

Figurations of displacement in and beyond Pakistan: empirical findings and reflections on protracted displacement and translocal connections of Afghans

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TRAF·G

Transnational Figurations of Displacement

Figurations of Displacement in and beyond Pakistan

Empirical findings and reflections on
protracted displacement and translocal
connections of Afghans

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SUMMARY

Pakistan currently hosts up to three million Afghans, a number that is likely to increase due to the Taliban's recent return to power in Afghanistan. This *working paper* is based on empirical research on the experience of Afghan displacement in Pakistan from 2019 until early 2021 as part of the European Union funded TRAFIG project.

Findings show that Afghans' protracted displacement is classed. Many low-skilled, low-income and largely non-educated Afghans experience barriers to upward social mobility, particularly leading the Afghan youth to consider migrating to Europe. First-generation Afghan refugees who migrated mainly in the 1980s and 1990s prefer to stay in Pakistan; only few would return if the conditions allowed it. While aiming to incentivise return, Pakistani government policies hamper the opportunity for Afghans to move around within and beyond Pakistan and remain connected to their translocal and transnational networks. Many Afghan refugees have family members who live in other parts of Pakistan or in other countries, but the potential of these networks to lift those in Pakistan out of protracted displacement is limited. We also found that social cohesion between Afghan refugees and the Pakistani host society has been decreasing. Local networks are highly significant in day-to-day life, but intergroup relations do not yield any emancipatory potential for Afghans.

Afghans' presence in Pakistan needs to be reconsidered by all actors, namely the country of origin, host and donor countries. The current approach of 'administering Afghans' keeps them in protracted displacement without the opportunity to integrate legally or sustainably. It needs to be replaced with a new narrative and operational approach—one that acknowledges Afghans' contributions to Pakistan's economy, society and culture, and that secures their right to remain in Pakistan. Such an approach is particularly important today given the looming prospect of more Afghans entering Pakistan to escape from living under a government headed by the Taliban.

KEYWORDS

Protracted displacement, migration governance, connectivity, (social) mobility, immobility, refugee regime, translocal lives, social networks, agency, social class, local integration, return, repatriation, durable solution, Pakistan, Afghanistan

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Introduction

Afghans have not contributed anything positive to society. Whenever something happens, it is attributed to Afghans, especially concerning the law-and-order situation. In one way or another, Afghans can be put in relation to the offenders, even if they only act as the transporters of the latter. The justification of their stay is no longer logical after 40 years (EI-BICC-KM-003-Pak).

This *working paper* describes and analyses empirical data that have been collected in Pakistan in the framework of the project “Transnational Figurations of Displacement” (TRAFIG), funded by the European Union and coordinated by BICC (Bonn International Center for Conversion). The overall objective of TRAFIG is “to contribute to the development of alternative solutions to protracted displacement that are better tailored to the needs and capacities of persons affected by displacement” (Etzold et al., 2019). The main question that our research aims to answer is: How are protractedness, dependency and vulnerability related to factors of local and translocal connectivity and mobility, and, in turn, how can connectivity and mobility be utilised to enhance displaced people’s self-reliance and strengthen their resilience? In this *working paper*, we focus on findings from Pakistan, a country that at the time of writing hosts up to three million Afghans (see Section 2 for details) and where new flows of refugees can be expected due to the takeover of power by the Taliban in Afghanistan in August 2021.

The quote above sketches the increasingly negative perceptions of Afghans in Pakistan that shape an overall adverse context that the displaced have to navigate. The discrimination and de facto forced repatriation since 2015 that many Afghans face reflects their increasing rejection in Pakistan. However, the quote can also be read as a call for urgency to scrutinise the established regional and national refugee regimes concerning Afghans. Accordingly, we need to rethink Afghans’ presence in Pakistan. The current approach of ‘administering Afghans’ and thus also keeping them in protracted displacement needs to be replaced with a new narrative and operational approach for framing Afghans’ presence in Pakistan that acknowledges Afghans’ contributions to Pakistan’s economy, society, and culture, that secures their rights and contributes to a sustainable solution to their protracted displacement. This is even more relevant at the time of writing given the looming prospect of more Afghans entering Pakistan to escape living under a government headed by the Taliban.

In the following sections, we first provide more detail on the empirical design of the study, its limitations and some background on how the data collection processes unfolded in practice, including the challenges we encountered. Section 2 provides a sketch of the figuration of displacement in Pakistan and how this has developed over time. Section 3 consists of the main body of our *paper* and analyses the empirical data in reference to the five main themes of TRAFIG. Thus, sub-section 3.1 looks into governance regimes of aid and asylum as they apply in Pakistan and how Afghans are subjected to them, and how major types of stakeholders navigate these regimes in their national, organisational and personal interests. Sub-section 3.2 revolves around the theme ‘living in limbo’ and analyses how Afghans sustain their lives and livelihoods but also to what extent they can escape from uncertainty. It highlights how class relations impact the social mobility prospects of Afghans in Pakistan. Sub-section 3.3 follows the networks of Afghans and looks into the role of people’s connections for social and physical mobility, including a special excursus on mobility constraints of Afghans in Iran. Sub-section 3.4 investigates how Afghans in Pakistan build alliances in their immediate environment and the extent to which these facilitate their de facto local integration. Sub-section 3.5 briefly sketches out under which conditions Afghans can seize opportunities and identifies sectors where Afghans achieve a considerable economic impact for the host country. Finally, section 4 discusses some cross-cutting findings and other emerging themes that resulted from our research. Amongst others, we pay attention to gendered immobilisation, how legal status and protection play out differently for people from different social classes,¹ Afghan youth’s outlook on the future and their vulnerability under conditions of COVID-19. In the concluding section, we provide a short summary of our main findings related to the notion of translocal figurations of displacement. We also discuss the conditions under which connectivity and mobility could help Afghans find a durable way to move out of protracted displacement.

¹ Social class is understood here as multidimensional concept based on the scope and mixture of capitals, including economic, social and cultural capital, held by individuals. The concept includes practices by which people signify class belonging and reproduce class relations (Bonjour & Chauvin, 2018). For the purpose of this paper, the conceptual underpinnings cannot be explored. However, the case of Afghan refugees (cf. Grawert & Mielke, 2018) and implications for class relations and social mobility constitutes a productive research gap (cf. sub-section 4.2 on ‘classed protractedness’). The terminology lower class, middle class, upper class is not meant pejoratively but serves as a shorthand for difficult-to-establish differences between individuals and social groups in terms of income and wealth as well as education and levels of skill.

1. Empirical design and limitations of the study

This *working paper* is based on empirical findings of research in four different regions of Pakistan. In the following, we provide more detail on the research team, the choice of research sites, sampling, planning, our approach to data analysis and the challenges we faced during the study. For an overview of the different methods used, see the overview infographic and Table 1 below. This *working paper* mainly relies on semi-structured qualitative interviews and quantitative data from the survey in Pakistan. Overall, 386 people participated in our research in Pakistan and 15 in Iran.

1.1 Research team and location

The research team initially aimed to conduct research in rural (i.e., camp or so-called refugee villages) and urban/ peri-urban (non-camp) settings in Pakistan. Of the registered Afghans in Pakistan, 31 per cent—444,439 people as of February 2021—live in mostly rural camps (so-called refugee villages) located in Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa province (46 per cent), Baluchistan province (15 per cent) and Punjab province (10 per cent). The majority of Afghans, i.e. 69 per cent or 990,947 persons as of February 2021, live in urban or peri-urban areas outside of camps. Access restrictions to the selected camp in Punjab meant that the team was not able to cover camp locations. Furthermore, qualitative data collection through semi-structured interviews the team had planned was not made possible in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, thus limiting the qualitative insights to a few expert interviews. However, within the survey, the team covered 60 respondents in Peshawar, the provincial capital of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Security considerations also rendered research in Baluchistan (Quetta)—the province with the second-highest number of Afghan residents—impossible, not least because of the risk of getting exposed to terrorist attacks and/ or security operations. As a result, the research conducted for this working paper has its limitations in terms of spatial representativeness.

SHARP was instrumental in choosing the research sites and focused on marginalised and poor communities of Afghans in places such as Pul Saggian, Lahore, (see the introduction of sub-section 3.2 for details) that had been one of the previous focus communities of SHARP and covered by several surveys for aid and other measures. One sub-cluster in Jhangabad, with 15 resettled households hailing from Mianwali refugee camp in Punjab, was a comparable site in Karachi. In Islamabad and Karachi, the team contacted key persons of the respective Afghan communities and administration to support our research work.

1.2 Sampling and data collection

Before we started collecting the data, our team held a methodology workshop in Islamabad in December 2019. The team operationalised the interview questions for use on-site and carried out pilot interviews, which were the basis for adjusting the semi-structured interview guide to researchers’ and respondents’ needs. At the start of data collection, SHARP held talks with key people (leaders) of Afghan communities to ensure support of the research (e.g., in identifying respondents for interviews) in all sites. To a similar extent, we used walk-alongs in areas populated by Afghans and asked around to identify respondents. To triangulate our findings and to be able to assess to what extent refugees’ experience of displacement differs from that of other migrants and non-displaced people, we also talked informally with respondents from the host community.

During data collection, the researchers began conducting semi-structured interviews first, followed by biographical interviews and the quantitative survey. We carried out expert interviews throughout the entire research collection period from late 2019 until March 2020. The first phase of fieldwork took place in December 2019, with initial interviews, including expert interviews, in Lahore and Karachi. From spring 2020

Table 1: Overview of research methods employed in this study

Type of interview	Pakistan					Iran	Total
	Lahore	Karachi	Peshawar	Islamabad	other		
<i>Biographic</i>				3			7
<i>Expert</i>	3	1		1	13	10	23
<i>Semi-structured</i>	13	32	2	8	7	5	62
<i>Survey</i>	82	75	60	65	17		299
<i>Total no. of participants</i>	102	108	62	77	37		401

onwards, the COVID-19 pandemic expanded, and our plans for data collection were stalled. In the following months, we only held a few interviews, mainly at the place of residence of the researchers (Islamabad). Throughout 2020-21, we interviewed experts mostly virtually (13 out of 18 in Pakistan). We analysed the qualitative interview data by using MAXQDA, a qualitative data analysis software based on deductive (initial TRAFIG coding tree) and inductive coding.

In September 2020, the research team prepared for the second phase of data collection and conducted another workshop for preparing the survey. In the survey, we covered Islamabad (Katchi Abadi I-12, Shahzad Town and Golra Mor, three neighbourhoods with a large Afghan population), Peshawar (Khazana Camp and Haji Camp, both former refugee camps which turned to permanent settlements for Afghan refugees), Mardan, Lahore (Pul Saggian, Davis Road and Ittefaq Town) and last Karachi (Jhangabad and Al-Asif Square) between October 2020 and March 2021.

1.3 Limitations of the study and fieldwork challenges

We cannot claim that the data we obtained in the course of this research is representative given the size of the Afghan community and at least two structural limitations:

1. While we took efforts to interview as many women as possible, the overall number of female respondents we could reach is disproportionate to male research participants (we conducted 15 out of 62 semi-structured interviews and two out of seven biographic interviews with women; for the survey, we were able to reach a higher share of 48 per cent female respondents). This has to do with traditional power and representation patterns within Afghan communities meshed with cultural codes that forbid, e.g. male researchers' access to Afghan women for interviews. With only one female researcher and one female data manager involved in semi-structured and survey interviews, we had to acknowledge this limitation.
2. The data reflects mainly the situation of UNHCR-registered Afghans (those having proof of registration [PoR] cards) and thus a group enjoying basic protection.² This focus is a consequence of the team's limited access to undocumented

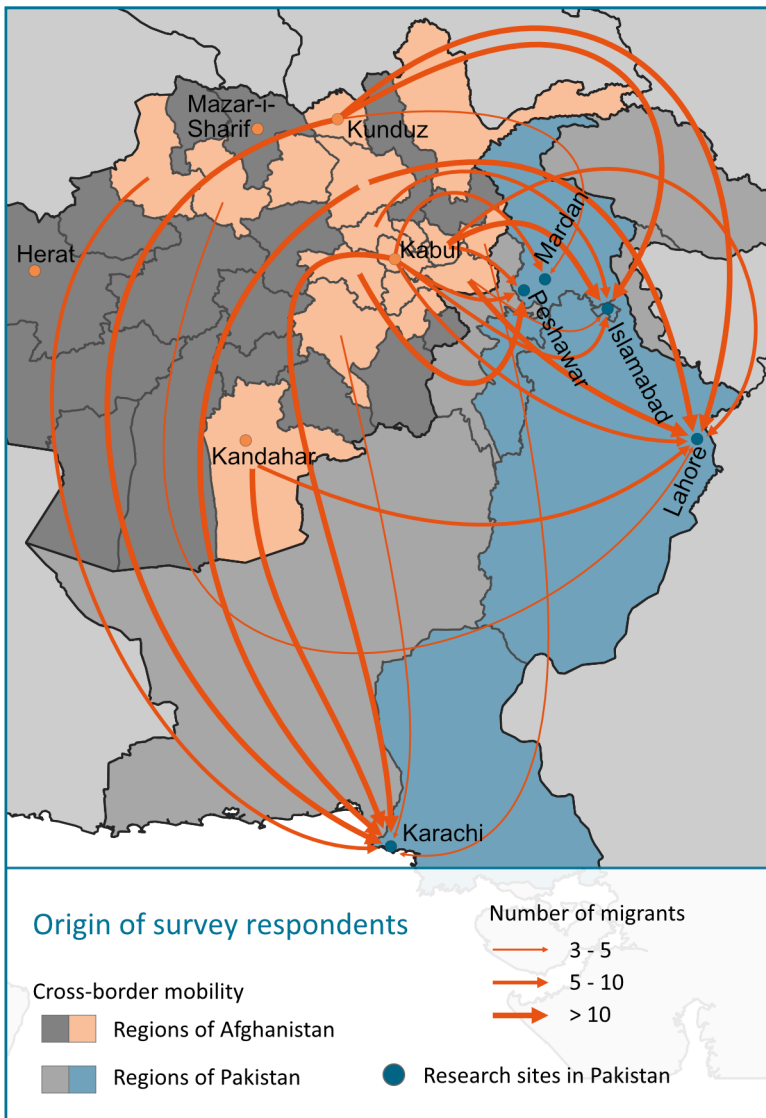
Afghans based on SHARP's exclusive dealing with registered Afghans, the politicisation and sensitivity surrounding the existence of undocumented Afghans in Pakistan, their efforts to blend in and not be detected, etc. The direct insights we could gain about the situation of undocumented Afghans stem from interviews that occurred by chance and reports of registered Afghans about non-registered family members as well as expert interviews.

One main challenge in practical fieldwork was managing the expectations of Afghan respondents in the field. Afghans in Pakistan are generally quite suspicious and expect that responding to visitors who ask questions will bring certain material or financial benefits. In addition, previous surveys by SHARP and other organisations at sites chosen for the TRAFIG survey registered names of people for aid purposes during needs assessments. Thus, asking vulnerable people questions for semi-structured interviews (SSI) or in the course of the survey almost inevitably led to expectations about aid and a possible distortion of answers. This is exacerbated when written consent forms and gadgets are used for SSIs. We quickly realised that using tablets for meta-data collection during interviews was not conducive as it raises the profile of the interview exercise and related expectations. Internet connectivity constituted a major problem, too. Therefore, the research team tried to keep a low profile, e.g. by not using tablets on the spot and mostly resorting to oral consent and not recording interviews. Thus, the team adapted its research work to the environment in each case and obtained approximately 50 per cent written and 50 per cent oral consent from respondents. In addition, the research team took detailed notes on paper during the interviews, digitalised the metadata and elaborated on their notes, writing up interview reports as soon as possible after each interview had ended. Another factor exacerbating the circumstances of working with respondents was the security situation for staff and equipment in so-called remote areas, which was raised by local police, who urged the team to leave certain areas before sunset.

For expert interviews carried out in 2020-21 through remote interviewing, i.e., via phone, skype or Zoom, oral consent turned out to be feasible.

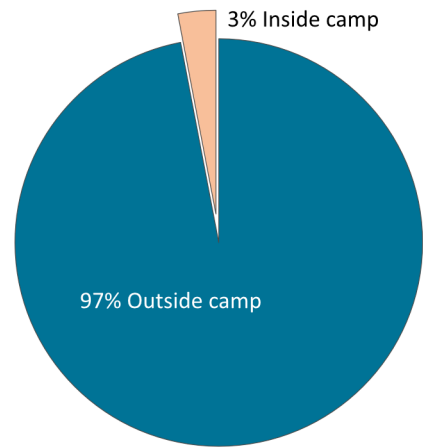
² In our survey sample of 299 Afghans, six per cent stated that they were not registered at all, whilst 94 per cent said that they are currently registered in Pakistan. Of the registered Afghans, the vast majority (87 per cent) possessed a proof of registration (PoR) card, a minority (10 per cent) had an Afghan citizen card (ACC, providing basic temporary protection against non-refoulement). Very few indicated to have both cards, or none of these.

TRAFIG research: Pakistan

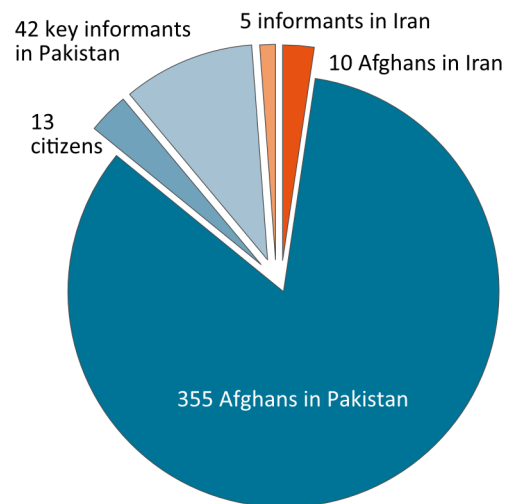


Time of empirical research: 12/2019 - 03/2021

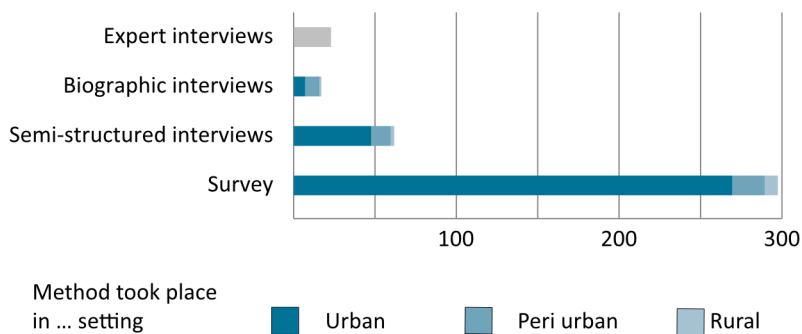
Share of respondents living inside/outside camps



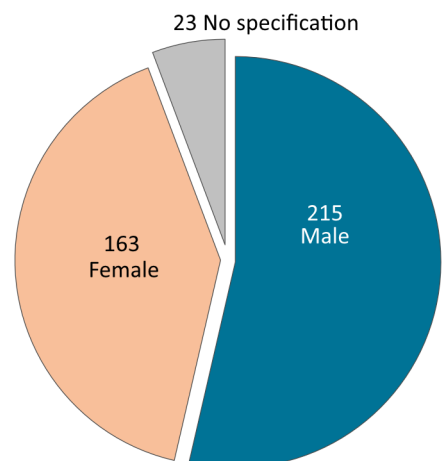
Type of respondent



Number of participants per method



Sex of respondent



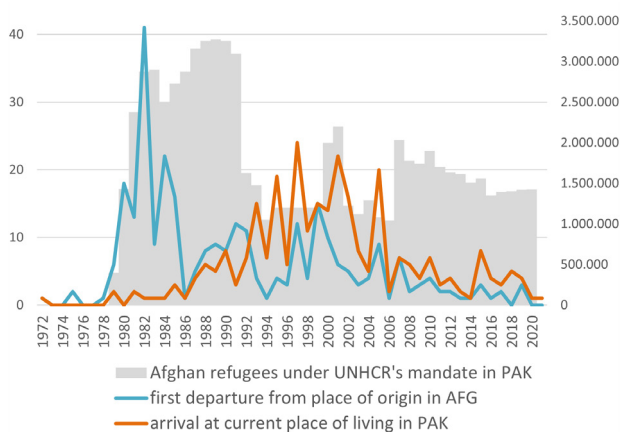
Source: FAO 2020, BICC 2021; Layout: Vincent Glasow, BICC, June 2021

The boundaries and names shown and the designations used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by BICC.

2. Protracted displacement in Pakistan

With more than 2.7 million registered refugees (2020), Afghans constitute the second-largest refugee population in the world after Syrians. One in eight refugees worldwide is from Afghanistan. Afghan displacement constitutes the main protracted displacement situation in South Asia; it has been going on for more than 40 years. In 2020, asylum seekers from Afghanistan filed the highest number of asylum applications globally, a total of 246,000 applications in 80 countries. The majority of Afghans abroad live in the region. As of late July 2021, there are up to 2.3 million documented Afghans in Pakistan (with UNHCR or the government of Pakistan). The number of undocumented migrants brings the number up to more than three million Afghans,³ which is 1.4 per cent of the total population of Pakistan (207.7 million according to GoP, 2017).⁴

Figure 1: Number of Afghan refugees registered in Pakistan and year of TRAFIG survey respondents' arrival in Pakistan



Source: TRAFIG survey (n=299; frequency of responses), UNCHR data as of December 2020 (<https://www.unhcr.org/refugee-statistics/download/?url=BiRkn4>)

While a high level of mobility and connectivity had characterised the region historically, mass displacement set in after the 1978 Marxist coup d'état and the Soviet intervention in December 1979, which triggered armed resistance and large-scale violence. In the context of the Cold War, the proxy conflict involved

support by the United States and the USSR to warring factions and client regimes, and ideological framings influenced the trajectory of conflict and attempts to bring peace and create the precondition for mitigating protracted displacement. Throughout the decade of the Soviet military intervention (1979–89), 3.1 million Afghans fled to Pakistan (50 per cent of the respondents in our survey first fled during this time (see Figure 1)), between 1.7 million and 2.2 million to Iran, and 1.5 million to 2.2 million were internally displaced, totalling between 6.3 million and 7.3 million displaced persons. This number, plus the Afghans moving to third countries such as Germany, the United States and Australia, amounted to about one-third of the entire estimated Afghan population at the onset of conflict.

