

# **NEW ISSUES IN REFUGEE RESEARCH**

**Working Paper No. 108**

## **Refugee integration in the intermediate term: a study of Nepal, Pakistan, and Kenya**

**Susan Banki**

Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy  
Tufts University  
Boston  
United States of America

E-mail : [susan.banki@tufts.edu](mailto:susan.banki@tufts.edu)

October 2004



**Evaluation and Policy Analysis Unit**

**Evaluation and Policy Analysis Unit  
United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees  
CP 2500, 1211 Geneva 2  
Switzerland**

**E-mail: [hqep00@unhcr.org](mailto:hqep00@unhcr.org)  
Web Site: [www.unhcr.org](http://www.unhcr.org)**

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ISSN 1020-7473

## Introduction

As the world reels from the cascading effects of Cold War conflicts gone awry, wars have grown increasingly complicated and refugee situations have become ever more prolonged. Such protracted refugee situations challenge the “durable solutions” framework embraced by the UNHCR,<sup>1</sup> which recommends one of three solutions for the refugee: local integration in the country to which the refugee has fled, return to the country of origin, or resettlement in a third country.

Protracted conflicts, however, keep refugees in limbo, where they are neither able to resettle in third countries nor return home. In the short and intermediate term, when refugees flee across a border, nearly all of them remain in the first country to which they have fled. Thus, while durable solutions have long been discussed as a means to resolve refugee crises, the increasing length of refugee stays suggests that refugees require solutions in the *intermediate* term.

Some intermediate solutions allow refugees to integrate better than others. Some refugees are able to pursue livelihood strategies in urban or rural settings amongst the local population. They rarely seek help from humanitarian or government agencies, and, more often than not, are below the radar screen of host governments. Other refugees reside in settlements, where they are prohibited from dispersing amongst the local population but may be given some land or other means for making a living. Others end up in restricted camps, where their capacity for self-sufficiency is virtually non-existent.

Although some host countries may offer better opportunities for refugees than other host countries, it cannot be assumed that within one country, the same level of integration is always available. In fact, different populations who flee to the same country often find themselves in vastly different circumstances. For example, the refugees from Djibouti who fled to Ethiopia in the mid-1990s were dispersed among the local population, while the more recent Somali and Sudanese refugees are restricted to camps (USCR 1998). Even within a refugee population that flees to the same country, rates of integration vary widely. Refugees from Angola who have fled to Zambia are either under restricted government control or are free to farm land and participate in the local economy.

This is a puzzle. Why, within a given country, would groups of refugees experience widely varying integration levels? Why would the same host country have different policies – actual and *de facto* – regarding different groups of refugees? What would explain different levels of integration for refugees who flee from the same country and arrive to the same country?

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The research for this paper could not have been conducted without the goodwill and patience of many employees at UNHCR. Among them, I thank Sue Mulcock, Brigitte Ballansat, and Bela Hovy. Greta Uehling and Jeffrey Crisp offered excellent editing aid. Members of the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy who responded to my various requests also deserve mention, notably Ahsen Khan, Hassan Abbas, and Jacob Hook. Finally, I am grateful to Dr. Karen Jacobsen for her critical assistance with the paper’s conceptual framework.

<sup>1</sup> UNHCR, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, is the international body charged with the protection of refugees.

This paper explores the factors that facilitate varying levels of refugee integration in the intermediate term. It begins by offering a measurement for integration, and then provides an overview of the author's terminology for possible factors that influence refugee integration. Then, it examines the cases of Nepal, Pakistan, and Kenya to substantiate/challenge these possible factors. Synthesizing the information, it concludes that no one factor is responsible for determining levels of integration in all cases. Notably, however, the ability of recent refugees to integrate has decreased consistently over the past decade. In addition, political considerations, social similarity, and the size of refugee flows are important integration determinants in the intermediate term. Finally, individual refugee behavior can circumvent government actions altogether.

