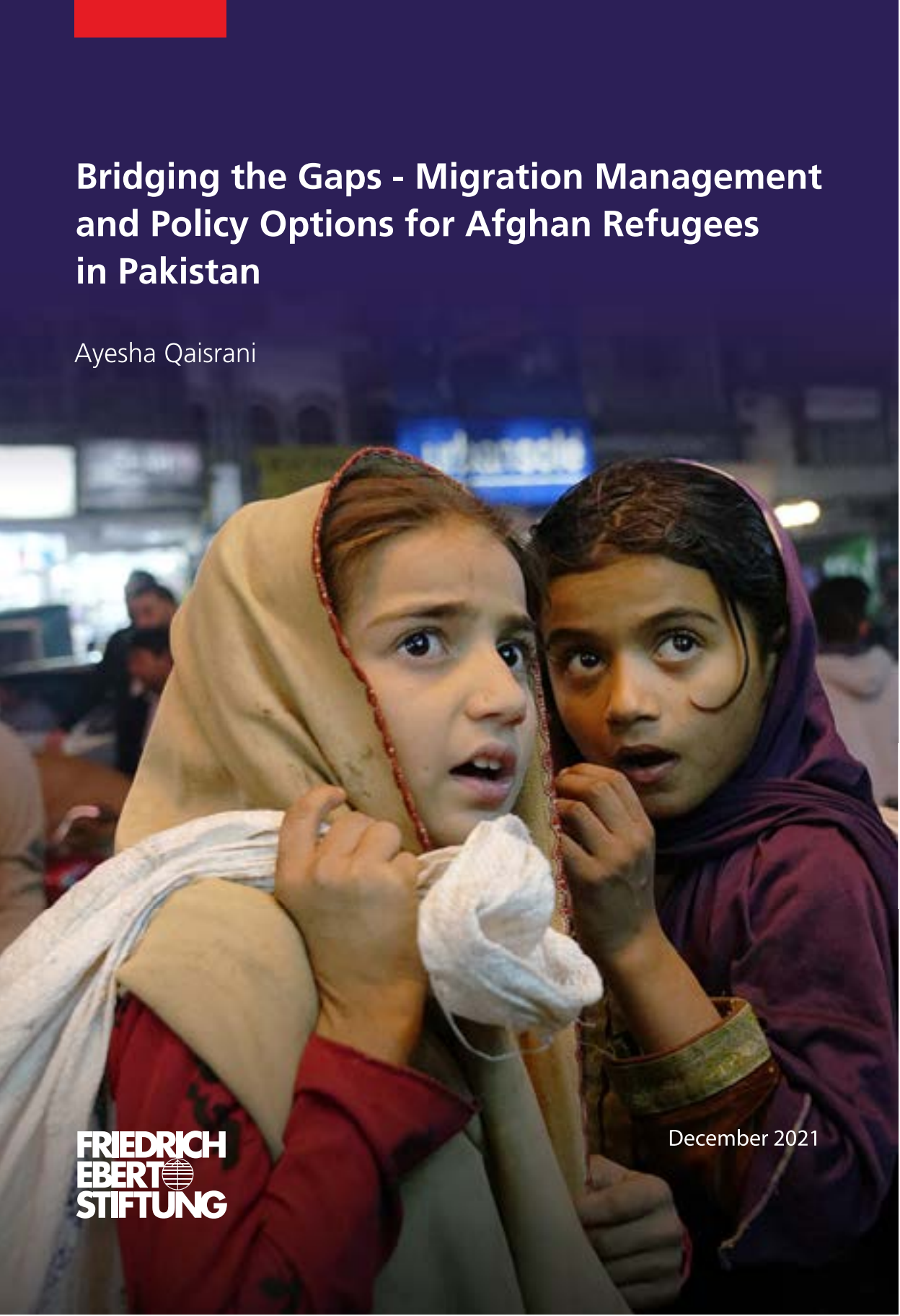
Bridging the Gaps - Migration Management and Policy Options for Afghan Refugees in Pakistan

Ayesha Qaisrani



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Preface

In Pakistan, migration is a common fact of life. Internal migration in or between provinces, emigration from Pakistan to Western countries and to the Middle East, transit migration of foreign migrants to third countries, and immigration to Pakistan itself are all quite common. In the last category we see mostly Afghan refugees and migrants, arriving (and sometimes returning) for some 40 years. While for a long time both state and society in Pakistan had been quite welcoming towards Afghan refugees, this has changed and been substituted be a mixture of welcoming, ambivalent, and hostile sentiments. In any case, with currently approximately 3 million Afghans living in Pakistan (and before sometimes nearly double this number) it is surprising that the Pakistani government still has no systematic and institutionalized policy towards Afghan refugees and migrants, but often appears to be improvising on how to deal with them. Such an approach might bring flexibility into policy-making, but it is not the best one for problem-solving.

The sudden victory of the Taliban in Afghanistan in August 2021 might bring the chance of improved stability to this country, or at least a dramatic decrease of political violence. On the other hand, such a hope might be premature. It cannot be ignored that the new regime might also result in further and increased instability. Several dangers might contribute: A threat from the so-called "Islamic State", evolving from its campaign of terrorism; a fracturing of the broad Taliban coalition itself, leading to another round of civil war; rising resistance against Taliban rule, centered on city-dwellers and ethno-religious minorities; and an economic crisis or complete breakdown, leading to a humanitarian disaster. All these possibilities cannot be excluded, and they all (and even more in combination) might trigger grave new instability, and corresponding flows of refugees to Pakistan (and maybe Iran, as well as more distant countries). To be sure, none of these scenarios is unavoidable; they all could be avoided in principle. But if the new rulers have the wisdom, the strength, flexibility, and the competence to actually evade them is far from certain. A new major flow of Afghan refugees into Pakistan (and other countries) surely is not certain, but is remains a realistic possibility in the future, that cannot be excluded. Far-sighted policy will try to prepare for emergent problems before they actually get out of control, and not just react to new crisis situations.

This is the political context of the paper at hand, written by Ayesha Qaisrani for the Sustainable Development Policy Institute (SDPI, Islamabad) in cooperation with the

Friedrich Ebert Foundation (FES, Pakistan Office). It provides a valuable overview of policy-making and the institutional set-up in regard to the Afghan refugees in Pakistan, and combines this convincingly with recommendations for policy reforms, both for Pakistan and the international community.

Finally, we would like to thank our partner SDPI and the author for the excellent cooperation. It always is a pleasure working with people who combine friendliness, flexibility, and competence.

We hope this paper will contribute to a fruitful public debate on the topic in Pakistan, and even beyond.

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1. Introduction

Pakistan has an extensive institutional architecture mandated with migration management. However, this institutional setup is almost purely concerned with emigration from Pakistan with a focus on encouraging and regulating labour migration from Pakistan, catering to the welfare needs of Overseas Pakistanis, and devising strategies on drawing nationally oriented benefits from the Pakistani Diaspora (Qaisrani, 2020). Almost overlooked in the institutional and policy approach towards migration in Pakistan is the issue of immigration. While special provisions, institutions and policy approaches exist for the management of Afghan refugees, a glaring gap exists in the mainstreaming of these mechanisms in the overall national planning. This is a key lacuna that needs instant political and institutional focus as more than 1.4 million registered Afghans refugees (in addition to an estimated 1.5 million unregistered Afghan refugees), along with about 300,000 Burmese and Bengali migrants, and 300 Rohingya Muslims reside in various urban areas of Pakistan (Shah et al., 2020). In addition, as per UNHCR's estimates of 2020, there were about 181 refugees from Somalia, 341 other refugees, and 9,717 asylum seekers in Pakistan (UNHCR, 2020).