Displacement did not end with the withdrawal of Soviet military forces by early 1989. On the contrary, several waves of displacement and return continue to occur, thereby establishing circular movement patterns and translocal lives over time. While in mid-2001, UNHCR estimated that two million Afghans were living in Pakistan (see Figure 1), return numbers after 2001 were much higher than that even though the 1990s had been heralded as a decade of repatriation.

A 2005 census in Pakistan showed that four years into the repatriation decade, still more than three million Afghans were living in Pakistan, thus indicating how previous estimates were far too low (Kronenfeld, 2008). While from April to August 2021, another re-verification of the number of registered Afghans in Pakistan is planned, the distinction between their 'refugee-ness' and other/ mixed motives that caused them to emigrate is noteworthy and relevant for any solution. Thus, what Kronenfeld pointed out in 2011, has not lost relevance to date:

The legal categories that define refugees and returnees do not necessarily describe Afghans and their neighbors as they live, move, work, and intermix along Afghanistan's borders. Refugee and returnee movements are and have been part of larger social and economic processes that Afghans have engaged in and developed for generations if not centuries. This has been both a source of strength and a weakness for Afghans. On the one hand, this mobility has given them an important tool for coping with adversity. On the other, however, it has clouded their legal status, making it difficult to provide for their protection and search for durable solutions. Many of these people are neither refugees nor returnees, strictly speaking, and neither permanent local resettlement nor permanent refugee return are entirely appropriate outcomes (p. 15).

3 The number of up to 2.3 million documented Afghans consists of those registered as refugees (1.4 million, see UNHCR, n.d.) plus 879,198 previously undocumented migrants that applied for Afghan citizen cards (ACC) with Pakistani authorities in 2017-18 (IOM, 2019, p. 13). The figure of an additional one million undocumented Afghans is a medium estimate established from a range of sources, e.g., IOM refers to half a million undocumented in the same source, ECHO (2017) to one million in 2017.

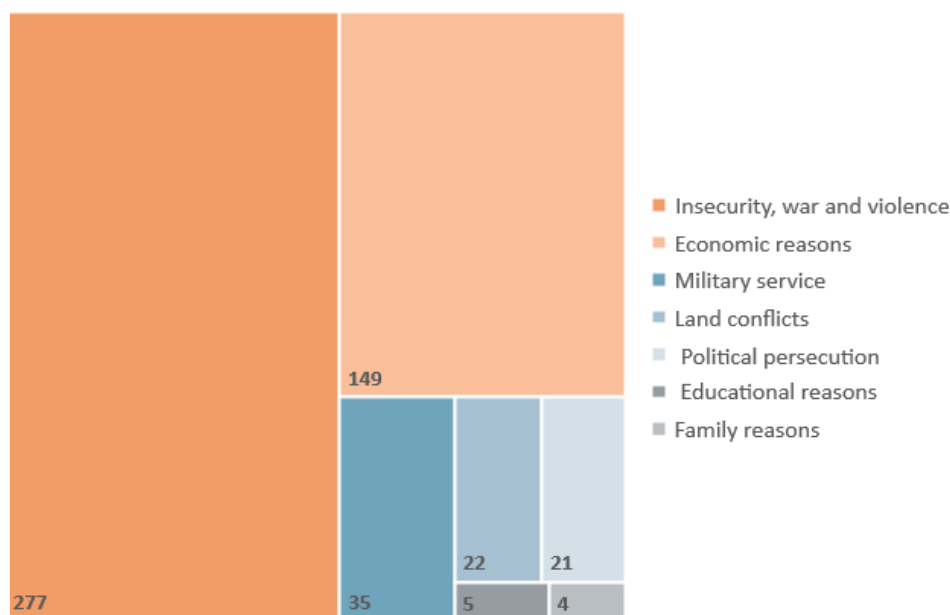
4 See UNHCR data for an overview of Afghan refugees (data available since 1979), asylum seekers (data available since 2000) and IDPs (data available since 1993) at <https://www.unhcr.org/refugee-statistics/download/?url=doVT7X>,

Responses to why Afghans left their country of origin in the TRAFIG survey reveal mixed drivers of mobility from Afghanistan. Ninety-three per cent of respondents indicated that one of their motivations was insecurity, war and violence. Half of our respondents also said that they had to leave Afghanistan due to economic factors such as unemployment and loss of livelihoods, often linked to violent conflict and insecurity. Military service or forced inscription (12 per cent), conflicts over land (7 per cent) and political persecution from the government or other groups such as the Taliban (7 per cent) were also mentioned and are linked to the lack of security, rights and transitional justice in Afghanistan (see Figure 2).

In Pakistan, 69 per cent of the registered Afghans live outside camps (so-called Afghan refugee villages/ ARVs) in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, Baluchistan and Punjab, where the ARV population is said to have access to health, education, water and sanitation services. Overall, the majority of Afghans in Pakistan live in the border province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (58.1 per cent/ 834,387 individuals), followed by 22.8 per cent or 327,247 Afghans registered in Baluchistan (bordering Afghanistan in the south), Punjab (11.7 per cent, 168,351), 4.6 per cent in Sindh (66,111) and 2.4 per cent or 35,003 Afghans who live in the Federal Capital Territory of Islamabad (UNHCR, 2021, as of 31 January 2021).

According to UNHCR, 4.38 million Afghan refugees were voluntarily repatriated by its programmes between 2002 and 2018, a much higher number than the estimates for initially displaced Afghans to Pakistan. As Monsutti & Balci (2014) pointed out, “the sustainability and veracity of such a large return movement is questionable.” It can only be made sense of if circular migration movements—which correspond to pre-war traditional migration patterns (seasonal labour, trade, nomadism)—are factored in, including ‘recycling’ across the border to receive cash grants in assisted return programmes more than once. The peak in voluntary return numbers was reached in 2016 when 381,275 Afghans left Pakistan in what experts call *mass-refoulement*.⁵ This process of leaving was supported by UNHCR (HRW, 2017) after the government of Pakistan launched restrictive policies against Afghans as a consequence of terrorist and other attacks falsely blamed on Afghans. In comparison, voluntary repatriation in 2020 amounted to 1,125 cases only. Repatriation figures were high when the political situation in Afghanistan seemed hopeful but decreased after 2005. More than 9,000 Afghans were resettled from Pakistan to third countries between 2003 and 2021; five countries alone accepted 8,952 of all resettled Afghans from Pakistan, namely the United States (4,429), Australia (3,089), Canada (873), New Zealand (445) and Sweden (107).⁶ Since 2019, however, options for resettlement have been almost zero after a peak in 2016 with 2,061 persons resettled.

Figure 2: Most important reasons for departure from Afghanistan



Source: TRAFIG survey (n=299; frequency of responses, multiple answers were possible)

5 *Refoulement* of refugees and asylum seekers denotes the removal of a person to a place where “their life or freedom would be threatened on account of their race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion” (UNHCR 2005, 444). The principle of non-refoulement is key to international protection of refugees, and because it is part of customary international law, all states, including those which are not signatories of the 1951 Refugee Convention, like Pakistan, are bound to it.

6 cf. <https://rsq.unhcr.org/en/#Kn4H> for key figures on resettlement of Afghans from Pakistan between 2003 until early 2021.

3. Key dimensions of figurations of displacement in the DRC

This section presents our empirical research findings. It addresses the main questions of TRAFIG by analysing its five main themes.

3.1 Navigating through governance regimes of aid and asylum

This sub-section looks into Theme 1 of TRAFIG: ‘Navigating through governance regimes of aid and asylum’. The main question this sub-section aims to address is: How do displaced people gain access to, make use of, and are governed by policies and programmes in the fields of humanitarian aid, development and protection?

Frameworks of protection for displaced Afghans

As Pakistan is not a party to the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol and has also not enacted any national legislation to protect refugees, all government institutions, UNHCR and other relevant stakeholders such as (I)NGOs dealing with Afghans in Pakistan and Afghans themselves navigate in legal limbo. The governance of Afghans in Pakistan is characterised by two main features. It first distinguishes registered Afghans (in common parlance termed ‘refugees’) from illegal aliens (undocumented Afghans), and its security policy-driven approach results in unpredictability and uncertainty for members of both groups. In the words of one legal expert: “The government of Pakistan has never explicitly and legally categorised Afghans in Pakistan, neither as refugees nor as economic migrants” (EI-BICC-KM-002-Pak). Instead, the protection of Afghan ‘refugees’ in Pakistan is rooted in administrative arrangements and policies issued by the Pakistani government on a non-regular, mostly ad-hoc basis.

The overall framework for governing the stay and repatriation of registered Afghans in Pakistan is the **Tripartite Agreement** between UNHCR and the governments of Pakistan and Afghanistan. It was initiated in 2003 and is currently extended until 2021. The Tripartite Agreement serves as the legal basis for UNHCR activities in Pakistan and is based on the agreed-upon aim of the three main stakeholders to resolve Afghans’ protracted displacement situation through a formal process of gradual organised return. Since 2003, several policy shifts have become visible, always in close relation with regional (geo)political developments, most significantly the domestic security situation in Pakistan (cf. sub-section 3.4). In a first significant move, the distinction of registered vs. undocumented Afghans was facilitated by the 2005-census of Afghans in Pakistan followed by a registration exercise in 2006–2007. As a result, 2.15 million registered Afghans were de facto recognised as *prima facie* refugees, i.e., without undergoing refugee status

determination (RSD) procedures, and received proof-of-registration (PoR) cards⁷ that entitle their holders as Afghan citizens to reside legally and temporarily on Pakistani soil and thus protect against *refoulement*. The number of undocumented Afghans in Pakistan is estimated to be around 500,000 to 1.5 million people (IOM, 2019, p. 13). They are not protected and subject to the Foreigners Act (1946) provisions that foresee detention and deportation upon being caught in Pakistan. However, undocumented Afghans may try to approach UNHCR for RSD (Ferreira, 2020, p. 33) and be issued asylum seeker certificates which also protect against *refoulement*. RSD was conducted on a larger scale until 2015 and constituted a viable tool for undocumented Afghans to receive asylum-seeker and de facto refugee status. However, with the change of policy in 2016–17 (cf. section 2), the options for RSD have narrowed. As a UNHCR expert in Pakistan stated:

When refugees get into problems in Pakistan and are unable to return to Afghanistan, they reach out to us, and we can register them as asylum seekers issuing the asylum seeker certificate. Whether or not they will go through the whole process of RSD is then still to be seen. Since RSD is highly resource-intensive, UNHCR needs to balance where the RSD tool is most beneficial. [...] Those reaching out to us for asylum are non-PoR card holders, i.e., Afghan citizen card holders, in case they have international protection needs or are undocumented Afghans. The total number of Afghans with asylum-seeker status as of 31 October 2020 was 3,011, out of a total of 9,723 asylum seekers from all countries in Pakistan (EI-BICC-KM-011-Pak).

Resettlement options have narrowed even more in recent years and are now close to zero (cf. section 2). It is no surprise to see that 94 per cent of our survey respondents have never applied or been suggested for resettlement to another country. Of the 18 people who had applied or were suggested for resettlement (to the United States and Canada), nine reported that a final decision was still pending, six noted that their application had been rejected, and the remaining three did not know their status.

Complementing the Tripartite Agreement since 2012 is the so-called **Solution Strategy for Afghan Refugees (SSAR)**, a regional policy framework between Iran, Pakistan, Afghanistan and UNHCR for cooperation between humanitarian and

⁷ PoR cards are issued by the National Database and Registration Authority (NADRA) to all registered Afghans over five years of age whereas those under five are listed on the card of the mother or the head of the family.

development actors to address Afghans' needs and support their repatriation and reintegration process in Afghanistan as the desired durable solution. Judging from the interview responses in the course of our research, this preferred durable solution by policymakers is at odds with the desires of Afghans themselves, i.e., their wish to obtain citizenship in Pakistan or be given a chance to continue living as Afghans in Pakistan on a valid legal basis. As one expert pointed out: "The main problem about the SSAR is that it has never been discussed with representatives of the affected population groups, i.e., Afghans. It is only discussed between three or four departments in Pakistan. Thus, no wonder that it remains nothing more than a paper tiger. The SSAR is highly artificial, without substance and only discussed among the upper echelon of government stakeholders and UNHCR" (EI-BICC-KM-005-Pak). Given the described distance of the policy, it was found to have only a limited meaning for Afghans on the ground (EI-BICC-KM-007-Pak).

The implementation gap

With the above protection architecture in place, our research revealed several fault lines in how policies are implemented and set to operate, thus pointing at a gap between policy and practice. The gap is tangible in several dimensions: The insufficient protection function of PoR cards; the failed attempt to decree a National Refugee Law after 2017 linked with the introduction of a visa regime and the documentation of unregistered Afghans; the subsequent process of issuing Afghan Citizen Cards (ACC) to more than 800,000 undocumented Afghans; and the Prime Minister's announced plan to naturalise Afghans in Pakistan that was almost immediately revoked.

Proof-of-registration (PoR) cards

Registered Afghans, i.e., PoR card holders, enjoy a de facto legal status (that of a refugee, albeit not in the framework of the UN 1951 convention and its 1967 protocol) and protection for the period of validity of their PoR cards. No other rights beyond protection from refoulement are officially connected to the status of being a PoR card holder. As one expert explained: "The individual PoR card holder was to be considered as Afghan citizen temporarily living in Pakistan. Section 3.4 of the MoU stipulates that 'the card does not grant the right of work/ employment within Pakistan'" (EI-BICC-KM-013-Pak). Social rights—alleged free access to public medical facilities and the right to education—are discussed in sub-section 3.2; however, it is important to note that the special quota for Afghans that existed in public sector educational institutions (schools, colleges, universities) has been reduced to one per cent only. non-citizens have no right to property—in Pakistan categorised as a political right. Even renting properties like shops or apartments, houses, storage rooms, etc., has become increasingly difficult in Punjab after the provincial government passed The Punjab Information of Temporary Residents Act in 2015 that requires landlords to register every tenant in a cumbersome pro-

cedure with the local police and enacts severe punishments and high fines for not observing the law (Javed, 2019, pp. 11–15). In effect, Pakistani house owners in Punjab and Islamabad Capital Territory (ICT) have become very reluctant to rent to Afghans. Their reluctance has only increased since counter-terrorism measures and criminal investigations targeted Pakistani house owners after the National Action Plan (NAP, cf. NACTA, 2014) was announced following the attack on a Peshawar army public school in December 2014. While these are all indirectly linked with the PoR card holder status, the actual protection gap is directly linked with the validity of the PoR card. Since their official expiry on 30 December 2015, the cards were extended irregularly by written government notifications for one to twelve months, often with delays (Mielke, 2019, pp. 34–35). One expert reflected on this policy as follows: "The PoR cards, meant to be a protection instrument, are de facto not protecting their holders effectively because of the government's haphazard policies, meaning the delays and blockages in extending the validity of the cards" (EI-BICC-KM-005-Pak). From 30 June 2020 onward, when the last extension ran out, there have been unprecedented delays in extending the PoR cards' validity. This had serious repercussions for Afghans in Pakistan on their access to health and education institutions, renting arrangements and mobility, not least because without extension, they face increased risks of arbitrary detention and arrest.

While an element of surveillance (Alimia, 2019) is already tangible in the Punjab Information of Temporary Residents Act 2015, the ongoing PoR card Document Renewal and Information Verification Exercise (DRIVE) from April 2021 onwards represents another step by the GoP to achieve clarity as to which Afghans live in Pakistan's territory. Supported by UNHCR, the National Database and Registration Authority (NADRA) has started to issue one million high-technology smart cards for Afghan PoR-holders and newborns and thereby successively extends their registration until the end of 2023. The smart cards are said to

be more technologically advanced than the previous PoR cards, more secure, long-living, and to contain a chip with biodata comprising fingerprints of all ten fingers and a facial recognition system but excluding iris scan. The chip is linked to centralised data management in NADRA. The idea is to register information about Afghans' bank accounts and SIM card numbers on the smart card. In contrast to earlier registration exercises, the government hopes to get an overview of the development of skill sets of Afghan refugees between 2010 and 2020 and about the type of support the government extended to Afghan refugees over the years. New is also a family ID that will be introduced for legal assistance; thus family data is to be improved; besides, other data to be obtained includes family linkages, tehsil [district] level/ origin of Afghans, skills, protection needs and disabilities" (EI-BICC-KM-013-Pak).

The objective to take account of skill-set development and received government support is in line with the SSAR framework in its latest version that emphasizes the alleged needs of Afghans and the best possible preparation of Afghans in Pakistan for their return to Afghanistan, that is giving them the skills they would need for (re)integration after their return. This policy is based on the assumption that education and skills development contribute to sustainable repatriation and prevent re-migration as has been the case until now (cf. sub-section 3.3). The policy completely eclipses the security and livelihood situation in Afghanistan.

Afghan Refugee Management Policy

Another telling example where policy implementation failed is Pakistan's Afghan Refugee Management Policy (ARMP) that the Cabinet adopted in February 2017. It consisted of three components: 1) the introduction of a visa regime for Afghans, including its implementation at the border crossings; 2) the documentation of all non-registered Afghans in Pakistan; and 3) a national refugee law. Acknowledging that not all Afghans in Pakistan are refugees, the government of Pakistan (GoP) opted to introduce different categories of visas after Afghanistan and Pakistan decided to end the unchecked passage of their common border (SHARP, 2019, p. 32, 4). The initial idea was to have Afghans apply from where they are based in Pakistan for a business/ investor visa, student visa, skilled/ unskilled labour visa, or inter-marriages/ family visa upon recommendation or with a support letter of a Pakistani institution or citizen. Reportedly, the Afghan government had assured Afghans in Pakistan that it would issue them passports by 31 March 2017 as a precondition for Afghans' ability to apply for a visa inside Pakistan (with the Commissionerates/ CARs).

Afghan Citizen Cards

At the same time, the GoP initiated the documentation of undocumented Afghans to make them eligible for applying for visas, too. Thus, between August 2017 and April 2018, 879,198 undocumented Afghans registered to receive Afghan Citizen Cards (ACC) (IOM, 2019, p. 13) with a validity of six months—the period thought necessary for each ACC holder to obtain an Afghan passport and eventually a Pakistani visa (EI-BICC-KM-003-Pak). Since the basis of the ACC dissemination was an MoU between the government of Afghanistan (GoA) and GoP, the ACC-holders are under the sole mandate of the GoP.

While ACC cards were advertised to raise awareness among refugees, their benefits were not made explicit. Many Afghans feared 'punishment', disadvantages and increased risk of deportation if they registered for ACC (EI-BICC-KM-012-Pak), while others hoped to obtain long-term legal status. However, the protection status of ACC was clearly limited to protection from refoulement for the period of its validity. After the schedule did not work out as anticipated initially, the validity of ACCs and thus the period to receive passports and start a visa application

process was extended three times: Until 30 April 2019, then 31 October 2019 and lastly until 30 June 2020. Since then, ACC and the PoR card extension is pending a Cabinet decision. Several experts interviewed during our research stated that the introduction of ACC was mainly motivated by security concerns, "to identify potential Afghan terrorist and suicide bombers" (EI-BICC-KM-004-Pak, government worker) or the need to investigate who is residing on Pakistani territory linked to the National Action Plan (NAP) financial taskforce activities and Pakistan's international listing as a terrorism financing state (EI-BICC-KM-012-Pak, employed in an international organisation). Another expert commented: "After the Pakistan Army school attack in Peshawar, the government of Pakistan was keen to know 'who lives on our territory' and to get biometric information of all residents" (EI-BICC-KM-011-Pak, employed in an international organisation). Meanwhile, a deadlock in the ACC process and the related regularisation of Afghans' visas for staying in Pakistan is manifest. While the GoA is claiming that the GoP changed its policy and would now insist that Afghans first repatriate and get their Pakistani visas issued in Afghanistan rather than in Pakistan, the GoP blames the GoA for lack of capacities to issue Afghan passports inside Pakistan (EI-BICC-KM-010-Pak, EI-BICC-KM-011-Pak), claiming: "They should have upgraded their personnel and technical infrastructure" (EI-BICC-KM-013-Pak, GoP worker).

As a result of the unsuccessful and, at best, partial implementation of the 2017 Afghan Refugee Management Policy, the ACC process is unresolved and uncertain. While at least more than 800,000 Afghans had been temporarily protected against refoulement due to the ACC registration, the fact that the visa regime was put in place in the north-western border checkpoint Torkham meant that Afghans could and can no longer enter Pakistan via this checkpoint without a proper visa and passport. At the same time, the other major border crossing in Baluchistan, Chaman border crossing, is still open for unchecked entry.