## Measuring levels of integration<sup>2</sup>

The author's use of the word "integration" in the intermediate term differs from the term "local integration" as a durable solution. Integration in the intermediate term refers to the ability of the refugee to participate with relative freedom in the economic and communal life of the host region. While local integration might also include cultural and political participation, integration in the intermediate term does not emphasize the latter two. Full legal rights, too, while ideal, are not a measure of intermediate integration. Further, full self-sufficiency, an excellent indicator of long term local integration, is perhaps too ambitious an indicator for refugees in the intermediate term.<sup>3</sup>

In this paper, the author developed key indicators of integration in the intermediate term through discussions with several UNHCR staff, literature about self-sufficiency, and her own experiences working with refugees in Southeast Asia. Thus, high levels of refugee integration are characterized by the following indicators:

- refugees are not restricted in their movements;
- refugees own land or appear to have official access to it (a measure of medium integration would be refugees who have no official access to land, but somehow have been able to obtain some land for farming);
- refugees participate in the local economy;
- refugees are *moving in the direction* of self-sufficiency;
- refugees are able to utilize local services such as health facilities;

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<sup>2</sup> While integration as defined below is generally considered positive, this paper avoids passing umbrella judgments. For example, non-recognized "integrated" refugees, such as the approximately 100,000 Burmese refugees in Bangladesh who eschew the camps may be limited in their movements, but because of the very fact that they are not registered with the government, they don't fear being forcibly repatriated, as do those in camps. This may be why they prefer to hide outside of the camps despite extremely poor conditions (interview with Kate Mackintosh, MSF, July 21, 2003). In addition, this paper examines the *causes* of integration as a refugee condition, and not its *results*.

<sup>3</sup> In his review of the effectiveness of community services of Angolan refugees in Zambia, Oliver Bakewell (2002) discusses the distinction between local integration and self-settlement. While his paper refers to the "self-settled" refugees from Angola in Zambia, this author prefers the term "integration" as it implies a less permanent and more intermediate solution.

- refugee children attend local schools; and
- refugees are dispersed among the local population.

## **Methodology**

This paper employs a mix of secondary source research, data analysis, and interviews with field workers to explore the reasons behind varying levels of integration. It examines three cases in which the dependent variable (level of refugee integration) differs widely within one country *at one point in time*. It first relies upon UNHCR data and USCR<sup>4</sup> reports to identify refugee situations that vary in their outcome. Three host countries have been selected for study, which possess populations with differing levels of integration.

Next, the paper outlines several factors which might be responsible for integration levels. Finally, the paper examines the cases of Nepal, Pakistan, and Kenya to determine which factors play the most prominent role in determining refugee conditions. Economic and demographic data is supplemented by country evaluations by practitioners and discussions with UNHCR officers and NGO field staff.

## **Selection of countries**

In-country variance of refugee integration was the first criteria for selection in this paper. Countries from the developed world have been excluded, as have countries with fewer than 10,000 refugees. The author used percentages of the refugee population living in camps as an estimate to ascertain approximate levels of integration. Importantly, the three countries were selected based on the author's initial understanding of the refugees' level of integration, and once chosen were not changed. Once the countries were selected, research was conducted using the indicators described above to establish levels of integration.

In all three cases, the author used the same year as a starting point to measure the number of refugees and their levels of integration. The year 2001 was chosen because it is the most recent year for which all kinds of demographic and economic data were available. In other words, the number of refugees and their levels of integration reflect information collected for the year 2001.

## **Difficulties with the data**

While case studies that compare countries can be valuable in attempting to establish patterns, there is an unmitigated danger in generalizing refugee data in order to ascertain global trends.

Refugee data is notoriously flawed. Common problems in representing refugees accurately by number include the operational difficulty of data collection, the

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<sup>4</sup> USCR, the United States Committee on Refugees, prepares its own annual reports with refugee statistics worldwide. See [www.refugees.org](http://www.refugees.org).

politicization of refugee numbers, and, notably, the interminable and impossible struggle to pin down clear-cut definitions (Crisp 2000).

Perhaps not surprisingly, most variation in refugee data comes from differing definitions of what is a refugee. UNHCR's hallmark classification of refugee status, one who flees a "well-founded fear of persecution" has been subject to both broad and strict interpretation by host governments and the international refugee regime (UNHCR 1951). The ambiguous distinction between a refugee fleeing persecution and an economic migrant whose home, land, and livelihood have been destroyed and has no means to survive can change refugee statistics considerably. For example, depending on whether or not the latter population is included, Pakistan's refugee population in 2001 was either 1.5 million or 3.5 million.

