and an additional 19.8 percent due to chronic illnesses. Despite such high regular medical needs, 15 percent reported that during the last six months family members needing medical attention could not reach a health facility. This was true for 17.1 percent of Pashtun but only 4.8 percent of Tajik respondents.

In terms of reasons they were unable to access medical services, while only 3.1 percent were denied access due to discrimination or legal status and only 1.5 percent did not have enough information, 10.5 percent simply could not afford expenses. This indicates the greater demand for public provision of health care services, which is arguably among the most fundamental of human needs particularly in conflict situations. In terms of physical mobility within the city, 53.9 percent rely on Peshawar's inadequate public transportation system to reach workplaces, with only 18.1 percent using private cars or motorcycles, followed by 10.5 percent biking and another 11.5 percent walking. This is arguably a suboptimal situation since non-access to quality transport services severely limits refugees' ability to participate in higher value added economic activities, i.e. better paying jobs.

TABLE 5

Work, Sectors and Occupations

	Percent
Food preparation and serving-related occupations	13.3
Sales and related occupations	48.9
Office and administrative support occupations	12.4
Transportation and material moving occupations	9.1
Others	16.3

In contrast to the census finding a 42.4 percent labor force participation rate, our surveyed population's high participation rate (83.3 percent) is likely due to our sample's nearly exclusive focus on urban areas where job demand is arguably higher. Near half of working respondents are engaged in sales related activities, followed by wage labor, administrative support jobs and food related occupations including street vending. In stark contrast, low proportions of refugees work in higher value added sectors such as education and training (0.1 percent), business and finance (4.7 percent), or personal care and services (3.5 percent). In fact, the high proportion of sales and service sector employment is likely due to the high prevalence of informal sector employment, including daily wage labor and domestic or home-based work. This reflects low vocational skills attainment, with 28 percent reporting having no marketable skills at all.

Moreover, the conservative local culture impacts gender norms regarding occupations, which is evident as follows. Over 92 percent of refugees working in food preparation and serving business and over 88 percent of office and administrative support jobs are taken up by men. Over half of all working women are engaged in the service sector. In addition, we do not observe any significant difference between men's and women's safety perception at the workplace. 96.4 percent feel safe or somewhat safe at the workplace despite the fact that many of them work in unregulated sectors at street corners or other informal establishments. Interestingly, while only 42.5 percent men reported feeling "safe" at

the workplace, this percentage was significantly higher (83.3 percent) for women—though in absolute terms these numbers are much lower than in the case of men.

In terms of income, while findings are in line with the census' reports, we found Tajiks earn 28 percent less than Pashtuns. However, all refugees are surviving in conditions of near-abject poverty, with an estimated per person daily income of only $6.30. On the other hand, the average level of savings is enough to cover 2 months' worth of household living expenses. These income levels must be viewed in the context of broader financial stability and locally appropriate household expense levels, as follows. Given average household size (10.2) of surveyed population, the average annual household income of $1,891 is significantly lower than Pakistan's average GDP per capita (PPP) of $5,000. Tajiks are more financially vulnerable, with 67.2 percent not having enough savings to cover a month of living expenses as compared to 56.9 percent Pashtuns. Regardless, the refugee population overall remains highly vulnerable, with 19.9 percent occasionally sleeping without a meal at night and 12 percent not having adequate clothing for winters. In addition to paid income, 22 percent receive regular monthly remittances, mostly from within Pakistan, likely from relatives working in larger Pakistani cities such as Karachi.

The Role of Social Networks in Well-Being

While economic and social factors go hand in hand, in situations of adversity such as refugee crises, people tend to rely on immediate and extended social networks for support. Through survey data, we explore this hypothesis by asking respondents to name up to four individuals from whom they are most likely to seek assistance when looking for housing or employment. We then ask a series of demographic questions about those individuals (or alters), helping establish the relative diversity and strength of their social ties. The sources of social network bonds varied significantly and included being neighbors in pre-displacement communities in Afghanistan, sharing ethnicity or tribal identity, or meeting generous Pakistani neighbors who later became close friends. Our analysis in this section however is limited by the homogeneity of the respondent population.