Moreover, the National Refugee Law was not issued even though federal and provincial task forces had been established to work on the draft law, which was eventually shared with all ministries and provincial governments and supposed to be passed in January 2018. Two reasons were reported why the law never came into being: On the one hand, security concerns due to Pakistan's porous border with Afghanistan were mentioned and that a refugee law would make Pakistan vulnerable to a strong inflow of potential refugees of diverse origins, as reflected in this quote: "We are unable to manage the refugee population. If we had a law, many people would come, including Somalis and others" (EI-BICC-KM-005-Pak). On the other, experts pointed out that Pakistani policymakers and bureaucrats fail to understand displacement-protection issues and the realities and needs of Afghans (EI-BICC-KM-005-Pak).

Granting of citizenship to long-term residents.

This lack of understanding of Afghans' protracted displacement situation has also hampered the option of local integration via granting citizenship to long-term non-citizen residents in Pakistan. When the new Prime Minister, Imran Khan, announced in February 2019 that he would grant Pakistani citizenship to Afghans and stateless people in Pakistan, he immediately faced strong opposition from various political groups inside the country who feared refusal of their local voters' support (EI-BICC-KM-005-Pak). As one expert explained,

The Citizenship Act of Pakistan says in one clause that everybody who was born in Pakistan is entitled to obtain Pakistani citizenship. However, the important condition is that the newborn's father also has to be Pakistani. Thus, the clause does not apply to Afghans. For Afghans, section 10 should be initiated that says after ten years of having lived in Pakistan, a person is eligible to apply for citizenship. Many Afghans have been in Pakistan for 40 years already. Again, for the government, it is difficult to issue any type of statement regarding the citizenship issue because it lacks the overall authority in the country (EI-BICC-KM-005-Pak).

Subsequently, a Citizenship Act Amendment Bill that was brought into the National Assembly in 2019 was likewise rejected due to security concerns.⁸ The prospect of getting naturalised in Pakistan by obtaining citizenship is thus very low.

Consequences of implementation gap for international aid organisations

Our research has shown that Afghans themselves and the different 'stakeholders' involved in protecting and supporting Afghans have to deal with the consequences of the described implementation gap. One expert explained how it was an unwritten policy of UNHCR not to discriminate against undocumented Afghans even if UNHCR refugee and partner support is targeted towards PoR card holders. According to this expert, the difference is in the framing of Afghans' presence by the implementing organisation: "In Pakistan, you don't say you benefit undocumented Afghans" (EI-BICC-KM-012-Pak). Likewise, UNHCR has to negotiate its space in a difficult environment. While the GoP considers return as the only desirable durable solution, UNHCR does not necessarily consider it the best solution (EI-BICC-KM-011-Pak) but is dependent on a working relationship with GoP institutions such as the Ministry of States and Frontier Regions (SAFRON) and the (Chief) Commissionerates for Afghan Refugees (C/CARs). Having been on a tightrope walk for much of its presence in Pakistan, UNHCR has fared better than other international organisations

and is still able to operate. In contrast, other organisations had to close down, e.g. Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) or the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) in Baluchistan.⁹ As one observer pointed out: "UNHCR has supported SAFRON and the CCARs hugely in the past; the CARs are still supported by UNHCR with staff salaries. The corruption element is omnipresent." He discussed how gadgets, vehicles and salaries that are all financed by UNHCR create vested interests for people in government offices, and he estimated that 20 per cent of the funding for UNHCR "go to waste this way".

The possible existence of vested interests in maintaining the status quo was also articulated by other respondents in the expert interviews and—remarkably—corroborated by two experts who are or have been part of the government's refugee administration machine (EI-BICC-KM-003-Pak; EI-BICC-KM-012-Pak). Accordingly, one former CAR member pointed out how under the military leadership of Zia-ul-Haq, refugees were brought and accommodated because it served Zia's own personal gains. He went on to say: "The same situation is still prevalent today. Refugees serve personal interests of particular individuals. I have been part of this, supporting this" (EI-BICC-KM-003-Pak). Others spoke of many Pakistani non-governmental profit-seeking organisations with agenda-driven funding. Given that the sustainability of measures in fields like education, training and awareness-raising poses one of the greatest challenges, not least because government officers get regularly transferred and counterparts change, there is always the need to train new staff and to provide awareness-raising sessions again, which require an endless amount of funding (EI-BICC-KM-012-Pak).

Another expert criticised the fact that the GoP has not decreed a sound refugee policy or respective laws and interprets this to mean "that the government probably wants the situation of Afghan refugees in the country to remain as it is" (EI-BICC-KM-016-Pak). Given that Afghans are not treated on humanitarian grounds but as objects in a game of political interests between the governments of Pakistan and Afghanistan and a donor community, there are indications of a certain degree of refugee rentierism (Tsourapas, 2019; Micinski, 2021) involved at different levels of governance.

Navigating legal limbo: The role of legal assistance

Against the background of legal limbo, insufficient policies and implementation gaps identified above, Afghans have no choice but to navigate this adverse legal environment. Here we present Afghan migrants' strategies and practices that result from the insecurity of their legal status. The insecurity and

⁸ cf. http://www.na.gov.pk/uploads/documents/1556636573_246.pdf

⁹ As part of the difficult political context in Pakistan, international NGOs face severe registration issues, mistrust, and suspicion by the GoP causing many to cease operation in the country.

related uncertainties are relevant for registered and undocumented Afghans alike, because in the many instances when PoR cards and ACCs are not being extended on time or—as is currently the case—extension is delayed indefinitely, this has implications for their legal protection in practice and their livelihood-making, which we will illustrate in sub-section 3.2. We also focus on how Afghans deal with the resulting increased vulnerability to discrimination by authorities in general and police harassment in particular, the impact on their access to healthcare, basic education, and housing, property registration, as well as banking issues (cf. also sub-section 3.5). It is important to note (and will be explored further in sub-section 3.4) that issues besides discrimination result from Afghans’ dependence on Pakistani citizens to ‘get their things done’.

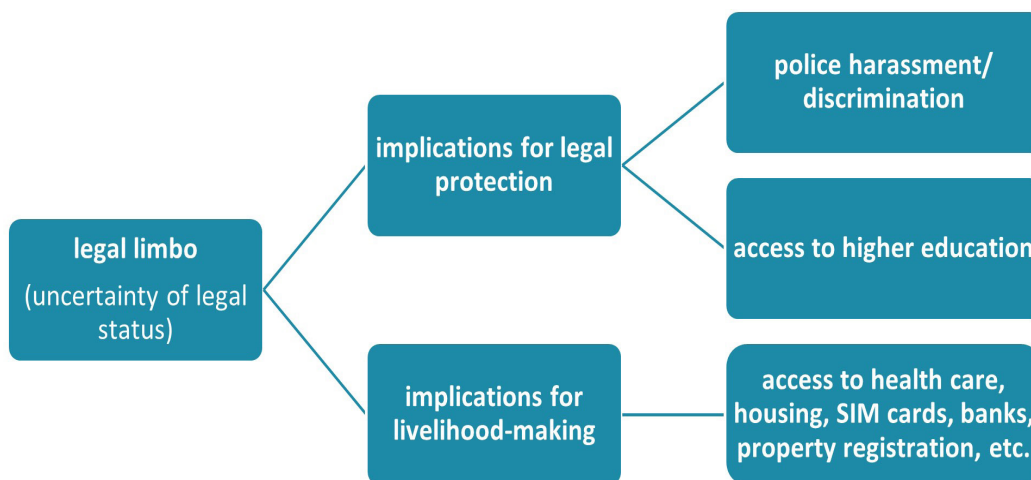
The main strategy employed by Afghans is to seek legal aid from NGOs. In the everyday encounters with the police, not being able to present a card at all (undocumented Afghans) or present a card that is not valid (all registered Afghans) or without an extension letter (e.g., all registered Afghans since 30 June 2020) often results in extortion, detention and/ or abuse. If an Afghan is caught without proof of registration (and the police officers do not know about or do not acknowledge the pending extension need by Cabinet) and the caught Afghan/s is not willing or able to bribe himself out of the situation, legal aid is an option – provided that the person is aware of it and knows, for example, the help line number. Several NGOs such as EHSAR Foundation, UNDP, Strengthening Participatory Organization (SPO), Paidar Development Organization (PDO) and SHARP provide legal assistance in all five Pakistani provinces. Yet, they most exclusively help registered Afghans.

According to our TRAFIG survey, legal aid was the most important form of support among Afghans—particularly those with only a temporary resident status—who had received support from NGOs.¹⁰ As one respondent reported, he relies on good relations with local NGOs, “because one day I was illegally detained by the police. I called SHARP office for help and they sent a legal advisor who got me out of detention” (SSI-SHARP-ZA-126-Pak). Some legal aid NGOs not only support registered Afghans but are also engaged in legal rights training and awareness-raising with different law enforcement agencies, legal institutions, legal staff (e.g., judges and magistrates) and police officers at different levels of authority (EI-SHARP-NS-201-Pak). Through these activities, they develop close relations with the authorities and can easily access them should they need to assist registered Afghans in legal matters.

In contrast, the NGO Human Rights Alliance (HRA) provides legal aid to undocumented Afghans, however, with a geographical focus on Sindh and Karachi (EI-BICC-KM-09-Pak). As the manager explained,

Undocumented refugees are often kept in prison for months and years; entire families are detained. When we get informed, HRA negotiates with the different parties to get the individuals or entire families released. We pay money so that these families can be brought to the border and go to Afghanistan. By helping them to get out of the major prisons of the districts in Sindh, we prevent mental health issues, security and criminal problems that prisoners usually have to deal with. Although the condition of the authorities is to deport these Afghans, the reality is that they usually do not have a place to go in Afghanistan.

Figure 3: Scope of implications of legal limbo showing fields where navigation becomes necessary



Note: Access (to higher education and health services) is understood here as the ability to benefit from respective services (Ribot & Peluso, 2003). This access is not homogeneous and equal but varies and is manifest in different degrees or graduations of this ability to benefit from services beyond mere proclaimed rights. In this sense access to higher education can be eased, enlarged, e.g., by quality enhancement, or decreased without depriving Afghans of it entirely (blocked access).

10 Thirty-two (87 per cent) out of 37 respondents stated that they received support by NGOs.

So, if they don't find any work or place to live in Afghanistan, they return to Pakistan. This has been a common mechanism. [...] When a family member of a caught Afghan who is unregistered has a PoR card or ACC; this can help the case and the life of an undocumented person in general (EI-BICC-KM-09-Pak).

The quote points out that—in times where cards' validity is extended by notification letter—the holding of cards of at least some family members (whereas several might not have obtained either PoR card or ACC) can help a legal case if one of them is caught by the police.¹¹

The other interface with authorities where legal aid plays a crucial role is the negotiation of access to medium and higher education institutions for Afghan students. As a legal expert explained: “there are regularly admission issues for Afghans, e.g., when they were not able to appear in front of Boards for grade 9 and 10, and for school admission in general. Very often, local administrators lack clarity about the status of Afghans, e.g., school principals or the police. Human rights specialists from CAR then come in to help” (EI-BICC-KM-002-Pak).

Afghans who had been able to obtain a Pakistani National Identity Card (CNIC) in the past sometimes still benefit from it today, even if they have been found to have acquired it illegally. The following report of a respondent gives account of this:

I obtained a CNIC in 2004 with the help of a local working in NADRA. I got the CNIC in return for two lakh [200,000] Rupees and could travel freely to Quetta and Karachi and Karachi to Quetta. I bought a house in 2015 in Quetta which was registered in my own name. Unfortunately, my CNIC expired in 2016. When I went for renewal to the NADRA office, they demanded my family records registered with NADRA. Since then, I have been trying to renew my CNIC but unsuccessfully. A year ago, I went to Afghanistan to get my tazkeera [Afghan basic identity document] and Afghan passport. I keep the expired CNIC in my pocket. If I face any problem, I show this CNIC and get rid of the problems, especially if the police stop me on my way to Quetta. The policemen usually do not check the CNIC in detail; they look at its cover and let me go (SSI-SHARP-ZA-125-Pak).

Repatriation as the preferred durable solution is no solution

The fact that security concerns dominantly frame Pakistan's policies towards Afghans is a major factor in why policies have been inadequate to meet needs. The GoP's obsession with declaring voluntary repatriation as the 'preferred' durable solution while refusing to discuss or consider other possible solutions, such as local integration, is a case in point (EI-BICC-KM-005-Pak). Subsequently, there is currently no durable solution in sight that could help move Afghans out of protractedness. The security lens of the GoP is a real hindrance for effective refugee policymaking and the search for a solution and ending of Afghans' protracted displacement situation. Similarly, the fact that the bureaucrats in charge do not understand the political implications of refugee issues has an adverse influence on the status quo. This gets amplified by staff rotation, ignorance and political affiliation of the provincial Commissionerates for Afghan Refugees (CAR) representatives. UNHCR does not believe a large-scale refugee status determination (RSD) to be feasible under these circumstances.

To discuss voluntary return as a durable solution has not worked so far. Large-scale re-migration to Pakistan and adverse conditions in Afghanistan for returnees to (re)integrate prove that voluntary return is no solution. According to one academic expert, the different ideas, concepts and policies that have evolved in the past for managing Afghans in Pakistan show the concern of the international community for refugees, but

none of these ideas have changed anything for refugees on the ground, i.e., the average Afghan in Pakistan. Nor do they guide the protection and assistance Afghans need in emergency situations. From the Afghans' point of view, they feel their issues and needs are neglected and are not high on the political agenda. It is still unresolved how practical solutions can be brought about that Afghans can profit from. The GoP, UNHCR and the donor community are groping in the dark for a workable solution even if this is in stark contrast with their articulated intention to end the cycle of displacement. In Pakistan, the doors are closed, few Afghans have access to resettlement. Repatriation is the favoured option in policy circles, with some de facto forced cases of return having even taken place—although nobody in Pakistan would ever admit they were forced. The average Afghan feels they are denied solutions. All stakeholders are increasingly exhausted: The refugees, the hosts and the international community. The issue is very complex (EI-BICC-KM-016-Pak).

¹¹ Legal assistance is also sometimes viable in cases where conflicts over contracts arise with members of the host society. However, as sub-section 3.4 will show, the most common way of solving such conflicts is via the involvement of a person of authority who is generally known to both conflict parties. This also corresponds to our observation that, given the fear from the police, Afghans tend to solve conflicts among themselves and not involve authorities. Cf. sub-sections 3.2 to 3.4.

What should be done instead? Which ideas were brought forth in the interviews that point to a way ahead? Here, a government employee shows an insightful perspective. Talking about repatriation, he said:

There are two types of Afghans, and only one requires help or a solution, i.e. the poor. We can assume that they will not return to Afghanistan for reasons of livelihood-making—because in Afghanistan, it is not possible to the extent as in Pakistan—and climatic conditions. In Pakistan, nobody is interested in solving the problem and amending the situation of Afghans because people get salaries on behalf of their administration of poor people. The latest invention and policy turn is now with the passport and visa regime that is to be implemented without giving people financial resources. Policymakers get together in five-star hotels to take such decisions (EI-BICC-KM-004-Pak).

Further, the interviewee admits: “I am part of this but not on the top level; only on the ground level”, suggesting that he cannot change things and is not responsible for top-level vested interests. He concludes that only a significant change in incentives for these salary recipients—including UNHCR, GoP and (I)NGOs—bears the potential to change the situation of Afghans in Pakistan, bringing a ‘durable solution’. He wonders where the ‘actual problem’ with the presence of Afghans lies, given that the plight of ordinary Afghans and Pakistanis is not much different in terms of daily life and survival. He further points to Afghans’ assumed privileged status as refugees outside Pakistan that puts them above ordinary Pakistanis and is thus a cause for possible grievances of Pakistanis towards Afghans. He concludes: “Afghans’ presence seems to be a money-making machine for entire strata of GoP staff and NGO-employees and representatives. The disinterest in solutions hampers the recognition that Afghans will not return and the facilitation of their local integration” (EI-BICC-KM-004-Pak).

A second, rather structural challenge is the situation in Afghanistan itself and how it conditions the chance of voluntary repatriation as a durable solution. Put differently, it requires “that the GoP and the donor community make significant development efforts in Afghanistan to create the conditions for return and reintegration” (EI-BICC-KM-011-Pak). The Solution Strategy for Afghan Refugees (SSAR) has taken account of this by shifting its focus from humanitarian to development aid activities for Afghans and host communities, emphasising skills-building, education and training for Afghans. This is complemented by UNHCR sectoral measures towards a solution, e.g., in education, access to health and refugee-affected hosting areas (RAHA) programming to increase social cohesion. As one UNHCR representative stated: “If you cannot take a big leap towards a solution, take little steps” (EI-BICC-KM-011-Pak).

Concluding remarks

Immediate needs at the policy level include the re-registration of PoR cards, the extension of stay arrangements for Afghans (both PoR card and ACC holders) and further registration of undocumented Afghans with longer-term protection entitlements and long-term stay arrangements. While in practice hardly any of the one to 1.5 million undocumented Afghans in Pakistan are deported, and mass arrests do not take place, Afghans and experts have been demanding certainty for up to 2025, which will allow Afghans to decide for themselves whether, when and where they will move to Afghanistan (EI-BICC-KM-005-Pak). Such practical measures require political will and support for these decisions in Pakistani society, including political parties. A re-branding of Afghans’ image in Pakistan would be helpful in this regard. However, any implementation of it such as teaching tolerance via school curricula and textbooks will not be achieved in the short term. Activities and policies need to acknowledge that second- and third-generation Afghans will not return to Afghanistan as is envisaged by current policy. The GoA and GoP alike need to come to terms with this reality and think of ways to make the presence of Afghans in Pakistan work for both sides.

Key findings

- *No international or national legislation is governing protection and aid provision for displaced Afghans in Pakistan. The Government of Pakistan, donors, international and local implementers, as well as the Afghans themselves operate in a legal limbo.*
- *Existing frameworks for protection and aid are policy- and donor-driven, as is the GoP's insistence on repatriation as the only acceptable solution for Afghans in Pakistan.*
- *Policies and the solution strategy fall short of implementation, while the strict denial of an implementation gap is indicative of refugee rentierism. The influx of refugees from the 1980s onwards has resulted in a thriving humanitarian (aid) sector and created government departments with vested interests.*
- *There is no durable solution in sight to end the protracted displacement of Afghans.*

3.2 Living in limbo: Livelihoods, (in)security and precarity in local settings

This section looks into Theme 2 of TRAFIG: ‘Living in limbo: Livelihoods, (in)security and precarity in local settings’. This section aims to address the main question: ‘Why and how do displaced people live in situations of ‘limbo’ and how do they sustain their livelihoods?’.

Limbo and social immobility among lower class Afghans

This section zooms in on two comparative cases of settlements of Afghans located in **Lahore** and **Karachi** to demonstrate how socio-economic stratification and class affect access options of Afghans with different legal statuses.

The northern part of the megacity Karachi is constantly expanding. A SHARP-internal document of 2019 assessed the number of Afghans living in northern Karachi to be up to 87,000 people, of whom an estimated 65,000 were registered as PoR card holders before 2018. Afghan settlements that came into being as early as the late 1970s in what then was an entirely rural area (Grawert & Mielke, 2018, p. 36), are today part of the peri-urban core even though the three neighbourhoods where the team conducted interviews—Chapal Garden, Al Asif-Square and Jhangabad—feature distinct characteristics and origin trajectories. **Chapal Garden** on the eastern side of the M-9 Highway is a rather new, urban-looking planned area with apartment blocks from the 1990s/ 2000s that offer all amenities to its Pakistani and Afghan residents. Afghans who settled here are educated, (highly) skilled and have a good income that allows them to pay the rent and enjoy the relative calm and security in the neighbourhood.

Al Asif-Square is located opposite the M-9 Highway, consists of apartment blocks that house a mix of residents—from more affluent, middle class traders and skilled workers to lower-middle and lower class labourers—and a large market specialised in Afghan goods and foodstuffs. Al Asif-Square neighbourhood came into being in the 1980s; its number of residents was estimated at 20,000 (CSSR, 2005, p. 12) in 2005, of whom between 60 and 75 per cent were Afghans of different ethnic backgrounds (except Hazara), and the remaining 40 to 25 per cent were Pakistani Pashtuns.

Jhangabad (literally: War town) is the name of the area west of the M-9 Highway a little north of Al Asif-Square, featuring unplanned makeshift housing near Sector 2-C. It evolved in the 1990s as a result of a mass influx of Afghan refugees from the civil war that started in 1992. Jhangabad is home to different ethnic communities of Afghans that have settled compactly on government land. As such, the area is not developed and in transition from a basic squatter camp to an irregular housing area (*katchi abadi*) without tenure security. The residents are

low-income earners with little or no education and low skill levels who engage in scrap collection, livestock tenure, daily labouring at the vegetable market and construction.

The interviews showed how the described spatial stratification patterns in one neighbourhood agglomeration of three distinct settlements reflect (and for the purpose of this section introduce) the scope of low-income, lower-middle class and middle class Afghans’ experiences of livelihood-making, socio-economic and everyday-protection limbo. Each neighbourhood can be typified with one sample resident or household in a simplified representation:

- The Uzbek doctor from an urban background in northern Afghanistan who runs a doctor’s office. He rents an apartment at Chapal Garden, and his sons and daughter have received quality education up to university level (in Urdu and English) although their legal status does not entitle them to take up public sector jobs. He entertains good relations with his neighbours, both Pakistani citizens and Afghans, and is in close contact with relatives in Afghanistan and abroad. The nearby police station is no nuisance for his family (SSI-SHARP-ARK-302-Pak).
- The Tajik or Pashtun shopkeeper who lives and works at Al Asif-Square. He sends three of his five sons to school and spends his time mostly with members of his own community in the immediate neighbourhood. He is in regular phone contact with his relatives in Afghanistan and Quetta as well as other cities in Pakistan. He hides his income and potential wealth from his neighbours as a strategy to avoid being robbed or kidnapped (SSI-SHARP-ZA-109-Pak).
- The 35-year-old Uzbek day labourer who lives in Jhangabad and strives to benefit from additional income that he makes with livestock trade and sale before Eid ul-Adha (Islamic sacrifice festival) to save money for medical emergencies. His children attend the religious teachings in the nearby *madrassa* (religious school) that is run by a trusted mullah. The public school is too far, and his children do not speak Urdu well. His father used to travel to rural Kunduz in Afghanistan regularly once or twice a year to look after the family’s land and harvest and to see his relatives. He feels secure because the neighbourhood is ethnically homogeneous, people know each other and self-organise nightly guards on a rotational basis (SSI-SHARP-NS-202-Pak).