UNHCR recognizes this definitional dilemma, but short of miraculously tripling its funds, the agency's limited resources require that it be rigorous about limiting refugee status. Refugees must either prove a well-founded fear or come from a country of origin that is dangerous enough that they receive *prima facie* refugee status. For the researcher, the fact that countless "persons of concern" or "persons in refugee-like situations" are not willing or able to receive refugee status means that any discussion pertaining to numbers of refugees is bound to be flawed. Research can only study what is known, not what is hidden.

Another definitional problem comes from UNHCR classifications for camps and settlements, which blend rather seamlessly into its categories of "Rural" and "Urban". Thorough definitions delineating the differences between camps and settlements do exist, that classify camps, organized settlements, and self-settlements according to, among other elements, their legal status, location, administration, and protection (Jacobsen 2001). Nevertheless, instructions to UNHCR field staff requesting demographic data by location simply read:

"Urban" refers to asylum-seekers and refugees living in urban areas....  
"Camps" refers to populations living in camps or refugee centres, whereas "Rural/dispersed/other" concerns populations who are living in rural areas, and not in camps or centres, often dispersed amongst the local population. Refugee populations that cannot be classified by camp, urban or rural areas should also be reported in this category.<sup>5</sup>

Refugee centers in urban areas, for example, and rural settlements with some measure of dispersion are likely to avoid easy classification. It is partially for this reason that this study relies not only on camp and settlement statistics but on a more cumbersome, but hopefully more enlightening method of examining refugee integration rather than camp placement.

The inherent difficulties associated with collecting refugee data notwithstanding, UNHCR data is by far the most comprehensive in the world. Particularly since 1993, with the recruitment of a professional statistician, UNHCR data provide an important examination of patterns across countries and over time (Crisp 2000). Members of field staff who live in host countries complete annual reports that detail the numbers of persons of concern by age, location, and gender. Data from these Statistical

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<sup>5</sup> Internal UNHCR document

Reports are expected to equal numbers from the previous year, which ensures both accuracy and consistency.

Comparative country analysis is problematic for a second reason. Particularly when it comes to conflict, trauma, and survival, each situation is different. Comparative country analysis runs the risk of blotting out the specifics of each refugee situation by making sweeping claims about a population that is as diverse – in race, ethnicity, socio-economic status, and geography – as the world itself.

Nevertheless, such research is valuable as a tool to understand new and emerging refugee situations and the international refugee regime's response. Studies that compare more than one situation allow researchers to explore how levels of integration vary due to a host of factors.

### **Explanations for integration: several possible factors**

Practitioners and academics both have offered many explanations for varying refugee treatment and experience. The following outline classifies these explanations according to category, as identified and termed by the author. However, it is only in reviewing the situations in Nepal, Pakistan, and Kenya that it will be clear which of these factors has significance in the three cases selected.

- *Political* factors generally function on the national level, and concern tactical security and cross-country relations. Political factors would be prevalent when host governments are influenced by global opinion, interaction with sending countries, and geo-strategic issues.
- *Security* factors respond to the domestic concerns of the host country aiming to protect its citizens from what it perceives to be dangerous outsiders, whether as rebel insurgents or as criminals.
- *Legal* factors relate to the status of the refugee in the host country. Determined by the host government, UNHCR, contracting agencies, or some combination thereof, legal factors can be presumed to prevail when official legal status and high levels of integration go hand in hand.
- *Economic* factors view refugees in terms of the market – as either a convenient pool of labor or a threat to domestic employment, as either a drain on resources or a boost to demand.
- *Social* factors are comprised of ethnicity, language, religion, and a history of trade and labor migration across communities. Evidence of social factors' prominence would be when refugees who are socially similar (ethnically, linguistically, religiously) to the local host community are able to integrate.

The following four factors can be classified as *physical* factors:

- *Geographic* factors concern the physical ability of refugees to cross the border easily without being detected, whether in small or large groups.

When the border is porous and refugees can meld with the local population unnoticed, geography plays a role in local integration.