Despite these numbers, immigration of individuals entering Pakistan for asylum or other purposes, as well as refugee management has largely been overlooked through a deliberate policy stance. The Government of Pakistan has not adopted a holistic perspective to manage these inflows towards Pakistan through an inclusive policy planning. As the following sections will show, immigrants and refugees in Pakistan navigate through a complex policy landscape, with profound impact on their everyday socioeconomic lives in Pakistan. This purposive "policy of having no policy" for refugee management in Pakistan not only reflects turning a blind eye to the presence of a huge immigrant population, but also holds back from recognising and mobilising these population groups for the national development goals of Pakistan. Pakistan does not exist in a political vacuum, and thus, it is likely to experience influxes of people from not only the neighbouring countries, but also other regions in view of the geopolitical developments around the world. Therefore, having a "no policy" approach towards immigration in general, and refugee management in particular is not the most optimal choice.

With this understanding, this policy paper takes the case of Afghan refugees for an analytical inquiry and seeks to explore some practical policy options for finding more realistic and human rights focused approach towards refugee management. The paper is organised as follows: chapter 2 delineates the institutional and policy mechanisms that exist in Pakistan for migration management. This chapter describes the skewed focus on emigration from Pakistan, rather than immigration management. It also discusses the institutional landscape that is available for managing Afghan refugees in Pakistan. Chapter 3 offers a picture of the international support mechanisms that exist in Pakistan for Afghan refugee management. Implications of the existing policy approach on the daily socioeconomic lives of Afghan refugees are discussed in Chapter 4. Based on these discussions, chapter 5 offers practical policy recommendations to the Government of Pakistan, the international organisations operating in the field, and the governments of EU Member States.

2. Policy Environment on Migration in Pakistan

2.1. Institutional Landscape of Migration Management in Pakistan

While Pakistan is a labour sending, transit, as well as destination country for many, policy and institutional framework related to migration has largely been concerned with labour emigration, and not much attention has been paid to the inflow of migrants in terms of policy (Shah et al., 2020). Pakistan generally has a pro-labour migration policy stance and is among the top labour exporting countries in the world, ranking second in South Asia after India (Qaisrani et al., n.d.). The foundations for a formal mechanism for promoting labour migration were laid in the early 1970s by establishing the Bureau of Emigration and Overseas Employment (BEOE) with the prime objective of promoting and regulating labour migration to meet the high labour demand in the Gulf region. Following the establishment of the BEOE in 1971, the Emigration Ordinance and Rules were defined in 1979 (updated as of 2019) which replaced the Emigration Act of 1922 and guided further institutional and policy development in the field of migration for Pakistan. In the same year, the Overseas Pakistanis Foundation (OPF) was developed to cater to the welfare needs of the Overseas Pakistanis – the official term used for all Pakistani migrants.

The institutional setup related to migration management has undergone various amendments over the years. Between the 1980s and early 2000s, institutional development and focus on migration management remained somewhat limited (Qaisrani, 2020). In 2004, matters related to migrants were dealt with under a separate department, called the Department of Overseas Pakistanis operating under the then Ministry of Labour. In 2008, a dedicated federal ministry was created called the Ministry of Overseas Pakistanis. In 2013, another round of restructuring led to the merger of the two ministries leading to the creation of the Ministry of Overseas Pakistanis and Human Resource Development (MOPHRD). All matters related to emigration from Pakistan and the welfare, security, remittances, return, and reintegration of Overseas Pakistanis are dealt under the ambit of the MOPHRD through its various dedicated departments and directorates. Following the merger,

other institutional strands such as the BEOE and OPF were also brought under the jurisdiction of the MOPHRD. As a federal ministry, MOPHRD has the mandate to coordinate with provincial departments, labour organisations and relevant international organisations, and serve as the prime policymaking body of the country related to migration (GIZ & ILO, 2016).

Much of the dedicated institutional mechanism related to migration management is concerned with emigration of labour, while aspects related to immigration to Pakistan are under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Interior, and internal migration comes under the ambit of provincial labour departments. Stipulations for immigration, including entry and stay in the country, are guided by four legislative documents: The Naturalisation Act of 1926, the Foreigners Act of 1946, the Pakistan Citizenship Act of 1951, and the Citizenship Rules of 1952. The Foreigners Act of 1946 directs the provisions of the entry and stay of non-Pakistani nationals in the country. Article 14 D in the Foreigners' Act, introduced through an amendment in 2000, allows for the registration of undocumented immigrants in the country through a specially designed institution called the National Aliens Registration Authority (NARA), which was later merged with the National Database and Registration Authority (NADRA) in 2015 (Qaisrani et al., n.d.).

For Afghan refugees in particular, the Ministry of States and Frontier Regions (SAFRON) under the office of the Chief Commissioner of Afghan Refugees coordinates with international humanitarian agencies, such as the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) for the welfare and management of refugees in Pakistan. All provinces, but Sindh have their own respective Commissionerates for Afghan Refugees (CARs) for coordination purposes (Qaisrani et al., n.d.). In Sindh, matter related to Afghan refugees are dealt by the Afghan Refugee Repatriation Cell of Karachi.

2.2. Policy, Programmes, and Initiatives related to Migration

Despite the extensive institutional setup related to migration management in Pakistan, the country does not have a formally accepted national migration policy (yet). The most pronounced effort related to policymaking in the context of migration was initiated in 2018 and a draft policy paper was developed based on wide consultations across the country with diverse stakeholders (Silk Routes Facility, 2020). So far, this policy draft is awaiting formal ratification to come into effect. This policymaking exercise was preceded by two prior attempts to devise a policy, one in 2008 and the second in 2014, however, neither draft was approved to form the national policy on migration (Qaisrani et al., n.d.).

Despite the lack of an official national policy, there have been several programmes and initiatives related to migration management introduced over the years that are concerned with encouraging labour migration, protection of migrants' rights, encouraging remittance flow through official and formal channels, and engaging with well-established diaspora members across the destination countries for nationally-oriented development and political goals (Qaisrani, 2020).

For promoting labour migration, the Overseas Employment Corporation was developed which regulates the Overseas Employment Promoters that are private recruiters responsible for placement of Pakistani labour. The protection of migrants' rights comes under the jurisdiction of the Overseas Pakistanis Foundation (OPF). The Protectorate of Emigrants, which defines the rules and initiatives for labour migrants' welfare, operationalised through the OPF. OPF also offers certain welfare facilities for the families of Overseas Pakistanis, such as a pension fund, subsidised vocational and education services as well as low-cost housing schemes (ILO, 2016). In an effort to broaden the protection and security measures for Overseas Pakistanis, Community Welfare Attachés (CWAs) are appointed in Pakistani missions abroad where the Pakistani community is large in number. For promoting the transfer of remittances through formal channels, the Pakistan Remittance Initiative was established in 2009 through a joint venture between the then Ministry of Overseas Pakistanis, the State Bank of Pakistan, and the Ministry of Finance (Pakistan Remittance Initiative (PRI), n.d.). Moreover, recently the focus of the government has also been towards redirecting investment from Overseas Pakistanis towards Pakistan through financial instruments such as Roshan Digital Accounts, and Pakistan Banao Certificates (bonds). Engagement with highly qualified diaspora members is being encouraged through knowledge transfer initiatives such as Naya Pakistan Calling which seeks to engage with high-profile Pakistani diaspora for temporary return to Pakistan to engage in national development activities

In addition to the various national level policy initiatives, Pakistan is also signatory to various international conventions in the field of labour migration, including the Colombo Process and the Abu Dhabi Dialogue. Pakistan is also a participant in the Budapest Process that is concerned with promoting dialogue and efforts on safe and orderly migration to Europe. In compliance with international conventions, Pakistan also passed two laws in 2018 related to undocumented migrants: the Prevention of Trafficking in Persons Act 2018; and the Prevention of Smuggling of Migrants Act 2018. These laws focus on strengthening the border and law enforcement agencies for curbing practices of undocumented migrants while at the same time protecting the rights of victims of human trafficking.