In Lahore, we find similar conditions to the ones just introduced for Karachi. The **Pul Saggian** (literally: Saggian Bridge) field site can be likened to that of Jhangabad (lower class) in Karachi. Like Jhangabad, it is a peri-urban squatter site located near the River Ravi. An estimated 350 to 450 families or 2,000 to 2,300 individuals live there (SHARP, 2020, p. 1), many of them ethnic Baluch (Dari- and Pashto-speakers) from Afghanistan’s Kunduz and Baghlan provinces. They found their occu-

pational niche in the scrap business to which usually all family members—including children and women—contribute and have established large makeshift depots of different kinds of scrap at their site. While the men collect scrap at night, women and children sort it during the day, and the men sell the different materials to factories according to orders and requirements of wholesalers. The community lives in destitute conditions, sheltered in tents (after a fire destroyed better shelters years ago), remote from services like doctors and schools, on rented land. The residents, especially the women, feel insecure because there have been cases when children were kidnapped, and one father who had followed a kidnapper at night was shot. The case was not followed up properly by the nearby police station; a feeling of powerlessness is tangible among the residents of Pul Saggian.

In contrast, Afghan businessmen who belong to the upper-middle class have their carpet workshops and storage rooms in one of the oldest and most densely populated residential neighbourhoods of Lahore, *Garhi Shahu*. They themselves and their business partners reside in upper class areas like Gulberg or even of the Defence Housing Authority (DHA) of Lahore, their highly skilled employees in Garhi Shahu and surrounding parts of the inner city. Their children go to high-quality private schools, attend colleges and universities. They have wide family relations to and family members in Turkey and Canada, among other countries. Their business activities provide jobs for Afghans in Lahore and in Afghanistan (in particular, female carpet weavers in northern districts of Afghanistan) as well as Pakistani citizens. Few of their business colleagues have opted to adopt the new visa regime for businessmen and stay and do their business in Pakistan with an Afghan passport and business visa, paying taxes to the Pakistani system. They regularly go back and forth to Afghanistan for business purposes. Their carpets are displayed in exhibitions and fairs across the world, e.g., in Germany, the United States and Japan. However, if they are registered refugees, they do not own shops in their own name and completely depend for wholesale, retail and international business on Pakistani business associates.

Both communities of Afghans in Lahore have nothing to do with each other, nor do the residents of the three neighbourhoods in Karachi, despite their spatial proximity. The examples point out how settlement is segregated according to ethno-religious, tribal and class properties. Accordingly, Afghans' social networks are locally/ spatially limited. Our research did not detect any inclusive social representation mechanisms beyond the groups and individual communities or solidarity across classes among Afghans.

Based on the entire range of qualitative data and thus going beyond the selected/ typified examples above, the next two sub-sections systematically present how Afghans experience

socio-economic and everyday protection limbo. We will analyse the needs and challenges in relation to the strategies Afghans apply to tackle these challenges and meet different needs. In the first sub-section, we focus on strategies towards accessing labour markets, shelter, education, and health facilities, while in the second section, we focus on strategies to avoid physical insecurity.

Living in socio-economic limbo

We found that socio-economic limbo and social immobility were predominant among lower class Afghans in low-income neighbourhoods. The well-off (middle class) Afghans in Pakistan do not live in precarity with all its subsequent effects and problems, such as finding decent and secure shelters or accessing health and education facilities, because they can afford all of it.

Access to employment

Not even half of the respondents (47 per cent of 299 persons) had work at the time of our TRAFIG survey (November 2020–February 2021). We noted clear differences between study sites and groups. More Afghans who lived in the periphery of large cities had work (75 per cent) compared to those in cities (46 per cent) and rural areas (13 per cent). Employment levels of refugees living in camps were much lower than average (30 per cent). Most notably, labour force participation among men was much higher (72 per cent) than among women (20 per cent), higher among younger (65 per cent of those between 20-29) than older Afghans (44 per cent of the age group 50-59), and higher among better educated (71 per cent of those with a secondary school degree or higher) than among those who never went to school (38 per cent). Legal status also mattered when it came to access to employment: All three respondents with Pakistani citizenship—an admittedly very small share in our sample—had work. In comparison, 48 per cent of those with a temporary residency and 32 per cent of unregistered Afghan migrants were (self-) employed.

The not and low-skilled respondents of our semi-structured interviews were shopkeepers, vendors, daily labourers, worked in construction and transport businesses (without drivers' licenses), as tailors, scrap collectors and traders, rearing livestock and trading, as security guards, washermen, waiters, running mobile food stalls, had a tandoor (bakery), a mobile repair shop or worked in mines, for instance in the vicinity of camps in southern Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa. In Karachi, Pakistan's economic centre and trade hub, several Afghans we spoke to found work in the many factories producing biscuits, matches, garments and soap, or in brick kilns. Female respondents reported earning and contributing to the household income with handicrafts, i.e., through embroidering, tailoring and sewing. Several women had benefited from training courses and the provision of sewing machines from NGOs. They work at home and sell

to women (Afghan and Pakistanis) in the neighbourhood. Child labour is common; children help in their fathers' businesses like scrap collection and sorting, in shops, engage in factory work and work as shoeshiners in neighbourhoods. One respondent explained how he took his little daughter along when searching for waste and scrap materials calculating that being accompanied by her, he would not be stopped and checked by the police. While he is looking for scrap, his daughter is selling boiled eggs (SSI-SHARP-AI-411-Pak).

In contrast, respondents with elementary and or intermediate education and skills reported to be teachers at religious schools (madrassas), teachers at community or private elementary schools, employed by local NGOs as disseminators or trainers for skill-development projects (e.g., mobile phone repairs), run mobile phone and repair shops, work as managers in fisheries, engaged in the carpet manufacturing business as well as property and car dealers inside camps. Few generated good business income from transnational trading, such as trading in carpets, dried fruits and fabrics. The prevalent form of employment is self-employment or daily labouring. A small proportion of Afghans in Pakistan run large-scale private sector businesses and employ Pakistanis and Afghans alike. Similarly, even Afghans engaging in the scrap business do so with a wide spectrum of activities and potentials. While some are just making ends meet as collectors and sorters of scrap, the interviewers heard from several respondents that they had established successful scrap businesses with up to ten employees, mostly other Afghans but also Pakistanis (SSI-SHARP-ZA-121-Pak, SSI-SHARP-ZA-123-Pak). In one case, a household head strategically decided to move from Lahore to Karachi because of better prospects there in the scrap business; he has successfully established himself in Karachi and can provide for his family (SSI-SHARP-ZA-120-Pak). Educated young Afghans working at the top end of the income ladder also work in government positions and (I) NGOs, trade and private sector jobs in Kabul while their families live in Islamabad.

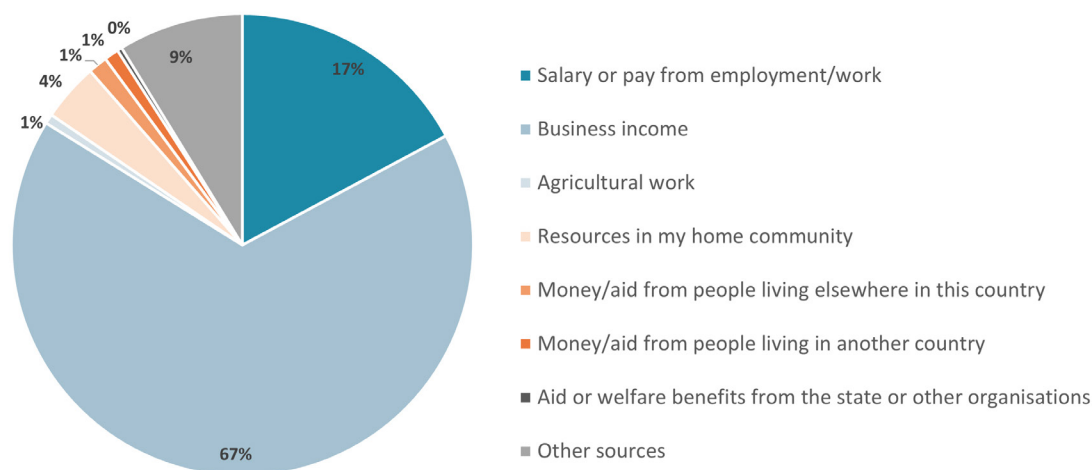
In several cases, we detected a continuity in the type of livelihood-making over generations and from before to after/ in displacement. For example, a shopkeeper who hailed from Imam Sahib in Kunduz province had sold his shop before migrating to Pakistan. After he had settled in in Chapal Garden, he opened a merchant shop in the neighbourhood (SSI-SHARP-ZA-109-Pak). Other Afghans who engaged in livestock rearing and trade before the festival of Eid ul-Adha reported that their parents or ancestors had been nomads or traded livestock, so they felt it natural and fitting for themselves to engage in the same trade (SSI-SHARP-NS-202-Pak). Besides the already discussed lack of eligibility for public sector employment that affects all Afghans in Pakistan due to their legal status, barriers to employment among lower class Afghans are high due to their lack of skills and education, including low literacy rates. Another barrier to employment is the distrust from private sector employers of the host community as well as increasingly hostile host community behaviour.

Overall, the households of two-thirds of our survey respondents relied primarily on income generated by their own—largely informal—businesses and self-employment, whereas 17 per cent primarily depended on salary from employment or pay from or other kinds of (also temporary) work. Agricultural labour as well as aid and welfare benefits such as cash transfers hardly played a role as livelihood sources (see Figure 4).

Access to shelter

Only three per cent of Afghan survey respondents own the place in which they live, while ten per cent live in a room or shelter that is provided for free. The vast majority of respondents (78 per cent) live in a rented apartment or house. Not finding even a temporary job and longer-term unemployment is thus catastrophic for low-income Afghans because they usually have no savings and live from hand to mouth. The average rent for apartments and houses paid by lower- and lower-middle

Figure 4: Afghans' primary sources of living



Source: TRAFIG survey (n=299)

class respondents amounts to 12,500 PKR, approximately 70 EUR a month (as of 1 January 2020).¹² At the lower end, it is about 25 EUR. In Pul Saggian in Lahore and in the interviewed community in Jhangabad in Karachi, for example, people pay their rent collectively to persons claiming to be the owners (often some type of land mafia). While living in such congested homogeneous settlements with co-ethnics provides security and resembles the socio-economic status of a resident, it can also represent a ‘forced choice’ if a person is not registered. A Punjab government rule punishes landlords who rent out to unregistered Afghans unless the Afghans provide an affidavit to the police, which can only be approved with proof of registration as PoR card- or ACC-holder.¹³ As one female resident of Pul Saggian describes:

For some time, we lived in a room adjacent to a shop on the other side of the road near this locality. But one day, the owner asked us to leave saying the government announced to impose a fine of 50,000 Rupees for anybody who will provide residence to a refugee. So, we came to Pul Saggian camp (SSI-SHARP-AI-402-Pak).

Squatting on government land or in irregular housing colonies (*katchi abadis*) represents one strategy to access shelter, however, for low-income Afghans, this is only a choice if they opt for it collectively to ensure the greatest extent of physical security they can hope for, e.g., in camps or camp-like settlements. Evidence shows that individual families, especially from a socio-economically vulnerable background, would not settle on their own in an alien neighbourhood among people of similar socio-economic status. Complicating the situation, however, is the fact that due to rising land prices, government land and land rented by the government to shelter refugees in the past has become highly contested. According to one expert, there are many cases where owners of previously leased out land to the government—for which the government, by the way, had stopped paying the lease years ago—are now suing the government to gain back their land (EI-BICC-KM-016-Pak). This means a shrinking space for those currently settling on the land because—even if they have been paying “rent” to the owners already for years voluntarily and higher prices than requested from Pakistanis (EI-BICC-KM-008-Pak)—the risk of shifts in ownership, sale of the land, etc. is high and means increasing uncertainty for the future.

Those who legally rent apartments and houses turn towards peri-urban areas or low-income neighbourhoods; however, utility bills are proving to be an increasing burden and amount to at least 10,000 PKR, i.e. 57 EUR a month (as of 1 January 2020).¹⁴ Alluding to a coping strategy, a female resident of Multan Changi, a peri-urban location in Lahore, stated, for example: “We rented a house for 20,000 Rupees and can share the rent with my brother-in-law who lives with us. Therefore, we can manage, but the utility bill is becoming a nightmare for us” (SSI-SHARP-AI-418-Pak). Another respondent reported how they cope by limiting their food intake and eating less quality food to save money and cover the running costs of housing (SSI-SHARP-AI-418-Pak).

Role of external sources of income

Income from labour migration, remittances or assets in Afghanistan play only a negligible role as a regular source of living for Afghans living in Pakistan. This observation from semi-structured interviews can be confirmed based on our survey findings (see Figure 4). However, when asked about the kind of support they got from ‘important persons’ who live elsewhere, 15 per cent of survey respondents replied that they had (occasionally) received financial support. Few Afghans thus rely on external resources, which we see as an indication of translocal connectivity, and if so, only in cases of emergency. In the few examples where respondents received remittances from Iran, Canada, Turkey or Saudi Arabia, or in the one case where a person sold his land and property in Afghanistan (SSI-SHARP-ZA-101-Pak), they used these funds for medical treatment of relatives (in one case of an accident, in one case for fertility treatment of someone’s wife) or the reconstruction of their home after a fire had destroyed shelters.

For labour migration, Iran was mentioned as the only option. However, only very few interviewees (SSI-SHARP-ZA-107-Pak, SSI-SHARP-ZA-120-Pak) had ever used this option.

Access to healthcare

Overall, Afghans in Pakistan have adequate access to healthcare. 91 per cent of our TRAFIG survey respondents stated that they could access a hospital or other health services the last time they needed it. However, the fact that Afghans accumulate savings for medical emergencies shows that there are still multiple hurdles that Afghans face in reality when it comes to receiving adequate health care. The public healthcare system is overburdened and underfinanced, while the private health sector is well developed and thriving. Thus, it is no surprise

¹² Average calculated from 16 SSI-respondents mentioning the amount of monthly rent and (partly) utility bills they pay. Exchange rate applied of 1 January 2020.

¹³ cf. 3.1, the government of Punjab issued the Punjab Information of Temporary Residents Act in 2015 that requires landlords to register tenants with the local police station.

¹⁴ cf. previous footnote. For media reporting on clashes over power bills among refugees, see Hayat (2020).

that Afghans prefer private hospitals and doctors, yet those who cannot afford private facilities depend on public health facilities. Given that the situation for Pakistani citizens is the same, the legal status of Afghans makes hardly any difference in the ability to access health services (EI-BICC-KM-010-Pak). Rather, it is the financial situation of an ill person that decides whether they will get proper treatment. However, even though four out of five unregistered Afghan migrants mentioned in our survey that they were treated at a hospital the last time they needed to, it is common practice to borrow PoR cards or ACCs to enter public health facilities (SSI-SHARP-AI-406-Pak, SSI-SHARP-AI-411-Pak).

According to one expert, government health facilities suffer from a lack of public finance and resources. The refugee population has never been budgeted into plans (EI-BICC-KM-001-Pak) even though the government did link free access to health services to Afghans' registration status. Another expert stated that Pakistan's health system is already overburdened by its citizens' health needs alone (EI-BICC-KM-012-Pak). The under-financing of the public health sector partially explains the problems Afghans experience in public health institutions (as do Pakistanis with no means to afford private doctors): There are long waiting times, doctors are absent, and many respondents deemed their behaviour and examination practice unprofessional. Doctors do not prescribe or hand out proper medication—it is issued subject to availability, or patients are requested to purchase medicine themselves. As a result, Afghans not only turn to private clinics or fee-based private doctors when their medical condition is serious (SSI-SHARP-ZA-122) but also when they do not have time and only minor ailments. The research detected kidney diseases, especially chronic kidney problems and needs for dialysis as one of the most frequently mentioned illnesses demanding due care. In one location, two patients needing dialysis receive financial support from members of the Afghan community at the site, i.e., those who “are economically stable” were reported to finance the treatment three times a week (SSI-SHARP-NS-202-Pak).

Access to education

Of the survey interviewees, 81 per cent stated that one or more members of their household are currently enrolled in school or other educational activities. Even among unregistered Afghans, this share lies at 58 per cent. And yet, access to education services is limited by similar structural factors as just described for access to healthcare. The public education system is of low quality with neither enough schools nor teachers. One expert stated that given in Pakistan (a country of 180 million people as per the census of 1998) only about 400,000 children of all backgrounds are enrolled in good schools (meaning private schools), the remaining children either go to public or religious schools (*madrassas*) (EI-BICC-KM-001-Pak). While these schools are not charging fees, several challenges remain for lower class Afghan parents to enrol their children even in

elementary levels: Several respondents mentioned the distance of schools and security issues for girls in rural and peri-urban areas. Such immobility issues risk creating an education gap for girls—a problem which at least one organisation has started to respond to by establishing informal community schools (EI-BICC-KM-009-Pak). School enrollment depends on registration and extension letters, and even with registration, access is sometimes difficult as school principals are often not familiar with the situation of refugees. In such cases, legal aid or advice from NGOs is crucial. A fundamental choice for low-income families is between being able to afford to send their children to school versus obliging them to contribute to the household income to make ends meet. As a result, families only send some of their children to school while others help them in their daily businesses and at home. Issues also arise after elementary level with children, having studied the Afghan curriculum in an Afghan community school, making the obligatory shift to the Pakistani curriculum from grade 6 onwards. Efforts underway since 2017 to ensure the complementarity of both curricula have so far not been very successful, and the anticipated shift has been one reason for parents to take their children out of school after grade 5. This is partly motivated and amplified by future uncertainties and limited job perspectives in formal employment, i.e., the government sector. The fact that Afghans are not eligible to take up employment in the public sector discourages parents from giving their children a decent further education (SSI-SHARP-NS-202-Pak). For example, a lawyer with Afghan background cannot practice in Pakistan because he would need the certificate of the Pakistan Bar Association, which is never issued to an Afghan (EI-BICC-KM-012-Pak).

While many interviewees expressed aspirations to have their children or grandchildren educated to achieve social mobility, the experiences showed that this is not always accessible/achievable under precarious circumstances. Schools are not open access, of low quality, and access barriers exist even with proof of registration. The same is true for higher education. While registered Afghans, in theory, have the same access options for enrolment as Pakistani peers, the enrolment procedure disadvantages and discriminates them due to lengthy and bureaucratic processes. This is also true for students who have successfully finished their bachelor's degree and seek to enrol in a master's programme. One expert told us about the case of a student with an Afghan refugee background who at the time of the interview had been denied admission for a master's by his university in Baluchistan, even though he had graduated with distinction ('gold medal') from the same institution in his bachelor course. The case was referred to the Commissionerate for Afghan Refugees (CAR) and SAFRON, but its resolution seemed highly uncertain (EI-BICC-KM-010-Pak). The regular procedure for Afghan-origin students' admission is that, before enrolment, the potential applicant must go through a verification procedure administered by CAR that requires verification from the Afghan embassy in Islamabad to issue a non-objection

certificate (NOC) that has to be submitted with the application. Access to studies seems easier via foreigner slots that can be applied for with an Afghan passport and study visas. However, in this case, the fees for international students will apply. Interviews with experts revealed two potential access avenues for Afghans to enrol in Pakistani universities: For one, DAFI Higher Education scholarships—since 1992 with more than 1,700 students profiting from it so far. For another, a special programme at Qaid-e-Azam University in Islamabad introduced by the current government (status 2021) that allows a batch of students with Afghan ‘refugee’ background (PoR card holders) to study and obtain degrees in International Relations (EI-BICC-KM-008-Pak).

Experiencing everyday protection limbo

Our research found that low socio-economic and low education/skills status is directly related to a lack of protection from everyday discrimination. Fourteen per cent of the survey respondents stated that they had already experienced harassment or intimidation at the place where they live—the figures differ not significantly according to legal status but are much higher in the lower class settlements of Al-Asif Square (37 per cent) and Jhangabad (31 per cent) in Karachi as well as Pul Saggian in Lahore (31 per cent) than in any other study sites. While almost one-quarter of interviewees are afraid of violence in their locality—again the highest numbers are in the three aforementioned lower class urban neighbourhoods of Karachi (e.g., 54 per cent in Al-Asif Square) and Lahore and in the city of Mardan—only very few (12 of 299) mentioned actual encounters with violence. Those who experienced violent encounters responded that state actors such as the police had been the perpetrators of violence against them.