- *Temporal* factors are potential determinants of integration and function on two levels:
  - The *arrival time* defines the time period in history when the conflict and subsequent refugee influx occurred.
  - The *duration* of the refugee stay describes how long the refugees remained in the host country.
- The *size* of the refugee population, both relative to the sending country population and as a measure of how quickly the refugees arrived (as a flood or a trickle) is a potential contributing factor to how the host government views, and accordingly treats, refugees.
- Finally, *individual* refugee action can moderate the effects of all preceding factors. When a refugee integrates despite political, economic, social, or physical factors that suggest that s/he shouldn't, the power of the individual refugee is a factor in determining her or his integration level.

The following section explores these factors as they pertain to each of the case studies. It tries to discern which factors are most important, the relationships between factors, and any patterns across the countries.

## Case studies

Nepal, Pakistan, and Kenya all host significant refugee populations. In each country, certain groups of refugees have been able to integrate to some degree, while other groups have not. In each case, a different group of factors appears to be responsible for this division. More than anything else, the studies reveal that 1) no one factor works alone to determine refugee integration; and 2) refugee integration has grown more difficult over time.

### *Nepal*

Exemplifying what is perhaps the strongest case of in-country variance in the world, Nepal's refugees from Tibet and Bhutan experience virtually opposing integration levels. Tibetan refugees in Nepal are some of the most highly integrated refugees in the world, while the vast majority of the Bhutanese refugees live inside restricted camps.

Refugees from Tibet fled to Nepal as early as 1959, and in 2001 this early population stood at approximately 20,000, most of whom are the children and grandchildren of the original refugees. Smaller numbers of Tibetans continue to arrive in small numbers every year (approximately 1000 annually) but almost all of the new arrivals quickly move on to settle in India. Refugees from Bhutan began arriving in Nepal in the late 1980s and early 1990s, following the Bhutanese government's enactment of a new citizenship act and discriminatory policies against the Lhotsampa – ethnic



Nepalese Hindu – who had been living in Bhutan for generations. In 2001, the Bhutanese refugees in Nepal numbered approximately 110,000.

Tibetan refugees have no legal status in Nepal, but they move freely, work in the local economy, utilize local facilities, and farm land that was purchased for them in the 1960s by the Nepal Red Cross. In Katmandu, some have dispersed among the local population.<sup>6</sup> Refugees from Bhutan have official refugee status, but remain in closed camps, where integration is quite low. They are restricted in their travel. Their food provisions, health, and education services are managed by UNHCR in the camps, and there is little dispersion amongst the local population. As many as 5,000 Bhutanese refugees live with friends and relatives and have found work outside the camps, but little is known about their ability to use local services or allow their children to go to school.

What explains different integration conditions for Tibetan and Bhutanese refugees in Nepal? First, the groups arrived decades apart. Tibetan refugees' advent in Nepal more than thirty years prior to the Bhutanese refugees suggests that the former's arrival time (Cold War era, pre-UNHCR presence) and duration (thirty years rather than ten) accounts for high integration levels.

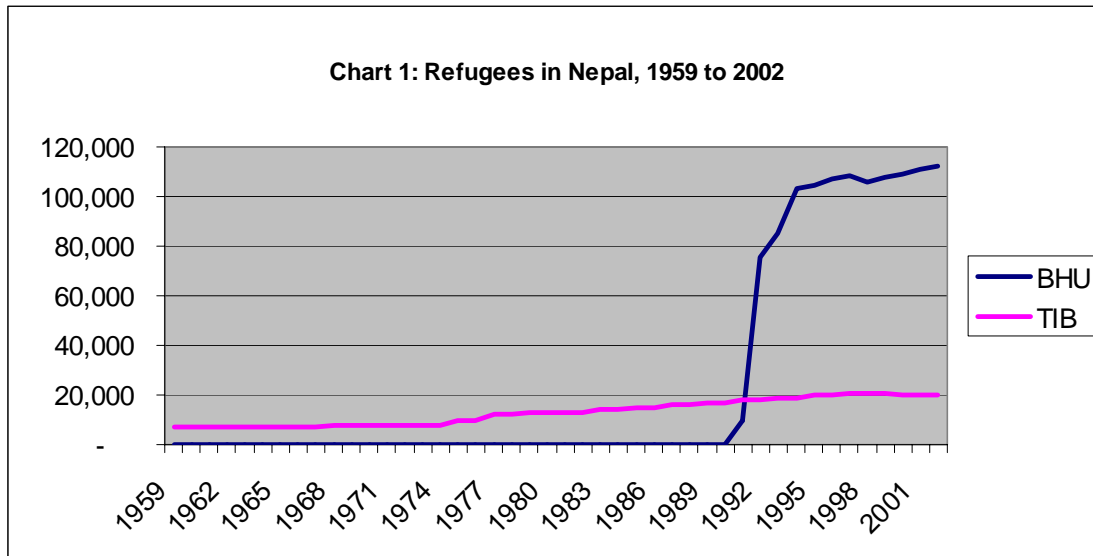
Tibetan refugees arrived at the height of the Cold War, after Communist China asserted control over the region. In the eyes of the Western world (which exerted pressure on Nepal), those who were lucky enough to escape across the borders were fleeing not just a conflict but a system, and thus merited good treatment. Nepal had neither the funds nor the incentive to control this desperate population. Today, no such world dichotomy exists. The Bhutanese arrived after the Cold War, and in an era when UNHCR funds are more readily available. In this decade, not only the Bhutanese, but the "new" Tibetan refugees (the small numbers who traverse Nepal destined for India) are restricted to camps and transit centers, respectively.

