

**Working Paper #14**

**How Ethno-Religious Identity Influences the Living  
Conditions of Hazara and Pashtun Refugees  
in Peshawar, Pakistan**

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**August 2002**

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## **List of Acronyms**

CAR	Commissionerate of Afghan Refugees
GoP	Government of Pakistan
IRC	International Rescue Committee
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
NWFP	Northwest Frontier Province
PDA	Peshawar Development Authority
PMC	Peshawar Municipal Corporation
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
WFP	World Food Programme

# How Ethno-Religious Identity Influences the Living Conditions Of Hazara and Pashtun Refugees in Peshawar, Pakistan

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This paper examines how living conditions and settlement patterns differ between two ethnic groups belonging to the Afghan refugee population residing in Peshawar, Pakistan. Evidence from Peshawar suggests that the Pashtun, the largest and most dominant ethnic group in Afghanistan, migrate to the city largely in search of employment and/or because they no longer require humanitarian assistance. Approximately one-third of the Pashtuns interviewed had spent some time in a refugee village before settling in Peshawar. In contrast the Hazaras, among the weakest minority groups in Afghanistan, avoid refugee camps altogether. The Hazaras fear persecution in the refugee villages by other Afghans and choose to settle in cities almost immediately after entering Pakistan. Both groups, in almost equal number, cite the existence of family and friends in Peshawar as another reason for settling in Peshawar. Since refugee relief efforts are focused in refugee villages, Hazaras and other minorities living in cities tend to be excluded from aid. Relying on data collected from sixty interviews, the paper describes issues faced by both groups living in Peshawar. It concludes that organizations coordinating refugee relief efforts in Pakistan ought to consider how minority groups within the larger refugee population are affected by the concentration of humanitarian assistance in refugee villages. It argues that relief efforts sensitive to the ethno-religious identity and location of refugee can mitigate the hardships faced by those normally outside the scope of humanitarian assistance.

## I. Introduction

This paper is concerned with the relationship between refugee identity and the urbanization of cities hosting refugees. Specifically, it seeks to understand how the ethno-religious identity of Afghan refugees residing in Peshawar, Pakistan influences living conditions and settlement patterns in the city.

This paper challenges two generalizations regarding the plight of Afghan refugees. The first of these contends that Afghan refugees live in refugee villages. As of 2000, Pakistan hosted some 1.2 million refugees in more than 200 refugee villages strewn along the border with Afghanistan (UNHCR, 2000).<sup>2</sup> The number of Afghans in these villages and the conditions therein have

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<sup>2</sup> The figure of 1.2 million refugees in Afghanistan is believed by many to be an underestimate. One official from the Government of Pakistan's Commissionerate of Afghan Refugees stated during an interview that nearly two million refugees lived in the country. The media speculates that more refugees reside in Pakistan than mentioned by UNHCR. A news release from Agence France Press (23 February, 2001), for example, reports that in addition to 1.2 million refugees living in Pakistan, the country also hosts "an estimated two million illegal immigrants who fled Afghanistan during the anti-communist war in their homeland."

prompted non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and aid agencies to concentrate the distribution of food, the provision of basic health care and other humanitarian efforts in refugee villages. While this figure is staggering, the refugees residing in these villages are not reflective of the entire Afghan refugee population in Pakistan: a substantial segment of these refugees has settled in urban areas, outside designated refugee villages. The Government of Pakistan (GoP) estimates that in 1999 there were more Afghan refugees in urban areas than in refugee villages (UNHCR, 1999). Since aid is focused in refugee villages, Afghans living in cities are largely excluded from relief efforts.

The second generalization relates to how mainstream scholarship, until September 11th at least, overlooked differences in ethnicity or religious orientation within Afghan society. This generalization is especially troubling given that ethnic violence has fueled conflict in Afghanistan since the reign of Abdur Rahman (1880-1901). Even after the ouster of the Taliban, ethnic rivalries threatened to plunge Afghanistan into greater turmoil (Paracha, 2001).<sup>3</sup> This paper compares the living conditions of the Hazaras and the Pashtun ethnic groups in Peshawar and examines the interactions between them.

Given these challenges, the paper argues that urban areas are excluded from efforts to assist Afghan refugees in the Northwest Frontier Province (NWFP) of Pakistan. As a result, refugees belonging to ethnic minorities that fear living with others in refugee villages are unable to benefit from relief programs. The paper calls upon UNHCR and NGOs to better account for the differences in ethno-religious identity and location among refugee populations when distributing aid in order that those typically outside the scope of humanitarian assistance are also helped.

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<sup>3</sup> Attention to ethnic rivalry in Afghanistan has only recently come to the forefront of policy debates. Rubin et al. (2001), for example, assert that ethnic identities need consideration for reconstruction and peace-building. Mousavi (1997) adopts a historical view and traces anti-Hazara discrimination over time to bring attention to ethnic rivalry in Afghanistan. Human Rights Watch (2002) reports that the ethnic strife that existed in Afghanistan has been exported across the border. It cites that ethnic minorities among the Afghan population in Pakistan are not afforded protection in the country's Pashtun-dominated tribal areas.

## II. Research Design



Figure 1: Map of Pakistan<sup>4</sup>

### A. Why Choose Peshawar?

This paper is based on data collected in July and August 2001 from Afghan neighborhoods in Peshawar, Pakistan. The city is home to more than two million people and is the capital of Pakistan's NWFP. Peshawar is located approximately forty miles from the Afghan border and more than two hundred refugee villages are found in the city's environs (UNHCR, 2000). As a result, a slew of local and foreign NGOs have offices in the city. Its proximity to the border and the refugee villages makes Peshawar a gateway for Afghan refugees traveling to other regions of Pakistan. Refugees from Kabul and northeastern Afghanistan, for example, tend to stop in Peshawar first before moving to Sindh or Punjab in search of employment. Although the last census was taken in 1980, the Peshawar Municipal Corporation (PMC) estimates that more than two million people live in the city today. Of these, the PMC believes, 25-50% are Afghan. Map 1 illustrates the location of Peshawar in relation to the rest of the country and Afghanistan.

### B. Definitions

The term "living conditions" refers to the physical characteristics of dwellings housing refugees (e.g., the number of rooms relative to family size) as well as the social welfare of refugees (e.g., problems with the police). Admittedly, the term is broad and demands that attention be paid to a range of variables including *inter alia* access to education and employment. The paper only

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<sup>4</sup> Source: CIA World Factbook <<http://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/geos/pk.html>>.

touches on some of these issues and its investigation is by no means exhaustive. The aim of the paper is to enumerate the problems facing urban refugees rather than conduct in-depth analyses of these hardships.

