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KNOW RESET – BUILDING KNOWLEDGE FOR A CONCERTED AND SUSTAINABLE APPROACH TO REFUGEE RESETTLEMENT IN THE EU AND ITS MEMBER STATES

Co-financed by the European Union

Refugee Resettlement from Pakistan: Findings from Afghan Refugee Camps in the North-West Frontier Province (NWFP)

Ilyas Chattha

KNOW RESET Research Report 2013/01

Country of First Asylum Report



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KNOW RESET - Building Knowledge for a Concerted and Sustainable Approach to Refugee Resettlement in the EU and its Member States

The KNOW RESET Project, which is co-financed by the European Union, is carried out by the EUI in partnership with ECRE (the European Council on Refugees and Exiles). The general objective of the project is to construct the knowledge-base necessary for good policy-making in the refugee resettlement domain in the EU and its 27 Member States. It aims to explore the potential to develop the resettlement capacity, to extend good practices and to enhance cooperation in the EU.

KNOW RESET maps and analyses frameworks and practices in the area of refugee resettlement in the 27 EU Member States. The team involved in the project, gathering members of the EUI's and ECRE's large networks, has proceeded with a systematic and comparative inventory of legal and policy frameworks and practices related to resettlement in the EU and its 27 Member States, providing the most updated set of information. The publication of comparative data and the dissemination of research results contribute to raising awareness for refugee resettlement and refugee protection in the EU and provide a knowledge-tool for policy-makers, governmental and non-governmental stakeholders interested or involved in resettlement activities and policies in the EU and countries of first asylum. The project involves too field research in Kenya, Pakistan and Tunisia, which will add to the knowledge and the assessment of resettlement practices of refugees from countries of first asylum to the EU.

KNOW RESET has resulted in the first website mapping EU involvement in refugee resettlement. It focuses on resettlement in the EU and covers the 27 Member States, involved in resettlement in one form or another, and to various degrees. It contains a unique database providing legal, administrative and policy documents as well as statistics collected from national authorities by the project team. It also includes a series of comparative tables and graphs, the country profiles of the Member States, country of first asylum reports, as well as thematic reports and policy briefs. This user-friendly website is a valuable instrument for: comparing the varied frameworks, policies and practices within the EU; for evaluating the resettlement capacity in the EU; for following the evolution of Member States' commitment in resettlement; and for assessing the impact of the Joint EU Resettlement Programme.

Results of the above activities are available for public consultation through the website of the project: <http://www.know-reset.eu/>

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Abbreviations

HRCP	Human Rights Commission of Pakistan
IOM	International Organisation for Migration
JERP	Joint European Resettlement Programme
NOC	NO Objection Certificate
NWFP	North-West Frontier Province
PoRs	Proof of Registration Cards
RRF	Refugee Referral Form
RCA	Refugee Consideration Assessment
SPC	Serious Protection Concerns
SACH	Struggle for Change
SSAR	Solutions Strategy for Afghan Returnees
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
USRSP	United States Refugee Resettlement Programme
VRP	Voluntary Repatriation Programme

Abstract

This report surveys Afghan refugee resettlement from Pakistan for the Know Reset Project in order to better understand the processes and practices of the refugee populations' resettlement in EU member states. This involved interviews with various agencies working with refugees as well as with individual refugees. The collected source material explains how the Afghan refugee community, living in different localities in Pakistan, are informed about resettlement policies, and how refugees are identified and selected and what Afghan refugee groups, if any, are given priorities in the resettlement processes. The report also examines the role played by local, national and international agencies, such as UNHCR, Pakistan-based NGOs, including SACH (Struggle for Change), Sharp (Society for Human Rights and Prisoners Aid), the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP) and the International Organization of Migration (IOM). More specifically we examined these organizations as they identified, registered and selected refugees for resettlement. The report also considers how information about resettlement is disseminated to Afghan refugees in "refugee villages", camps or places; how the refugees are subsequently identified and chosen for resettlement; and how they are assisted in submitting applications and obtaining security clearance from the Pakistan Interior and Foreign Affairs departments. We then asked how submissions are then forwarded to the individual EU countries for resettlement and what selection and scrutiny measures, if any, are adopted by the resettlement countries. Finally, the report looks at the responses and reactions of the Pakistani government in the resettlement of Afghan refugees in Europe and beyond. The findings not only add to the empirical knowledge of resettlement in Pakistan, but offer data to improve the efficiency of resettlement schemes in individual EU member states.

Introduction

1. Definition

Resettlement is one of three durable solutions – the other two being voluntary repatriation and local integration – which is offered to refugees who have sought protection in a country where local integration is not an option, and to those who cannot return to their home country.

2. Methodology

This report relies heavily on oral testimonials. These are drawn from interviews with individual Afghan refugees in need of resettlement and the involved actors and partners. Interviews with representatives of UNHCR and members of NGOs were conducted in Islamabad. The interviews with individual refugees and their spokesmen were conducted at different locations at the refugee camps, which are locally called “refugee villages”. More specifically, these were the Khazana Camp, Haji Camp, Lucky Marwat Camp and UNHCR’s voluntary repatriation centre at Hayatabad in the city of Peshawar in NWFP. All together 25 interviews were conducted that ranged from twenty minutes to more than an hour: 15 interviews were conducted with individual Afghan refugees and their headmen; 3 in the Lucky Marwat “refugee village”; 4 in the Khazana Camp; 3 in the Haji camp; and 5 in the Hayatabad camp. 4 extensive interviews were conducted with UNHCR representatives and 3 with the members of NGOs in Islamabad. 2 interviews were conducted with local interpreters, who worked in the Afghan refugee camps and 2 other interviews were conducted with local journalists who were based in the city of Peshawar, and one long interview was conducted with an academic, who is an expert on the impact of Afghan refugees in Pakistan. In addition, a number of informal discussions were held with the directors and staff of IOM and HRCP. A number of “semi-structured” interviews were conducted with the authorities of the Pakistan Interior and Foreign Affairs ministries in Islamabad, as well as with individual local doctors, journalists and the local UN staff, who have been working with refugee communities at the grassroots level. In addition, archival source material was also consulted in the “record rooms” of Pakistan’s Foreign Affairs and Interior departments concerning the complicated and lengthy security checks and clearance for the refugees selected for resettlement. This is referred to officially as the NOC (No Objection Certificate).

