



Diversity, Intersectionality and Context: Labor Market Integration Challenges Facing Afghan Refugees in Pakistan

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Introduction

- ▶ This paper sheds light on the various socio-cultural, economic and legal issues faced by Afghan refugees in Pakistan related to their labor market integration.
- ▶ Despite being the second largest refugee hosting nation, there is a lack of in depth research on the c
- ▶ The usual focus of past studies is on the geographic dispersion of Afghan refugees throughout the country and the extent of their repatriation to Afghanistan.
- ▶ In particular, there is a dearth of in depth, qualitative insights on the issues and challenges they face in Pakistan. hallenges faced by refugees in Pakistan.
- ▶ Intersectionality of refugee status with gender, age and class.

Important host countries by total refugee numbers and asylum claims

Country of destination	Turkey	Pakistan	Iran	Ethiopia	Jordan	Germany	Sweden	Austria
<i>Number of refugees / claims 2015</i>	2.5 million	1.6 million	970,400	736,100	664,100	441,900 claims	156,400 claims	85,800 claims

Important countries of origin for refugees

Country of origin	Number of refugees worldwide
Syria	4,900,000
Afghanistan	2,700,000
Iraq	260,000
Eritrea	380,000
Pakistan	280,000
Nigeria	150,000
Albania	10,000
Russian Federation	70,000
Serbia	40,000
Iran	85,000

The study's context

- Greater part of the influx of Afghan refugees into Pakistan triggered as a result of Soviet Union's invasion of Afghanistan in 1979.
- By 1989, around 3.27 million Afghans were present in Pakistan. In 1992, with help from UNHCR, around 1.2 million of these refugees were repatriated to Afghanistan.
- In 1994, the number of registered Afghan refugees living in Pakistan was around 1.47 million, excluding the unregistered and displaced refugees (Brücker *et al.*, 2015).
- In 2018, about 2.3 million Afghans refugees were living in cities across Pakistan. According to the UNCHR, 1.4 million were registered with the government and the rest (est 850,000) were undocumented

Methodology

- ▶ In January 2018, 22 Afghan refugees, including registered and unregistered, working in formal or informal sector, were interviewed in the city of Lahore, Pakistan. Areas of Kacha Jail Road, Chungi Amer Sidhu along with Township, Anarkali, Liberty, Karim Block and Azam Market were visited.
- ▶ Semi-structured interviews
- ▶ Snowball approach

Findings: Short-Term Government Policies and Legal Status

- ▶ A 29 years old unregistered refugee who pulled hand carts in the Anarkali main bazar mentioned:
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- ▶ *“I have seen many refugee cases where even after getting themselves registered, they continue to live as a refugee. Pakistan does not give them nationality no matter how long they have been here after getting themselves registered. I know a few people with similar cases living in Pakistan for over 15 years and still their status remains that of a refugee.” (Participant 7)*

- ▶ A 63 years old participant who had been living in Pakistan for more than thirty years said:
- ▶ *“Not having legal nationality despite living in Pakistan for three decades is a source of worry for me. Every now and then government officials and politicians announce and order us refugees to leave the county. This is our country as much as it is yours. We love it the same way as you do. We have been living here for more than 30 years and this is our home. But these recurring warnings and deadlines cause me stress over the thought of leaving this country and starting my life from scratch. I have built up this business after a long struggle. (Participant 6)*

Police Excesses

- ▶ A 20 years old Afghan boy, who picked trash for living, reported:
- ▶ *“Around a month ago, some officials came to investigate about our legal documents and identities which we provided. So, they left after checking but later in the night at around 2 am they came again, breaking in by climbing over the walls of our premises and arrested us without any justifiable reason.” (Participant 1)*
- ▶ Similarly, a 47 years old poor refugee who collected scrap and rubber waste for making ends meet said:
- ▶ *“They (police) demanded PKR 8000 in order to release me. I did not have money at that time so I told them to either shoot me in the head or let me go as there is no way I will be able to pay them.” (Participant 3)*

Workplace Exploitation

- ▶ A 22-year old refugee thus described his employment at a leather factory:
- ▶ *“The air in the warehouse was barely breathable and highly contaminated. The workers were given only two face masks to protect themselves. Those masks were of the lowest quality, the green ones you see nowadays that only cost around PKR 5 or 10. I bought a good quality mask with my own money and used to wear it in combination with the other two to create a thick protective layer. After working for 3 to 4 months in that place, I left because I was sure that I will end up having a cancer if I continued further. Also, the wage I received was very less as compared to the efforts required to perform the job.” (Participant 8)*

- ▶ *“The landlord of our scrapyard increases the rent after every three to four months. Even though our rental agreement is on yearly basis. In a span of last one year, he raised the rent from PKR 8,000 to 13,000. If we do not pay the desired amount, he threatens to call the police. Sometimes he also locks the whole place down in case of delay in payment.” (Participant 2)*

Child Labor

- ▶ A 42 years old Afghan who had his two young boys working at a local automobile mechanic shop and upon asking that whether his sons have ever been beaten by their employer or not, he replied:
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- ▶ *"They have been struck by their master a few times while teaching them work but what can he do about it as at the end of the day he (the master) is trying to teach them something and also he is paying them for work. If they will not do as asked, he will definitely act that way. Moreover, the boys also manage to bring something home (money)." (Participant 9)*

Women's Marginalization

- ▶ The females, no matter young or adult, were not allowed to work outside their homes in majority of cases. This restriction is justified by Pashtun communities with reference to their cultural and religious beliefs.

Agency and Social Capital

- *"I have set up this stall with my own money that I earned from my previous jobs. But, initially Pakistani Pashtun brothers from the same tribe that I belonged to in Afghanistan assisted me. I have good relationships with them and I knew them even before migrating."* (Participant 5)
- *"In Karachi there are many Pashtuns that run their business successfully. They have made friends there that helps and protect them from police. Even in Lahore in every market there are Afghans who have set up big shops but most of them never publically reveal themselves and mostly appear to be a local born Pashtun. They hide their identities due to the fear of getting caught and sent back."* (Participant 8)

Discussion

- ▶ Throughout the world, different approaches that have been used by the host nations to integrate refugees into host economy can be classified essentially into three categories: multicultural, assimilation, and exclusionist approach (Freeman, 2004). In a multicultural society, the focus is on integrating the refugees into the host society in a manner that their cultural diversity and identity remains intact, while assimilation aims at getting refugees to adopt the host culture and identity. In contrast, the exclusionist approach is based on discrimination and segregation, and lacks in consideration and integration.
- ▶ While governmental approach in Pakistan since late 1970s has been based on accommodation, since the Army Public School (APS) attack in Peshawar (2014), Pakistani government has assumed the approach of separation or exclusion.
- ▶ Intersectionality, diversity and context

Conclusion

- ▶ The issues and challenges faced by Afghan refugees that hinder their successful integration into the Pakistani labor market are influenced by several factors including social capital, duration of stay, gender, age and legal status. The element of social capital can somewhat alleviate the exploitative effect that the law and order officials impose. There are however gaps in government policies and a well laid out and realistic repatriation strategy for Afghans is needed.
- ▶ Police and other security departments may be brought under control to eliminate any abuses against refugees. The literature suggests that refugees have the chance to integrate best when they are treated like everybody else. It is evident that in the Pakistani context, the government's emphasis is on their repatriation to Afghanistan and hence a large scale integration of Afghan refugees in Pakistani labor market seems to be a distant dream.