This paper shares Glatzer's (1998) view that ethnicity encompasses principles of both social order and social boundary. Thus, ethnicity is defined by how one categorizes oneself and others within social units. Ethnic groups a) comprise both genders and all age groups, and transcend generations; b) have distinctive cultural qualities by which the members of that unit would differ from comparable neighboring units; c) exist where members identify themselves and their families with the past and future of that unit; and d) are established when members and neighbors are given a name (*ethnonym*) and are not sub-units of other ethnic groups.

This definition coincides with Yelvington's (1991) understanding that ethnicity is an aspect of social relationships among agents who consider themselves culturally distinct from members of other groups with whom they have a minimum of regular interaction. In this sense, ethnicity—at least as it used in this report—is defined as a social identifier based on contrasts with others groups. In this regard, when cultural discrepancies regularly make a difference in the interaction between members of groups, the social relationship has an ethnic element. Ethnicity also refers both to aspects of gain and loss in interaction, and to aspects of meaning in the creation of identity. In this way, it possesses a political, organizational characteristic as well as a symbolic one (Eriksen, 1993).

The term “ethno-religious identity” adds an extra, but necessary, layer of complexity to the research. The term reflects the fact that within Afghan society, ethnicity can indicate religious orientation. Most members of the Hazara ethnic group, for example, adhere to Shi'a Islam. Pashtuns, on the other hand, tend to follow Sunni Islam. The difference in relative power of each group is even more pronounced given that Shi'as comprise only 15% of the world's Muslim population. This paper contends that the religious affiliation of refugees influences how they interact with other ethnic groups.

### **C. Methodology**

The data collected concern two ethnic groups and are comparative in nature. They investigate the condition of a) Hazara refugees, traditionally the weakest group economically and politically within Afghan society; and b) Pashtun refugees, the largest and strongest ethnic group in Afghanistan and the NWFP. The Pashtun have dominated Afghan political circles since the eighteenth century. The Taliban, the family of King Zahir Shah, and current President Hamid Karzai, for instance, are composed of Pashtun tribesman from southern Afghanistan. This report uses the Hazara-Pashtun relationship as a proxy for ethnic discrimination in Peshawar. By framing the research in terms of the ethnic difference between the most powerful and the most vulnerable groups, the data are defined by differences struck along ethnic lines. In this way, the contrast in the data is easier to interpret and analyze.

The heart of the research is based on data collected from a total of sixty interviews—thirty from each ethnic group. These interviews are supplemented by interviews with government officials at both the national and local level; foreign and Pakistani NGO officers; as well as observations



made during my two months in Peshawar. The synthesis of these three methods form the bulk of the research.

Two translators were needed for this research: a) a Hazara fluent in Dari; and b) a Pashtun fluent in Pashto. Besides the difficulty in finding a single translator able to communicate in both languages, the animosity between ethnic groups prevents Hazaras from providing forthcoming responses to questions posed by Pashtuns and vice versa.

In Peshawar, Afghan neighborhoods are based along ethnic lines. Afghan Uzbeks, for instance live in certain sections of the city in the same way that Hazaras live in well-demarcated neighborhoods. Pashtuns, since they form the majority in the NWFP, can be found throughout the city. To interview Hazaras, we visited three known Hazara neighborhoods, namely Sikander Town, Gharib Abad and Haji Camp. Typically, we approached Hazaras in shops and on the streets asked if they would oblige us with an interview. We were often invited to interview refugees in their stores and homes. The duration of each interview was approximately twenty minutes. The Pashtuns we interviewed were found using the same method in areas contiguous to Hazara neighborhoods. All the interviewees were male as Afghan culture discouraged us from speaking with women.

The two types of questions characterize the interviews: a) short-answer closed questions (for example, when did you leave Afghanistan? And how many rooms in your home?) were used to “break the ice”; and b) complicated, open-ended inquiries (for example, how did you find your current home? And why did you move?). With the latter set of questions, interviewees grew more candid, recounting stories of interactions with property dealers, the police, and landlords. The interviews returned both quantitative and qualitative responses. These have been compiled in summary tables and can be found in Section Five of the paper.

The research also sought the opinion of officials in the Commissionerate of Afghan Refugees (CAR), the Peshawar Municipal Corporation (PMC) and the Peshawar Development Authority (PDA). Interviews with government officials provided insights into Officialdom’s attitude regarding the influx of Afghans in urban areas. Their interviews represent an effort to reflect the dominant State perspective towards the economic impact of and lawlessness often attributed to Afghans. This aspect of the research is critical as it sets the general framework for studying the refugee crisis in Peshawar and its policy responses.

While responses from government officials provided an overall understanding of refugee issues in Peshawar, interviews with UNHCR and NGOs allowed for a view into the everyday realities of disbursing aid. Since the orientation of NGOs differs from that of public agencies, their perspective completes the picture describing the difficulties faced by urban refugees and what can be done to improve their socio-economic status. UNHCR and the NGOs were invaluable resources in accessing refugees. FOCUS Humanitarian Assistance (Pakistan) was especially helpful in locating Hazara neighborhoods in Peshawar. Generally, the officials within government agencies and NGOs did not view Afghan refugees as a group stratified by ethnic division.

#### **D. Limitations**

The research took place exclusively in Peshawar, Pakistan. Thus, the results obtained are specific to ethnic dynamics of the city. The condition of the Hazaras in Peshawar, for example, likely differs from that of Hazaras in Quetta. In the latter case, Hazaras are aligned with the local

Baluchis to compete for political power with Pashtuns. No such relationship exists in Peshawar. Nevertheless, the lessons learnt can be generalized and are relevant to other refugee situations.

Due to the limited time spent in Peshawar, I conducted only sixty interviews. The data collected are therefore indicative rather than representative. In this sense, the research serves as a stepping-stone for future research interested in the relationship between ethno-religious identity and the disbursement of aid. As mentioned above, I yielded to cultural norms and did not interview women at all. The gender perspective is therefore absent from this analysis. Future research ought to incorporate the views of female refugees. In such crises, women are often the most vulnerable and can offer a different perspective on how programs can better serve their needs.

The methodological technique employed is biased against the poorest among the Afghan refugee population in Peshawar. Arranging interviews with those found in shops and on the street excluded refugees engaged in day labor or construction work. The poorest and weakest segments of the Afghan refugees in Pakistan are often entirely dependent on the Government of Pakistan, UNHCR, NGOs, and private charity for their survival. These segments have been overlooked in the research.

The benefit in pitting the Hazaras against the Pashtuns is that differences in responses are pronounced and easily recognized. The limitation in this method however lies in extrapolating the responses of Hazaras and Pashtuns to other ethnic groups such as the Tajiks and the Uzbeks. Thus, no attempt has been made to differentiate the gray areas within the relationship between ethnicity and aid.