As we shall see, the collected source material has not only provided life and migration histories of refugee respondents. It has helped us to understand the socio-economic and the physical and cognitive experiences of refugees as they apply for resettlement, more broadly. The interviews looked for insights into refugee orientation, awareness and concerns about resettlement in EU member states. The focus was on different sets of refugees, their experiences of integration in Pakistan and on the practice of repatriation, as well as on their fears about deportation and registration and selection processes for resettlement. Source material reveals refugees’ intentions, aspirations and decisions for resettlement and consequent preparations. A volunteer Pashtun journalist was engaged in fieldwork research in Peshawar, not only to access “refugee villages”, but also for translation purposes. Names of respondents have been concealed in this report in order to protect their identities. With respect to placenames such as the North-West Frontier Province (NWFP), I have given the old name, rather than the new one, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

It is necessary to point out at the outset, that there was a great difficulty in getting access to the Afghan “refugee villages”, because of growing security concerns. It was almost impossible to interview female Afghan refugees who, at present, make up many of the refugees, as we shall shortly see. The figures mentioned in this report are, perforce, based on the information available in the conducted interviews. They neither cover the entire spectrum of resettlement from Pakistan, nor the fuller

experience of the Afghan refugee community. This is especially true in relation to information about victimisation and “women at risk” because it proved difficult to record their voices and experiences.

There are also problems concerning the “biases” in the collected source material. Individuals sometimes exaggerate experiences for reasons of resettlement and NGOs toned down criticism towards the Pakistani state authorities and the representatives of UNHCR. It also proved difficult to get access to the UNHCR representatives in Islamabad and Peshawar for security concerns. In one case, by using every means at my disposal, it took me one week to fulfil the bureaucratic requirements to satisfy the conditions for entering Islamabad’s security “red zone” to meet up with UNHCR representatives in the city’s heavily-guarded “diplomatic enclave”. Likewise it proved difficult to approach the members of the IOM and officials from Pakistan’s Interior and Foreign Affairs ministries, in part because of deteriorating security. Despite my repeated explanations about this project and its usefulness, many respondents were reluctant to contribute. Moreover, despite my constant efforts, I got no information from EU consulates, embassies and missions in Islamabad, because of the tight security checks in the capital’s “diplomatic enclave”, where the embassies are based.

The fieldwork, then, was not straight forward. There were many problems ranging from security concerns in terms of access to female Afghan refugees to security issues in terms of survey and data collection. Moreover, to make matters worse, refugee headmen as well as the Pakistani authorities in the interior ministry were uncooperative and sceptical about the scope of the project. Before providing any information about the resettlement process, many respondents had to be convinced about the usefulness of this project. Some interviews were not easy despite repeated explanations. The UN has set up an office in Islamabad and a “field unit” in Karachi, Peshawar and Quetta, but even so approaching the members of the refugee community was not easy.

Moreover, it must be acknowledged that with this kind of a limited time-frame and with such scarce resources a fuller understanding of the entire operation of resettlement in Pakistan cannot be grasped. There are also the difficulties arising from visiting remote refugee villages and from access to Afghan refugee women, the most vulnerable section of refugee populations in Pakistan and perhaps the most in need of resettlement. Most Afghan refugees are not educated. And despite the fact that an interpreter was present at all times difficulties concerning ethnic issues, gender taboos and language barriers proved formidable.

3. A Profile of Afghan Refugees in Pakistan

Pakistan has hosted the world’s largest refugee populations. The issue of Afghan refugees in Pakistan is protracted: it has now been thirty years since the first arrived. Many of these refugees were actually born and raised in Pakistan, though they are still counted as Afghan citizens. They were allowed to work, to rent houses, travel and to attend schools in the country until the end of 2012, a deadline set for the Afghan refugees to return home. Afghan refugees came to Pakistan in three distinct phases. The first and most important phase began with the Soviet invasion of 1979 and the ensuing decade-long occupation of Afghanistan (1979–1989). Following the Soviet Union’s withdrawal from Afghanistan in 1989, the lives and conditions of refugees began to change. The refugees longed for a return to their country and they began to leave in large numbers. In fact, in six months, more than one million Afghan refugees returned to their country of origin. This mass repatriation was halted, however, when the various *Mujahideen* factions began to fight for power. Then, in the last decade there has been a war against terrorists. As of October 2012, up to 1.7 million registered Afghan refugees remained in Pakistan, and another 1 million undocumented Afghans. Annex 1 shows the number of the Afghan refugees in different parts of the country. Over the years, UNHCR has assisted Afghan refugees to return through its “Voluntary Repatriation Programme”. Since 2002, a round 5.7 million Afghan refugees have gone back to Afghanistan or nearly a quarter of the country’s population.