Most significantly, we found refugees rely much more heavily on social networks based on ethnic similarities or personal relationships than formalized associations, local or international nonprofits, government in Pakistan, or international humanitarian agencies. This was observed to be true for both sexes and major ethnicities. When asked whether they had received direct support from these groups, few responded in the affirmative across key categories including cash transfers (19.9 percent),

education or vocational training (14.0 percent), health services (13.9), legal counseling (16.6 percent) and food, clothing or shelter (41.2 percent). This is in contrast to 90.7 percent who received "some form of support" from interpersonal social ties such as friends, acquaintances, or even random strangers from either the refugee or host community. While recognizing that informal ties can only fulfill certain limited support needs, the differences in magnitudes of support strongly indicate the critical role of social network ties in refugee self-reliance.

At the time of arrival in Pakistan, on average refugees had 2.5 friends or acquaintances in their adapted home, most of which we understand were ties from Afghanistan. Not surprisingly given the conservative local culture, we found men having much larger and more diverse networks than women, thus the later relying heavily on male family members' networks for assistance. For example, the 237 respondents who reported not having a single friend or acquaintance in Pakistan at the time of arrival constitute 22.3 percent of the male and 32.3 percent of the female respondents respectively. Similarly, when broken down by ethnicity, unsurprisingly we find that Tajiks have fewer social ties than Pashtuns, as the vast majority of host communities in Peshawar are Pashtun. For example, 22.7 percent of Pashtuns and 27.4 percent of Tajiks did not have any ties at the time of arrival, but when comparing those who had more than 2 social ties, these percentages change to 72.6 percent and 58.0 percent respectively. When correlated with the likelihood of finding a job, or level of household income, we find no significant relationship.

Overall, refugees' interactions with host communities soon after arriving in Pakistan were mostly related to information exchange (91 percent) and exchange of financial resources was limited (9 percent). But our interviews revealed several heartwarming stories of random strangers extending in-kind and emotional support that made refugees feel at home. Arguably the two critical elements of settlement as well as finding a job and housing, were supported by these social connections in 34.9 and 53.3 percent of the cases respectively. The likelihood of receiving support in finding jobs from social connections was considerably stronger among Tajiks (48.2 percent) than Pashtuns (32.2 percent) which could mean that the minority community maintains stronger social ties. Our interviews revealed however that in recent years this feeling of camaraderie and belongingness to Pakistan among some refugees is fading as their relations with the Pakistani state and host communities deteriorates.

We now focus the discussion on exploring main social network characteristics of alters (social connections identified by primary respondents) reported by respondents, which offers unique insights into network structures and their impact on wellbeing outcomes. All respondents were given the option of naming up to four alters, two each in the categories of who they would reach out for help when in need for a new job, or home. We chose these because both are highly critical personal and family

decisions in which most people only engage highly trusted friends or acquaintances. Out of 1,004 total respondents, 915 chose to identify the first alter, 642 identified the second, 827 the third and only 523 identified a fourth possible alter.

TABLE 6

Network Diversity—Similarities and Differences within Alters, by Ethnicity, Religion and Sex

	Similar	Different
Ethnicity (%)	84.4	15.6
Religion (%)	99.6	0.6
Sex (%)	85.4	14.6

By looking at each unique respondent-alter combination, we find that 84.4 percent relationships are between people of the same ethnicity regardless of alters' legal or socioeconomic status. While in other contexts this could indicate refugees' social isolation, in Peshawar such an interpretation would be simply incorrect because the vast majority of refugees and host community members are Pashtun. In fact, despite only 18.5 percent of respondents being Tajik, having 15.6 percent of relationships being non-similar could be significant and indicate cross-ethnic network ties. Similarly, the vast majority of these relationships (85.4 percent) are between members of the same sex, which again is unsurprising given the domination of men in respondent sample and the traditionally conservative culture that strongly restricts interaction between men and women.