2.3. Institutional Framework for Afghan Refugee Management

Relevant for the scope of this paper is to understand the institutional mechanisms and structures in place for management of refugee populations in Pakistan, particularly the Afghan refugees. Since Pakistan has not ratified any of the international conventions on refugee rights, including the Geneva Refugee Convention of 1951 and the associated Protocols of 1967, the legal status of Afghan refugees in Pakistan is rather vague (Zubair et al., 2019). The main legislative provisions guiding the treatment of Afghans in Pakistan are the Foreigners' Act of 1946 and the Foreigners' Order of 1951. While the Foreigners' Act includes a clause differentiating between a refugee and other foreigners within the territory, no clear structures are embedded to manage refugees in general. In fact, the Foreigners' Act restricts the entry of those without proper documentation into Pakistan, limiting the chance of asylum seekers to seek refuge in Pakistan, undermining the universally declared human right of seeking legal protection in another country (Human Rights Watch, 2002). Thus, in the absence of a legal framework at the national level and lack of recognition of the international refugee protection frameworks, Afghan refugees in Pakistan were dealt with on a prima-facie basis up until 1999, after which new arriving Afghans were not given the status of refugees (Zubair et al., 2019).

The Ministry of States and Frontier Regions (SAFRON) is the prime policymaking body concerned with Afghan refugee management in Pakistan through its office of the Chief Commissioner of Afghan Refugees which coordinates with international humanitarian agencies, such as the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) (Qaisrani et al., n.d.). The CCAR is also responsible for issuance of approval for other non-governmental organisations (NGOs) to operate within Pakistan for the Afghan refugees. Under its jurisdiction, Commissionerates of Afghan Refugees (CARs) in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Balochistan and Punjab, and an Afghan Refugee Repatriation Cell in Karachi have the mandate of managing refugees within the respective provinces. Despite these institutions in place, there is a lack of coordination among the provincial and federal entities responsible for refugee management, and most policies and mechanisms enacted to manage Afghan refugees have largely been ad-hoc (Mielke et al., 2021).

Protracted conflict and violence on the Afghan soil have led to multiple waves of refugee influx into adjoining states including Pakistan and Iran. The first displacement of Afghans into Pakistan can be traced to the Soviet military takeover of Afghanistan in the 1970s, which also led to a civil unrest among the diverse ethnic tribes in

Afghanistan (Pashtoons, Tajiks, Turkmen, Uzbek and Hazaras). Pakistan's political alignment with the US at the time led to the welcoming acceptance of the displaced Afghans. In absence of a legal stipulation on refugees, Afghan refugees were treated on a prima-facie basis. The responsibility of management of these initial flows of Afghans was delegated to the provincial governments and local of the then North West Frontier Province (now known Khyber Pakhtunkhwa) and Baluchistan (Ahmad, 2017). The open reception of refugees in Pakistan was complemented with enormous aid funds given by the international community to Pakistan to host the displaced population.

The second influx of Afghan refugees into Pakistan was recorded in 1989 because of the civil unrest created after the dismemberment of the Soviet Union and the subsequent departure of the Russian army from the Afghan soil. However, by this time, aid was diminishing and the general welcoming environment for refugees among the Pakistani population was dwindling. By 1998, UNHCR's aid and interventions in Pakistan to handle the Afghan refugees came to a halt. This was later combined with the closed border policy introduced by General Pervez Musharraf on the pretext of border security, who insisted on the repatriation of Afghan refugees and refused to take in more refugees (Mielke et al., 2021).

The third wave of Afghan refugees entered Pakistan as a result of the US-led invasion of Afghanistan on the pretext of War on Terror in 2001. This occurred in an environment when the government of Pakistan had already announced that it had exhausted its capacity of hosting more refugees. As in the past, the end of the US invasion in Afghanistan, and the subsequent takeover by the Taliban have pushed the country into yet another phase of civil instability in August 2021, creating another looming crisis of displacement in Afghanistan.

Moreover, the different phases of refugee influx have also been combined with several rounds of return. Initial estimates suggest that about three million Afghans sought refuge in Pakistan in the decades of 1970s and 1980s (Mielke et al., 2021). In the 1990s, return and repatriation of Afghan refugees reigned the policy narrative, however, it experienced a slowdown due to another round of influx resulting from the American invasion in 2001. Estimates of 2001 show that about two million Afghans were residing in Pakistan. Nevertheless, the rate of return expedited after 2001, and the 2000s were declared as the decade of return (Mielke et al., 2021). In 2003, the Governments of Pakistan and Afghanistan and the UNHCR entered into a Tripartite Agreement to devise a framework for the management and repatriation of registered Afghan refugees. It also forms the basis for UNHCR's activities in Pakistan for administrating the return of Afghans in protracted displacement. Under

the Tripartite Agreement which also included the Refugees and Host Areas (RAHA) Initiative., the Government of Pakistan introduced the Management and Repatriation Policy for Afghan Refugees in 2010.The Tripartite Agreement was extended up until 2021, however, the progress and further continuation of activities is uncertain right now amid the new crisis and expectation of new displacement from Afghanistan.

In addition to this tripartite agreement, a regional quadripartite framework was devised in 2012-13 called the Solution Strategy for Afghan Refugees (SSAR) between Pakistan, Afghanistan, Iran and the UNHCR. The main purpose of this framework is to guide the return and reintegration of Afghans in Iran and Pakistan as a means to a durable solution (Ministry of SAFRON, 2021). The SSAR also served the basis of mobilising international support for the host communities. Moreover, in 2017, the Federal Cabinet in Pakistan adopted the Afghan Refugee Management Policy (ARMP) which was guided by the SSAR and the Tripartite Agreement, focusing on the following components: i) introducing a visa mechanism for Afghans in Pakistan building on the principle that not all Afghans in Pakistan are refugees; ii) registration of all undocumented Afghans in Pakistan; and iii) development of a national refugee law (Mielke et al., 2021).