4. Fieldwork Research Sites

In Pakistan, there are about 160 Afghan refugee camps or “refugee villages”. The focus of this report is the North-West Frontier Province (NWFP), the cities of Peshawar and Islamabad and their surrounding areas where different sets of Afghans reside. The Peshawar site was chosen in order to understand the experience of Afghans in the city as well as in the refugee camps and villages outside the city. According to the 2005 Census, NWFP accounted for 61.6 percent (1.88 million) of all Afghans in Pakistan, and the Peshawar district was home to the largest single concentration of this population (20.1 percent). The most important camps include Khazna Camp, Haji Camp, and Lucky Marwat Camp in NWFP. The interviews with individual refugees and their spokesmen were conducted at these locations as well as UNHCR’s voluntary repatriation centre at Hayatabad in the city of Peshawar. They were chosen for fieldwork not only because of the large concentration of Afghan refugee, but also because of the refugees’ continued fears of forced deportation to Afghanistan and police harassment on a daily basis, as most Afghan Citizenship Cards expired in early 2010. Haji Camp in Peshawar houses a small population of Hazara Shia refugees who have faced constant discrimination and persecution from the Taliban and other anti-Shia groups over the years. These refugee groups cited particular concerns due to targeted attacks on them, including forced deportations, because of their Shia ethnic identity.

Some semi-structured interviews were conducted in Nowshera’s Jalozaï camp, which was set up in 1983: over 100,000 refugees live there. Informants claimed that they faced Taliban persecution due to their ethnic or religious affiliations (e.g. Shias). More than 25,000 Afghan refugees live in Khazana Camp now one of the oldest camps in Peshawar, most are Pashtun Afghans who migrated from Afghanistan in the 1980s. Luckily Marwat Camp (refugee village) is one of the oldest and largest camps in NWFP: hundreds of thousands of Pashtun refugees live there. They have been living there over the last thirty years. Interviews with members of this group suggest that the community was not interested in returning to Afghanistan because their children were born and brought up in Pakistan. They have a relatively better quality of life as a result of establishing their own local businesses and agricultural trades. They also have access to housing, education and healthcare services, provided, for the most part, by UN and other international agencies.

5. Pashtun Refugees in NWFP: A Vulnerable Community

In 2010-11, a UNHCR survey gathered information about 50 percent of registered Afghans refugees: 1.8 million live in Pakistan. The registered population living in Pakistan is 52.6 percent males and 47.4 percent females. About 85 percent of Afghans are identified as Pashtuns, hailing from the Nangarhar, Kabul, Kunduz, Logar, Paktia, Kandahar and Baghlan areas, while the rest were Uzbeks and Tajiks. The survey provided information about refugees’ family histories, regions, tribes, sects, arrival period, as well as their social-economic circumstances and medical conditions. The survey also assessed the “genuine reasons” that prevented various sections of refugees from returning to their “homeland” in Afghanistan. One important group of Afghan refugees are the Pashtuns. They are not only identified as one of the most vulnerable sections of Afghan refugee populations, but they have been living here for more than thirty years and are still counted as Afghan citizens. Informants recounted that their houses had been destroyed and that their land had been occupied by members of rival tribes. If they returned home, their lives would be in danger. The members of this community claimed that they could be attacked upon repatriation. Members of this community stated that they wanted to go back, but that they had no place to live there; their land had been occupied by the locals and revenue records had been destroyed. Some informants stated that their relatives have resettled in some EU countries, particularly in Norway, under “family reunification”.

All of the refugees interviewed in the camp were acutely aware of resettlement, while some respondents stated that they were not much interested in resettlement in Western countries. Their elders have opposed this option. In fact, they want to live with their tribal traditions and to preserve their culture

and values. They feel that they would not integrate in an EU country. Some respondents stated that they would prefer to go to a Muslim country, but there is no Muslim resettlement option. Moreover, members of Pashtun community cited that they wanted to settle in one place or in one country together. Aftab Khan, a spokesman of the Pashtun refugee populations in Lucky Marwat camp, described his community's difficulties as far as resettlement in an EU country is concerned. "We do not want our women go in Western countries. I would not send my family to Europe.... We can go to resettle in a Muslim country, but there is no option for the resettlement. We may go to Muslim countries where women observe *purda* (veil)...." There were many issues in this community, including "run-away couples" and "forced marriages". There were reports that members of community had brutally killed their women who "run-away". Many members of this community were involved in Taliban activities. The community has very strict traditions. For example, women cannot go outside the "refugee village" areas. Members of NGOs, human-rights organisations and charities stated that they have little or no access to Pashtun womenfolk. An assistant director of Pakistan Human Rights Commission even stated: "If they can kill their daughters for 'running-away'; they could easily kill officials and journalists who would try to approach them". Some young members of this community indicate their intention to resettle in the EU in search of a better way of life, as some acquaintances have settled there. Few though have submitted their applications for "family reunification".

In Pakistan, these Pashtun refugees have established their "refugee villages" on the private land of local people. The Pakistani government wants them to return to Afghanistan. There is mounting pressure on the government to evict this refugee community. The provincial government faced a great deal of pressure from local populations who want their land back. Over the years, there have been many clashes over the possession of land between locals and refugees and creating law and order problems in places. Children born and raised in Pakistan often consider themselves Pakistani. A young Pashtun refugee stated: "I was born in Lucky Marwat in Pakistan in 1982; I never visited Afghanistan. I am a Pakistani...but Pakistan wants to send us to Afghanistan...in Afghanistan we have no place to live...our elders are not much interested in resettling in the US...They are too concerned about our women".