The last and most significant limitation is related to the change in the extent and attitude of Afghan refugees since the removal of the Taliban in 2001. I have tried to include these recent developments in my analysis but since little attention is given to urban refugees in the first place, it has been difficult to find data (other than anecdotal) that relate the rate at which urban Afghan refugees are repatriating or whether it is happening at all.

### III. The Major Ethnic Groups in Afghanistan

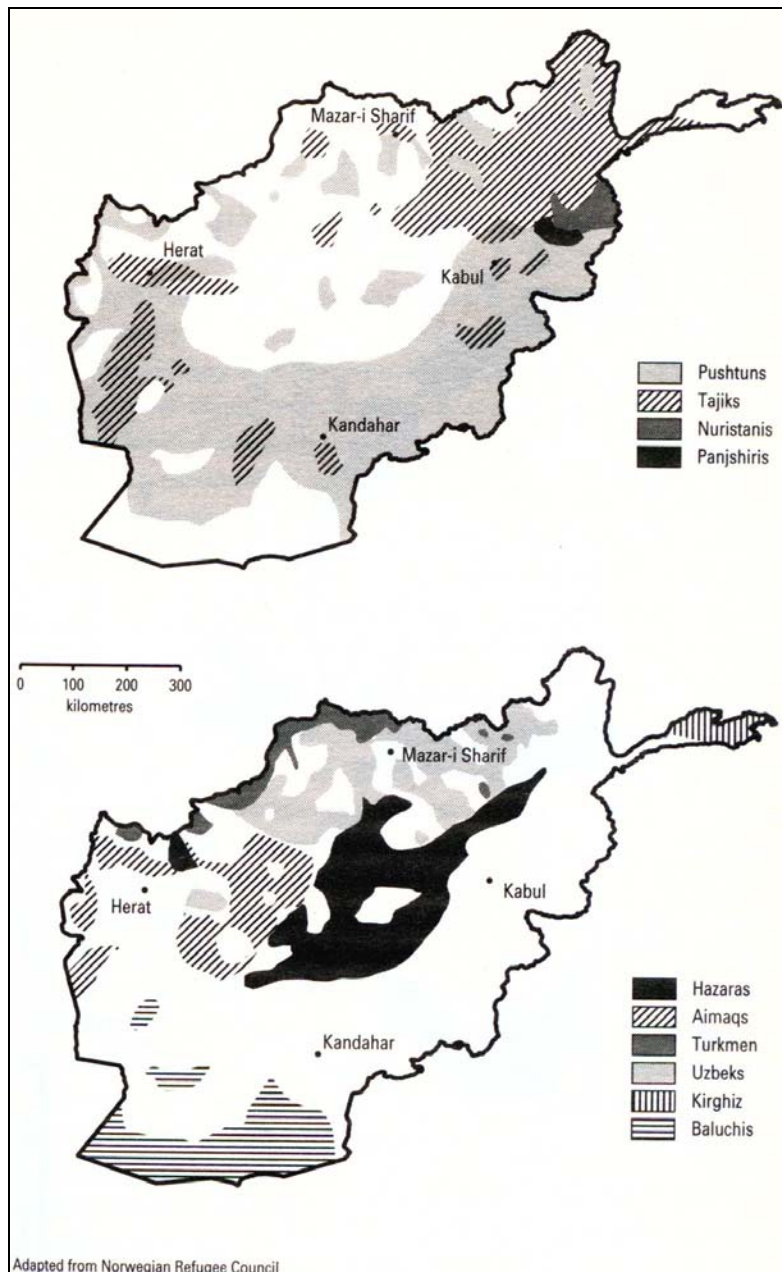


Figure 3: Map of Major Ethnic Groups in Afghanistan<sup>5</sup>

Afghanistan is as ethnically, linguistically and religiously diverse as any other country in the region. The Afghan population is composed of Pashtun tribes, Tajik villagers, Uzbek and Hazara clans. These groups constitute about 50%, 26%, 8% and 7% of the population respectively. Smaller ethnic groups comprise the remainder of the population (Ahady, 1995). Map 2 shows the geographic distribution of Afghanistan's various ethnic groups.

<sup>5</sup> Source: Marsden (1998), pg. ix.

## A. Tajiks

In the north, the Tajik, Uzbek and Turcomen populations share a common Turkic history and affiliate themselves with the Central Asian countries of Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, and Turkmenistan. The Tajiks form the second largest group in Afghanistan. Labeling them as an ethnic group however involves expanding our definition. There exists no recognizable cultural, social or political boundary between the Tajiks and other groups in the country. Tajiks, when asked to identify themselves, responded by naming their valley, area or town (Glatzer, 1998). Often, the term “Tajik” is used to differentiate between those who do not belong to a tribal society, who speak Persian and who are mostly Sunni. Tajiks live all over the country: in larger cities they form majorities or important minorities. Most of the people in the provinces north of Kabul are called Tajik and in almost all Pashtun provinces there are important Tajik pockets (Glatzer, 1998).

## B. Uzbeks

The Uzbeks are centered around Mazar-e Sharif in Northern Afghanistan. They speak a Turkish dialect, adhere to Sunni Islam and unlike the Tajiks, are organized in tribes and clans. The Uzbeks in Afghanistan can be grouped according to their arrival in the country. Some Afghan Uzbeks are autochthonous, having lived in Northern Afghanistan for centuries. The second group of Uzbeks migrated to Afghanistan after the expansion of Tsarist Russia or when Uzbekistan was made a republic of the Soviet Union. These later Uzbek migrants disassociate themselves from their native Afghan cousins and have formed a distinctive sub-group under the name *Muhajerin* (literally, refugees) (Glatzer, 1998).

The relationship between the Uzbeks and Tajiks in Afghanistan is characterized by careful cooperation and crafted from the recognition of a common enemy. Both groups found themselves together on the frontlines during the Afghan-Soviet war. Under the leadership of Abdul Rashid Dostam, the Uzbeks *Mujahideen* (commonly equated with “holy warriors”) fought alongside the Tajik militia of Ahmed Shah Masoud as well as other resistance groups to fend off the Soviets.<sup>6</sup> The withdrawal of the Soviets in 1989 created a schism among the Mujahideen forces: Dostam supported Dr. Najibullah’s Soviet-backed government, while Masoud and Burhanuddin Rabbani (the former Afghan president), both of whom are Tajik, opposed him. Allied with other Mujahideen groups, the Najibullah regime became the target of Masoud’s attacks. Without the military prowess of Dostam, the Najibullah’s government would have crumbled under Masoud’s barrage. The turning point in the conflict over control of Afghanistan came when Dostam betrayed Najibullah in 1992 to join forces with the Tajiks to conquer Kabul. With the advent of the Taliban from southern Afghanistan, Dostam and his Uzbek troops aligned themselves with the Tajiks, the Hazaras, and others to form the anti-Taliban Northern Alliance.