The refugee protection architecture in Pakistan for Afghans is largely concerned with two major themes: i) identification and registration of Afghans in Pakistan; and ii) devising return and repatriation frameworks. Both these policy priorities are guised in the narrative of national security for Pakistan, taking leads from the geopolitical developments and the domestic security situation in Pakistan (Mielke et al., 2021). To address the first concern, a census of Afghan refugees was conducted in 2005, according to which about three million Afghans were residing in Pakistan at that time. All those not registered under the 2005 census were declared as illegal aliens under the Foreigners Act of 1946 and its Protocol of 1967. Following the census, the National Database and Registration Authority (NADRA) in collaboration with the Ministry of SAFRON and UNHCR issued Proof of Registration (PoR) Cards to the registered Afghans in Pakistan which allowed them a legal status and identity in Pakistan. The PoRs were extended every year by the Ministry of SAFRON, and the validity was until 2020, after which PoRs have been renewed to biometric identify documents to update the information on Afghans in Pakistan.(Dawn, 2021). As of September 2021, 1.4 million Afghans have received the new and smart PoRs. (Dawn, 2021). These new cards will be valid until 2023. In 2017-18, NADRA gave Afghan Citizen Cards (ACC) to undocumented Afghans.

The drive of registration and issuance of identity documents relates to the second strand of Afghan refugee management infrastructure in Pakistan, i.e., return and

repatriation. Information collected through the smart PoRs is expected to provide reliable information on the socioeconomic placement of Afghans in Pakistan to support the return and repatriation under the SSAR.(Dawn, 2021) Between 2002 and 2021 (September), 4.3 million Afghan refugees have been facilitated to return to Afghanistan by the UNHCR (UNHCR, 2021a). The most recent estimates suggest that currently about 1.4 million registered Afghans live in Pakistan, while about 1.5 million additional unregistered Afghans also reside in Pakistan.

In the beginning of his regime in 2018, Imran Khan, the current Prime Minister pledged to offer citizenship to Afghan refugees who have been residing in Pakistan since the 1970s, or born in Pakistan(Kaifee, 2020). Although this offer of citizenship is in line with the Constitution of Pakistan according to which anyone born in Pakistan has a right to Pakistani citizenship, the anti-refugee sentiment from both the opposition political parties and public at large forced this promise to be revoked and Afghan refugees continue to live a life in limbo in Pakistan (Wasim,2018).

3. Mechanisms introduced by International Organisations for Afghan Refugees

The protracted displacement of Afghans in Pakistan necessitates the continuous involvement of international community to provide support in managing the complex situation. Initially, the scale of displacement in terms of number of Afghans entering Pakistan created a need for the UNHCR to have a presence in Pakistan. UNHCR started its work in Pakistan in 1979 with an initial funds of $15 million and opened another office in Peshawar in 1980 (Ahmad, 2017).

To fill the policy and legislation lacuna related to refugees in Pakistan, UNHCR operates under its own asylum framework and the Cooperation Agreement developed between the Government of Pakistan in the UNHCR in 1993. SAFRON and CCAR are responsible for coordinating UNHCR's efforts and initiatives in Pakistan. Initial efforts were concerned with humanitarian assistance, including supply of emergency relief goods such as food, shelter and clothing, provision of potable water, education and training, and veterinary services for the livestock (Church World Services, 2013, p.23). However, by 1995, foreign aid to deal with the Afghan refugees in Pakistan diminished and the distribution of ration passes by UNHCR came to an end (Ahmad, 2017). Up until the 1990s, the World Food Programme was the prime institution responsible for giving food assistance to Afghan refugees.

Later in 1992, the UNHCR also introduced the voluntary repatriation programme as a durable solution for the Afghan refugees. Funding constraints temporarily halted the programmes in 1999, however, they resumed in 2000 and continue to support Afghans to repatriate to Afghanistan. The Afghans themselves do not welcome this policy initiative as a durable solution (Ahmad, 2017). Many civil society watchdogs criticise the not so voluntary nature of some of the repatriation as reports of force being used to compel people to leave broke (Human Rights Watch, 2016).

UNHCR has also been coordinating the access to education up to primary level since the 1980s. Over the years, UNHCR has built about 146 schools in refugee village[1]s across Pakistan, offering free primary education to about 56,000 refugee

1. Refugee village is the official term used by Pakistan for refugee camps. These settlements are organised as villages, and constitute mud houses, rather than tents and camps.

children. Moreover, UNHCR also provides some scholarships to refugee students for higher education with support from the German government. Recently, UNHCR published an updated Refugee Education Strategy for Afghan refugees in Pakistan for 2020-22 (UNHCR, 2020). Focus of the Education Strategy preceding the recent one (2016-18) was on transitioning the curriculum of refugee schools from Afghan national curriculum to one that is aligned with the Pakistani curriculum in order to ensure access to secondary and higher education in Pakistan.

UNHCR, along with other international donors, including the European Union, and governments of Germany, Japan, United States, Denmark and Australia have supported the RAHA programme aimed at fostering social cohesion among the host and refugee communities.(GIZ (Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit), n.d.; UNHCR, 2014.; United Nations Pakistan, n.d.) More recently, a Support Platform was developed in 2019 at the Global Refugee Forum to mobilise international donor community to assist in the implementation of the Tripartite Agreement (UNHCR, 2021b). Countries including Belgium, Hungary, Italy, Poland, Spain, Switzerland, as well as Sweden have also made contributions for technical and vocational training of Afghan refugees through this platform.

The International Organisation for Migration (IOM) has been instrumental in supporting the Government of Pakistan in managing the refugee influx since 1981 when it first opened its office in Pakistan, even before Pakistan became a Member State in 1992. The Cooperation Agreement with the Government guides operations of IOM in Pakistan related to Afghan refugees. Generally, IOM's mandate is registering and documenting the flow of undocumented Afghans in Pakistan and across the borders of Pakistan. For this, IOM Pakistan supported NADRA and SAFRON in introducing the Afghan Citizen Cards to those ineligible or unregistered with the PoRs. Moreover, a core responsibility of IOM Pakistan is to assist the voluntary return of undocumented Afghan refugees. Between January and October 5, 2021, about 8,599 undocumented Afghan refugees returned to Afghanistan (IOM Pakistan, 2021).

While much of the institutional mechanism within Pakistan to deal with Afghan refugees focuses on repatriation of refugees, the option of resettlement to other countries is also available through funding from the European Commission, the United States, and Australia, although to a very limited scale. These options, however, are not advertised openly, leading to limited awareness among the intended beneficiaries (Chattha, 2013).The limited scope of resettlement of Afghan refugees from Pakistan to third countries is further riddled with bureaucratic delays, with some applications taking years to be processed. The relentless focus

on repatriation by the UNHCR and reluctance in extending awareness about the resettlement options may reflect the priorities of donor countries.

Other key players that have played an active role in terms of providing humanitarian assistance and rehabilitation services to conflict and disaster affected population in Pakistan, especially the Afghan refugees, include the German development agency (GIZ), Danish Refugee Council (DRC), the International Rescue Committee (IRC), Caritas etc. In the premise of integration, there are some initiatives led by European governments. For instance, the German government, in partnership with UNHCR initiated the concept of Urban Cohesion Hub, which is designed to support 30,000 Afghan refugees and local host community members through health, education, skills training, legal support, and recreational services and activities (Ahmed, 2021). There are currently two Hubs, one in Rawalpindi and the other in Quetta, envisioned to foster social cohesion and productive interaction between the host and refugee communities. Moreover, international funding supports projects such as RAHA, the Refugee Management Support Programme (RMSP), and the Social Support for Vulnerable Afghan Refugees and Host Communities (SSARC) etc. While such initiatives are welcomed and contribute meaningfully to aspects of social cohesion, the desired impact may not be achieved unless structural barriers that keep the refugees separate from the local community are not addressed. Some of these barriers are explained in the next section.