Their first preference is to return back to Afghanistan and their land there. As earlier mentioned, their houses and property in Afghanistan have though been occupied or destroyed, and they, on the other hand, have set up housing on the land of local people in NWFP. This community want to settle *en masse*. Some of the Pashtun refugees interviewed in the Lucky Marwat camp expressed their intentions to resettle. Elder members of the community are against resettlement in the EU or in the US. An assessment officer of UNHCR's resettlement programme noted that "our fieldwork workers have unsuccessfully attempted to convince the members of this community for resettlement. Elder members of the tribe are against resettlement in the Western countries". She added that they firmly believe in Pashtun traditions. In the past, many members of this community were recruited by the Taliban, though now they are not involved. But they still face rigorous security checks both in Pakistan and Afghanistan. In any case, if the Pakistan government forces them to leave the country— which seems likely in the present circumstances – the Pashtun who returned would be in real danger. Pakistan has issued Proof of Registration Cards (PoRs) to these Afghan refugees that expired 31 December 2012 and the government has not yet decided to extend these cards. While the Pakistani government seems to be determined to deport these groups, a community headman described how they came to this country 30 years ago. He also set out how their houses and properties in Afghanistan had been destroyed or occupied by rival tribes and by the Taliban. Instead, they have established their houses and businesses in Pakistan, but they have not been given citizenship. Members of this group also claimed that some refugee families were selected for resettlement and "family reunification" in Europe, Australia, Canada and the US.

6. Somali and Iraqi Refugees

It is worthwhile mentioning here little-studied refugee groups of Somalis and Iraqis who live in Pakistan. They altogether number several thousands. They live in very poor conditions and cannot move from one area to another. Despite my best efforts, I was not able to conduct an interview with members of these groups of refugees. A representative of the UN explained that “they could not be integrated locally in Pakistan. They are vulnerable people. The Pakistan government has confined these sections of refugees in designated areas”.

7. Hazara Refugees: Facing Targeted Killings

One of the most vulnerable Afghan refugee groups in Pakistan are the Hazara refugee families. Their number is about 500,000 in Pakistan, mainly in Quetta. The ethnic Hazara constituted about 18 percent of the Afghan population and they were massacred and expelled during the time of the Taliban in Afghanistan because they are Shia. In Pakistan, over the years they have faced “targeted killings” and persecution by Taliban and other anti-Shia groups, such as Lashkar-i-Jangvi. Hundreds of Hazara have been victimised in Quetta in recent years. Around 900 Hazars were reported to have been murdered, including women and children, either in suicide attacks or targeted shootings. More than 50,000 have been displaced internally. This community, as a whole, is in desperate need of protection and resettlement, as they cannot be repatriated to Afghanistan because of fear of persecution. In Pakistan this community is under attack from anti-Shia militant groups. This community is facing “ethnic cleansing”. Pakistan’s encampment policy and draconian measures to restrict the country’s refugees’ movements in the designated areas curtails opportunities for local assimilation and integration. Local integration appears not to be an envisaged or desirable solution for the government of Pakistan, which views Afghan refugees, as a burden and has made clear that the only option it sees for them is repatriation. 31 December 2012 was announced as a deadline for the voluntary repatriation of Afghan refugees from Pakistan. Moreover, repatriation of some refugee groups has been unsuccessful, because of fears for the security of their families, personal persecution, fear of the cost of building houses and a lack of work opportunities upon their arrival in Afghanistan. There were several Afghan families in the Hayatabad Camp in Peshawar who were repatriated to Afghanistan but who then returned to the camp. A returned refugee recounted his family’s return to Peshawar and how he could find neither shelter nor livelihood in Afghanistan.

Given the circumstances, resettlement is thus an important option for international protection as well as a durable solution for some sections of refugee groups in Pakistan, when other two durable solutions, repatriation and local integration, is not practical. In 2011, UNHCR named Pakistan “refugee top priority”. As mentioned above, the Pakistan government has threatened it will close registration for repatriation by 31 December 2012, making it clear that it would treat all Afghan refugees as “illegal immigrants” after the expiry of their PoR. Of the three durable solutions, then, resettlement is apparently the only real option for some sections of the refugee population in Pakistan. However, owing to the very limited number of resettlements from Pakistan this opportunity is realistically just on offer for a fraction of the 1.8 million Afghan refugees in Pakistan.

The Resettlement Process in Pakistan

Most Afghan refugees in Pakistan are unaware of the resettlement scheme. The interviews with individual refugees and the discussions with UNHCR members confirmed this. All the refugees who were interviewed in Khazan camps in Peshawar were not aware of the option of resettlement from Pakistan. The case was much the same in other camps, though some well-informed and educated young men in the Lucky Marwat camp were aware of resettlement as well as those individual refugees whose relatives and acquaintances had been selected for this process. In reality, UNHCR little advertises the opportunity of resettlement. Instead, the agency widely advertises repatriation to

Afghanistan, highlighting the deadline set by the Pakistan government. The UNHCR Resettlement officer in Islamabad claimed about 2000 refugees resettled in 2011 from the 1.8 million registered refugees in Pakistan.