Tibetan refugees' thirty years duration in Nepal has also influenced their ability to integrate. Over time, they have developed a thriving carpet and jewelry-making industry, using the skills and knowledge of these trades that they brought from Tibet. It is possible that, over time, the Bhutanese may be able to integrate as well, but since their original reception was more restrictive, it is unlikely.

Second, the size of the two respective populations plays a role in determining the levels of refugee integration. The Bhutanese refugees outnumber the Tibetans, and, further, arrived in a flood, rather than a trickle. As Chart 1 indicates, the size and immediacy of the Bhutanese refugee influx would have been perceived to overwhelm the local area if camps had not been built.

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<sup>6</sup> Interestingly, UNHCR statistics still record these refugees as living in camps/settlements, clearly demonstrating why such definitions require revamping.



Source: UNHCR internal statistics

Third, the political situation today explains differential integration experiences for refugees in Nepal. China, the immensely larger and more powerful neighbor to Nepal, is highly sensitive to the issue of Tibet and would strongly object both to legal recognition and to seeing Tibetans in camps, where their plight would be highlighted and China's human rights abuses laid bare. Thus, Tibetan refugees remain outside of camps and unrecognized legally. Ironically, it is the Bhutanese, with their official legal status, who are confined to camps and unable to integrate. Legal factors are decidedly lacking in Nepal.

Social factors also do not play a role in refugee integration in Nepal. Bhutanese refugees are ethnically, linguistically, and religiously similar to the Nepalese, yet their levels of integration are low. The Tibetans, who are socially distinct from the Nepalese, are freely integrated.

The geography of the border, too, defies the pattern of what we might assume. The difficulty for the Tibetans of crossing the Himalayan mountain range requires that refugees arrive in clusters, which one would expect would facilitate camps or camp-like conditions. The opposite has occurred. And although the Bhutanese had to pass through a small part of India to arrive in Nepal, the ability the Bhutanese refugees to more easily disperse would have increased the likelihood of integration. Yet the Bhutanese remain in camps.

In the case of Nepal, temporal factors, size of refugee population, and politics appear more important than legal, social and geographic factors.

### *Pakistan*

The refugees in Pakistan from Afghanistan and Indian-administered Kashmir represent a multi-tiered case where integration changes significantly both between and within refugee populations. Refugees from both regions who arrived more than a decade ago are well integrated, but those who arrived more recently have experienced medium and low levels of integration, respectively.

The refugees from Afghanistan fled in immense numbers beginning in 1978 after the Soviet invasion and have found subsequent reasons to move across the border – notably, inter-factional fighting from 1992 to 1994, the arrival of the Taliban in 1995, the victory of the US-supported Northern Alliance against the Taliban at Mazar-i-Sharif in 1998, and the post-September 11 war in Afghanistan. These myriad conflicts, combined with repatriation efforts, have resulted in an incredibly complicated Afghan refugee situation. There are more than one million refugees integrated in villages and settlements who arrived in the 1980s, over 200,000 who currently live in camps established after September 11, and an unknown number in urban areas. Pakistan claims that many are economic migrants, which accounts for such a widely contested total figure that ranges between 1.5 and 3.5 million.