4. Situational Context of Afghan Refugees in Pakistan

Considering the above mentioned (lack of) national policy mechanisms in place to deal with the Afghan refugees in Pakistan, there is enough room to elucidate the gaps in practice and how these gaps shape the day-to-day lives of Afghan refugees living in Pakistan. Pakistan's approach to handling the refugee situation is driven by a national security agenda, often at the cost of human security, especially of non-citizens.

According to a detailed analysis by Mielke et al., several key policy-practice gaps exist in the mechanism to manage Afghan refugees in Pakistan These gaps along with a detailed review of existing literature on Afghans in Pakistan, are summarised below:

1. **Registration:** While a big chunk of refugee management efforts has been dedicated towards registering the Afghan refugees, mere registration of refugees has not offered extensive services/facilities to Afghans other than protection. The Government of Pakistan gave Proof of Registration (PoR) cards to registered Afghan refugees which gave them a legal status temporarily for the time of validation of the PoR cards (which are extendable through the Ministry of SAFRON). Although the PoR cards do not legally offer services beyond protection to Afghan refugees, they are taken as de facto legal documents for identity, exemption from the Foreigners' Act 1946, and allow access to social services offered to Afghans as per a quota system (Ahmad, 2017).

   More than 800,000 undocumented Afghans were also given Afghan Citizen Cards (ACC) by the Government of Pakistan, which protected the ACC holders against refoulement, and were valid for six months allowing Afghans to apply for an Afghan passport, and eventually a visa for staying in Pakistan (Mielke et al., 2021). The introduction of ACCs was another effort at registration of Afghans with the objective of surveillance as the core driving force. In addition, as the ACCs did not offer de facto protection as refugees, many Afghans were reluctant to sign up because of fear of

being deported. Moreover, the Afghan Government also struggled to provide Afghan passports to the ACC holders in Pakistan, which further led to the lack of success of the ACC scheme. Currently, there is an ongoing process of offering new PoR cards to Afghan refugees which require biometric registration. While a number of benefits are associated with the biometric verification such as easy access to services, the essence of the biometric feature is enhanced security and surveillance of Afghan refugees in Pakistan. Moreover, the validity dates and delays in extensions for the PoR cards and ACC registrations have dire consequences for the access to social services for the Afghans in Pakistan, including for health, education, the right to work, open a bank account, have a driving licence, own a SIM card, mobility, and renting arrangements (Mielke et al., 2021).

2. **Residence and living standards:** With the cut in aid and food assistance directed for the Afghans and a lack of hope for the security situation in Afghanistan to improve, refugees started to move out from the dedicated refugee camps to urban centres and peri-urban localities. While many still live in refugee villages more than 70% of the Afghan refugees actually live outside of camps (Khan, 2014). As per UNHCR estimates, about 444,726 Afghans live in refugee villages, while 975,947 live outside of allocated refugee villages. A study by the Afghan Refugee Evaluation Unit (AREU) highlighted the politics of settlement of Afghans, which also dictate their socioeconomic experiences in Pakistan (AREU, 2006). Prior to 1982, the refugee villages in Pakistan did not have an official status; however in 1982 UNHCR under the authority of the CAR adopted the formal administration of the camps. Settlements and residential grouping in these camps was based on ethnic, tribal and organisational ties (Church World Services, 2013, p.22). For instance, most of the ethnic Hazara community within the Afghan refugees settled in Balochistan (Ahmad, 2017). The camps largely comprise of mud structures, while there are some brick and cement houses as well. Basic public amenities are supposedly provided; however, the infrastructure is insufficient and lacks upgrade and upkeep, leading to a low standard of living for those living in the camps. Most of the residents of these camps are low-income Afghans, and as per the recent TRAFIG survey, employment levels of those residing in camps were found to be lower as compared to those who lived in urban settlements in their survey (Mielke et al., 2021).

Low-income Afghan households are particularly marred with socioeconomic stagnancy, while the better off Afghans in Pakistan can afford to live with

low precariousness, and enjoy the basic services of a decent neighbourhood (Mielke et al., 2021). The more affluent Afghans were able to resettle in urban areas in mixed neighbourhoods. The tribal and ethnic ties continued somewhat in the urban areas as well. Groups of Afghans that moved to urban centres with their tribal leaders redeveloped traditional social structures in the new settlements (Church World Services, 2013, p.22).

In this context, the role of host communities was significant in assisting Afghans living in their neighbourhoods by sharing their infrastructure and resources as per the concept of ***baradari.*** However, in communities with already meagre resources at disposal, such situations are bound to create friction between the host and refugee communities. To counter this, the UNHCR with support from the Government of Pakistan introduced the RAHA programme to assist the host communities in integrating Afghan refugees by providing medium and small programmes in sectors such as health, education, livelihoods and water and sanitation (Ahmad, 2017).

However, the real impact of such mechanisms also depends on a range of other national and provincial legislation as well. Stricter policies with regard to land ownership mean that most of the Afghans are living on tenancy, rather than own property (AREU, 2006). Moreover, recent developments in provincial legislation have also affected the security of tenure for Afghan residents. The Punjab Information of Temporary Residents Act of 2015, for instance, requires every tenant to be registered with the local police station through a cumbersome process. Due to this requirement, property owners in Punjab and Islamabad are hesitant to rent out their houses to Afghans. Indeed, in a survey conducted by SDPI with Afghan refugees, the biggest challenge faced by Afghan refugees was access to housing (Javed et al., 2020).

3. Despite granting a legal status to stay in Pakistan and work and enjoy freedom of mobility, the PoR cards do not guarantee **the right to work i**n the formal sector (Amparado et al., 2021). However, since the refugees could not be confined to the camps, and a general policy acceptance of them moving out was present, it was inevitable to allow them to find livelihoods (Ahmad, 2017).

Prior to refugee influx and even dating back to pre-partition times, Afghans generally enjoyed a freedom of mobility for economic purposes within Pakistan(Rashid, 2019). However, the aspect of mobility and right to work became quite restrained for the Afghans by the end of 1990s as the

general policy atmosphere towards them started to become restraining. As aid became limited, many Afghan refugees started moving out of the refugee camps in search of work. By 1997, the Government of Pakistan also supported the idea of Afghan refugee's need to work and move freely. However, by 1999 Pakistan stopped taking in "refugees" and started treating the incoming Afghans as economic migrants. The legal parameters allowing Afghans to work became somewhat blurry, forcing many Afghans to stay hidden in layers of informal work (Rashid, 2019).

Afghan refugees' involvement in the formal labour market is restricted by a few legal stipulations. For refugees to engage in formal work or start their own business, they need Pakistani partners to show immovable asset ownership, as well as documentation and registration (Khan, 2017). This hampers the freedom to be involved in gainful economic activity. The nature of employment for Afghan refugees is not only shaped by the legal status of the Afghan living in Pakistan, but also the locality of their residence, as well as their ethnicity, and socioeconomic class, all these factors being interdependent. Discrimination based on ethnicity, language, and class often emerges as the reason behind labour market exploitation of Afghans in Pakistan. Moreover, concentration in specific economic activities and sectors have created linkages of association, pre-defining the livelihood options for many Afghans, making upward labour market mobility difficult for many (Church World Services, 2013, p.33).