In Pakistan, the process of identification for individual refugees for the resettlement programme is complex. It requires detailed knowledge and documentation of Afghan refugee populations and of their specific needs and vulnerabilities. As it is an indirect and a complicated process, it requires the help of community headmen, members of NGOs and the local staff of UNHCR. As I gathered, through observations, and interviews, selection for resettlement varies greatly and depends on individual case and situations. In some cases, the identification for refugees in need of resettlement comes down to community leaders, UN's local officials and most importantly those doctors/medical officers who are involved in the treatment of refugee populations at the grassroots level. In other cases, when the local newspapers highlighted the danger to those journalists and interpreters who worked for the refugee community, some registrations were made for resettlement. In this way, about 4000 individuals were registered for the resettlement process in the first half of 2012. While most refugees are referred by members of NGOs, local journalists and the local UN staff, the selection process for resettlement mainly depends on UNHCR's Refugee Consideration Assessment (RCA). In this process the social and economic condition of refugees are considered, alongside their difficulties in local integration and refugees' repatriation to Afghanistan. The following is a four-tier process and the Refugee Consideration Assessment is carried out by UNHCR:

1. Refugee Identification

As mentioned above, refugee candidates for resettlement are generally picked out initially by members of NGOs, local journalists and UNHCR's local staff.

2. Refugee Registration

After refugees in need for resettlement have been identified, their registration is made. After taking the life histories, arrival time, bio-data, and present circumstances of the refugees, three-way criteria of assessment are launched for resettlement consideration.

3. Personal Refugee Wing Research

This research wing assesses each individual case thoroughly. Apart from considering the social and economic condition of the refugees, this wing carefully notes whether the identification and registration processes fall under the actual definition of UNHCR resettlement: namely, that refugees cannot integrate locally or that they cannot be safely repatriated. UNHCR caseworkers then gather all the necessary information required for the investigation. After completing this process, this wing refers the selected cases on to the second stage of resettlement scrutiny, namely "the senior officer reassessment" (the UNHCR term).

4. Senior Officer Reassessment

The senior officer carefully reassesses the selected cases for resettlement, including refugees' year of arrival and the bio-data of individual refugees. They then select refugees who are invited for interview to evaluate their eligibility for resettlement, mainly based on information collected. Refugees are interviewed based on the extent to which they need protection and whether resettlement is the only option. Indeed, priority is given to vulnerable refugee groups, including trauma victims, unaccompanied children and above all the "women at risk" and medical emergencies. Once cases are considered to be qualified for resettlement and UNHCR has identified a potential country of resettlement, the refugees are

informed to which countries they have been recommended for the resettlement. At this stage, any case could be rejected, though registered refugees have a “right to appeal”.

5. Right to Appeal

Upon rejection, refugees can appeal by submitting additional proofs and documents for consideration, though this takes months. Resettlement from Pakistan is a protracted process. As mentioned previously, in 2011, out of 1.8 million registered refugees in Pakistan, 4000 were registered and only half of them were finally selected for resettlement.

What Type of Refugees Register for Resettlement: “Women at Risk”

The resettlement of refugees in Pakistan varies depending on circumstances and individuals. Some cases for registration for resettlement were taken where entire sections of a refugee community faced danger and experienced constant sexual harassment. In other cases, refugees were identified and some registered for the resettlement on medical grounds. Some members of refugee populations were considered for registration because their family members had been killed or because their lives were deemed in serious danger. Interviews with refugees and aid agencies working for refugees confirmed this. In addition, a number of Afghan refugee families were selected for resettlement as part of “family reunification” in Europe, Canada, Australia and the US. Some Pashtun informants reported seeking resettlement through family reunification in EU countries, especially Norway, Sweden, Germany and the UK.

In Pakistan, some refugees are more vulnerable than others: these are naturally given priority in resettlement. According to UNHCR, in Pakistan over 38 percent of selected refugees for resettlement to the EU states related to “women at risk”. Interviews with UNHCR representatives, NGO members, local journalists and community headmen pointed out 15 types of “women at risk” (about 38 percent of all selection cases for the resettlement from Pakistan to EU countries) who were chosen for resettlement in 2011.

1. Husbands Disappeared/Killed

In this case, women were chosen whose husbands or other adult members of family had either been killed during the war or personal feuds/disputes. As a consequence, there was, in fact, no other adult male in the kinfolk, but children/minors.

2. Forced Marriages

In some cases identification and registration of refugees are made when women’s husbands disappeared or when they were killed and their widows are afterward forced to marry other members of the tribe. In some cases, upon the death of adult males, their young daughters are forced into marriage.

3. Domestic Violence

In this case the selections for resettlement are made when women/wives received “repeated husband beating”. Sometimes husbands are addicted to heroin or to other drugs.

4. Loss of Family Members

In this case, registration for resettlement is generally made for those women/wives/daughters, whose close relatives/guardians were lost in Afghanistan during the war; and as a result they are left alone in Pakistan and have faced fear, abduction and sexual harassment.

5. “Shame Family”

Some refugee families were found who sold their daughters for money; in other cases adult members of family sold their siblings in order to buy drugs. So these cases are registered for the resettlement for vulnerable members of these families.

6. “Run-away Couples”

In this case, selection/registration is considered for those girls/women who were forced to marry against the will of their family/tribe and who somehow managed to escape their family. As a result their lives remain in constant danger. In a few cases, some girls were threatened with forced marriages with older members of the tribes.

7. Hazara Women

Some Hazara refugee families, who are Shiites face threats; this includes a substantial segment of refugee women whose menfolk had been killed in sectarian violence over the years by Taliban and other anti-Shia groups. About 900 Hazaras in Quetta have been murdered in the past few years, mainly because of their ethnic identity. In some cases, registration for resettlement is made for vulnerable women who are left behind.

8. Land Disputes/Feuds

Some refugee families have seen their land, houses and property occupied in Afghanistan by members of powerful locals or military types. It is thought that there is no chance of taking back their occupied land. These families could not return to Afghanistan, because their property/land either had been occupied or destroyed. Members of these refugee families are registered. In cases of “blood feuds”, the selection for resettling this group mainly comes from the refugee families who had disputes over land and property. In this regard, menfolk had either been killed or are in prison. Women were left alone with their families and they faced constant threats to their lives and to those of their children.