Afghan refugees who fled almost entirely to rural areas prior to 1995 have experienced relatively high levels of integration in Pakistan. The majority of these refugees were ethnic Pashtun, as were the Pakistanis to whose regions they fled. In general, they have been permitted to travel through the country and participate freely in the economy, although the government has limited their capacity to farm (USCR 1996).

In 1995, after international aid decreased significantly, refugees who couldn't support themselves moved to the cities, and the "urban refugee problem" was born. Pakistan authorities were reluctant to furnish the urban refugee population with the same freedoms it had the rural population, and for these newer refugees, integration proved more difficult. These refugees would be considered to be at medium levels of integration; while freedom of movement hasn't been entirely restricted, urban refugees have been subject to police harassment and arrest.<sup>7</sup>

The refugees from the Indian-administered part of Kashmir who crossed the line of control (LoC) and reside in the Pakistan-administered region have proved difficult to research. Those who fled before 1991 received either immediate citizenship or domicile status, and can be assumed to have integrated. However, post-1991 refugees are neither assisted by UNHCR nor by international NGOs, and because the Pakistan government regards all of Kashmir as a part of Pakistan, it considers the refugees to be internally displaced. In 2001, various reports placed the number of refugees at 15,000 to 17,000, most of whom live in makeshift camps (USCR 2002, Refugee Council 2002). Kashmiri refugees in Pakistan are Muslim and primarily Sunni, as are members of the local population. However, while both populations consider themselves "Kashmiri", this term represents an amalgam of many different local ethnicities. Further, the local dialects and languages in the region on both sides of the LoC are too disparate and too many to assert that refugees and locals speak the same language.

Virtually all of the refugees from Indian-administered Kashmir who fled after 1990 have experienced very low levels of integration.<sup>8</sup> They have no legal status and are required to live in encampments. While they have some ability to participate in the local economy, their movement is highly restricted, their children cannot attend public schools, and they are prohibited from owning land.

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<sup>7</sup> Correspondence with UNHCR Field Office, Pakistan. August 14, 2003.

<sup>8</sup> I am indebted to Ahsen Khan, a Canadian-born South Asian American who worked on the Pakistani side of the LoC in Kashmir, from whom much of the following information comes.

What explains the fact that “old” and “new” refugees have experienced different integration levels in Pakistan? Early refugees from both regions thrived – those from Kashmir received citizenship and those from Afghanistan have become such an integral part of many local economies that when massive repatriation began in 2002, there was concern that the building and transport industries would suffer.<sup>9</sup>

Historically, both countries had reason to integrate refugees. The Soviet presence in Afghanistan from 1978 to 1992 facilitated sympathetic treatment of the refugee population, as Pakistan officials opposed the Soviet regime and supported its overthrow. It is certain that authorities knew that in some camps, young boys and soldiers were actively being recruited to fight against the Soviets. Integration was the logical policy for such refugees given that prior to 1996 most were of the same Pashtun background as the local population.

Pakistan’s territorial dispute with India over the region of Kashmir has soiled the countries’ relationship since their creations, and Pakistan, eager to validate itself and shame its neighbor, granted legal status to all those who moved across the border. The original movement of Kashmiris over the border – both to Pakistan and India – in 1947 is one of the largest migration movements in history.

Today, however, both sets of refugees have experienced decreasing integration levels. Afghan refugees who arrive today to the “non-Pashtun” areas of Islamabad, Lahore and Karachi do not have the same ethnicity as their local hosts. Decreasing ethnic similarity generates Pakistani reluctance to host such a massive population (Centlivres and Centlivres-Demont 1988). Despite the fact that Pakistan authorities closed the border in 2000, hundreds of thousands continue to cross.