Police harassment seems to be ubiquitous, manifest in extortion during overland travel (SSI-SHARP-AI-415-Pak, SSI-SHARP-ZA-112-Pak), corruption at police checkpoints in the city and at traffic junctions, violence and beatings in custody or when stopped and taken out of a bus for being searched, unannounced search operations in Afghans’ premises and shops (SSI-SHARP-ZA-119-Pak), abusive language, and, in general, awareness of the omnipresent “possibility that the police or security authorities can penetrate your space anytime” (EI-BICC-KM-008-Pak). Police would usually request proof of Afghans’ legal status and, in many cases, do not know or deny the fact that the PoR cards (which formally expired in 2015 but have ever since been extended by notification in the form of a document) or ACC are valid with an updated notification.¹⁵

Many respondents reported that they would pay money to the police officer just to get out of the situation (e.g., SSI-SHARP-AI-405-Pak). Such payments at check posts amounted to between 200 and 6,000 PKR. When detained for putative expired documents, reported bribes demanded for release were up to 20,000 PKR (see below). If somebody rejected paying money to the police, he would be dependent on access to legal aid by specialised NGOs as the following example demonstrates:

I visit my two sisters in Peshawar twice a year and once, upon travelling to Peshawar by bus, I was taken out from the bus by the police, and they said my PoR card had expired. Even though I showed them the extension notification, they refused to acknowledge it and detained me. Once at the police station, they demanded 20,000 PKR for my release. When I refused to pay the money, they kept me in custody for five days even though I had done nothing wrong and my documents were in order. On the sixth day, a team of a local prisoners’ aid NGO came. They took on my case, talked to the police inspector, and when they made clear that they would sue the police officers in court if I was not released immediately, they let me go, and I continued on my journey (SSI-SHARP-ZA-123-Pak).

Especially vulnerable lower class communities of Afghans face a certain arbitrariness in police encounters and raids at their residences, as two female interviewees of Pul Saggian reported: “Whenever something bad happens anywhere, the police comes to our house and takes one of the men with them and then releases him after one night at the police station” (SSI-SHARP-AI-402-Pak). “They raid and enter our houses without showing a search warrant and without warning or informing the women of the house” (SSI-SHARP-AI-403-Pak).

We are thus speaking of a daily sense of insecurity and protection limbo. Protection issues for ordinary lower and lower-middle class Afghans arise mainly from ‘outside’ of and sometimes ‘from within’ their own tribal, kin or settlement community. In our semi-structured interviews, some respondents, especially women, perceived the surroundings as threatening because they experienced threats themselves (women were being followed by strangers, children kidnapped), and the Pakistani security authorities are seen more as a threat than providing security for Afghans. The example mentioned earlier of the case of Pul Saggian (cf. sub-section 3.2), where the murder of a family head was not investigated, indicates the absence of a rule of law context. Afghans do not experience equality before the law in their everyday encounters (see also 3.1 and 3.4).

¹⁵ At least this was the case in the past, the last notified extension of PoR cards and ACC expired on 30 June 2020 and ever since (until the time of writing, i.e., 1st March 2021) Afghans are in complete legal limbo. Cf. sub-section 3.1 for details and background.

Strategies to decrease perceived physical insecurity include establishing rudimentary self-defence and local security management, e.g., guarding of the own neighbourhood in peri-urban camp-like settlements at night. Due to fear of the Pakistani security authorities and law enforcement agencies, especially the police, Afghans try to solve their conflicts among themselves whenever possible, even when members of the host community are involved. This is possible because of a strong tradition of local and communal conflict resolution mechanisms in Afghan and various Pakistani peoples' cultures. Consequently, Afghans have their own conflict resolution bodies and attribute communal leadership and traditional authority structures (elders) an important role and significant authority for conflict resolution, mediation and representation towards the outside.

This type of everyday protection limbo—manifest mainly in police harassment—is related to class in the sense that especially low-class Afghans suffer from socio-economic limbo and insufficient protection. It is nonetheless important to note that all Afghans, regardless of their socio-economic status and profession, depend on outside legal assistance from NGOs in certain situations. Given that the refugee status implies that even middle- and high-income Afghans cannot own property, conclude contracts or register businesses in their own name, they are highly dependent on members of the host community, their moral integrity and fair behaviour towards Afghans. We conclude that this dependency and everyday protection limbo concerns all Afghans as everybody is in legal limbo and subsequently depends on the goodwill and cooperation of locals (see sub-section 3.4).

Resilience through local social networks of support?

From the above, we can deduce that Afghans sustain their livelihoods and access to services with the help of local social networks. This begins with mutual support within the core family and extends to relatives, the wider kin network, ethno-religious support networks, the wider community of Afghans in the place of living and can also include specialised non-governmental organisations that provide legal aid in particular, and the Commissionerate for Afghan Refugees (CAR) which is in charge of dealing with Afghans' needs in the Pakistani institutional environment. These support networks are spatially concentrated in the immediate environment of the individual or family in need and reflect (except for those with CAR and direct contact with NGOs) everyday interaction patterns. Again, this observation seems especially relevant for lower class Afghans who are facing precarity in one or several dimensions of their daily lives.

The strategies for sustaining livelihoods within families include helping each other out with money. Some reported that better-off relatives, like a cousin or sister-in-law, helped out financially (SSI-SHARP-AI-406-Pak), while others reported that their relatives often could not help in emergency cases because

they also faced economic hardship (SSI-SHARP-AI-405-Pak). This shows the limitations of support within the family. Many interviewees mentioned the significance of having sons and their contributions to the family income as children (SSI-SHARP-ZA-120-Pak, SSI-SHARP-NS-203-Pak) and their parents' total reliance on their income as adults. The diversification of professions is remarkable. In two cases where the sons jointly earn the family income, their jobs range from unskilled to skilled: In one family, one son rears livestock, the second makes fast food, the third is a teacher in a primary school (SSI-SHARP-ZA-106-Pak). In another family, two sons work as waiters in restaurants, two others as labourers in a garment factory and one as a teacher at a religious school (*madrassa*) (SSI-SHARP-ZA-107-Pak). It goes without saying that diversification is instrumental for resilience and constitutes a strategy to earn respect within the community.

The Ismaili community is a prime example of intra-community cohesion. Afghan Ismailis have benefitted from the support of the ethno-religious network of Pakistani Ismailis. They have close-knit support structures and their own educational and health institutions. This, for example, means that they enjoy preferential treatment at the high-quality Agha Khan hospital in Karachi. One respondent reported discounts amounting to 50 to 70 per cent for Ismailis at their educational institutes. As the Ismaili community is highly skilled, job placements are facilitated easily. One respondent's father profited from this when he got work as a manager in fisheries (SSI-SHARP-ZA-117-Pak).

The mutual support strategies and networks at the community level to counter the detected everyday protection limbo include a cohesive ethnic settlement with as much community cohesion (similar background, having relationships) as possible, practices like hiding wealth and earnings, obeying and respecting local leaders/ elders in case of necessary intervention on behalf of the family (to help bail somebody out of jail or resolve a conflict with elders of the other conflict party), to mobilise institutional aid, etc. In many cases, elders access legal aid from NGOs such as SHARP. Moreover, elders reported having contact with UNHCR and the Afghan consulate in Karachi and said that these institutions would involve them in solving conflicts with outsiders.

Afghans are often described as knowing the loopholes and how to survive in Pakistan's urban and rural settings (EI-BICC-KM-016-Pak) because they successfully navigate a highly informal economy and use the venality of local structures, e.g., when earning a living from driving without being legally entitled to obtain drivers licences. While the existence of local networks of support could be interpreted as an indicator of Afghans' self-reliance, the interviews revealed that immediate needs and everyday challenges—arising from inflation and rising prices for food, utility bills, rents, the need to purchase water daily, deficiencies in the process of opening bank accounts (see sub-section 3.5 for details) to name just a few—leave lower

class Afghans struggling and reflect a high level of precarity. The temporariness of legal status related short-term perspectives and the subsequent lack of formal mechanisms to access services (e.g., education, public sector employment) that enable social mobility constitute barriers to meaningful living that agency and coping strategies cannot fully substitute or remedy.

Concluding remarks

Against the background of the depicted high level of uncertainty that Afghans face in socio-economic and partly in security terms, the assessment of one academic expert sums up the limbo Afghans are caught in, thereby linking it to future perspectives of Afghan youth:

“The majority of Afghans in Peshawar and Pakistan are young people; these young adults are looking for certainty in the future—whether in Afghanistan or Pakistan. Afghans in Pakistan have their livelihoods and secure their incomes; many run businesses of various scales, even if these are partially illegal. They lead a life in Pakistan where they would secure a certain future for themselves but expect improvements. [...] The young generation badly wants some kind of certainty in the home country; the pull factors are not tangible. If this is not realised, their options are in Pakistan. Here, they know how to beat and even defeat ‘the system’ through illegal ways, but what they actually long for is to contribute to Pakistani society and economy in their own right, legally, and with an outlook of certainty in the future. They have the self-confidence that their presence can be turned into a meaningful contribution to Pakistani society and economy. A precondition is that the perceived restrictions should be removed. Afghans are tired of coping with restrictions (EInt-BICC-KM-016-Pak).

The analysis has shown that local networks mitigate socio-economic and everyday protection limbo insufficiently in that they enable survival but not social mobility. Policymakers should thus make an effort to establish the necessary formal mechanisms that allow Afghans to access services to the extent needed, starting in the legal realm with public sector employment, resolving access barriers for higher education, entitling Afghans to have drivers licenses, register property, etc. Concrete measures need to improve the quality of education for Afghans and Pakistani citizens alike and ensure access to quality education in practice. The existing programmes to provide modes of informal or community schooling need further extension and financial support to avoid the education gap for children and especially girls who cannot reach schools safely due to their remote place of living. Moreover, skills- and vocational training activities need to go beyond short-term courses and last at least six months.

Key findings

- *Socio-economic limbo exists only for lower class Afghans in Pakistan; the better-off do not live in precarity with all its effects.*
- *Afghans are not eligible to work in the public sector of Pakistan.*
- *Access to health care and education is theoretically provided, but the overburdening of the public health care and education systems means that access is limited in practice.*

3.3 Following the networks: Connectivity and mobility in the context of protracted displacement

This sub-section looks into Theme 3 of TRAFIG “Connectivity and mobility in the context of protracted displacement”. The main question it aims to address is: How do translocal and transnational networks shape refugees’ mobility aspirations, experiences and trajectories, and how do specific legal frameworks and policies enable or inhibit this mobility?

From cross-border displacement to developing translocal domestic connections

The reason why millions of Afghan refugees decided to seek refuge in Pakistan in the 1980s was not only a matter of geographical proximity for Afghans of all backgrounds but also one of several other pull-factors. Most importantly, Cold War politics and US antagonism towards Iran after the events in 1978/79 (hostage-taking in the US embassy in Tehran and Islamic revolution) conditioned that Pakistan started an immense humanitarian effort to receive and accommodate ‘refugees from communism’. International aid organisations provided everything from shelter to food and medical assistance. The average refugee who perceived the Soviet intervention as an attack on Islam opted for Pakistan because, for one, it was a Muslim country. For another, some refugees’ decisions to move to certain camps were not only made for their reputation in terms of organisation and services they provided (Quetta camp, for instance, SSI-SHARP-ZA-115-Pak), but which Afghan resistance fighters (so-called mujahedin) group was running the camp informally. With the war against the Soviets being organised from beyond the borders, refugee camps in particular played a role in sheltering, equipping, treating and healing mujahedin. Mujahedin ties and commander networks played a strong role in the exact choice of destination in Pakistan for Afghans throughout the 1980s (SSI-SHARP-ZA-113-Pak, SSI-SHARP-NS-202-Pak). In our semi-structured interviews, many refugees, however, stated that they went where their relatives had already established themselves in Pakistan. These relatives also served as the main source of information. Thus, the second

wave of refugees—displaced during the civil war from 1992 onwards (cf. section 2)—largely relied on personal networks, either kin networks of relatives or refugees from the same location in Afghanistan who had moved to Pakistan earlier. The first wave of displaced (1980s) moved in large groups as entire extended families, lineage groups or village communities (Maley, 1992, p. 11), forming large convoys that often swelled during their journey to Pakistan because it fused with other refugee caravans (SSI-SHARP-NS-202-Pak). The later refugees in what can be called the third wave (after 2001) primarily moved as individual families or core segments of extended families searching for peace and better living conditions.

The importance of local and transnational network relations for Afghan refugees’ mobility is confirmed by our survey, even though the share of respondents who actually received support for their move from Afghanistan to Pakistan is lower than expected (17 per cent). Among those who received assistance, 62 per cent relied on family members and/or friends who lived in Pakistan, while 44 per cent drew on support by relatives and/or friends in Afghanistan. Family members living in third countries such as Iran, people they had met along the way or smugglers were hardly mentioned as a source of support for these journeys.

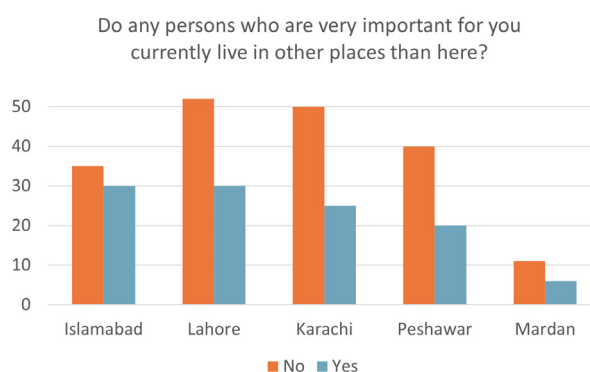
After initial displacement from Afghanistan, the movement trajectory often started with the move out from the relatives’ place or location to a place in Pakistan that was thought to offer better income and living opportunities. According to our survey, besides geographical proximity (40 per cent), the perceived improved economic conditions (mentioned by 62 per cent) and security situation (35 per cent) were decisive factors in Afghans’ decisions to move to the place where they currently live. The similarity of languages and traditions (mentioned by 12 per cent) had been another reason for the respondents’ mobility decision. Many (14 per cent) also stated that they came to this place to reunite with family members who had already lived there, and a few (4 per cent) had previously lived at the current place themselves. Both latter aspects point to the relevance of translocal social relations and own migration experiences as determinants in mobility decisions.

Displacement is often considered a temporary experience. For Afghans in Pakistan, however, it became a protracted situation to which they were forced to adapt. Respondents described how they adjusted in their temporary presence to a permanent settlement over time. Latest by 1995, when Afghans were officially allowed to move out of the camps because international aid had stopped facilitating the camps¹⁶, those who chose to remain in Pakistan went on to seek employment in the cities. Translocal

domestic connections evolved further through marriage relations. Those born in Pakistan married relatives or other members of the refugee community or relatives in Afghanistan, who were then brought to Pakistan. One respondent reported how his own family had grown to 300 members in Pakistan (SSI-SHARP-NS-203-Pak). As a result, translocal connections between different hubs of Afghan residents evolved, in particular between the large cities Lahore, Karachi, Peshawar and Quetta, leading to translocal mobility manifest in visits and further marriages (see also Map 1) with mobility trajectories along social relations.

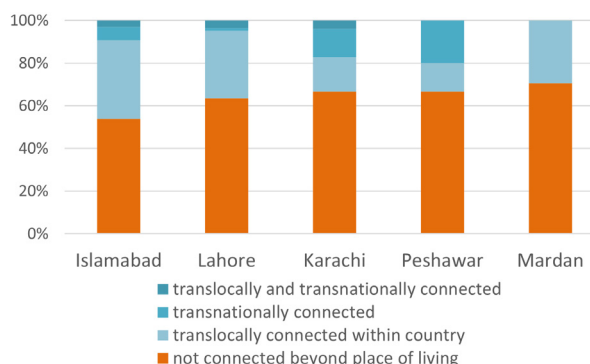
According to our survey, the social relations of most Afghans (63 per cent) are concentrated at their current place of living. Yet, 37 per cent maintain social relations with people who live elsewhere, which we see as a key indicator of translocal connectivity. While gender, age, educational background or legal status did not seem to be essential factors that could explain the difference in translocal connections, the respondents’ place of living seems to make a difference. For example, a larger share of Afghan migrants living in Islamabad (46 per cent) seem to maintain social relations beyond their place of living than at the other sites (see Figures 5 and 6).

Figure 5: Number of respondents at our study sites who maintain translocal social relations



Source: TRAFIG survey (n=299)

Figure 6: Share of respondents at our study sites who maintain local, translocal and transnational social relations



Source: TRAFIG survey (n=299)

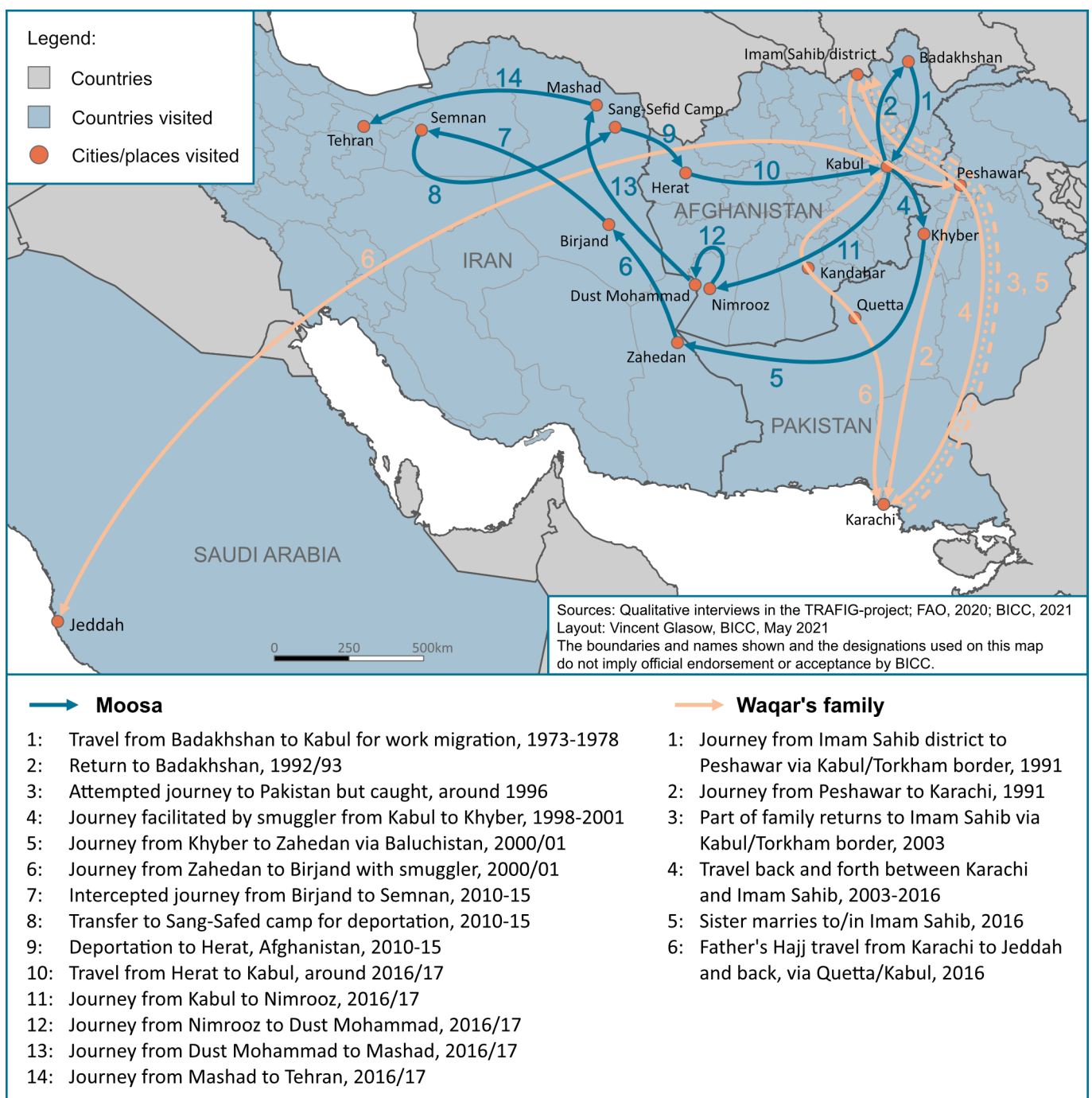
¹⁶ The World Food Programme (WFP) and UNHCR terminated assistance to refugee camps on 30 September 1995, marking the beginning of a new phase—sometimes euphemistically called ‘policy of self-reliance’—because it ended the “care and maintenance approach” (Fielden, 1998, p. 469). See also section 2.

Our survey revealed that Afghans' translocal figurations of displacement are by and large translocal family figurations. The quality and content of these translocal connections within Pakistan revolve around mutual support that is largely non-material and manifests in moral support through consultation and advice. Typical channels of maintaining relations are via phone (75 per cent of respondents stated that they keep in contact with their 'important persons' this way). For 61 per cent, personal visits continue to be an essential way of maintaining the translocal figurations in which they are embedded.

The scope and quality of cross-border connections

Several respondents reported that their parents and some siblings had moved back to Afghanistan in recent years for various reasons, one major factor being the harassment by the police and the perception that they cannot continue to live a life with dignity in Pakistan. The communication with returned family members and relatives mostly occurs over the phone, and relations are sustained by mutual visits, e.g. for funerals, marriages and the like. Sometimes, a deceased family member is brought back to be buried in Afghanistan, but often the funeral takes place in Pakistan. Several experts emphasised that split households among extended Afghan families are a reality, meaning that parts of the family live in Pakistan, the others in

Map 1: Displacement and movement trajectories of two Afghan families



Afghanistan, thus attributing normalcy to translocal lives (EI-BICC-KM-010-Pak, EI-BICC-KM-016-Pak). Moreover, these networks exist against the background of manifold cross-border dynamics and historical cross-border mobility (EI-BICC-KM-015-Pak) that was both amplified and immobilised because of war. The complexity and multifariousness of Afghans' presence in Pakistan and Iran is visualised in Map 1, which shows the displacement and movement trajectories of two families—one towards Iran, the other towards Pakistan.