TABLE 6

Nature of Social Network Interactions

	Yes	No
Do you interact with alters at least monthly? (%)	17.0	83.0
Have alters been mostly helpful? (%)	86.9	13.1
Do the majority of alters know one another? (%)	25.7	26.9

In order to assess the strength of network links, we asked respondents to indicate the average frequency of interaction with each listed alter. Only 17 percent of respondents interact with alters more frequently than once every month on average, including over the telephone, which perhaps indicates the relative weakness of these ties. Similarly, when asked whether or not the identified alter was helpful in practical ways, only 17 percent of responses were in the affirmative. This too appears quiet low, though in the absence of reference points such interpretations it is difficult to substantiate this interpretation. Finally, we assess the extent to which social networks are open or closed—that is, do alters within a respondent's network know each other or otherwise? The answers here are mixed as well, with around a quarter knowing each other well, another quarter not known each other at all and

the remainder being unsure. Overall, the analysis of respondent-alter relationships is a mixed bag particularly given the lack of reference point that could help better situate results.

Discussion and Policy Implications

The year 2017 could become a watershed for Afghan refugees in Pakistan—as their relationships with host communities, the Pakistan and Afghanistan governments, and the international humanitarian community is at a cross-roads. They are being encouraged and incentivized to voluntarily repatriate to their home country, but there are considerable political, economic and security challenges that make their futures extremely uncertain.

In addition to being a humanitarian issue, large-scale repatriation of Afghan refugees would have economic consequences for the Peshawar metropolitan economy. Some refugees we interviewed shared anecdotes of returning families being desperate to sell-off real estate (mostly registered with Pakistanis) and private vehicles and are forced to accept below market values. There is generally limited recognition of this form of economic exploitation, in part because of the difficulty in systematically documenting the frequency and magnitude of this problem. Interviews with refugees revealed that unlike prior years, when host-refugee community relations were largely positive, they now live with the perceived threat of intimidation, harassment or deportation, including from local communities which they previously considered friendlier.

Despite the increasing momentum of voluntary repatriations, large numbers of Afghan refugees will likely continue staying in Pakistan and thus will require continued assistance from the humanitarian sector and government agencies. Some specific policy recommendations are as follows:

- Local advocacy groups and other forms of institutionalized collective action platforms must be established by local implementing partners. This will enable refugees to better leverage social networks, develop greater affinity within their own community and have greater bargaining powers for their own rights. As victims of civil war and international conflicts, they are legitimate stakeholders whose lives are currently being shaped by authorities that do not represent them. Given that on average less than 0.5 percent respondents are members of organized groups such as credit associations or refugee associations, and only 0.9 percent attend community meetings, their active participation in such platforms could improve the degree of available support. In order for these groups to be self-organized and sustainable however, they should ideally emerge from the bottoms-up. Thus local nonprofits must be

supported to undertake community outreach and awareness campaigns encouraging participation in newly created entities, and then help sustain them through initial handholding before communities can own them.

- The significant uncertainty regarding their fate within Pakistan is severely hampering the short- to medium-term wellbeing of refugees. Many are holding back key livelihood and personal life decisions, such as starting a new business or marrying off a daughter, until after their longer-term outlook is more obvious. All key stakeholders, including the two national governments and UNHCR, should work together to chart out and publicly announce a clear future path for these families, allowing them to take more informed decisions in their best interest.

- Concrete policy steps are needed to document, understand and avoid further economic exploitation of refugees increasingly desperate to leave Pakistan, particularly when they are forced to liquidate assets that they have often purchased in the name of local friends. The Peshawar local government, in close coordination with the provincial police department and the provincial Commissionerate Afghan Refugees, must further encourage reporting of such incidents for improved law enforcement against exploitation. Further, if the government of Pakistan is indeed contemplating a new visa regime, the details of proposals should be made public and potential implementation timelines shared so displaced families can make more informed decisions.

- The UNHCR census found refugees being significantly worse off than locals in terms of school enrollment, prevalence of chronic diseases and household income levels—making them highly vulnerable in social and economic terms. Steps must therefore be taken to ensure refugees receive adequate access to basic services including health and education, primarily through the public system because most refugees cannot afford private providers.

- The newly formed local governments in Pakistan, particularly in localities with high concentration of refugee populations, must be empowered to create new departments or other institutional arrangements to protect refugees. For example, the city government could create a department of Afghan community affairs to maintain active contact with community representatives. Having well-integrated refugees could serve interests of host communities as they provide inexpensive labor and social integration helps avoid potential criminal activity in the long-term. Local academics, with support from bilateral and multilateral donors, should conduct studies to further demonstrate the local economic impact of the Afghan community in the form of investments and job creation.