While there have been numerous initiatives to register and document Afghans in Pakistan, the 2005 census is the first and the only survey that comprehensively elucidates the socioeconomic status and demographic profile of Afghans in Pakistan (Shah et al., 2020).Other than that, there have been smaller, survey-based initiatives to gauge the demographic profile of Afghans in Pakistan. According to the 2005 census, roughly 58% of Afghans in Pakistan earned a living through daily wages, while about 16% were self-employed. About 7% were engaged in salaried employment. Other more recent surveys also confirm these trends. In 2013, the Danish Refugee Council (DRC) conducted a survey of 544 Afghans living in KP, Pakistan. The DRC survey found that the most common primary source of income reported was small trade (shopkeepers), followed by transport sector (drivers), hawking (street vendors), and farming, while the most common secondary sources of income were reported to be farming, tending livestock, transport sector (driving), and tailoring. About 57% of the respondents were found to be unskilled. The more affluent Afghans,

and those with legal documents have established themselves in the carpet, transport, and gemstones business (Khan, 2017). In fact, Afghan workers dominate the carpet weaving and transport sectors in KP. Moreover, the TRAFIG survey conducted among 299 Afghan refugees shows that those residing in or around urban centres have higher access to employment than those living in camps. Majority of the respondents in the TRAFIG survey as well were self-employed, while about 17% had temporary employment (Mielke et al., 2021).

The nature of work that Afghan refugees are engaged in also has relevance to the programmatic initiatives of international implementing partners. For instance, majority of the programmes focus on creating self-employment and entrepreneurial activities among the Afghans, rather than employment. In a country where they already have meagre resources and social networks, enterprises are not bound to flourish to the extent to take the refugees out of poverty. The majority of their businesses end up remaining small-scale, in traditional markets, and in the informal sector (Church World Services, 2013, p.26).

Moreover, the hurdles in accessing credit for business opportunities is a key issue for Afghan refugees. The SDPI survey notes access to credit as the main obstacle in doing business. (Javed et al., 2020) It was not until 2019 that the Afghan refugees were officially "allowed" to use their PoR cards to open bank account, that too conditional on a range of other registration and proof requirements (Masood, 2019). Even so, delays in extension in the validity of PoR and ACC cards can have serious implications for the continuation of banking services, as well as earning a livelihood for Afghan refugees (Mielke et al., 2021).

4. **Access to health services** is largely marred with similar structural issues for both Afghan refugees and Pakistani citizens. Afghans, regardless of their legal status, can access public health services without any hurdles. However, because of the low standard of the public health system in Pakistan, many Afghans, like the Pakistani citizens, prefer to acquire private medical services. Thus, healthcare is on sale, for both local population as well as Afghan refugees. Access to better healthcare depends more on the economic situation of the person, rather than their legal status. The issues experienced in access to public healthcare, such as unavailability of doctors, long waiting queues, lack of medicines in public dispensaries etc. are similar for both Pakistani citizens and Afghan refugees (Mielke et al., 2021).

Moreover, health facilities available in the camps are inadequate supplied to cater to the growing needs, especially amidst COVID-19. Particularly vulnerable are Afghan refugee women who often face barriers in accessing health services due to long distance, cultural norms that prevent them to seek medical support alone, and shortage of female staff (European Commission, 2020). Accounts of gender-based violence in refugee villages are high, necessitating the need for the implementation of special measures that address the issue (International Medical Corps, 2010). The trauma of abuse, along with the suffering of living in protracted displacement may also lead to serious mental health issues among the refugees, an aspect that has received limited, if any, policy focus in Pakistan.

5. In principle, Afghan children have **access to education,** especially at the primary level**.** However, recent estimates suggest that about 500,000 Afghan children of school going age are out of school (UNHCR, 2020). This is concerning as according to UNHCR's estimates, about 65% of the documented Afghan refugees are below the age of 25 (Anadolou Agency, 2021). The low quality of public education means that both Pakistani citizens and Afghan refugees prefer private schooling. While in theory, Afghan refugees have access to public education, issues such as distance of camps and rural areas from educational facilities and poverty often hamper their access to education. Indeed, in the SDPI survey conducted among Afghan refugees, lack of education/qualification, and lack of skills emerged as the top impediments towards finding gainful employment (Javed et al., 2020).

   Another issue with regard to education is that primary schools developed for refugee children in refugee camps by UNHCR were following the Afghan national curriculum. Some private Afghan schools registered with the Ministry of Education in Afghanistan have also been operational in Pakistan. However, the certificates offered by these educational institutes are not recognised in Pakistan, proving to be troublesome for higher education or transition to the local education system. To address this issue, the strategy paper developed by UNHCR for 2016-18 planned a transition from the Afghan curriculum to Pakistani curriculum in order to facilitate onward education from primary to secondary and higher levels, but the extent of implementation of this policy is not known.

   Access to education beyond the primary level is marred with some structural issues. While the Afghan refugees can acquire higher education based on a quota system in Pakistan, this quota varies across the provinces as

education is a provincial subject in Pakistan. Access to secondary education is not much of an issue in KP and Balochistan where the majority of the Afghan citizens dwell. However, in Sindh, the rules discriminate against refugees (Khan, 2020). Moreover, the unawareness about the legal status of Afghan refugees among the local administration, such as private school principals, often restricts their access to educational facilities (Mielke et al., 2021). Often times, due to unaffordability, parents end up sending their children to religious seminaries instead. There are also some reports that even if Afghan children enrol in regular educational institutes (especially in Sindh) they are required to provide their child birth certificate to continue studying beyond grade eighth which often bars refugee children (Khan, 2020).

6. The underlying factor creating the mismatch and uncertainty in policy and practice is the lack of any **local integration** of Afghan refugees in Pakistan. The need for local integration measures is particularly important for the second and third generation of Afghan refugees, and those who live in urban centres. This is relevant as more than 70% of the refugees live outside of camps, while the institutional framework designed to deal with the Afghan refugees is more focused on camp management. Moreover, all the solutions and mechanism put in place by the Government of Pakistan with the international partners are concerned with the repatriation of Afghans, introduced through a lens of national security. However, this approach of repatriation as a durable solution has been heavily criticised by analysts (Mielke et al., 2021). Considering the recent developments in Afghanistan with the withdrawal of the American forces and recurrence of social unrest and civil displacement, re-migration to Pakistan may be an ongoing phenomenon, rendering expensive repatriation programmes unfruitful, and even against the principles of human rights protection.

   The RAHA programme was designed to build social cohesion among the host and refugee communities. Under the RAHA programme, about 4,260 projects of $ 220 million have been implemented, with 41% of the projects focusing on water and sanitation, 24% on infrastructure, 17% on education, 13% on livelihoods, 4% on health, and 1% on social protection (UNHCR, 2014b). A bulk of the programmes (68%) have been implemented in KP, followed by Balochistan (29%). Punjab and Sindh received 2% and 1% of the projects. However, measuring social cohesion is not easy or straightforward. A few evaluation studies applaud the achievements of the programme

(UNHCR, 2014a), nevertheless, the key performance indicators fall short in determining the level of social cohesion, or improvement in co-existence among the refugee and host communities through the programme.

To fill the literature gap, SDPI recently conducted an assessment of about 590 Afghan refugees and 250 local community members to understand the differences in socioeconomic experiences in the community (Javed et al., 2020). Key aspects to consider from the study are that a substantial majority of the Afghan refugees reported that the Pakistani host community has been welcoming to them, and majority reported having a strong network of Pakistani friends (a higher percentage than as reported for having a strong network of Afghan friends). However, despite these positive findings, analysis of negative experiences of Afghan refugees in Pakistani urban communities show that discrimination against the refugees is systemic, with bias attitudes adopted by the law enforcement authorities, that also encourages local community to be hostile towards the refugees.