Case 1: Moosa's family's displacement trajectory

Moosa—an elderly Hazara man who lives in a city west of Tehran—was born in Afghanistan's northeastern Badakhshan province. As a young man, he moved to Kabul in search for work, engaging in daily jobs as a labourer there in the mid-1970s. After the Marxist coup d'état in April 1978, he and his family moved back to Badakhshan, where he remained until the Taliban took over in the mid-1990s. Threatened by the persecution of Hazara in Afghanistan, Moosa decided to flee with his family to Iran. He was intercepted by Taliban forces and arrested, tortured in prison and exploited for forced labour until the International Committee of the Red Cross negotiated his release a long time later. Set free, he wanted to use smuggling channels to reach Iran. However, the smuggler advised him to move via Pakistan because of the lower risk of getting caught by the Taliban. After arriving in Khyber, a small town in Pakistan's tribal areas, Moosa worked as a labourer to pay the smuggler and save money to move on to Iran via Balochistan. From there, he managed to get to Zahedan and, accompanied by a fuel smuggler, on to Birjand. He never again heard of his family he had lost when they were intercepted by the Taliban. In Iran, Moosa lived as an undocumented Afghan. He married a registered Hazara and started another family. Later, one of his daughters followed her husband back to Afghanistan. When he tried to relocate his family to Tehran because there were no good job opportunities in Birjand, he and his family were arrested on the way. His wife's Amayesh card—a registration card for Afghans in Iran—was voided, and all of them were deported to Afghanistan (Herat) after a one-month stay in Sang Sefid camp. They moved on to Kabul and stayed at Moosa's daughter's house for several months and later with his brother's family. His brother found a job for Moosa's eldest son, who then married his cousin and stayed in Kabul. However, when Moosa and his second son could not find a proper job after 18 months, they decided to return to Iran. Moosa's brother introduced him to a cousin of his wife who smuggled people to Iran. They travelled to Nimrooz and met the smuggler. Because of their family relationship, he agreed to smuggle Moosa and his family free of charge. The smuggler took them to Dust Mohammad town in the north of Sistan-Balouchistan province, Iran.

He introduced them to an Iranian smuggler who trafficked drugs and humans and agreed to take them to Mashhad. When he learned that they could not afford the cost of this trip, the smuggler suggested that, should the police arrest them, Moosa should take the blame for the drugs that he was smuggling and accept its consequences. Moosa agreed with the deal. They managed to safely arrive in Mashhad. From there, they paid a bus driver to take them to Tehran in his bunk to avoid getting caught. Moosa and his wife stayed in a city west of Tehran province, while Moosa's son went on to Tehran for better employment opportunities. He still lives there and works as a daily construction worker. He married an Afghan woman who is irregular as well (BI-BICC-SA-102-IRN).

Note: The case study from Iran has been collected by Shamin Asghari, who contributed to our TRAFIG research by conducting five expert interviews and ten biographical interviews with Afghans displaced in Iran.

Case 2: Movement pattern of Waqar's extended family

Waqar came to Pakistan as a three-year-old with his family and close relatives. They left Imam Sahib in Kunduz Province in 1991 due to instability in Afghanistan, after the father had sold his merchant shop. They arrived in Peshawar via Torkham border crossing, and some relatives, including his parents, moved on to Karachi after around two weeks. In Karachi, his father started working as a labourer in a private company and rented a small house in Al Asif Square area. Since his father had brought earnings and savings with him at the time of migration, he was able to rent and open a merchant shop after five years. Some of his relatives returned to Afghanistan in 2003 after the new government was formed, trusting that peace will prevail. Since then, Waqar and his father have visited Afghanistan many times, e.g., to attend marriage and funeral ceremonies. Waqar's sister is married to one of his close relatives in Afghanistan. His father made the pilgrimage of Hajj from Afghanistan on his Afghan passport in 2016 and returned from Afghanistan to Karachi via the Chaman border crossing (SSI-SHARP-ZA-109-PAK).

The examples show how personal life trajectories escape neat categorisations as a refugee or a (labour) migrant, between temporariness, permanence and circular movement. Both cases also highlight the degree to which these individuals are highly self-reliant but at the same time vulnerable.

We found that current connectivity is constituted by growing but relatively close-knit, extended family networks across borders that are also family figurations and perpetuated by intra-family marriages the significance of which Williams (2010) has shown for Asia. Afghan women who were born and grew up in Afghanistan marry a relative in Pakistan and settle there and the other way around, Afghan women from Pakistan marry a relative in Pakistan and move in with his family there or return with him to Afghanistan. As with translocal domestic networks, personal exchanges through visits and needs-based contact via phone, etc. between the elders of the families characterise the quality of relations. This allows the exchange of family news and information. In many cases, Afghans arrange their Afghan identity documents (tazkeera and passports) with the support of relatives and travel to Afghanistan to receive the documents. Several cases were reported where respondents or their relatives perceived this as an urgent need and precondition to be able to make the Hajj from Afghanistan (SSI-SHARP-ZA-113-Pak). Afghans’ legal status in Pakistan deprives them of the opportunity to make the Hajj from their place of residence in Pakistan. Thus, arranging documents in and travel from Afghanistan is more feasible. After returning from the Hajj to Afghanistan, the hajji (pilgrim) takes the road via Chaman border crossing and re-enters Pakistan.

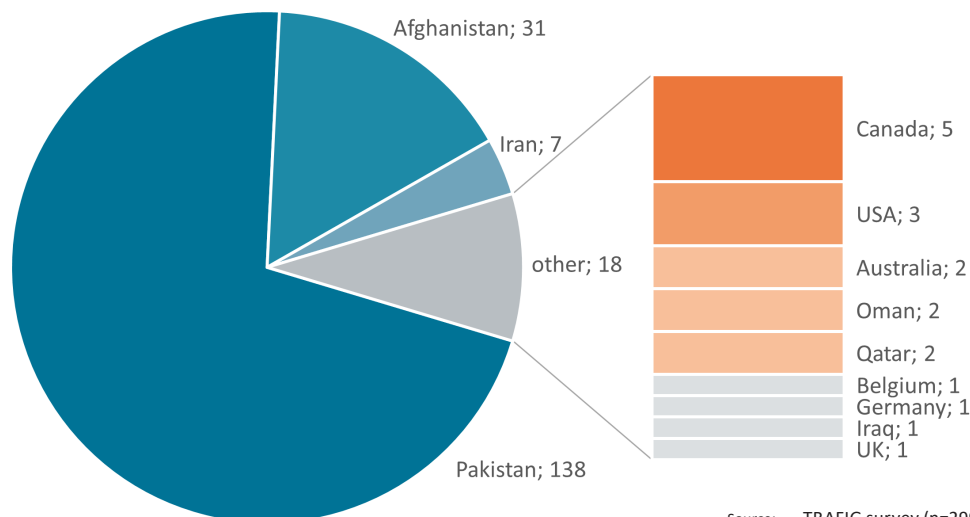
Our research found that translocal and transnational mobility within the region, i.e., extending from Pakistan to Afghanistan and in some cases also to Iran, is more relevant than mobility and networks further abroad (see Figure 7). The qualitative interviews indicate that this could be especially true for lower class Afghans. However, the survey data do not corroborate this impression. In some cases, connections with relatives in Iran are either sustained from the original displacement when families decided to split up and one part migrated to Iran, the other

to Pakistan or when male relatives went to Iran from Pakistan for labour migration (SSI-SHARP-NS-206-Pak). In the latter case, the respondents mentioned that when family members had migrated to Iran illegally for work in low-skill jobs, they were in constant fear of being caught and subsequently could not move around. Interviewees perceived their own mobility options in Pakistan as much more liberal and freer (SSI-SHARP-ZA-101-Pak). Once the Iranian police had caught their Afghan relative, he was deported to Afghanistan and returned to the family in Pakistan via the Chaman border crossing.

Mainly business networks and family networks of upper-middle class Afghans have moved beyond Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Iran. Thus, carpet businessmen spoke of travels to Russia, Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan, with their carpets being exported globally and sent to Germany, the United Kingdom, Australia, the United States and South Africa, for example (SSI-SHARP-NS-201-202-Pak). Overall, respondents mentioned kin relations with family members in Turkey, Canada, the United States, Australia, the United Kingdom, Germany, Norway, Saudi Arabia, Oman, Qatar, Belgium and Iraq (note that some of the countries mentioned in semi-structured interviews were not among those recalled by survey respondents, see Figure 7). Apart from the networks in Canada and Turkey, relatives abroad were not considered precedents that would help respondents realise their own mobility aspirations of moving abroad.

Moving to settle in Turkey was reported to be highly attractive for some well-off Afghans who possessed the financial means of investment required by the Turkish government as a precondition for immigrants to acquire Turkish citizenship (SSI-SHARP-ZA-103, SSI-SHARP-ZA-115-Pak). The clear path to obtaining Turkish citizenship, the prospect of freedom of movement in Turkey and the precedence set in their own extended

Figure 7: Countries where key contacts of Afghan migrants live



Source: TRAFIG survey (n=299), responses of 111 Afghans in Pakistan who maintain social relations to persons living at a different place than themselves

family of moving to Turkey and having success after three to five years were uncontested. In contrast, migration chances to Canada were less tangible. One respondent knew that the Canadian government had issued an immigration stop in 2017, and even now that the ban was lifted, migration for family reunion turned out to be difficult as she presented her case:

I have four brothers and two sisters, my younger brother and I live in Pakistan with our families, the rest of my siblings moved from Pakistan to Canada about nineteen years ago. My four uncles and aunts also live in Canada, all of them in Quebec. I am in regular contact with them. My brothers help me financially; sometimes they send me money every month, sometimes not; my sisters do not help me. As my younger brother is also in Pakistan, my brothers in Canada say that they can call only one family to live with them. So, it's not decided yet whether my family or my younger brother's family will go to Canada. My immigration was rejected, and my brother in Canada has discussed with the authorities that if they only allow my family to come then, he will bear all expenses, but it didn't work. I went to an organisation to seek assistance in this matter, but it refused to give that assistance (SSI-SHARP-AI-404-Pak).

Relatives who had settled in Norway and Germany had migrated via Iran and Turkey since 2016. One Afghan told us about his three nephews who are now in Germany, Turkey and Norway. “They went to these countries by facing great hardships. First, they went to Iran and then to Turkey and then to Germany and other countries. They are not in contact with me but with their families. They went and never came back. One of them could not come to attend his mother’s funeral” (SSI-SHARP-AI-407-Pak). The respondent added that he is happy to stay in Pakistan.

This intention to stay reflects the position of the vast majority (82 per cent) of Afghan refugees we spoke to. Only a minority of 18 per cent aim to move to another country to live there in the future. Interesting differences are revealed when age, educational status and study sites are considered. Respondents living in Karachi (in the settlements at Al-Asif Square and Jhangabad) and in Haji refugee camp in Peshawar were less inclined to stay than at all other sites—around one-third want to move on from there. Generally speaking, the younger generation of Afghans, especially those born in Pakistan and those who are better educated, seek to move to third countries to realise their social mobility aspirations. The share of those who aspire to permanently migrate to another country—the United States, Canada, Australia, Iran and the United Arab Emirates were most often mentioned—is highest in the age groups of 20 to 29 and 30 to 39. This is also reflected in the statement of a young Afghan who told us: “I do not see a bright future in Pakistan as I am

educated and am struggling to get a government or a private job due to my Afghan nationality. I prefer to go to a country where I have a secure future” (SSI-SHARP-ZA-109-Pak). It is further corroborated by an expert: “The third-generation Afghans in Pakistan will rather go to Abu Dhabi, the Gulf states or Europe for working than return to Afghanistan” (EI-BICC-KM-001-Pak). Many of our respondents have, however, been aware of the multiple barriers to their mobility and named visa and border restrictions (65 per cent), high costs of the journey and their own lack of financial means (55 per cent), lack of information on how to move (29 per cent) and lack of support by others to embark on a migration journey (13 per cent) as primary reasons why they cannot realise their ambitions to migrate.

Non-return, immobility and circular mobility as features of protractedness

Non-return

It is consistent with the widespread desire to stay in Pakistan that three out of four Afghans do not intend to return to Afghanistan. Their main reasons are that they are afraid to return home due to persisting violence and insecurity (84 per cent) and because most of their family members and friends also live in Pakistan and do not wish to return (37 per cent). One-third of respondents mentioned that they lost everything (their house, livelihoods and other assets) when they had to flee and thus have ‘nothing to return to’. The survey and our qualitative interviews show that older Afghans who belong to the first generation of Afghan refugees (see section 2) have no intention of returning. The vast majority of those who are considering return (64 per cent), however, stated that the presence of close family members would be their central motive to (temporarily) return to their former place of living. Only a few (8 per cent) said that they would only be willing to return if peace is restored and security conditions are improved. Thus, we can conclude that despite continuous bonds to their place of origin and existing transnational family relations, it is insecurity as much as the governance regime that hinders return and cross-border mobility. As one expert put it, “Pull factors in Afghanistan do not exist as of now” (EI-BICC-KM-015-Pak). It must be expected that the Taliban takeover of the country in August 2021 and their declaration that the war has come to an end will not immediately incentivise large-scale return from Pakistan. Even those considering life in the emirate will be wary of moving until they can see economic prospects that allow their families to make a living at the same level or better than in Pakistan.

Immobilising policies

Another important observation is that keeping the most significant networks running is becoming increasingly problematic due to immobilising policies and the legal limbo Afghans find themselves in, as described in sub-section 3.1. Travel across provinces in Pakistan constitutes a challenge for many re-

spondents. One respondent pointed out how mobility became constrained over time: “In the 1980s and 1990s, it was very easy to travel anywhere in Pakistan; there was no one who would stop you. But now it is very difficult, especially in Punjab because the Punjabi police harass refugees and extort money from us” (SSI-SHARP-ZA-121-Pak). Even holders of PoR cards face discrimination in cross-provincial travel (EI-BICC-KM-011-Pak, SSI-SHARP-NS-201-Pak, SSI-SHARP-AI-402-Pak), and 58 per cent of these holders mentioned that they had experienced mobility restrictions in Pakistan. Due to the fear of abuse and detention (cf. 3.4), many Afghans thus tend to stay in their residential locality and avoid domestic travel if they do not have cards. As one expert explained,

For domestic mobility, PoR cards do not enable freedom of movement. Especially when crossing provincial borders, Afghans face a lot of problems. For example, if coming from Quetta, people are stopped at D.I. Khan border check posts and are usually not allowed to pass. Even drivers get blamed by the police at the check posts for transporting Afghans in their cars. So, it is increasingly hard to find any driver because they fear problems with the security authorities. Afghans are not even allowed to buy tickets to travel by bus or train; they are not sold to Afghans (EI-BICC-KM-010-Pak).

In contrast to other situations of protracted displacement across the world, many Afghans have actually been quite mobile and regularly engaged in circular mobility to and from their country of origin but also across territorial borders within the region. Almost one-quarter of survey respondents have returned at least once to Afghanistan since their initial displacement—the share is higher among men (28 per cent) than women (17 per cent); higher among the younger (29 per cent of those <40 yrs.) than older Afghans (16 per cent of those >50 yrs.); and higher in study sites closer to the Afghan border (47 per cent of those interviewed in Peshawar) than those farther away (e.g. 9 per cent in Karachi). Those who did return temporarily came back four times on average. Transnational mobility is, however, increasingly impeded since efforts to seal the Afghan–Pakistani border and to introduce strict visa regulations are being implemented as part of the government of Pakistan’s policies (cf. sub-section 3.1.). Increasing immobility leads to four types of effects:

- *Spatially-regional*: Due to the strict entry and exit rules introduced at the Torkham border crossing in Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa (KP) province since 2016/17, Afghans living in Punjab, KP, and in the Islamabad area face mobility restrictions because they cannot use the border crossing and must go via Chaman crossing in Baluchistan where a strict visa regime is not yet being implemented and everybody can de facto pass. Afghans settling in southern KP, Karachi and Baluchistan do not face these restrictions in their cross-border interactions.

- *Gender*: The suspension of irregular border crossings affects females from the said provinces because since then mostly men have taken the hassle of the detour via Punjab alone when travelling to Afghanistan to visit the extended family or participate in festivities, cultural events or funerals. Women are thus increasingly becoming excluded, their relationships more distant and their connectivity weakened.
- *Generational*: Under the given circumstances, mostly elders and first-generation Afghans who had migrated to Pakistan keep up physical mobility for the mentioned occasions and show presence to secure assets from land and property in Afghanistan.
- *Future*: We observe a decline in physical mobility with time passing because many, if not most, of the second and third generation Afghans who were born in Pakistan do not have the same emotional connection and sense of belonging to Afghanistan. They rather want to naturalise in Pakistan. Despite the difficulties they might face every day—and which among lower class Afghans are very similar to the daily challenges of ordinary Pakistanis—they have no aspirations to return.

We consider this trend of policy-induced immobilisation and immobility to constitute one feature of protractedness, besides re-migration to Pakistan after initial return to Afghanistan and the circular migration patterns (see below).

Circular mobilities

Several of our respondents had re-migrated to Pakistan after their initial return to Afghanistan for mainly two reasons: The lack of security in Afghanistan (SSI-SHARP-NS-202-Pak) and livelihood options (SSI-SHARP-NS-203-Pak). The narrative of a woman who re-migrated with her husband and brother is insightful in several respects:

We went to Afghanistan with the intention to live there permanently, but my husband failed to find a job; there are no employment opportunities. I wore the veil but never a burqa. One day after I visited a doctor, I received a warning by the Taliban that they would punish me if I was seen again without a burqa outside. When we left Afghanistan via Torkham, the officer cut our PoR cards into pieces; we returned through Chaman border and Quetta. The authorities at Chaman border post humiliated us; my husband and brother were beaten for no cause. My father also plans to come back to Pakistan because he is not well. He bought land there to build a house but has not yet been able to start (SSI-SHARP-AI-402-Pak).

The quote also points to a third motive for re-migration, which is related to the availability of health services and treatment (SSI-SHARP-AI-401-Pak, SSI-SHARP-AI-411-Pak). Especially for serious illnesses and long-term health treatment needs, families consider moving (back) to Pakistan. Whereas

previously, with unchecked travel also via Torkham, hospital visits in Peshawar, Rawalpindi and other places were normal for many Afghans and constituted one type of circular migration, the tightening of borders is increasingly narrowing this option.

Another type of circular migration revealed in the interviews is made up by scoping visits that seem to have been very common, i.e., where Afghans went to Afghanistan to assess the situation and their prospects for making a living ‘back home’ (SSI-SHARP-NS-204-Pak). Besides, there are many cases where Afghans travel to Afghanistan regularly to secure their assets in terms of land and property for a possible return in the future or should emergencies necessitate their sale. One example of this is that of the family head who sold his land in Afghanistan to afford the treatment of his wife when she was in critically ill (SSI-SHARP-ZA-101-Pak). Other types of circular mobility include the return of undocumented Afghans after they were deported to Afghanistan (SSI-SHARP-AI-407-Pak, EI-BICC-KM-007-Pak). What immediate return deportation can look like is described by the following respondent:

I was charged with crimes under section 354 and 452 of the Pakistan Penal Code, a FIR [First Information Report] was lodged against me, and after being tried in court, I was jailed for three years. Later, I was proven innocent and got an order of acquittal. However, under section 14 Foreigners Act, the court ordered my deportation to Afghanistan with a fine of five thousand Rupees. I was deported through Torkham Border, where my uncle was already present and picked me up immediately to take me back to Peshawar (SSI-SHARP-AI-407-Pak).

Hajj-travel and labour migration to Iran also fall into the category of circular mobility, but the latter has been reported less in our sample. Finally, those going back and forth based on Afghan passports and Pakistani visas for business purposes constitute a new group of circular migrants. This mode of transnational livelihood-making and connectivity suits especially Afghan businessmen with less robust documents such as ACCs. One carpet businessman, who had migrated to Pakistan from Jawzjan in 2008, that is after the PoR card registration process, reported that he had decided to return to Afghanistan due to constant police harassment in 2016 and subsequently re-migrated to Pakistan with an Afghan passport and business visa after one month. Ever since, he has been going back and forth every one to two months, while his personal relationships are mainly in Afghanistan, not in Pakistan (SSI-SHARP-ZA-103-Pak). From the spectrum of interviews conducted, we can conclude that many Afghans would prefer a mode of existence where they can legitimately live transnational lives with legal options to maintain cross-border and translocal relations through regular visits and based on freedom of mobility within Pakistan. As of now, GoP policies and the state of insecurity in Afghanistan adversely affect their ability to maintain the previous level of connectivity.

Concluding remarks

The evolution of translocal connections is strongly entwined with Afghans’ displacement and migration trajectories that stretch over generations. Our research found that translocal and transnational mobility from Pakistan and Iran to Afghanistan is of higher relevance than mobility and networks further abroad, especially among lower class Afghans. Among the educated members of second- and third-generation Afghans in Pakistan, mobility aspirations are oriented towards third countries, whereas first-generation Afghan refugees who migrated mainly in the 1980s and 1990s prefer to stay in Pakistan. Only few are likely to opt for return if the conditions allow it. As resettlement quotas for Afghans have become negligible, increasingly illegal channels are being sought in search of a better life abroad. The interviews revealed that many Afghans would prefer an option of existence that allows them to be rooted in Afghanistan and their current residence in Pakistan or Iran. We detected several immobilising policies that hamper connectivity and the upkeep of networks within Pakistan and Iran but also across the border with Afghanistan. We have shown that this immobility but also certain types of mobility, that is re-migration or circular migration, constitute features of protractedness in Afghans’ displacement but not a way out of protractedness. Overall, we find that the role of Afghans’ translocal and transnational networks to end protracted displacement is limited.