For the refugees from Indian-administered Kashmir, social factors have never been strong enough to allow integration on its own. In 1989/90, when the conflict escalated, the Pakistan government was motivated to exploit these refugees for publicity, limiting their movement and calling attention to India’s human rights abuses. From that time on the Pakistan government preferred that Kashmiri refugees remain in refugee camps in order to depict to the international community the Indian army’s brutalities, and many visiting delegations are brought for that purpose. Funds and facilities are provided to continue running camps that have no equivalent in any other part of the country.<sup>10</sup>

Further, it is likely that some of the Kashmiri refugees are involved in insurgency against India, although this information could not be confirmed. If this is so, Pakistan’s decision to contain most of the refugees in camps and prohibit them from moving to other areas of Pakistan is logical, if not openly admitted. Refugees who support themselves through the local economy are likely to direct their energies to building a better life, while refugees living in cramped and restrictive conditions will likely continue their rebel activities.<sup>11</sup>

Notably, Pakistan is neither a signatory to the 1951 Refugee Convention nor the 1967 Protocol. This may suggest that UNHCR’s absence actually facilitated integration in

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<sup>9</sup> Telephone interview with Monique Malha, Senior Legal Officer, UNHCR. August 9, 2003.

<sup>10</sup> Correspondence with Hassan Abbas, former senior police officer in Pakistan. September 15, 2004.

<sup>11</sup> On the other hand, when Afghan refugees were recruited to fight the Soviets, the presence of insurgency in this population did nothing to lessen the levels of integration.

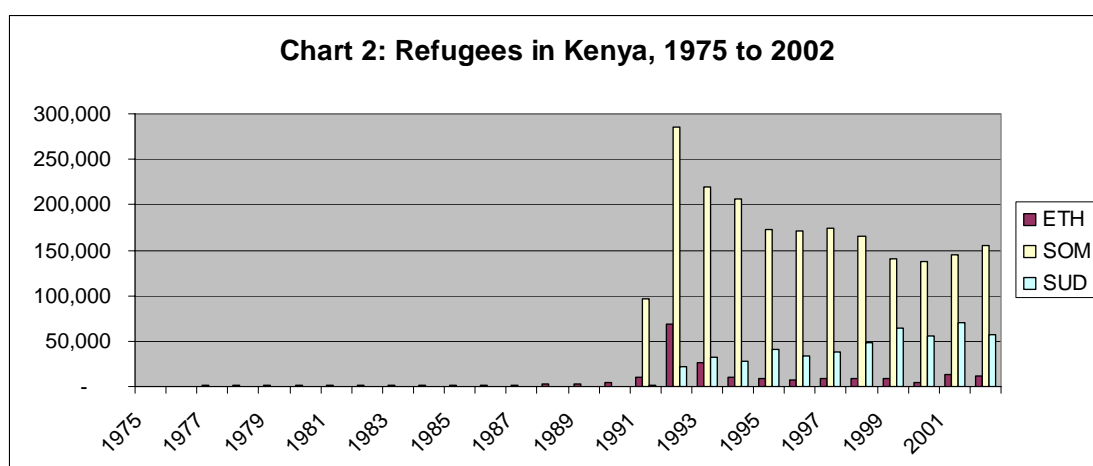
the past. Today, however, Pakistan's non-signatory status prevents UNHCR from holding Pakistan legally accountable for its treatment of refugees. Legal protection for both sets of refugees is conspicuously absent in Pakistan, and integration levels appear to be unrelated to such protection.

In Pakistan, *social* factors, notably ethnic similarity, contributed to high integration levels in the past. However, *temporal* factors and related *political* issues have prevailed as the most salient factors to influence the ability of groups of refugees to integrate today.

## Kenya

Kenya hosts refugee populations from at least 10 African countries, but only from three whose population number more than 10,000, one of the criteria for this paper. In 2001, according to the USCR, 33% of Ethiopians, 65% of Somalis, and 100% of Sudanese were residing in camps. While discussions with UNHCR staff suggested that these exact percentages may be somewhat inaccurate (for example, there are some, albeit few, Sudanese who live in the capital), they offer a general sense of the range of levels of integration. Clearly, many Ethiopians, some Somalis, and few Sudanese have integrated in Kenya.

Although Kenya had hosted small numbers of refugees for years, the early 1990s witnessed massive influxes of refugees from Somalia and Sudan, and, to a lesser extent, from Ethiopia. (See Chart 2). Nearly 100,000 Somali refugees arrived in Kenya in 1991, and hundreds of thousands followed in the next several years, flooding the country with its first massive refugee population. Somalis fled the political situation created by the fall of the Siad Barre regime, and, from the outset, arrived by different modes of transport and experienced different refugee conditions (Horst 2003). In 2001, the Somali refugees in Kenya were estimated at between 150,000 and 200,000.