With the recent developments in Afghanistan, and a harsher and stricter closed-door policy adopted by the Government of Pakistan in anticipation of further displacement, there are risks that social fragmentation against Afghan refugees already residing in Pakistan may worsen. The strict policy tone against anticipated new refugees by the Pakistani Government may encourage hostile attitudes and backlash by the local host communities towards the existing refugees (Amparado et al., 2021).

5. Policy Implications

In light of the above-mentioned gaps in policy, legislation, and practices in the management and treatment of Afghan refugees in Pakistan, there is adequate room for improvement and redirection in the approach to handle the refugee and migration situation. Of particular relevance is to consider the current state of crisis in Afghanistan and the possibility of new migratory flows and further extension in the protraction of displacement. All actors in the field, including the Government of Pakistan, and the international community, as well as the governments of European Union Member States should pay attention to the shortcomings in the approach of refugee and migration management from Afghanistan. The following sub-sections offer some guidelines to improve the mechanism in light of the issues highlighted in the above discussion.

5.1. Recommendations for the Government of Pakistan

1. Bearing in mind the protracted nature of displacement of Afghan refugees, and the ongoing volatile socio-political and security situation in Afghanistan, a policy approach focusing heavily on repatriation as a durable solution is bound to fail. With over 40 years of experience of hosting Afghan refugees, the lack of legislation is a glaring gap that requires priority concern. Although the hospitality of Pakistan towards Afghan refugees for over four decades has garnered international appreciation, Pakistan should learn from its own experience and improve the range of durable solutions offered to Afghan refugees. **The foremost need of a legislation related to the Afghan refugees is to overcome the issue of uncertainty created on their status in Pakistan**. Not being party to the international conventions related to refugees and lack of a national legislation on refugee management protocols prevents accountability of Pakistan in terms of human rights violations and responsibility sharing. A policy approach that renders Afghans in Pakistan in a legal limbo while focusing on repatriation in a tense security environment is not only against human rights, and the rights of refugees, but also detrimental towards Pakistan's efforts to manage the refugees. Devising legislation would also open up more avenues of international support for Pakistan for refugee management.

2. Related to the above point is also the realisation of the need for investing **in changing the policy paradigm from repatriation towards integration of refugees who are already in Pakistan**. In this vein, there is value in mainstreaming the aspect of immigrant integration in the national migration policy of Pakistan. Currently, the draft migration policy of Pakistan has a one-sided focus on emigration from Pakistan. However, a comprehensive national migration policy that not only speaks to the needs of Overseas Pakistanis, but also addresses the concerns and needs of immigrants living in Pakistan is of utmost importance. It should draw on the Foreigners' Act, but also elaborate more on the mechanisms in place or required for efficient integration of non-Pakistanis in the society, especially those residing on a refugee status.

3. Building on the above points, shortcomings in local integration of Afghans, especially for the younger Afghans, majority of whom have been born in Pakistan, is of dire policy concern. As mentioned earlier more than 65% of the Afghan population in Pakistan is under the age of 25 (Anadolou Agency, 2021). With the continuation of civil unrest and political instability in Pakistan, the circumstances are not ideal for them to return any time soon, despite the various repatriation programmes introduced. Therefore, an important aspect that warrants policy focus is also giving **a legal status to children born to Afghan refugees in Pakistan**. even if full citizenship is not awarded (despite being in violation of the Citizenship Act), basic rights such as the right to education, work, residence, as well as the right to own property shall be awarded to Afghans born in Pakistan.

4. Policy priority must be shifted towards integrating the educational and skills needs of these young Afghans in the national policy concern, rather than running parallel systems of social development for the Afghans and the locals. **Access to quality education for all Afghan refugee children of school-going age,** beyond just the primary years is not only essential for these young Afghans to find gainful employment and self-sustenance, but also develops their profile better for resettlement or migration to third countries, and even reintegration to Afghanistan. Moreover, in the short term, recognition of Afghan school certificates for those receiving education based on Afghan curriculum should also be part of the policy agenda. For higher education, the quota of Afghan students is at the behest of the provinces. While the quota system ensures the inclusion of certain "eligible" Afghans in the higher education institutes of Pakistan, a more inclusive approach would also minimise the eligibility criteria for Afghan students born and living in

Pakistan to access higher education. Special attention must also be diverted towards girls' education among the Afghan children in terms of access, quality, and learning outcomes. Through a coordinated approach, provincial governments should focus on reducing difficult eligibility requirements, and allow Afghan children to acquire education, regardless of their legal status.

5. **The most important aspect that deserves utmost policy concern is the right to work for Afghan refugees**. PoR cardholders only have temporary legal status and thus this does not guarantee access to lawful, safe, and permanent work opportunities for the Afghans residing in Pakistan. This creates a precarious situation for the Afghans in Pakistan where they do not have enough means to sustain themselves, nor the opportunities to find livelihoods. Obviously, this also creates an undue pressure on the host community when the barriers to accessing gainful employment makes them dependent not only on international humanitarian assistance but also on local resources without having their contributions accounted for. To cater to this, the Government of Pakistan should offer an explicit right to work to the Afghans in Pakistan. Lessons can be drawn from Ethiopia's case where although the right to work for refugees is constrained, self-employment opportunities have been created for refugees in partnership with UNHCR and ILO to promote self-reliance (Zetter & Ruaudel, 2016). Moreover, the example of Turkey and Jordan also provide notable lessons where refugees working in the informal economy were regularised (ibid.). Funding based training and skills programmes for livelihood activities would not be fruitful unless the beneficiaries are also provided with productive avenues to utilise those skills in a meaningful way.

   The introduction of smart PoR cards can be leveraged to make labour market assessments for Afghan residents in Pakistan. Permission to open bank accounts to the Afghans is a positive step, although it came very late. This right should also be complemented with access to micro-financing and right to own business for them to benefit from opportunities of self-employment.

   Moreover, while the principle of assisting host communities through projects for integration are well-intended and much needed, the need for avenues of productive employment and integration of Afghan refugees in the formal labour market would be much more beneficial for all parties at play (the Pakistani government, the host communities, the Afghans, as well as the international partners). Considering that 70% of the refugees, including the

PoR card holders, as well as ACC holders and the undocumented migrants live in cities, **an urban refugee management mechanism is much needed**. The Ministry of SAFRON should engage with the respective provincial governments that in turn should work in close coordination with the district governments and the UNHCR to look for durable solutions for effectively integrating the refugees in the urban societies. While the RAHA programme is a step in the positive direction, effective integration warrants an acceptance of refugees as equal members of the society with access to all the services and amenities that are available, without any prejudice and discrimination.

6. Moreover, for all the above points, **a prime aspect to consider is the ambiguity created by the different legal statuses and their varying validity durations**: PoR card holders, ACC holders, and undocumented Afghans. The close expiry dates and the delays in renewal further add ambiguity, making even the documented Afghan refugees and citizens live through an obscure legal framework with limited security of stay and livelihoods. Therefore, a holistic approach would be to issue long-term legal residency to Afghans in Pakistan to enable the government to develop a well-rounded policy for managing Afghans in Pakistan with a long-term perspective.