9. Journalists and Interpreters Facing Persecution

In a few cases, some journalists who broke the stories of “forced marriages”, and “run-away couples” and other sensitive issues, are considered for resettlement. They receive regular threats to their lives, not only from refugee tribes/headmen but also, on occasion, from the Taliban. In a similar vein, some interpreters, who worked with different local and international agencies and NGOs, received threats and are identified for resettlement registration.

10. Members of NGOs Killed or Families in Danger

Members of NGOs working in refugee camps and war fronts were either kidnapped/murdered; their families now left alone are in danger. Their cases are considered for resettlement registration.

11. Unaccompanied Minors

Selection can also be made for minors whose parents/guardians have been killed, or maimed. In some cases, minors face sexual harassment; in others cases, distant relatives used them for bonded labour and forced marriages.

12. Adult Males in Prisons

Resettlement is also considered for refugee women where male members of refugee families are in prisons. In some cases, they might have committed crimes; in other cases, they were being punished for others' crimes. They would commonly receive money from criminals; and spend time in prison for others' crimes.

13. Medical Cases

Selection for resettlement is also considered for refugees on medical grounds; if medical facilities/operations are not available at the local level. This could be "prolonged illnesses"; "treatment may change their life"; "significant impact on their life after treatment".

14. Violence/Torture

In this case, registration can be made for women who feel constant danger to their lives. Women could be kidnapped, face physical beating, sexual harassment, and the fear of being sold.

15. War Continued

War is ongoing in Afghanistan. Some adult males from refugee families have been killed in the war. Others have been killed in personal feuds and sectarian violence. As a result only women are now left.

Resettlement: A Time-consuming Process

After completing Afghan refugees' registration and selection for resettlement, it takes months – in some cases years – to move on to the next stages. Generally speaking, UNHCR in Pakistan has divided resettlement into three categories:

1. **Moral Cases:** these should be finalised within 6 months but they typically take a couple of years;
2. **Urgent Cases:** these should be finalised within 2 months but they typically take months or even a year;
3. **Emergency Cases:** the cases which are identified as "serious cases" requiring immediate protection needs or medical emergencies usually take one week or less.

Most emergency cases are submitted for resettlement in Canada, as the country is known as the fastest country for resettlement. Emergency cases for resettlement to EU countries are mainly forwarded to the transit centre in Manila, the Philippines. If the selected members/families have had some involvement in the Taliban in the past, they require a further No Objection Certificate (NOC) and this prolongs the process by months.

EU Countries' Scrutiny of UNHCR Submissions

After completing submissions for resettlement, UNHCR in Islamabad forwards the dossiers to its head office in Geneva, where the EU resettlement countries offer submissions for resettlement. They assess individual submissions in accordance with their policies, laws and regulations and decide whether or not to grant resettlement. They also determine the size and composition of refugee resettlement. However, the resettlement officer in the Islamabad UNHCR office notes that EU countries take a great deal of time. They not only thoroughly assess security concerns, but also integration prospects. In some cases, this takes a long time, in other cases they announce their decision punctually. A UNHCR representative claimed that "[the EU countries] take a long time for the decisions on certain sections of

Afghan refugee populations and that delay is a concern for us.” Some cases do require urgent resettlement decisions but response from the countries arrive too late. The individual EU countries, in fact, are too concerned about security issues, especially relating to some sections of Afghan refugees. Security checks are complicated, complex and lengthy. This not only requires clearance, namely a No Objection Certificate from Pakistan’s Foreign and Interior Department. An EU country might also carry out its own screening. They can reject the cases on any grounds, for example, they might claim that relevant refugees are not really risking their lives. Some EU countries do not issue decisions until they have completed all security checks and medical examinations. Some cases take a great deal of time; while others are processed fast. UNHCR are not informed why some cases take so long. On receiving submissions from UNHCR, the EU countries carry out the following steps:

1. **Medical Checks:** selected cases can be rejected on medical grounds.
2. **Security Checks:** a “no objection certificate” (NOC) is required from the Pakistan government.
3. **Consideration:** conditions of family/kinships connection in the resettlement countries.

All resettlement countries have their own security checks; they assess the submitted dossiers in accordance with their own criteria. They can reject cases for any reason, but, if they reject a case, they do not need to provide reasons for rejection to UNHCR. A resettlement officer in Islamabad expressed concerns about the criteria adopted by some individual EU states on the submitted dossiers. “We are unsure why some refugees’ decisions are processed speedily and they depart within a relatively short space of time, while others have to wait for months.” The different countries have various policies for resettlement. Canada has set up a local mission office in Islamabad, while Australia’s office for the Afghan resettlement is in Dubai. US officials are based out of New Delhi and visit Islamabad every three to six months. The US follow the security checks through IOM. While some individual EU countries accept UNHCR submissions, others ask for additional information about individual refugees or on some refugees. In some cases, they ask for the individual’s life histories, their age, arrival time, living place, and their actual name and tribal affiliations. UNHCR staff described how “on the ground, it is hard to find their proper addresses, as most move from place to place, locality to locality and from camp to camp. In many cases their age is guessed; by stating 20-30 years etc. They claim that resettlement countries do not fully understand the realities on the ground and they, on the other hand, dictate their own procedural processes”. The Afghan refugee cases for resettlement to EU states are generally forwarded through UNHCR head office in Geneva. In the context of resettlement for EU countries, most emergency cases are shifted to UNHCR’s transit site in Manila, the Philippines, where an “Emergency Transition Centre/Facilities” has been set up.