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<sup>6</sup> With reference to Afghanistan, Muhajideen refers to those Afghans who defended the country from the Soviets from 1979-1989. Literally, Muhajideen are those that engage in  *Jihad*  – “an effort directed towards a determined objective” (Tyan, 1965, pg. 538). Islam recognizes two forms of  *Jihad* : a) a greater  *Jihad*  which is an effort upon oneself to attain moral and religious perfection; and b) a more commonly used lesser  *Jihad*  which entails military action with the objective of expanding or defending Islam.

### C. Hazaras

A study of the Hazaras provides an interesting contrast in the analysis of Afghanistan's ethnic groups. Their Shi'a beliefs isolate them to the extent that they effectively constitute an island in a sea of Sunni Islam. Likewise, their facial features easily distinguish them from the Afghan populace, making them an easy target for discrimination. Hazaras have Asiatic features while the Pashtun and other Afghans appear "Persian". The majority of Hazaras are located in the mountainous region of central Afghanistan.

Until the Afghan-Soviet war, Hazaras were organized into disparate tribes and clans. Iran's support to the Mujahideen was directed to Afghan Shi'as, in particular the Hazaras. In 1988, with the Soviet withdrawal imminent, Iran viewed backing the Hazaras as a means to gain sway in Afghanistan's internal politics and counterbalance Saudi Arabia's support for anti-Shi'a/pro-Sunni groups. Through the promise of financial assistance, Iran coaxed Shi'a Hazara tribes to coalesce into the *Hezb-e Wahdat* (Party of Unity). The unified Hazara front contributed enormously to the Northern Alliance, winning Mazar-e Sharif from the Taliban in 1997. The formation of the Hezb-e Wahdat has also cemented the Hazara tribes into a singular cohesive unit, a structure that has never been witnessed in the Hazarjat before (Rashid, 2000).

### D. Pashtuns

The Pashtun comprise the dominant ethnic group in the country. They number between 15 and 20 million. There are as many Pashtun tribesmen in Pakistan as there are in Afghanistan (Glatzer, 1998). Of those Pashtuns living in Afghanistan, most inhabit the southern part of the country in an arc circling the Hazara heartland and incorporating Kabul, Kandahar and Herat. The Pashtuns subdivide themselves into thousands of tribes along a genealogical charter. An elaborate tribal system; possession of *Pashto*, their own language; and adherence to *Pashtunwali*, a distinct code of values and norms, make ethnic identity for Pashtuns straightforward and clear cut.

Traditionally, Pashtuns have dominated the Afghan political arena. Pashtun political primacy can be traced to the Durrani Empire (1747-1818). The Empire represented the first time the Pashtun tribes were brought under the control of a single political center. Pashtun tribal levies constituted the backbone of the Empire's military force. As such, the State treated the Pashtun, especially its Durrani faction, preferentially compared to other subjects. At this time, the Pashtuns were the major recipients of State largess in the distribution of land. The Durrani Empire marks the beginning of Pashtun military, political, and economic dominance in Afghanistan.<sup>7</sup> Even as the Empire disintegrated, Afghanistan in ethnic terms was predominantly a Pashtun country. Intra-dynastic conflict among the Pashtuns however meant that the central government had minimal

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<sup>7</sup> The term "Afghan" is itself a Pashtun construct related to Pashtun tribal affinities. In some sense, "Afghanistan" can literally be translated to the "land of the Afghans", the "land of the Pashtuns". Even today, ethnic groups in the country equate "Afghan" with Pashtun and "Afghani" for their language (Tapper, 1984). The use of "Afghanistan" to identify the entire country therefore signals a monopoly of power and an imposition of Afghan identity on non-Pashtuns. Simultaneously, the term denies the identities of other ethnic groups in the country. For this reason, ethnic minorities have historically never accepted "Afghanistan" as the name of the country.

control over the various regions. Nevertheless, in this period the Pashtun were the only contenders for power and in ethnic relations, the military and political their dominance was indisputable (Ahady, 1995).

#### **IV. Afghans in Pakistan**

Understanding the circumstances that pushed Afghans to seek refuge in Pakistan provides an insight into their status in the country. Most comments concerning the history of Afghan refugees in Pakistan begin with the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979. Although this event is a common logical starting point for many historical analyses, it does not represent the first instance of Afghans crossing into Pakistan. Dupree and Dupree (1988), for example, report that even before the communist coup of Kabul in 1978, more than 75,000 Afghans crossed the Pakistan border annually. In addition, the drawing of the 1893 Durand Line effectively halved the Pashtun tribes and families along the border. Many Pashtuns in Peshawar, for instance, have family members in adjacent Jalalabad. Ethnic congruity therefore explains some of transborder migration.

The Soviet invasion in 1979 spurred massive flows of Afghans to western Pakistan. At its height, more than 3.5 million Afghans sought refuge in Pakistan. The GoP, though not a signatory of the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, chose to host Afghans for multiple reasons: a) on religious grounds, Pakistan felt duty-bound to aid fellow Muslims; b) the ethnic (mostly Pashtun) bonds made NWFP residents sympathetic to and supportive of the Afghan struggle; c) the GoP gained from the aid provided by Saudi Arabia and the Gulf States, which saw the Afghan-Soviet confrontation in terms of ideological conflict between Islam and godlessness; and d) the GoP viewed the acceptance of aid from the West as a way to defray the cost of hosting Afghans as well as an opportunity to form strategic partnerships with the United States and Europe.<sup>8</sup>

At the climax of the Soviet-Afghan war, the GoP established nearly 400 refugee villages on its soil. These villages served as safe havens for refugees as well as bases from which the Mujahideen could launch anti-Soviet resistance. The Mujahideen organized themselves along ethnic and tribal lines. Refugee villages in Pakistan came to reflect this structure and each Mujahideen group became affiliated with a particular refugee village.

The geopolitical importance of the Soviet-Afghan war distinguished the Afghan refugee crisis from other refugee situations in the world. The unique nature of the conflict spawned this dual-purpose refugee village and compelled the GoP to treat Afghans refugees differently from the way other governments tend to. As a testament to this, refugee villages in Pakistan were not situated far from the city; nor were they enclosed by fences; nor did the GoP prevent Afghans from mingling with the local population or finding employment. Nasir Bagh Camp, for example, was one of the first camps created in Pakistan and is located only a few kilometers from the center of Peshawar.