   Lastly, **there is a definite need of change in the narrative surrounding Afghan refugees and residents in Pakistan**. Political statements based on prejudice may fuel additional layers of discrimination that these vulnerable communities have to navigate through, and are detrimental to social cohesion. Behavioural barriers that hamper their access to labour markets such as abuse, harassment, and overly securitised outlook on their rights should be curbed through a change in the policy narrative. Political statements should avoid blaming refugees for the social evils and instead highlight the positive contributions of refugees. A paradigm shift in the dominant discourse relating to refugees should move away from portraying them as mere victims, and elucidate their agency and the positive contributions of refugees.

5.2. Recommendations for the International Partners

1. UNHCR, IOM and other development partners should **more openly provide information about relocation and resettlement to all refugees.** It is fair to provide balanced and ethical information about all the available options at hand for the protection of refugees, rather than a unidirectional policy

stance on repatriation. Based on the current scenario, voluntary repatriation is unlikely to occur at scale for the near future, making it even more important to consider options of integration and resettlement (Koser & Murphy, 2021). Moreover, the implementing partners should also ensure that resettlement information is provided to all vulnerable Afghan communities, including ethnic minority groups such as the Hazara community largely residing in Balochistan (Chattha, 2013).

2. Relatedly, the UN agencies and other intergovernmental organisations should also **urge the European governments to expand their resettlement quota.** Now is not the time for fortifying borders on the pre-text of national security. As per the principle of shared responsibility, financial assistance to developing countries is welcomed, but not sufficient to meet the needs of the Afghan people. Those fleeing conflict should have a chance at starting their lives in a safe environment and be self-reliant, rather than be at the behest of aid to meet their needs.

3. The UNHCR and other international implementing partners working in Pakistan should collaborate to **devise a strategy to urge the relevant government authorities, including the Ministry of SAFRON, to grant certain rights to the Afghans residing in Pakistan**. Of most relevance is the right to work, which would allow the Afghans in Pakistan to provide for themselves rather than be dependent on humanitarian assistance and precarious work arrangements. International agencies can also support by researching the labour market impacts of refugees, coupled with advocacy on the economic contributions of refugees in certain economic sectors and the overall national economy of the host country. Moreover, following the model of Jordan Compact, the international community can urge and support the Pakistani government in developing special economic zones, focusing on economic sectors of relevance to Pakistan's development objectives and job creation not only for the hosts, but also for the refugees (Ble et al., 2021).

4. An important avenue that that the international partners such as the UNHCR and IOM can work on is **to involve the private sector in Pakistan to create gainful employment opportunities and regulations for Afghan labour force in Pakistan**. The private sector can also be instrumental in lobbying for change in policy to allow the right to work to Afghan residents in Pakistan. Partnerships can also be sought with the World Bank and other trade related entities, including the provincial and district level chambers of commerce for participatory livelihood programmes, microfinance for small businesses and enterprises etc. for the Afghan refugees.

5. There is also a need for a **joint regional UN platform for streamlining humanitarian and technical assistance being provided to Afghans in the region**. This platform could be used to coordinate the support from the international community, including the governments of Europe. Issues concerning integration in host communities, resettlement options, and voluntary repatriation should be coordinated through this regional platform to devise a more comprehensive response to displacement in the region.
6. Moreover, the international development partners should redirect **more funds to projects that have high value for social inclusion of Afghan refugees in Pakistan and cohesion among the host and refugee communities.** Projects that have the potential of being scaled up should be prioritised.
7. The UNHCR and other development partners should also carry **out campaigns that highlight the contributions of Afghan refugees in Pakistan.** There is a dire need of change in terms of how Afghan refugees are viewed in the Pakistani society. Due to biased political statements, the image of Afghans is closely linked to security issues, even though these assumptions are often not backed by statistics. A more responsible role is required of people in high posts to dispense such baseless accusations. For this, relevant international development organisations could design a mass social attitude change programme to dispel the negative attitudes by debunking false correlations between terrorism and refugees, and highlighting how the refugee population have helped in terms of economic productivity, frontline services, and other heroic contributions.
8. International organisations should also **urge the wider international community not to stop aid and humanitarian assistance to the Afghans** who are stuck in Afghanistan or those chose to stay, including the internally displaced persons. Refusing to provide humanitarian assistance to the victims of conflict may result in another human catastrophe, to avoid which, all international actors should commit to continuing services in Afghanistan.

5.3. Recommendations for the EU and Member States

1. Ensure and improve contributions to support the Afghan refugees as per the principle of shared responsibility and fair share. **While assistance for humanitarian efforts is noteworthy, more investment is required for durable solutions, including in integration in the host communities as well as resettlement to third countries**, especially in view of the recent situation in

Afghanistan. Increased focus is required on resettlement to third countries by opening up more opportunities for displaced Afghans to resettle in European countries, coupled with an expedited application processing mechanism. A dedicated office post should be created at the EU Delegation in Pakistan to coordinate resettlement of Afghans from Pakistan to the EU Member States. Resettlement options should also be complemented with less complex and easier legal pathways to migration for Afghans.

2. A money+ approach is required from the international community, including the EU and Member States. The EU pledged a support package of 1 billion euros for helping the Afghan people and the neighbouring countries, while blocking development aid to Afghanistan itself (European Commission, 2021). Financial assistance provided to support voluntary repatriation should also be coupled with **investments in their home communities where the refugees intend to return**. Therefore, focus should also be placed on reconstruction in Afghanistan, as well as creation of livelihood opportunities for the repatriated refugees. Issue of recognition of the Taliban administration should not prevent the world from engaging with the Taliban constructively on issues of grave humanitarian concern. Regardless of recognition (or lack of) for the Taliban regime, engagement with the current Afghan administration is imperative to ensure humanitarian and rehabilitation assistance provided to Afghans in Afghanistan to prevent the risk of further protracted displacement. Such engagement should also focus on the need for universal distribution of humanitarian assistance to Afghans, including women and minorities.

3. Project funding to neighbouring countries, including Pakistan, **must focus on programmes on social inclusion and local integration, mobilising the government to devise a more comprehensive policy on integration of Afghans** who have been residing in Pakistan for over four decades. Investments in programmes such as RAHA should be continued to support the local host community in addition to the refugees to build a case for Pakistan's development through assisting the refugees. Lessons could be drawn from the Jordan Compact in which special economic zones were created focusing heavily on job creation for Syrian refugees (Ble et al., 2021). Lobbying should also be done with the Pakistani government to devise a national legislation on refugee management, and where needed, technical expertise should be provided, in addition to funds.

4. **European governments should also prevent rejection decisions on Afghan asylum application in Europe.** The conditions in Afghanistan are not

conducive for rejected asylum seekers to return. If neighbouring countries of Afghanistan are expected to take in more refugees, if need be, Europe should step up too and support those Afghans who reached Europe.

5. European government should respect **the right of Afghan refugees to obtain travel documents to avoid irregular migration**. Governments should consider waiving off visa requirements for vulnerable Afghans fleeing conflict, and remove restrictions on airlines that are helping Afghans to evacuate.
6. Europe should **reconsider its policy rhetoric around asylum seekers** in general, and Afghan asylum seekers in particular. People arriving from Afghanistan should be treated with dignity and respect, rather than a policy environment that stereotypes the asylum seekers, and adopts a stance that calls for "protection of European borders" instead of protection of humans displaced from conflict.

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