In addition, studies are needed to better understand the economic and social repercussions of repatriation and potential implications of the new visa regime. When asked for suggestions for improving their living conditions in Pakistan, 63.7 percent said that above all else they would like to have work permits so their ongoing economic activities can become legitimate. These should be based on data from exit interviews and additional surveys of returning and non-returning refugees, ascertaining which types of refugees are most likely to return and why. Are more socially and economically vulnerable refugee families more likely to return, or otherwise? How much and what form of support do they require in Pakistan and Afghanistan during the repatriation process? Moreover, what lessons in refugee management can this situation offer to authorities in Turkey, Kenya and elsewhere?

Extending this study's focus on household income toward refugee owned businesses, particularly those involved in cross-border trading with landlocked Afghanistan. Is the presence of millions of Afghan refugees across Pakistan, and tens of thousands in the Peshawar valley, a net positive for the local economy? How much of a competitive advantage have Pakistani owned enterprises gained from the supply of inexpensive refugee labor? How do refugees utilize cross-border social ties for business advantages, and in what particular sectors? We can evaluate these questions by better understanding the value chains and spatial clustering of refugee owned businesses, and helping the government of Pakistan make more informed decisions regarding the proposed visa regime for Afghans.

Notes

1. United Nations Human Rights Council. 2016. Repatriation of Afghan Refugees From Pakistan: Revised Supplementary Appeal September-December 2016.
2. Given our interest in social networks which required respondents to have good recall of cross-border movements, the surveys only covered post-2001 arrivals.
3. UNHCR. 2016. Voluntary Repatriation Update October 2016. Washington, DC: UNHCR
4. UNHCR. 2011. Population Profiling, Verification and Response Survey of Afghans in Pakistan 2011. Islamabad, Pakistan: UNHCR http://unhcrpk.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/11/PPVR-Report.pdf.
5. UNHCR. 2016. Voluntary Repatriation Update October 2016. Islamabad, Pakistan: UNHCR http://unhcrpk.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/12/VolRep_Summary_20161001_v11.pdf.
6. Simpson, Gary, Saroop Ijaz, Ahmad Shuja, Bill Frelick, Judith Sunderland, James Ross, Tom Porteous, Marta Kosmyna, Olivia Hunter, Jose Martinez, and Fitzroy Hepkins. 2017. Pakistan Coercian, UN Complicity: The Mass Forced Returned of Afghan Refugee. New York, NY: HumanRights Watch.
7. Following the December 2014 terrorist attack on the Army Public School in Peshawar in which 135 children were killed, all major political parties in Pakistan unanimously agreed on a 20 point action plan to counter terrorism. Source: Government of Pakistan. 2016. “National Action Plan.” Islamabad, Pakistan: Government of Pakistan Ministry of Information, Broadcasting & National Heritage. http://nacta.gov.pk/NAPPoints20.htm. And: National Counter Terrorism Authority. 2016. “20 Points of National Action Plan”. Islamabad, Pakistan: National Counter Terrorism Authority. http://infopak.gov.pk/InnerPage.aspx?Page_ID=46.
8. The UN Refugee Organization. 2017. Tough choices for Afghan refugees returning home after years in exile. Washington, DC: UNHCR. http://unhcrpk.org/tough-choices-for-afghan-refugees-returning-home-after-years-in-exile/
9. Waraich, Omar. 2016. Pakistan: Afghan Refugees still languish in limbo. New York, NY: Amnesty International. https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2016/08/afghan-refugees-lives-in-limbo/
10. Source: http://unhcrpk.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/07/Notification.pdf
11. Using a “contact sheet” asking potential respondents to identify nationality and length of stay in Pakistan, we ensured that all respondents were Afghan refugees living in Peshawar who arrived after 2001, regardless of registration status. Household selection was undertaken using the random walk method, with every third household on the right-hand side approached. Starting points for random walks were identified using a Kish grid of landmarks.

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