The Soviet retreat in 1989 created uncertainty in Afghanistan. Mujahideen groups who had been fighting for a decade now faced the prospect of governing the country. Although the Soviets installed Dr. Najibullah as President, he held little authority outside Kabul: Mujahideen groups

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<sup>8</sup> Matthew (2001) reports that the GoP received more than three billion dollars from the Central Intelligence Agency to support anti-Soviet forces.

viewed his administration as an extension of Soviet influence in Afghanistan. As a result, the Najibullah administration was plagued by violence throughout its term. The heavily armed Mujahideen vied for power and sought to carve out fiefdoms for themselves in the country. Inevitably, fighting among the Mujahideen groups ensued, enlarging the gulf between Afghanistan's ethnic groups. Although the Afghans had rid themselves of the Soviets, violence and lawlessness in the country worsened. In spite of this civil strife, Pashtuns returned to Afghanistan marking the first wave of repatriation.

The Taliban came to power in Kandahar in 1994 and took control of Kabul in 1996. Their strict adherence to Islamic Law temporarily neutralized the chaos that marred Afghanistan after the departure of the Soviets. At first, people welcomed the Taliban; they were seen as a stabilizing presence and a solution to the violence that had grown common in the country. At these early stages, the Taliban were not simply a religious force but an ethnic one as well: the Taliban leadership comprised members from a handful of Pashtun tribes from southern Afghanistan.

For the Taliban, Islam became a legitimizing tool. Religion became a means to return peace to Afghanistan and it is for this reason that the Pashtun in Kandahar's environs initially embraced the movement. As the Taliban moved north, they encountered religious and ethnic minorities and competed with them for regional control. The success of the Taliban in quickly gaining control of Afghanistan can to some extent be attributed to outside sponsorship. Saudi Arabia and the Gulf States, for example, favored the creation of an Islamic State and supported Taliban efforts to this end. The GoP, on the other hand, saw the Taliban as their ticket to bolstering regional influence and increasing strategic depth. Control over Afghanistan provided the GoP a route to access Muslim states in Central Asia, to offset the influence of Iran in the region, and to secure a training ground and troops for the ongoing conflict with India over Kashmir. The momentum of the Taliban in the other parts of Afghanistan translated into a shift in the ethnic composition of Afghan refugees: Pashtuns repatriated, but soon returned to Pakistan with Tajiks, Hazaras, Uzbeks and other minorities in search of refuge from the fighting and drought in northern Afghanistan.

## **V. Findings<sup>9</sup>**

### **A. Background**

This section reveals differences in living conditions among Hazara and Pashtun Afghan refugees living in Peshawar. Quantitative data are presented in summary tables and are supported by qualitative data garnered from interviews conducted in July and August 2001 with thirty Hazaras and thirty Pashtuns.

The GoP reversed its attitude towards Afghan refugees after the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan. In view of its pivotal role in thwarting Communism in the region, GoP officials claim that the West, and in particular the US, fell short in its promise to support Pakistani interests in the international arena—especially regarding its dispute with India over Kashmir. Moreover, no one predicted that Afghans would remain the world's largest refugee caseload for more than twenty years. In spite of throngs of refugees in Pakistan, foreign funding for Afghan refugees slowed to a trickle, leaving the GoP the burden of caring for millions of refugees. Government

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<sup>9</sup> Interview questions are listed in the Appendix

officials added that Pakistan itself was a poor country and that without foreign aid, it was in no position to care for Afghan refugees. At the local level, officials from the PMC and PDA blamed urban refugees for rising crime in Peshawar; the strain in municipal services, such as garbage collection and the provision of water; pollution and environmental degradation; as well as taking jobs away from local Pakistanis. These effects prompted the GoP to suspend the distribution of identity cards to Afghan refugees in 1995, to tighten border controls, as well as to initiate a screening process in Summer 2001.<sup>10</sup> Effectively, these measures criminalized Afghans seeking refuge in Pakistan. The GoP refusal to issue identity cards, for instance, was tantamount to rendering the entry of Afghan refugees illegal.

## **B. Hazaras Do Not Reside in Refugee Villages**

Although more than 200 refugee villages still exist in the NWFP, the inhabitants do not reflect the ethnic diversity of the Afghan exodus. Villages are organized along ethnic lines and are often dominated by Pashtun tribesmen. Smatterings of Tajik and Uzbeks are also found in these villages, but only in demarcated enclaves within the villages. Hazaras avoid the refugee villages altogether. Of the thirty Hazaras interviewed, only one claimed to have spent any time in a refugee village. In contrast, one-third of the Pashtuns interviewed had stayed in a refugee village before settling in Peshawar.<sup>11</sup> Table 1 shows the disparity among Hazaras and Pashtuns Afghans regarding their arrival in the country and housing conditions. The distinctive facial features of Hazaras immediately identify them as a non-Pashtun and therefore as supporters of the Northern Alliance. The brutalities experienced on both sides of Afghanistan’s civil war continue to weigh heavily on the minds of Afghan refugees. It is this remembrance that feeds animosity between ethnic groups in Peshawar. In general, the Hazaras fear that living in a village would render them targets of ethnic discrimination or violence. Curiously, Pashtuns did not voice this concern in interviews.

**Table 1: Arrival and Housing Conditions Data of Hazaras and Pashtuns**

	<b>Hazara</b>	<b>Pashtun</b>
Percentage Who Have Spent Some Time in a Refugee Village	3%	33%
Median Year of Arrival in Pakistan	1997	1991
Average Length of Stay in Current Dwelling (Months)	20.8	55.1
Average Number of People per Dwelling	29.9	15.0
Average Number of Families per Dwelling	3.8	1.9
Number of People per Room	7.0	5.0

Hazaras also worry about the potential for religious violence. Since their ethnicity identify them as Shi’as, Pashtuns and other Sunni Muslims perceive them as heterodox or, worse, “infidels”.

<sup>10</sup> The decision to halt the distribution of identity cards, a CAR official notes, coincided with a UN-World Food Programme policy to discontinue food aid in refugee villages. The GoP interpreted the WFP position to mean that Afghan refugees had achieved self-sufficiency and no longer required assistance from international agencies or the GoP for that matter.

<sup>11</sup> International Rescue Committee (IRC) surveys on population characteristics in Jalozi (2001a) and Nasir Bagh (2001b) camps confirm the assertion that Hazaras do not stay in refugee villages. Of the 328 respondents in Jalozi and 231 respondents in Nasir Bagh, the IRC did not come across any Hazaras.



Although Shi'as exist within other ethnicities as well, the notion that all Hazaras are Shi'as is well engrained among Afghans. Other groups are able to mask their religious orientation with their ethnicity to avoid confrontations with over-zealous Sunnis, but the Hazaras are unable to do so. Refugee villages are, therefore, not a viable option for Hazaras. Instead, the latter are forced to seek refuge in Pakistan's urban centers. Although no accurate figure exists, the Hazaras interviewed estimate that approximately 5,000 Hazara families live in Peshawar.