Key findings

- *Most Afghans living in Pakistan intend to stay in the country, particularly first-generation Afghan refugees who migrated in the 1980s and 1990s. Among the educated members of the second and third generation of Afghans in Pakistan, many aspire to move on to third countries outside the region. Only few opt for return if the conditions allow it, yet an increase in returnees is highly unlikely in view of the situation in August 2021.*
- *Translocal mobility in Pakistan and transnational movements in the region, extending mainly to Afghanistan and Iran, are more significant than movements further abroad.*
- *Pakistani government policies and the absence of national refugee law—while aiming to incentivise return—have an increasingly immobilising effect on translocal domestic and transnational connectivity.*
- *Many Afghan refugees have family members who live in other parts of Pakistan or other countries. The role of these translocal and transnational networks to end protracted displacement, for instance by providing financial support, is limited.*

3.4 Building alliances—Displaced people’s integration and intergroup relations with ‘hosts’

This section investigates Theme 4 of TRAFIG: ‘Building alliances: Displaced people’s integration and intergroup relations with ‘hosts’’. The main question this section aims to address is: “Which processes structure inter-group relations between refugees and hosts and displaced persons’ pathways of local integration?”

Intergroup relations from the perspective of Afghans

In our survey, we asked Afghan refugees who they regularly spend time with. Most respondents (87 per cent) stated that they normally meet other persons from their ‘home community’, i.e. other Afghans coming from the same region, and three out four Afghans replied that they meet members from their (extended) family who live at the same place. They often mentioned persons they know from work (24 per cent), members of the same ethnic group (19 per cent) and people they know from the mosque (17 per cent) (see Figure 8). Pakistani citizens are regular contacts of 15 per cent of the respondents, and more frequently by men (17 per cent) than by women (12 per cent), for example

We also enquired whether the respondents felt accepted or rejected by other people, including Pakistani citizens, at their place of living. With 82 per cent, the vast majority responded that they felt accepted and only few (4 per cent) said they felt rejected by the host community; the remaining 14 percent had reportedly experienced both acceptance and rejection in the past. We interpret this finding as an indicator of a relatively high social cohesion among residents of Afghani and Pakistani origin. In semi-structured and biographic interviews, respondents

also did not speak negatively about their relations to Pakistani ‘locals’. A Pashto-speaking Afghan housewife who lives in a low-income household in peri-urban Lahore, for instance, told us:

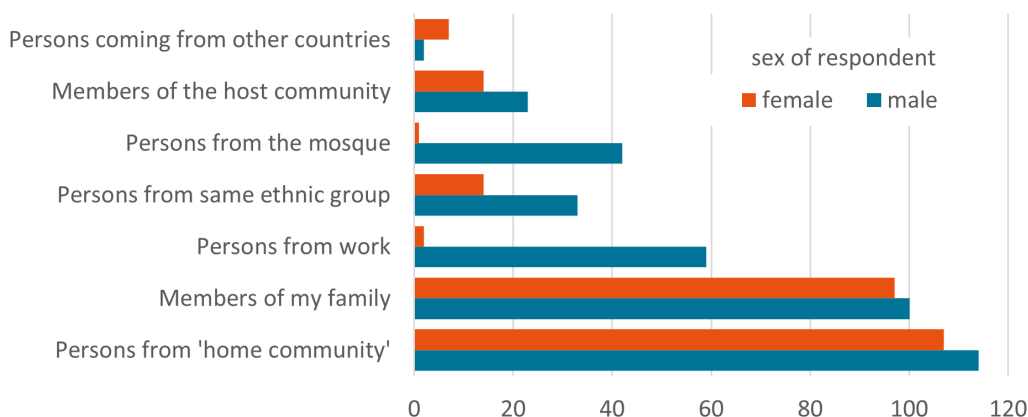
The locals are kind enough with us, and they tolerate us in their country. [...] Our local neighbours help us in hospitals and in banks because we cannot speak Urdu very fluently and we do not have the right documents. It is locals who helped us renting a house and buying a motor-bike (SSI-SHARP-AI-417-Pak).

This quote is indicative in several respects: (1) It reveals cooperative relations and Afghans’ dependency on Pakistani citizens in managing anything that requires legal documents; (2) it hints at barriers to local integration and self-reliance because of insufficient language skills in addition to lack of legal recognition; and (3) the expression ‘kind enough with us’ in combination with her saying ‘tolerating us in their country’ indicates that the woman is aware of the rampant view among hosts that refugees are an additional burden in the complex and difficult socio-economic and political setting of Pakistan.

Fields of interaction

Our research found that Afghans and Pakistani hosts interact in a variety of fields daily: Through work relations as employers and employees, as shopkeepers, vendors, tailors, etc., as customers and clients, as landlords and tenants, as neighbours, worshippers in the same mosque, as teachers and students. As a rule, interactions prevail among Afghans and Pakistanis of a similar socio-economic background, which has to do with the classed spatial separation described in sub-section 3.2. Bridging class relations are rare for the fields of interaction discussed here. Moreover, while some of these relations are purely professional, others are characterised by dependency, friendship and/ or something in-between, often manifest in

Figure 8: Afghan refugees' local network relations at their place of living



Source: Trafig survey (n=254)

consultative or conflict resolution exchanges. In personal (e.g., tenant-landlord) and friendship-relations, moral support, advice, and—if necessary—material assistance is naturally more common than in business networks. Relations between neighbours were commonly framed as positive, and respondents described interactions where Afghans engaged in occasional visits of their Pakistani neighbours for festivities such as Eid ul-Adha or marriages and where they expressed their condolences during funerals. Close personal networks and trust relations with Pakistani citizens are rooted in long-term relationships based on joint work experience or jointly spent schooldays or childhood days in the same neighbourhood. The latter is particularly relevant for the younger generation. Young people also reported more often spending their leisure time with Pakistani peers, e.g., playing cricket or football, compared with previous generations of Afghans. The fact that the young generation is more likely to have childhood friends and relations with members of the host community seems to bode well for a future mutual understanding, trust, and local social integration.

In one instance, we found that such close personal relationships of trust nearly circumvented the formal rule prohibiting Afghans' public sector employment. In this case, an unregistered Afghan was paid to work at a motorway toll station because he was familiar with the work and known to the local boss.

The respondent is doing a government job at toll plaza standing in for an employee who died in an accident. That employee was his friend. He used to visit him. So he became familiar with the procedure and how the work is done. Then the boss at toll plaza asked him to do the job and gave him money on a daily basis for that. According to the respondent, there are opportunities for refugees, but if a person does not have a card, he can do nothing. He does not have a card (SSI-SHARP-AI-407-Pak).

As this excerpt from the interview notes shows, the employment was informal after all; however, it meant much-sought recognition for the respondent. In another case, a master tailor reported how he had managed to establish a successful business with a city-wide reputation among customers in Karachi. Due to the social status achieved, his elder son was able to marry a girl from a Pakistani family. Moreover, he reported: "One of my local friends suggested that his daughter should marry my son, which I happily accepted. Now I have two grandsons of four and two years respectively" (SSI-SHARP-ZA-119-Pak). Inter-marriages are common, mostly between Afghan females and Pakistani males, but also—albeit to a lesser extent—the other way round. In theory, Afghan wives of Pakistani husbands are eligible to apply for and receive Pakistani citizenship (EI-BICC-KM-012-Pak). However, the process is slow and highly bureaucratic, and seemingly arbitrary at times. Afghan males can never obtain citizenship through marriage with Pakistani nationals.

Collaboration and conflict

By far the most significant interaction between both communities comes from Afghans' limited rights to purchase and register property, such as motorbikes, apartments, houses, etc. in their own name. They thus depend on friends, neighbours, landlords, employers and others who either lend them their identity cards (CNICs) to purchase property, access hospitals and doctors (SSI-SHARP-NS-202-Pak), or act as guarantors in case of disputes and in dealing with local authorities or banks and help them to get children registered at school (SSI-SHARP-ARK-305-Pak). According to respondents, conflicts occur mainly about financial issues and false claims of ownership by Pakistani partners. As one Afghan waiter in a restaurant reported about his Afghan colleague, "He had bought a motorbike using the name of a local person, but upon purchase, the local partner claimed that it was his own bike. Tension arose, and some persons from the local Pakistani community supported the Afghan and compelled his Pakistani partner to quit his claim and hand over the bike to the real owner, which he did in the end" (SSI-SHARP-ZA-112-Pak). In another case, where a dispute arose over financial issues in the market, the market union was said to have settled the issue without any discrimination. It is noteworthy that the market union consists of Pakistani and Afghan members (SSI-SHARP-ZA-109-Pak). An Afghan respondent reported a case where he caused an accident hitting a child 'of a local man' with his motorbike:

The child's leg was broken. People gathered at the site and started blaming me. They called the police and brought the child to the hospital. The police took me to the police station. Fortunately, my local [Pakistani] friends and shopkeepers went to the child's father to ask for forgiveness and explained that it had not been my fault. The child had suddenly run into my motorbike, and I could not evade him. Upon the insistence of my local friends and colleagues, the father gave in and accepted the offered compensation. I was then released from police custody" (SSI-SHARP-ZA-115-Pak).

This type of conflict resolution among conflict parties, which involves an agreement about compensation as a precondition for disengaging the authorities and formal legal procedures, is common. It involves local representatives with some kind of authority, such as members of professional unions or (tribal) elders and respected persons of the community who act as mediators. This is another example: A respondent's brother was once brutally beaten 'by a local young man' when they were playing cricket. He approached the tribal elder of the perpetrator, telling him that his brother was innocent and beaten without reason. Once the elder had called on the Pakistani boy with his father and found him indeed guilty of beating the

Afghan for no reason, he judged that the Afghan must be given 50,000 PKR as compensation. It was not the amount of money that the respondent praised and was thankful for, but the fact that the elder had judged without bias, thus truly serving justice from the perspective of the Afghan respondent (SSI-SHARP-ZA-127-Pak).

One expert mentioned that many guarantor relationships of Pakistani and Afghan partners, which enabled Afghans to purchase or register property based on a Pakistani partner's legal document, often involved some payment of benefits for the local partner (EI-BICC-KM-010-Pak). This could not be verified from the semi-structured interviews as respondents did not explicitly mention it. They were eager to point out instances of positive cooperation, for example, where a doctor in a local hospital gave the Afghan patient 100,000 PKR as gift so he would be able to get the surgery and further treatment for his leg after a motorbike accident (SSI-SHARP-ZA-113-Pak). Such help, however, was not unilateral. One case was reported where an Afghan provided a 50,000 PKR-loan for a local boy of the neighbourhood to enable him to study at university (SSI-SHARP-ZA-121-Pak). However, from among the respondents of the middle and upper-income class, one respondent expressed that he is in constant fear when engaging in transactions involving movable or immovable property, stating: "I am obliged to trust locals. Should/whenever tensions arise between any Afghan with refugee status and locals, we try to solve it through negotiations" (SSI-SHARP-ZA-201-Pak). Several instances where locals do not pay adequately for services or products purchased from Afghans (SSI-SHARP-AI-403-Pak, SSI-SHARP-ZA-122-Pak) or defaulted on credit repayments (SSI-SHARP-ZA-104-Pak) were mentioned.

Observations on Afghans' collective subjectivity: Local integration vs. belonging

In the majority of responses to the question of how Afghan men and women assess their relations with the host community over time, the typical answer was that 'relations are improving day by day'—paired with expressions articulating confidence and hope that this would be the case (e.g., SSI-SHARP-ZA-204-205-206-Pak). Aware of the recent conflictual history of political scapegoating of Afghans, acts of exclusion¹⁷, and de facto forced returns by the government (see section 2), we suspect that this mantra of hoped-for improvement over time points to the carefully hidden, maybe not acknowledged and possibly even actively rejected underlying emotions of hurt, non-comfort and individual fear of the respondents, connected in particular to politically motivated incidents after December 2014. We argue that these issues which respondents did not talk about

reveal something about Afghans' collective subjectivities¹⁸, their feeling of vulnerability, fear to some extent and feeling not recognised and accepted. Especially the young generation is feeling frustrated for lack of career options regarding social mobility and future (un)certainities (see sub-section 3.2).

Respondents' verbal framing of their relations with Pakistani citizens ('locals') in the semi-structured interview responses is also revealing: While Afghans commonly distinguished between normal and neutral vs. close/ friendly contacts (SSI-SHARP-ZA-103-Pak, SSI-SHARP-NS-207-Pak), few interviewees also spoke of 'superficial' relations (SSI-SHARP-NS-202-Pak, SSI-SHARP-NS-203-Pak), and one made a clear distinction between interaction—which he has with Pakistanis on a daily basis—and contacts with hosts, which he said are limited. The following quote demonstrates that here again, generational differences are relevant: "I have contact and interactions with locals, but my elder son has close and friendly interactions with locals. It is also his business to contact locals to sell out the scrap metals. [...] I think that here in Karachi, locals are neutral but in Quetta, the host community is very friendly and helpful" (SSI-SHARP-ZA-120-Pak). The quote also introduces regional variation in the intensity and closeness of contacts experienced.

In Baluchistan and Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa (Peshawar), the language, tribal background and traditions (including food, style of living and behaviour) of the locals are even more similar to that of Afghans. As one interview account indicates, language skills give confidence and can also help avoid police harassment: "When I travel in Pakistan and am being investigated by the police, they normally let me go when I speak Urdu fluently with them because they think I am a Pakistani. I also speak Roghni, Saraiki and Pashto" (SSI-SHARP-AI-407-Pak). Only in Sindh (even though in Karachi as the capital of Sindh, large number of Pashtuns have been settling for decades and Pashto is spoken widely in certain quarters) and Punjab (Lahore) the lack of Urdu or other local language skills poses a certain challenge for local acceptance (EI-BICC-KM-007-Pak, EI-BICC-KM-003-Pak). And as has been mentioned before, the second and third generation Afghans who were born, raised and—ideally—educated in Pakistan, speak Urdu fluently and master English depending on the school they went to. Many of these second and third generation Afghans we spoke to expressed

17 None of the respondents mentioned, for example, the closure of Afghan refugee schools and the exclusion of Afghan refugee children from Pakistani state schools since the beginning of May 2016 (HRW, 2017, p. 24).

18 Collective subjectivity refers here to the collective mode of Afghans' subjective experience of how they make sense of the world based on interactions within the host society, its economy, political institutions, natural surroundings and in dependence with other context factors. It is the basis for constructing meaning in everyday life and the background of interpretation for everyday experiences (and thus not static). This collective subjectivity is distinct from, for example, the collective subjectivity of members of different host communities. In sociology, the concept is prominent in phenomenological approaches and the sociology of emotions. See for example Ellis & Flaherty (1992).

their wish to obtain Pakistani citizenship because they feel more Pakistani than Afghan and have visited Afghanistan maximum once in their life if at all. In contrast, more Afghans of the older/first generation of refugees seem to be emotionally and physically attached to Afghanistan, the land, and its people, and what they had left behind, so that they would consider return if only conditions in Afghanistan allowed it (see sub-section 3.3).

A substantial share of interviewees across generations articulated a strong wish to be integrated legally, too (e.g., SSI-SHARP-NS-202-Pak). The lack of legal acceptance and related rights, subsequently arising dependencies on members of the host community, the lack of mobility options to work or study abroad from Pakistan as point of departure and the seeming nil prospects of obtaining citizenship create frustration, especially among the young, educated generation of Afghans in Pakistan. They feel de facto integrated but yet struggle to obtain a sense of belonging because of insufficient acceptance by hosts and the government (policies). One way to get out of this situation is migration to Europe, which many consider. As one expert explained, “The incentive is clearly the quality of life in Europe. Afghans want to migrate there and leave Pakistan because they realise that if they stay, they will need another 60-70 years of their lives to legitimise themselves in Pakistan” (EI-BICC-KM-001-Pak).

Shift of perceptions regarding Afghans’ presence in Pakistan

The analysis offered in this sub-section (3.4) on Afghans’ integration and intergroup relations has so far mainly focused on the current situation and recent dynamics. However, it is crucial to keep in mind that both communities share a forty-year history of close interaction as refugees and hosts during which relations have changed considerably. The reflection of one Pakistani academic expert about memories of his own childhood years in Pakistan and the situation of Afghans today provides insights into the host perspective about Afghans who had fled to Pakistan since the early 1980s. He said,

When from the 1980s onwards, the Soviet intervention induced migration flows of many Afghans to Pakistan, they were welcomed as muhajirin, a designation related to the religious connotation of the Prophet Mohammad’s (PBUH) displacement (hijra) from Mecca to Medina. In my memory, the name and existence of muhajirin is associated with places ‘where you work like a donkey’, i.e., sweatshops and mines where stones are cut, etc. that were also referred to as ‘Kharkar camp’ [khar meaning donkey in Urdu, Dari, Pashto; kar meaning work/labour]. In the mid-1980s, rumours spread that Kharkar camp residents would kidnap small children, and parents used to tell their children that these kharkars would come to get them if they do not behave. Such stories were not based on an-

tagonism towards Afghan migrants but just to rein one’s children in and make sure they observe rules and are secure overall. This imagery creation was most relevant during the reign of Zia-ul-Haq in the 1980s. Most Afghans were poor; they were visible in the streets selling corn and chickpeas on carts. The better-off Afghans were traders and earned a lot of money due to massive smuggling across the border. [...] Today, there is also a common perception that Afghans are encroaching on the already congested and contested employment market in Pakistan. However, Afghans are part of the largely informal economy that characterises Pakistan, and they work first and foremost in niche areas where Pakistanis don’t want to take up employment. [...] The population of Pakistan is divided regarding the Afghans’ presence. On the one hand, they feel some antagonism, especially when Indian politics comes in, i.e., when they hear news about Indian investments in Afghanistan. On the other hand, there is still much empathy towards Afghans because many Pakistanis—at least in Punjab—have a migration background as well (EI-BICC-KM-008-Pak).

These childhood memories and current observations reflect a shift of perceptions from welcome to burden from a Pakistani perspective (also: SSI-SHARP-ZA-101-Pak). Throughout the last two decades (since 2001), Afghans have been less welcome in Pakistan and faced increasing rejection by locals. The influence of international and regional politics on host–refugee relations, especially events and conflicts in bilateral relations between Pakistan and Afghanistan, affect the treatment of Afghans in Pakistan immediately (Grawert & Mielke, 2018, p. 85). Tensions became tangible, and hostility peaked after the December 2014 Peshawar public army school attack (see section 2) that was spuriously blamed on Afghans. Since then, Afghans have increasingly been put under surveillance, persecuted, forced to sell ‘property’ and assets quickly and below-market prices and in some cases, forced to repatriate (peak in 2016). Only with the change in government (Imran Khan, PTI) in 2018 did the tension ease markedly (SSI-SHARP-ZA-101-Pak, SSI-SHARP-ZA-112-Pak). An academic expert shared his observations from Peshawar:

After this incident, Afghans would not come out openly for fear of being rounded up by the police and major backlashes by the Pakistani hosts. The incident thus very much damaged the cohesion that had been there from the outset of Afghan displacement to Pakistan. So, today we can rather speak of ‘coexistence in tension’ where the friction is beneath the surface, with the potential that a small incidence could spark major open conflict. In my opinion, authorities in Pakistan do not recognise this underlying tension, and it will take years to alleviate it, if at all. The local population is no longer positive about the presence

of Afghans; so, if something like the school incident happens again, the situation might escalate and in the worst-case, violence towards Afghans will unfold. After the Peshawar school attack, the Pakistani public demanded that 'refugees go home' (EI-BICC-KM-016-Pak).

In the past, both communities were always thought of and perceived themselves as having more in common than not. Low-income people (EI-BICC-KM-012-Pak) of both nationalities faced the hardships of living in Pakistan around the poverty line with daily challenges such as gas and electricity load shedding, the reported difficulties in accessing health and elementary education services (cf. 3.2), realising their rights, finding decent employment, etc. However, fueled by rejectionist government policies, racial profiling and the security lens the GoP adopted for its overall treatment of Afghans in the country, negative perceptions soared also among ordinary people. A very outspoken Pakistani government expert who had been dealing with Afghan refugees in an official position for more than one decade complained about what he perceived as lack of loyalty of Afghans towards Pakistan claiming that “Not a single Afghan is appreciating the government of Pakistan and the Pakistani people. [...] How to expect that Pakistanis, the common men, here love Afghans?” (EI-BICC-KM-003-Pak).

Thus, while Pakistanis increasingly see Afghans as a security risk and factor for instability, Afghans experience their own frustrations. As one respondent put it, “At the communal level, Pakistanis and Afghans share more than what separates them, also and in particular in low-income areas. However, whereas daily wage labourers who are Pakistanis get 1,000 PKR per day, Afghans only get 500 PKR a day, this frustrates them” (EI-BICC-KM-012-Pak). Another expert pointed out an additional dimension: “... the tension between both states is at the government level, not between people. When in 2016, Afghans were forced to sell their property, the Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa government insisted that they should be paid the due amounts and not disadvantaged prices. The resentment Afghans feel against Pakistanis is not given due attention. In the view of Afghans, they have been deprived of resources dedicated to them initially but which the ISI [Inter Services Intelligence] and GoP kept to themselves” (EI-BICC-KM-001-Pak).

What can be discerned from the interviews is that the overall strong social cohesion that had existed between Afghans and Pakistani hosts from the outset is waning for the second decade in a row, fuelled by the previous government's narrative that connected Afghan refugees, terrorism and insecurity in Pakistani cities and towns. The current government, which is keener to acknowledge Afghans' contribution to the Pakistani economy and society, is facing great difficulties in getting rid of negative narratives as the population has developed a hostile attitude towards Afghans' presence from 2015 onwards. This is confirmed by the explanation of an academic expert:

Given that the local economy in Pakistan is not thriving, Afghans are perceived as competitors and local workers as a threat. They are perceived not only to have outsmarted average Pakistanis but also to receive international assistance. Thus, the Pakistani viewpoint is 'We are equally suffering, but we are not getting all of this'. This feeds into the mood that all security incidences are attributed to Afghan refugees and has set off a blame game that is increasingly mutual. On the one hand, Pakistanis blame Afghans to be terrorists. On the other, Afghans blame Pakistanis for non-respect and a hostile attitude, amongst others (EI-BICC-KM-016-Pak).