Role of International Organization for Migration

Upon receiving submissions from resettlement countries, IOM liaises between successful candidates and their resettlement countries. It also helps refugees in preparing travel documents and obtaining No Objection Certificate (NOC) from the Pakistan Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Interviews with IOM staff in Islamabad suggest that the protracted security checks for resettlement refugees consume significant time due to the current security situation in the country. Sometimes, the ministry returned filed cases back to IOM with some objections, asking for more details and clarification. Pashtun refugees usually experience a significantly longer waiting period for the security clearance because of previous Pashtun links with the Taliban. In addition to facilitating security checks, IOM arranges refugees’ pre-departure arrangements and travel schedules.

Role of the Pakistan Foreign and Interior Ministries

After the selection process selected refugees must go through security checks, by gaining No Objection Certificates (NOC) from the Pakistani government. The NOC/security checks could relate to crimes

committed in the localities; courts litigations; and connections with the Taliban. To get an NOC is a very hard task. Here the role of local policemen is crucial. They investigate refugees' characters and credentials; they verify their addresses, areas, and streets over the period they have lived in Pakistan as well as their arrival time. Tracing their residential histories are a difficult and a time-consuming process. Refugees move from one area to another; they live in tents and play-grounds. In this process, massive corruption is involved for security clearances; authorities' decisions for "no" or "yes" can change a refugee's life. A UNHCR representative stated that: "the lengthy process for the security checks is a concern for us and this process consumes unbelievable amounts of time. It should take 6 weeks normally, but it takes far longer. Refugees move from one place to another; sometimes they have changed their places of residence twenty times over; and they have no proper addresses. In many cases they just say they "live near a given shop, or near a school, or near a playground". Here it is almost impossible to trace all addressees where refugees have lived over the years. If they are not on the police's "wanted list" they could be issued an NOC in months, but in other cases the process takes a great deal of time. Some pay a bribe to the local police to speed up the process of getting an NOC. In obtaining an NOC, many refugees face sexually harassment, too. In cases of unaccompanied women, individual policemen not only take advantage of their vulnerability. There are also cases reported in which the police sexually abuse them. In cases of conversions to Christianity, the police created problems. After the long process of getting an NOC, if the resettlement countries find that any selected refugee is involved in fraud or crime or has had links with the Taliban in the past, the selections are dropped.

Role of NGOs and Community Headmen

UNHCR works closely with the Pakistani-based NGOs, such as Sharp (Society for Human Rights and Prisoners Aid) and SACH (Struggle for change), not only for the identifications and referrals of refugees in need of resettlement, but also for the legal issues and pre-departure processes. Sharp has set up offices in Peshawar and Quetta. This NGO not only assists UNHCR in legal issues and protection, it has been involved with the identification of refugees for resettlement. It also provides advice and legal aid for Afghan POR Card Holders. SACH is a non-profit organization based in Islamabad/Rawalpindi working for the rehabilitation of victims of traumatic human rights abuses through a multidisciplinary approach that includes, *inter alia*, offering shelter, medical treatment, and psychological support to survivors of state, domestic and other kinds of abuse: especially to women and children. The organization is not only supporting refugee communities. It also focuses on Afghan refugee populations in Pakistan. For that matter SACH has been providing shelter services to refugees who have been approved for the United States Refugee Resettlement Program, but who are still awaiting departure. More importantly, it teaches refugees basic language skills and provides them with cultural orientation training that might help in resettlement countries.

It is important to point out here that these NGOs have no role in the selection of refugees for resettlement. In the past, UNHCR was concerned about corruption and nepotism, so it now only gives tasks that involve legal issues, or submits applications, or organise workshops for culture awareness. While these NGOs are involved, to some extent, the identification of refugees in need of resettlement, they mainly provide medical, educational and legal support to both refugees and UNHCR. They sometimes identify individual refugees' suffering and vulnerability to UNHCR, but such cases do not often register for resettlement. "I referred some Afghan refugees to UNHCR who were in real need for the resettlement as their lives were in danger", Asif Ali, a member of SACH, informed me during the course of an interview in Peshawar, "but almost nine months have passed and they have not been contacted for the registration". When this concern was raised with a UN spokesman in Islamabad, he reaffirmed "we do encourage NGOs to provide us assistance about what profile we are looking for. They recommend many cases on medical grounds and on vulnerability of some refugees, but medical reasons for resettlement are not the only criteria". However, the spokesman admitted that UNHCR always sought support from both SACH and Sharp for the identification of refugees in need for resettlement, because they have a better local network. They work mainly on women rights, and

children's wellbeing. Their members could go to areas where UNHCR staff cannot go, so in that sense they know better which sets of Afghan refugees are genuinely in need of resettlement.

A member of SACH who works with Afghan refugees noted "our NGO has recommended hundreds of Afghan refugees for resettlement to UNHCR. It provided the names of the refugees whose lives are in danger and who deservedly need resettlement". Sometimes NGOs submit a whole section/tribal of refugees to UNHCR who will not go back to Afghanistan and who the Pakistan government will not tolerate either. They have forwarded many unaccompanied minors/children and girls to UNHCR for resettlement whose lives have been in danger. A respondent stated "I personally recommended resettlement for a Pashtun family whose head worked as an interpreter for an aid agency in the refugee village but who was killed by the Taliban, but as of recently the family has still not been contacted". Rightly or wrongly, some informants believe that UNHCR is unfair in its criteria for registration and selection for resettlement.