Whatever the nature of the movement or legal status of persons of concern to UNHCR in urban areas, the overriding priority of the Office of the High Commissioner remains to ensure their protection (Obi and Crisp, 2001). In spite of the clarity in the UNHCR mandate, the Office of the High Commissioner and its NGO partners focus the bulk of their efforts in refugee villages, leaving refugees living outside villages to fend for themselves. The absence of aid for refugees residing in cities further reinforces the GoP notion that refugees living in Peshawar and elsewhere are self-sufficient, undeserving of assistance and existing as economic migrants.

### **C. Differences in Settlement**

The Soviet invasion in 1979 first prompted Afghans to seek refuge in Pakistan. The Soviet withdrawal ten years later encouraged Pashtuns to repatriate temporarily. The 1991 arrival of Pashtuns in Peshawar reflects the second wave of refugee inflows in the country. The instability and fighting among rival Mujahideen groups in Afghanistan forced Pashtuns to flee again. Some of the Pashtuns interviewed had not returned to Afghanistan at all: one-fifth of those interviewed had lived in Pakistan since the early 1980s. Not until the Taliban captured Kabul in 1996 and moved northwards, did Hazaras seek refuge in Pakistan. The median year of arrival in Pakistan for Hazaras was 1997.

The difference in the year arrived in Pakistan partially explains why the average length of the stay in Pashtun homes is longer than that of Hazaras. This variable is used as an indicator of stability. Households that frequently move and change houses are likely to suffer transaction costs and be uprooted from social networks. In contrast, immobility denotes satisfaction with one's home and a general level of comfort. On average, Hazaras remained in the same house for nearly twenty-one months, while the figure for Pashtuns was more than double.

Afghans tend to live in extended families where parents share homes with the immediate families of their children. This social pattern is both a product of culture and a means to economize. Hazara households on average number nearly thirty individuals and are twice as large as Pashtun households. Dwellings in Peshawar are typically single units comprising one floor. Three or four 8 ft. x 6 ft. rooms are found in each house along with a shared bathroom, kitchen and foyer. Usually, one room is allocated for each nuclear family. The data indicate that Hazaras live in tighter quarters than their Pashtun counterparts. With two families per home, the Pashtun are able to rent out extra rooms or enjoy the added space. On average, Hazara nuclear families are two family members larger than Pashtun families, which means that individual rooms are crowded in comparison.

Refugees are not permitted to own property in Pakistan. Most Afghans therefore rent housing from Pakistani landlords. The interviews however revealed that Pashtuns are able to circumvent this

stipulation. The PDA estimates that more than 20% of the Afghans living in Peshawar own housing in the city. Three strategies exist for Pashtuns to acquire housing in Pakistan: a) Pashtuns are able to purchase housing under the name of a Pakistani relative; b) Afghan males marry local Pashtun women and are able to purchase land in their wife’s name; and c) informal partnerships are formed between well-to-do Afghans and poorer Pakistanis. In this case, a local signs his name to a title deed for a fee and in return, the Afghan is able to keep a house. Due to the illegality of these transactions, the rate of Afghan land ownership is likely an underestimate. This phenomenon challenges the notion that refugees are, for the most part, poor.

#### **D. Differences Regarding the Perceived Problems of Living in Peshawar**

Afghan Pashtuns have been able to integrate into Pakistani society better than any other ethnic group. The time spent in the country has enabled them to adapt their Pashto to the Pakistani dialect such that locals find it difficult to identify refugees. In Peshawar, Hazaras are easily pegged as Afghan and do not have the ethnic ties enjoyed by the Pashtun. While the latter are able to own land, albeit illegally, Hazaras are forced to find housing via a property dealer and/or to rent housing from Pakistani Pashtuns. More than 70% of the Hazaras interviewed pay rent to Pakistani Pashtun landlords. The Hazaras incur the cost of paying commissions to landlords and property dealers that some Pashtuns do not face at all. In fact, more than half of the Hazaras interviewed cite conflicts with landlords as a problem associated with living in the city. They claim that Pakistani Pashtun landlords tend to break rental agreements with Hazara tenants because they would rather rent to other Pashtuns. On the whole, rental contracts are perceived to be the prerogative of landlords. Even if such contracts are breached, tenants feel they have no legal recourse. Table 2 illustrates perceived problems faced by both Hazaras and Pashtuns living in Peshawar.

**Table 2: Perceived Problems Facing Hazaras and Pashtuns Living in Peshawar**

<b>What are the Problems you Face in Peshawar?</b>	<b>Hazara</b>	<b>Pashtun</b>
Problems with the Police (Bribery, Fear of Deportation, Police Aggression, etc.)	73%	30%
Ethnic Discrimination – “Hazaras are Easy to Recognize”	37%	0%
I Have No Legal Status in Peshawar/I am at the Whim of the Authorities	17%	0%
I am Having Trouble Finding Work	47%	3%
It is Difficult to Find a House/ I Have Problems with the Landlord	57%	20%
I Find Peshawar is too Expensive	0%	17%
I Have No Problems in Peshawar	3%	37%

The notion that Hazaras are more easily recognized as refugees than the Pashtuns manifests itself in most aspects of city life. For instance, 73% of Hazaras remarked that problems with the local police are a major disruption in their lives. Typically, the police stop refugees on the road and ask to see their identity cards in an attempt to prove their illegal entry in the country. Many interviewees see the threat of deportation by the police as a ploy to extract bribes from refugees. Many Hazaras, because they arrived in the country in 1997 and the GoP terminated the distribution of identity cards in 1995, do not have authentic identity cards (identity cards are easily forged). They are prime targets for this sort of discrimination. At the same time, the Hazaras interviewed argue that holding real identity cards is moot: the police either disregard genuine identity cards altogether or find other ways to harass Hazara refugees.

Hazaras are aware of the tenuous nature of their legal status in the country. In identifying the problems they encounter in Peshawar, 17% of Hazaras explained how the lack of legal standing in Pakistan leaves them at the mercy of the police and public authorities in Pakistan. Pashtuns did not articulate this concern and only 30% mentioned having problems with the police.

Regarding public utilities, the Hazaras interviewed claimed that they were often charged commercial rates for electricity and water. Since more than 60% of Hazaras are involved in the carpet industry and weave from home (see below) the authorities categorize them as factories and charge them correspondingly. Because Hazaras seldom paid these rates, the harassment they underwent often included the shutting off of public utilities. The Pashtuns interviewed had no such experience.