Overall, we detect a depreciation of Afghans' local integration in an increasingly hostile environment.

Concluding remarks

Compared to other displacement contexts, there were only few hurdles to Afghans' local integration in Pakistan in the past. From a bird-eye viewpoint, conflicts had long been absent at the political and intercommunal levels, large-scale mass deportations never occurred, and social cohesion was lived due to many commonalities. Our research revealed current contradictory developments in terms of intergroup relations between Pakistani hosts and Afghans. On the one hand, the presence of an increasing number of second- and third-generation Afghans who were born and raised in Pakistan amid Pakistani neighbours and in close interaction with the host community constitutes an ideal starting point for closer relations of trust and cooperation in the future. On the other hand, political influences and the security perspective that frames Afghans' presence since 2015 are detrimental to local integration and social cohesion. There is the potential for further deterioration and escalation. With the mood shifting and increasing 'coexistence in tension', it seems that it is high time for policymakers and the international community to review previous community cohesion programmes and to engage more seriously in initiatives that emphasise shared future-building and improvements of everyday lives.

Key findings

- *Social cohesion between Afghans and the host society has traditionally been high. The intergroup relations do, however, not yield emancipatory potential and upward social mobility for Afghans.*
- *Relations have moved from support to 'coexistence in tension' with risks of violent escalation.*
- *Many Afghans are torn between the will to belong and rejection by locals.*

3.5 Seizing opportunities—Development incentives and new economic interactions

In this fifth theme of TRAFIG, the overarching question is: What are the economic impacts of protracted displacement situations and transnational figurations of displacement in the medium and long-term, and how can policies contribute to maximising development effects?

Ordinary Afghans have found niche occupations in the Pakistani economy over the years, such as the scrap business and recycling of waste. Moreover, they are construction workers, mine workers, cobblers and have a certain dominance in the transport sector for goods and people, e.g., as lorry- and rickshaw drivers. These are mostly occupations where they do not compete with Pakistani labourers—by one of the experts referred to as “the odd jobs no Pakistani is willing to do” (EI-BICC-KM-007-Pak). Larger businesses involving cross-border trade are typically carpet-making and international trade, dried fruit business and trade, trade in clothes and fabrics, and handicraft production. In these and the transportation-, garment factory- and the scrap business, Afghan entrepreneurs employ Afghans and Pakistani citizens alike. Afghans’ involvement, however, remains unacknowledged and informal (cf. 3.2 and 3.4) due to restrictions resulting from their legal status. The carpet-making business is truly translocal in terms of production and marketing. One carpet businessman shared that he “used to import 80 per cent of handmade carpets from Afghanistan and managed the production of 20 per cent in Pakistan.” He expressed that 90 per cent of his workforce are women who are engaged in home-based manufacturing of carpets for him in Afghanistan (SSI-SHARP-NS-201-Pak).

According to all empirical accounts by Afghan employers, labourers, entrepreneurs and experts from the academic and aid community, Afghans’ contribution to the Pakistani economy is significant and could be expanded further because potentials for domestic investments and business development as well as for translocal trade are huge (e.g., SSI-SHARP-AI-417-Pak, SSI-SHARP-ZA-103-Pak, SSI-SHARP-ZA-114-Pak, SSI-SHARP-NS-203-Pak, EI-BICC-KM-005-Pak, EI-BICC-KM-007-Pak).

However, two caveats accompany these statements. One is the non-availability of quantitative figures for the investments, employment rates (of locals) and revenue contributions of Afghans to the Pakistani economy (EI-BICC-KM-001-Pak). This is due to two factors: For one, the Pakistani economy is largely informal and undocumented. For the other, the legal status of Afghans prevents them from owning and registering property (land, businesses, etc., cf. 3.2 and 3.4) in their own name, and it excludes them from public sector employment. In this regard, it is noteworthy to point out that a study tendered by the government of Pakistan in 2016 about the impact of Afghans on the Pakistani economy has not been finalised and published to date.

The second caveat manifests in adverse and contradictory policies by the GoP that regulate cross-border interactions, deprive Afghans of developing their economic potentials through denied access to the formal economy (private and public sector) and lack a coherent strategy to benefit from Afghans’ presence in terms of revenue and tax income. The trade between Afghanistan and Pakistan is badly affected by volatile political relations between both countries that have regularly caused day- and week-long border closures. As a result goods have perished, entrepreneurs have been unable to fulfil contracts and lost orders. In the words of one respondent: “The economic relationship between Pakistan and Afghanistan deteriorated over the last few years as Pakistan has tightened up the policies for the people of Afghanistan. Pakistan is of the view that terrorists come from Afghanistan, and this has affected its policy towards Afghans and the trade between the two countries, plunging people on both sides in financial crisis” (SSI-SHARP-ZA-113-Pak).

The recent positive move of the new government that allows Afghans to open bank accounts¹⁹ and use Pakistani SIM cards has clear economic motives, not least to facilitate capital movement from business transfers via banks and thus create a base from where fiscal revenues can be deducted. However, it remains unclear why Afghans are not allowed to obtain drivers’ licenses and register vehicles in their name or when insufficiencies of the bank account regulation will be remedied. The latter are significant as Afghans perceive them to be almost useless in some cases because accounts expire with the expiration of notification of PoR cards. There is also no mechanism for the family of an account holder to withdraw the money in the account should the holder die. These shortcomings undermine trust in the Pakistani banking system and the intended objective of the GoP to incentivise formal business transactions and investments by Afghan entrepreneurs and to include these into the Pakistani tax revenue system.

¹⁹ According to UNHCR (2019, p. 117), by the end of 2019 3,200 registered Afghans in Pakistan had opened bank accounts after it was permitted in February 2019.

For policy-making, two major insights are evident from the above: First, a shift in policies—concretely, to regularise Afghan employment in Pakistan; to allow Afghans to register and purchase businesses, movable and immovable properties; to allow Afghans to open bank accounts and obtain drivers' licenses, and the easing of trade policies including adjustments in visa policies—would maximise Afghan investment and trade and revenue effects for the Pakistani national budget. Second, as a precondition, Pakistan needs to establish trade- and economic investment policies independent of volatile bilateral relations on the everyday level and not driven by a security approach.

Key findings

- *Afghans occupy niche sectors in the Pakistani economy, such as the scrap business and recycling of waste, where they do not compete with Pakistani labourers.*
- *In certain sectors such as transport, carpet-making or -trade, dried fruit business and trade, and the scrap metal business, Afghan entrepreneurs employ Afghans and Pakistani citizens alike.*
- *The tremendous potential for bilateral cross-border trade is inhibited by detrimental policies and volatile political dynamics between the governments of Pakistan and Afghanistan.*

4. Cross-cutting findings and emerging trends

In section 3, we discussed the five main themes of research in the TRAFIG project. In this section, we will look at some cross-cutting findings and emerging trends that we discerned in Pakistan. Please note that most of these findings have not been in the focus of our attention but have emerged from our data analysis and merit follow-up research to be better understood.

4.1 Gendered immobilisation

Throughout the themes, it has become apparent that while women and girls are particularly vulnerable to protracted displacement in Pakistan, they are sharing the burden of income generation to a considerable degree, especially among lower class households by earning with home-based activities. We discerned a trend of increasing immobility (ongoing immobilisation) in female spatial mobility due to the tightening of the borders (e.g., closing of Torkham for travel without passports and visa) which induced men to keep up relationships with relatives, assets and kin-networks in Afghanistan alone and by travelling less frequently, on the at times longer route via Chaman border crossing. Increased vulnerability to harassment and discrimination of both sexes by the police following the non-extension of cards since 30 June 2020 is an additional factor why women are increasingly staying home. Those who are geographically immobilised avoid even domestic long-distance travel to visit friends and family in other parts of Pakistan. The effect is that women are increasingly excluded from translocal and transnational networks of interaction as they are prevented from joining their family in occasional visits for weddings, funerals and on family occasions. Women are worried about protection and liberties at the same time—the former in Pakistan, the latter upon return to Afghanistan, thus constituting a barrier for potential repatriation.

On another note, we observed social immobilisation of sorts in women because they are the least informed about legal options of moving out of protractedness, and usually their access to TV, internet facilities, and mobiles is limited. In the words of one lower class woman living in Lahore: “We are living as deaf and dumb” (SSI-SHARP-AI-415-Pak). Women also experience legal disadvantages in matrimonial relationships as marriages with and among Afghans in Pakistan are concluded in a customary manner and are usually not registered as required by personal law. We learned that the non-registration of a marriage can result in severe legal consequences and exploitations, especially for wives regarding second marriages and inheritance issues. Further research into the legal disadvantages that women face will help shed light on the extent to which structural factors are shaping their situation and which measures are necessary to move towards gender equality both in law and in practice.

4.2 Classed protractedness

The significance of how socio-economic status, including educational background and origin, determines chances of social mobility has been striking throughout the interview responses. We observed that belonging to a social class is one main ‘structural’ factor influencing the risk of continued protractedness. It determines vulnerability, dependence and livelihood-related limbo (less so legal limbo). We have seen a continuity of social class membership over family generations, e.g., where a father was involved in the scrap business in Afghanistan, the son started dealing with waste and scrap in Pakistan; similarly, individuals rearing livestock spoke of continuity from their forefathers to son. Pakistan is not a country where the poor strata of society can move up and attain social mobility. Only those Afghans who already brought with them assets like skills and resources were able to establish businesses. However, as long-term hostile and discriminating policies do not permit Afghans to register and attain property in their name or enter the public sector employment market, barriers to social mobility are strong. Thus, even the majority of Afghans who attained higher education in Pakistan are facing social immobility and usually remain in the same social/ socio-economic strata. The differences between lower class and middle/ upper class Afghans and the fact that there are hardly any dynamics and intersections between these two (ideally-portrayed) groups—except for charity-giving and -receiving—point out that protracted displacement in Pakistan is a class issue. The in-class similarities between Pakistanis and Afghans are higher than across classes of the same nationality. For example, as a long-term observer of Afghans’ protracted displacement in Pakistan pointed out: “Among Afghan refugees, some are more powerful than middle and upper class Pakistanis or members of the upper class in other parts of the world; they have relations with influential people in government and international organisations” (EI-BICC-KM-015-Pak).

4.3 Future-making of Afghan youth: Prospects of the 2nd and 3rd generation

One thread running through our empirical evidence has been the prevalence of child labour and evidence of separated children’s migration on the one hand, and the inter-generational long-term experiences due to the protractedness of Afghans’ displacement and migration trajectories on the other. From here, the question arises about the multifarious relations between different generations of forced Afghan migrants and how these shape current realities and future aspirations. As Bloch (2019, p. 437) noted, we know relatively little “about the various and complex ways that the children of refugees are affected by their parent’s [sic] experiences”. Moreover, policies tend to

homogenise ‘target groups’ and fail to address the diversity of needs and aspirations among different generations of forced migrants. We demonstrated the differences among first-generation (of the 1980s and 1990s) and second/ third-generation Afghans in Pakistan, concluding that while the former have an emotional and often tangible material attachment with their place of origin in Afghanistan but prefer to stay in Pakistan because of insecurity in Afghanistan and perceived better livelihood prospects in Pakistan, those born in Pakistan tend to seek movement to third countries if they aspire social mobility. The described situations of limbo due to bureaucratic procedures of the receiving society’s refugee (non)policies shape Afghans’ (non)integration in Pakistan—while most of them simply want to belong. However, impatience with the unfavourable context of integration causes young Afghans to seek to migrate to third countries. Europe is a highly preferred destination and is approached in two ways: Via attaining a solid education and English language courses to avail of legal routes or via illegal channels sought by those who are less educated but ready to invest years to secure a legal stay by all means (EI-BICC-KM-012-Pak). aft themselves or to accuse others of witchcraft.

4.4 Refugee rentierism

We had the strong impression that classed protractedness is used by several aid actors in Pakistan to derive benefits from portraying Afghans without differentiation as poor, vulnerable and in need of aid. This is in stark contrast with the self-reliance the research team observed overall (except in the legal sphere). And even the legal limbo is a constructed one: Refugee-ness is the product of registration exercises initiated and conducted in collaboration by GoP and UNHCR. It implies a kind of surveillance—portrayed to be the basis of protection—and thrives due to an established aid rentier system that must be nourished by ever new ideas and shifts in foci because of the overall fatigue of donors, implementers, and Afghans themselves with the state of protractedness. Several respondents—Afghans and different types of experts alike—pointed to vested interests of ‘stakeholders’ in the status quo of the protracted displacement situation of Afghans in Pakistan. The underlying rationale is the fact that a considerable number of government employees in various institutions/ authorities make a living on behalf of Afghans—a group of people the designation of whom as vulnerable and in need of aid and protection ensures the upkeep of salaries and access to related gadgets.

The observation of an increasing refugee rentierism in Pakistan is not unique to our own findings. In a recent contribution, Micinski (2021) argues that the government of Pakistan has frequently used the protracted displacement situation of Afghans, which is marked by the deliberate construction of a legal limbo and the threat of their deportation as a foreign policy tool to extract aid from the international community.

4.5 Vulnerability under COVID-19

For those Afghans in Pakistan who already grapple with many disadvantages and everyday discrimination, the COVID-19 pandemic has amplified their vulnerability. Three out of four survey respondents mentioned that the pandemic has had a significant impact on their life. While comparatively few reported that they (7 per cent) or close family members (9 per cent) have had COVID-related health problems, the restrictions on access to education and work weighed much heavier, as indicated by 40 per cent and 85 per cent respectively. The repeated lockdowns have caused major disruptions to the day labour sector in which many Afghans work. Restrictions on public gatherings limit already scarce economic opportunities, demonstrated by the closing of markets near refugee camps that employed many Afghans living in the camp. Overall, one-third of the survey respondents indicated that their economic situation had deteriorated due to the effects of the pandemic and related restrictions.

Additionally, the constant threat of deportation continues to have a profound effect on the mental health of Afghan refugees who are now dealing with the additional anxiety of pandemic-related uncertainty. The effects of the COVID-19-pandemic and those of humanitarian programming in the context of crisis will have to be systematically investigated in the future, both for registered and undocumented Afghans.

Conclusions and outlook

The central hypothesis of the TRAFIG research project is that “the more connected and mobile refugees, IDPs and other migrants are, the less likely it is that they end up in a situation of protracted displacement. Conversely, the less connected and the more immobilised displaced persons are, the greater the risk that they are vulnerable, dependent, and become stuck in precarity” (Etzold et al., 2019). How can this question be answered when looking at forced migrants in Pakistan and beyond?

Not in sight: Durable solution and end of protractedness of displacement

Our research has confirmed that repatriation and return as the only acceptable durable solution by the government of Pakistan has not been working so far and is likely to not yield the expected results in the future. The governing mechanisms—tripartite agreements and the regional Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees (SSAR)—lack implementation and are limited by adverse national measures and practical hurdles: Lack of will related to vested interests, lack of competence, non-understanding of ‘refugee issues’, increasing rejection by locals which results from the politicisation of Afghans’ presence in the country and their scapegoating for security incidents and terrorist attacks. The complicity of international organisations and donors in reaffirming the government’s insistence on repatriation as the only durable solution that they aim to implement is problematic against these actors’ better knowledge that repatriation is surely not the best solution. However, resettlement options have drastically decreased as result of the large-scale migration to Europe since 2014 and the subsequent avoidance of burden-sharing responsibilities of European and other Northern countries in accommodating forced migrants. Since the existing frameworks for protection and aid are donor-driven, insisting on repatriation as the only durable solution discussed serves the interests of all stakeholders in an adverse “triple-win” situation: For the governments involved (including the Afghan government), those commissioned to assist Afghans in displacement (UNHCR and national humanitarian and development organisations) and donors (Northern governments trying to avoid large intakes from resettlement). However, the data revealed very clearly that current procedures administering Afghans in Pakistan no longer satisfy the younger (second and third) generations of Afghans who feel deprived of options to attain social mobility and recognition. As a result, they aspire to move to third countries, if need be through irregular channels to Europe.

Based on the insights of classed protractedness elaborated in this paper we hypothesise that the better educated and skilled from middle class families have a theoretical chance to realise their aims of moving up and out, while lower-class Afghans find themselves unable to end protracted displacement on their own. This would require the governments’ readiness to discuss options for local integration and pathways towards citizenship. Another central objective should be to support translocal lives through legal provisions in a regional mobility regime, thereby regularising the realities of split households across both sides of the Afghan–Pakistan borders. Either way, the resolution of legal insecurity is the key to ending forced displacement. However, even in the context of legal limbo, everyday protection limbo and socio-economic limbo, Afghans risk being misrepresented as largely dependent and vulnerable, which is not true for all. It is also important to consider that many Pakistani citizens find themselves in very similar patterns of vulnerability and dependency that limit their prospects for social (im)mobility and access to services and employment in the country.

Connectivity and mobility are subjected to structural forces

We have found that networks exist but are strongest among Afghans, most at the local (neighbourhood, same city) level, followed by support networks spanning across Pakistan and into Afghanistan and the region (including Iran). Regional transnational mobility is more significant than mobility further abroad, especially for lower-class Afghans. Remittances from abroad play a surprisingly small role as the quality of flows in transnational networks is determined by moral support and maintaining regular contact. In cases where family members have recently migrated abroad, the connection is often lost and whether contact can and will be re-established remains to be seen in the future.

Within the region, we detected several immobilising policies that hamper connectivity and the upkeep of networks both within Pakistan and Iran, but also across the border with Afghanistan. We have shown how this immobility but also certain types of mobility—such as re-migration and other types of circular migration—are features of protractedness in Afghans’ displacement but not a way out of protractedness. Overall, we find that the role of Afghans’ translocal and transnational networks to end protracted displacement is limited for two reasons. One is that social class determines vulnerability, dependence and social immobility. The other relates to international (geo) politics and the security lens employed by Pakistani authorities in approaching the presence of Afghans in the country and the

de facto refugee rejectionist regime resulting from it. Consequently, structural conditions—including ongoing violence and war in Afghanistan—largely inhibit Afghans' move out of protracted displacement. We thus conclude that the project's hypothesis places too great an emphasis on refugees' agency and the potential of their transnational networks. The case study of Pakistan shows the weight of structural forces—mainly political interests of host, origin and donor countries. Afghans are thus administered not in their own interest but have become subject to political capture by the different stakeholders involved, with the result that protracted displacement is further entrenched.

How are the findings relevant for policymakers and practitioners?

What the Pakistan case study has highlighted is that the quest for durable solutions needs a rethink. A first step into this direction could be to support more research into power structures of the international refugee regime and displacement situations to reveal dependencies and the relational shaping and tolerance of (non)policies. Another urgent step would be to account for the distinct needs of different refugee generations and members of different social classes.

To ensure protection in the short to medium term, the current protection regime needs to be revitalised as soon as possible—PoR card and ACC holders should receive the opportunity to re-register and receive longer-term protection entitlements and arrangements in the framework of which they can stay. In parallel, a mechanism should be found that de-couples protection from surveillance and control. Such practical measures require political will and support for these decisions in Pakistani society, including among the political parties and at the international level. In the domestic realm, measures to prevent a further politicisation of Afghans' presence in Pakistan and resulting rejection by many Pakistani citizens should be taken, for instance, by introducing measures to improve tolerance, most simply via school curricula and books. Refugee-related activities and policies need to acknowledge that the second and third generation Afghans will not return to Afghanistan as is envisaged by current policy. The governments of Afghanistan and Pakistan need to think of how best to 'make use of' these Afghans for both sides (Gerver, 2019); for example, through (local) integration as part of transnational living (Carling et al., 2021) and possibly repatriation without return (Long, 2013).

Further, at a practical level, policymakers in Pakistan should take efforts to establish the necessary formal mechanisms that allow Afghans to access services to the extent needed, starting in the legal realm with public sector employment, entitling Afghans to have driver's licenses, register property, then further improving access to health services, resolving access barriers to higher education, etc. Concrete measures need to improve the quality of education for both Afghans and Pakistani citizens and ensure that this is accessible for both groups to achieve social mobility. While Afghans in Pakistan are de facto integrated into their host society but without the concrete measures mentioned here, they lack the institutional basis to achieve their longing to belong.

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LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

ACC	Afghan citizen card
ARV	Afghan refugee village
CAR	Commissionerate for Afghan Refugees
CCAR	Chief Commissionerate for Afghan Refugees
CNIC	Computerized national identity card
EI	Expert interview
FIR	First Information Report
GoA	Government of Afghanistan
GoP	Government of Pakistan
ISI	Inter-Services Intelligence
KP	Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa
MoU	Memorandum of Understanding
NADRA	National Database and Registration Authority
NAP	National Action Plan
I(N)GO	International (non-)governmental organisation
NOC	Non-objection certificate
PKR	Pakistani rupee
PoR	Proof of registration
RAHA	Refugee-affected hosting area
RSD	Refugee status determination
SAFRON	Ministry of States and Frontier Regions (of the Government of Pakistan)
SSAR	Solution Strategy for Afghan Refugees
SSI	Semi-structured interview
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

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TRAFIG provides academic evidence on refugee movements and protracted displacement; analyses which conditions could help to improve displaced people's everyday lives and informs policymakers on how to develop solutions to protracted displacement.

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