Conclusion

The material here has shown that refugee resettlement from Pakistan is a complex issue that involves a series of drawn-out processes and checks. Such practices aim not only to make resettlement transparent, but to search out the most vulnerable refugees for resettlement. In actuality, most Afghan refugee populations were not aware of resettlement. UNHCR and other agencies do not advertise resettlement. Voluntary repatriation remains UNHCR's preferred solution in Pakistan for most refugees, as elsewhere in the globe. The general feelings among the agency members was that the number of resettlements were too few to make it worth publicising given the 1.8 million documented Afghan refugees in Pakistan. Few agencies staff interviewed were aware of the modifications introduced by the Joint European Resettlement Programme (JERP) which was passed through the European Parliament in March 2012.

Most registration cases for resettlement come through NGOs who work with refugee populations at the local level. Other cases for resettlement are referred on by doctors and journalists who are involved with refugees at the grassroots level. They only identify the cases though. UNHCR carries out its own assessment for registration and selection for refugees in need of protection for resettlement, what has been described "Population Profiling and Verification Exercise". The refugees who fall into the category of resettlement are described by the UNHCR as "Serious Protection Concerns". The findings of this report have identified that some individual refugees or sections of refugee populations in Pakistan are more vulnerable than others. Other cases that are registered for the resettlement process include "family reunification" in resettlement countries. However, a great number of the Afghan refugee "women at risk" are registered for resettlement in Pakistan.

On receiving submissions from UNHCR, some EU resettlement countries initiate their own scrutiny for resettlement. They take a significant time in order to scrutinise security and medical factors and perhaps most difficult, a clearance (No Objection Certificate) from the Pakistan authorities begins. The NOC process starts with the local police station and passes on through different channels ends in the Pakistan's Foreign Affairs and Interior departments. This long process involves issues of corruption and sexual harassment of the individual refugees.

Recommendations

Local and national publicity and awareness about resettlement option in Pakistan would provide a unique opportunity to refugees in need of resettlement, as most vulnerable refugees are sometimes the least visible and vocal. It would also provide a better understanding of the motives of resettlement for both the refugee populations as well as the public as a whole. There is, of course, the need to ensure that the most vulnerable individuals or sections of refugee populations who cannot be reached by UNHCR are still given opportunities for resettlement. For example, many ethnic Hazara refugees are

in need of resettlement, but they remain largely invisible and inaccessible. As the fieldwork interviews have revealed opportunities for resettlement are not usually made explicit, though some Afghan refugees were well aware that such options exist. Moreover, in order for a fuller understating of the resettlement operation in Pakistan, the voices and experiences of refugee “women at risk” need to be recorded. Women informants might be accessed through a female fieldwork assistant. One of the drawbacks of this research is that the voices of refugee “women at risk” are muted.

In most cases the refugee populations have no direct access to UNHCR regarding the registration for the resettlement process. As we have noted, they are chiefly identified and referred for resettlement registration indirectly. In this indirect process of identification individual refugees sometimes are exploited and, on other occasions, fraudulent claims come up. The presence of an EU mission in Pakistan, like some other resettlement countries, would not only further the entire operation of resettlement. It might speed up the resettlement process, as a whole.

Moreover, there should be state-level arrangements for resettlement countries with the Pakistan government to expedite resettlement and security clearance (No Objection Certificate) from Pakistan’s Interior and Foreign Affairs departments. In the resettlement context for EU states, a separate set-up office concerning the “security clearance” in Islamabad could further accelerate the procedural requirements for gaining an NOC. More monetary and human resources are required in this regard. UNHCR representatives in Islamabad noted limited financial resources and limited time allocated by resettlement countries. Indeed, there is a feeling that European countries should be more committed not only to supporting the agency financially, but also to assisting in human resource matters at grassroots level.

Moreover, resettlement states should not only increase their number of resettlement places in Pakistan, given the presence of millions of refugees who need resettlement. Some Muslim countries might offer places, as some conservative refugees in need of resettlement might be convincingly directed there. Finally, the EU resettlement countries ought to be more explicit in their criteria and scrutiny in their own selection process. There is bewilderment in Islamabad as to why decisions on some submissions are resolved immediately, while others have to wait months, if not years.

Annex 1. Afghan refugees in Pakistan

Province	Number of Refugees (in millions)
NWFP	1.878 61.6
Baluchistan	769 25.2
Punjab	207 6.8
Sindh	135 4.5
Islamabad	045 1.5
Azad Jammu & Kashmir	013 .4
Total	3.047 100

Source: UNHCR, 2007

Annex 2. Ethnic breakdown of Afghan Refugees in Pakistan

Pashtuns	Tajiks	Uzbeks	Hazara	Turkmen	Balochi	Others
81.5%	7.3%	2.3%	1.3%	2.0%	1.7%	3.9%

Source: *Census of Afghans in Pakistan* by the Ministry of States and Frontier Regions**Annex 3. Reasons for not repatriating to Afghanistan in % of Afghans**

	Personal Animosity	Security	Livelihood	Shelter	Other
Pakistan	3.1	17.8	18.2	57.2	3.7
NWFP	3.1	13.9	13.0	67.0	3.0
Non-NWFP	3.1	25.1	27.9	39.0	4.9
Camp	2.3	18.1	12.5	64.3	2.9
Non-camp	3.9	17.5	23.1	51.2	4.3
Ethnicity					
Pashtun	3.2	18.2	18.2	56.9	3.5
Non-Pashtun	2.6	15.7	18.3	58.7	4.7

Source: UNHCR 2007