By and large, the Hazaras interviewed had more complaints about living in Peshawar than their Pashtun counterparts. Only 3% (1 out of 30) claimed to have no problems with living in Peshawar whatsoever. In contrast, nearly 40% of the Pashtuns sampled were able to make the same assertion.

### **E. Hazaras and the Carpet Industry in Peshawar**

The motivations behind coming to Peshawar also differ among Hazaras and Pashtuns. Table 3 illustrates that the existence a social network in the city is the biggest draw for both groups. However, relative to the Pashtuns, Hazaras view social networks as doubly important.

**Table 3: Motivations for Coming to Peshawar**

<b>Why Did You Come to Peshawar?</b>	<b>Hazara</b>	<b>Pashtun</b>
I Came to Work in the Carpet Industry	20%	0%
I Could Not Afford to Move Elsewhere in Pakistan	13%	13%
I Came to Find Other Work	17%	13%
My Relatives Lived in Peshawar or the Surrounding Refugee Villages	53%	27%
The City is Close to my Home Afghanistan	17%	23%

The prospect of finding work entices both groups to settle in the city. Among Hazaras, the carpet industry is especially luring. Although more than 60% of the Hazaras interviewed are involved in some aspect of the carpet industry, 20% settled in Peshawar expressly for that reason. Save marketing and sales, Pashtuns tend not to be involved in Pakistan’s thriving carpet industry. The work is tedious, and Pashtun lack the experience in pattern making, weaving, and dyeing.

The carpet industry in Pakistan is not new. While the Punjab and Sindh have been traditional centers for “Persian-style” carpets in the country, carpet exports have been stagnating or have declined since 1995 as a result of competition with India and China. The arrival of the Hazaras and Uzbeks in Peshawar in 1997 is responsible for inserting “Afghan-style” into the market and thereby, invigorating the industry in the country and making the NWFP the world capital for the production of Afghan carpets. From 1995-96 to 1998-99, Pakistan’s carpet exports hovered at nearly \$200 million. In 1999-2000, Pakistan exported \$265 million worth of carpets (Abbas, 2001). Similarly, carpet exports from the NWFP amounted to \$19 million in 1995-96 but jumped to \$130 million in 2000-01 (Frontier Post, 2001).

The relationship between the arrival of carpet-making Afghans in Pakistan and the boost in country's export market has not gone unnoticed by the GoP. Recognizing the comparative advantage it holds over India, Iran, Turkey and other carpet exporters in hosting Hazaras and Uzbeks, the GoP has established three "carpet towns" near Peshawar. These carpet towns will serve as training institutes for local Pakistanis as well as production centers where each facet of carpet making—from pattern design to the finishing chemical treatment of carpets—will take place. Besides systematizing how carpets are made in Peshawar, the carpet towns are a means to control the movement of urban refugees in Pakistan. Only those Afghans affiliated with the government-sponsored carpet towns will be granted permission to reside in Pakistan: the remainder will be forced to return to Afghanistan. Under the stipulations of this GoP policy, carpet town workers are required to live on site, effectively removing them from the social networks they have built in Peshawar. The idea of linking carpet production with permission to stay in Pakistan is partially in response to the offers made to Afghans by India and Iran to grant citizenship to carpet weavers.<sup>12</sup>

PMC officials believe that the establishment of carpet towns has a number of positive consequences. Currently, carpet weavers in Pakistan work on their looms from home. The carpet making process is noisy, the chemicals needed are harmful to the environment, and excess carpet fibers block sewage pipes and drains. In forcing weavers to shift to the carpet towns, the PMC believes that living conditions for others in the city will improve.

Hazaras consider their skill in weaving carpets to be both a blessing and a curse. On one hand, the market for carpets has been strong over the last few years and they have been able to earn more than other ethnic groups. On the other hand, their success renders them a target for police exactions. Moreover, Hazaras are wary of GoP motives. Hazaras worry that they will lose control of the production process and will gain less income as employees of the GoP than as owner-operators. They also suspect that once local Pakistanis have learned how to produce "Afghan-style" carpets, they will be expelled from the carpet towns and Pakistan.

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<sup>12</sup> The Governments of India and Iran make no official claim of this offer. Nevertheless, many of the Hazaras interviewed claimed they had been invited to or knew of others invited to weave carpets in India and Iran in exchange for citizenship.



Figure 3: Four-year old Hazara girl and an older sister weaving a carpet at home

The most pressing concern related to GoP policies regarding the carpet industry is their impact on the welfare of refugee children. The most time-consuming and arduous component of carpet making is weaving. The small hands of children, their dexterity, and the speed at which they work compel Hazara families to recruit their own children into the industry. As a result, many children forego primary school to work an average of twelve hours a day to support their families. Children enter the carpet industry as weavers as early as four years old (See Figure 1). At age sixteen, males are encouraged to continue in the industry as dyers or pattern makers, while females of the same age typically manage younger siblings in carpet weaving. It is unclear how the GoP proposes to shed the image of carpet towns as incubators of child labor. A manager of the Chamkani Carpet Town noted that schools would be built inside the carpet towns for children. Nevertheless, it remains difficult to fathom how the time of weavers will be apportioned between carpet making and school. Further research needs to be conducted regarding the fate of Peshawar's carpet towns. This is especially important given the pace of Afghan repatriation.

#### **F. Choosing Peshawar Over Refugee Villages**

Once Afghans choose to enter Peshawar, they are left with the decision either to settle in refugee villages, where they would benefit from international aid, or to remain independent and live elsewhere. Of the sixty Afghans interviewed, all had elected to settle in Peshawar as opposed to a refugee village. Table 4 displays the motivations behind choosing not to stay in these villages.

**Table 4: Motivations for Not Settling in Refugee Villages**

<b>Why Are You Not Staying in the Refugee Villages?</b>	<b>Hazara</b>	<b>Pashtun</b>
My Friend/Family is Living in Peshawar	50%	23%
I Don't Need UNHCR/Assistance	10%	23%
I was Unaware of Refugee Villages When I First Arrived	20%	0%
Living in Refugee Villages Would be too Difficult	7%	13%
I Fear Reprisals from other Ethnic Groups in the Refugee Villages	27%	0%
I Would be Unable to Find Employment in the Refugee Villages	3%	53%

Again, only 3% of the Hazaras interviewed had spent any time in the villages in contrast with one-third of the Pashtuns who had. The motivation for abandoning the village or not settling there at all varies across ethnicities. More than half of the Pashtuns interviewed settled in Peshawar because of the perception that employment was easier to find in the city than in refugee villages. For 50% of the Hazaras interviewed, having friends or family already settled in Peshawar made moving to the city enticing. The fear of reprisal from Pashtun and other ethnic groups, on the other hand, repel Hazaras from settling in the refugee villages. For Pashtuns, the potential of reprisals from other groups did not deter them from seeking refuge in the villages. Interestingly, 20% of the Hazaras claimed that upon their arrival, they had no knowledge of refugee villages in Pakistan. None of the Pashtuns interviewed stated the same. One explanation for this difference maintains that Hazaras entered Pakistan surreptitiously, using unmonitored mountain trails, while the Pashtun use the main border crossing at Torkham.

## **VI. Conclusions and Policy Implications**

This paper urges aid agencies and others interested in humanitarian assistance to consider how the ethno-religious identity and location of minority groups influence the disbursement of humanitarian assistance. Findings from this research, for example, illustrate that Hazaras—traditionally the most vulnerable ethnic group in Afghanistan—are excluded from international aid as a result of their avoidance of refugee villages. In contrast to GoP opinion, not all Afghan refugees residing in the country's urban areas are economic migrants or willfully choose to settle in cities. For the Hazara refugee, the decision to steer clear of refugee villages stems from an ethnic rivalry that has outlasted the Afghan civil war. The fear of reprisals compels Hazaras to settle in urban areas, effectively excluded from the distribution of food aid and the provision of health care and primary education concentrated in refugee villages. The Pashtuns represent the largest ethnic group in Afghanistan and Pakistan's NWFP. The search for employment and/or the means to do without humanitarian assistance motivate their settlement in Peshawar.

Once settled in urban areas, ethnic minorities face circumstances entirely different from those encountered by the dominant ethnic group. For example, Hazaras overwhelmingly cite bribery, the threat of deportation, and police aggression as major problems with living in Pakistan. Human Rights Watch (2002) confirms the Hazara contention that the Pakistani police disproportionately target minority groups within the general Afghan refugee population. In stark contrast, 37% of the Pashtun interviewed claimed to have no problems with living in Peshawar.

The research highlights the need for NGOs to be specific in how they determine who will benefit from humanitarian assistance. Although NGOs profess to help the most vulnerable, the Peshawar

case demonstrates that focusing aid in refugee villages overlooks the plight of those who have a history of being marginalized, those last to leave the fighting in Afghanistan, and those apprehensive about being outnumbered in refugee villages. In this sense, the research challenges the notion that the refugees most in need confine themselves to refugee villages. A handful of organizations in Peshawar, such as FOCUS Humanitarian Assistance, have heeded this challenge; however the scale of their efforts is insufficient to handle the number of Afghan refugees in the city.

Granting ethnic and religious minorities access to humanitarian assistance entails modifying how NGOs and other agencies disseminate information. Indeed, 20% of the Hazaras interviewed were unaware of refugee villages in Pakistan upon their arrival. None of the Pashtuns interviewed made the same claim. Members of minority groups are cognizant that aid is available to refugees; however they tend to exclude themselves from such assistance. The Hazaras interviewed, for example, feel that Pashtuns control the distribution of aid and are more inclined to help a fellow tribesman than a Hazara.

The “open door” policy instituted by the GoP allowed Afghans living therein to search for employment in Peshawar and generally to roam the country’s urban areas while remaining beneficiaries of aid in the refugee villages. UNHCR and NGOs report that many Afghans are strategic about where they reside. Often members of the same family live in different refugee villages in order to take full advantage of the range of relief programs offered. The notion that urban refugees are economic migrants is a product of this policy and is applicable to Pashtuns and others who are wealthy enough to abandon the refugee village yet continue to take advantage of the aid dispensed there.

Hazaras choose to live in Pakistan under circumstances wholly different from those of their Pashtun counterparts. Policies, such as those equating urban refugees with economic migrants, inappropriately homogenize the experiences of different segments within the refugee population. In Peshawar, the GoP makes no distinction between the Hazara and Pashtun refugee: both are considered economic migrants and both are strongly encouraged to return to Afghanistan. In order to incorporate the nuance existent in the urban refugee experience in the disbursement of aid, NGOs and other entities ought to recognize that ethno-religious identity can serve as a tool to distinguish the most vulnerable refugees from those who are well-to-do.

Recognizing that heterogeneity exists within refugee populations is necessary if policies governing the distribution of aid are to better target the most vulnerable. In separating refugees as carpet weavers and non-carpet weavers, the GoP had begun to realize that differences exist among the Afghan refugee population in Pakistan. It remains to be seen, however, whether this realization can alter the GoP definition of what it means to be an economic migrant and how such migrants should be treated.

It is unlikely that urban refugees, and by extension ethno-religious minorities, are as willing to repatriate as those living in refugee villages. Although no figures exist regarding repatriation by ethnicity or religion, urban refugees are more firmly rooted in Pakistan because they have invested more in their permanent settlement and risk more in returning to Afghanistan than refugees residing in villages. The planning behind refugee villages in Pakistan is, to some extent, responsible for this. The design of refugee villages reflects the principle that refugees are to

remain in the host country temporarily. The inhospitable conditions in the villages discourage residents from investing in their residence or more generally, becoming too comfortable. For example, while urban refugees in Peshawar are able to live in proper homes (or in the case of Pashtuns, to own property), those in refugee villages often live in tents or mud houses. It appears that ethno-religious minorities are more likely remain in Pakistan than dominant ethnic groups. Ethnic strife is what led groups like the Hazara to seek refuge in Pakistan in the first place. Moreover, it is difficult to imagine the repatriation of minorities without a stable government in Kabul capable of protecting them.

Examining the plight of refugees from the perspective of ethno-religious identity provides a more accurate depiction of the circumstance surrounding the most vulnerable segments within larger refugee populations. The fact that earlier reports, until recently, only briefly mention ethnicity among Afghan refugees for example, indicates that this topic is vastly under-studied and that little has been made of the relationship between refugee identity and the disbursement of humanitarian aid. In exploring this gap, this research has sought to shed light on why refugees settle in urban areas rather reside in refugee villages and how this contributes to their living conditions in cities.



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## Appendix – Interview Questions

1. When did you arrive in Pakistan?
2. To which city did you first arrive?
3. Why did you choose to arrive there first?
4. Which crossing did you use?
5. Where do you currently live?
6. How many times have you changed houses since your arrival in Pakistan?
7. Why did you choose to move?
8. How many months have you spent in your current house?
9. How did you find your current house?
10. Do you rent or own your house? Who is the owner?
11. What are the terms of your rental or ownership? Is there a contract? What is the nature of the contract?
12. How many people live in your house?
13. How many families currently live in your house?
14. How many bedrooms are there in your house?
15. Have you ever visited a refugee village?
  - a. If so, for how long? Why did you leave?
  - b. If not, why have you not spent time in the refugee villages?
16. What are the problems you face living in Peshawar?
17. What is your occupation?
18. What is your ethnicity?