Source: UNHCR internal statistics

Refugees from the Sudan began arriving in large numbers in 1992. Many of these refugees previously lived as refugees in Ethiopia, but when the Ethiopian leader Mengistu Haile Mariam was ousted and the new regime backed away from supporting

the SPLA,<sup>12</sup> the Sudanese refugees fled Ethiopia and eventually made their way to Kenya. The first group of Sudanese to arrive in Kenya were the so called “Lost Boys of the Sudan” for whom the first refugee camps were built in Kenya.<sup>13</sup> Recently, repatriation efforts and renewed fighting have caused the number of Sudanese refugees to rise and fall, but at the close of 2001, there were an estimated 70,000. A small number of Ethiopian refugees have been in Kenya since the mid-80s, but a group of 10,000 or more entered in 1991, and peaked in 1992 at 70,000. Since then, Ethiopian refugees have declined and in 2001 there were an estimated 14,000 in Kenya.

Historically, Kenya was well-known for its generous refugee policies, allowing nearly all its refugees to integrate easily. Prior to the massive influxes in the early 1990s, integration of small numbers of refugees from Mozambique, Rwanda, and Uganda was an accepted fact. It was only with increasing sizeable refugee populations that Kenya turned to the UNHCR for support:

The shift in responsibility for the care of the refugees from the government to the international community had the positive effect of attracting external funds. On the negative side, however, the laissez faire policy before 1991 had provided few obstacles to local integration of the refugees... The refugees had the right to work, to education and freedom of movement. When the UNHCR took over, none of these positive aspects were preserved (Horst 2003, 60).<sup>14</sup>

Today, despite Kenya’s policy that all refugees live in camps, some clearly reside with the local population. Thus, refugee integration in Kenya today is a reflection of the percentage of refugees who live outside of camps. Those in camps – whether they are Somali, Sudanese, or Ethiopian – are unable to integrate. They can only leave their respective camps with a permit and there is no opportunity for economic livelihood outside the confines of the camp. Camp refugees receive all education and health inputs from UNHCR, and while some of the camps provide a small bit of land for subsistence farming, this is neither enough to make a living nor to be seen as a move toward self-sufficiency.

By contrast, refugees who live outside of the camps have found ways of integrating. They are still restricted in their movements, but they are dispersed amongst the local population and participate informally in the economy. These refugees might be considered at medium levels of integration. Refugees in Kenya who live outside of camps are almost entirely outside the legal system, but have managed to integrate despite this; their illegal status gives them some opportunities at the same time that it takes away others. That is, the very fact that the Kenyan authorities cannot track them both provides them with a modicum of cover to engage in the shadow economy at the

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<sup>12</sup> The SPLA – Sudan People’s Liberation Army – is the primary southern Sudanese anti-government force fighting the Sudanese administration.

<sup>13</sup> The Lost Boys of Sudan received this epithet because they arrived in Kenya as orphans after spending years hiding in the desert. The term, however, is a bit patronizing. The “Lost Boys” are young men today, as old as 30, and many, far from being lost, have settled in the United States or achieved other means of self-sufficiency.

<sup>14</sup> This quote points to the possibility that the presence of UNHCR may actually be a catalyst for decreasing integration. The host country gains as the refugee loses, as the burden of the refugee problem shifts from the host country to the refugee.

same time that they are limited in pursuing any activities requiring legal status, such as provision of services, transportation, etc.

The question that we might ask about refugees in Kenya, then, is not what factors contribute to varying levels of integration for the three countries, but instead what factors contribute to different *percentages* of refugees experiencing different refugee conditions?

In Kenya, refugees who live outside of the camps (and thus are able to partially integrate) are those individuals with the resources to do so, regardless of their country of origin.<sup>15</sup> While ethnicity is not the primary explanation, *social* factors influence the ability of the individual refugee to access the resources they need to integrate.

The Sudanese, who have the fewest resources of the three refugee groups, have the lowest rates of out-of-camp settlement. Until recently their diaspora connections were few indeed, and the number from urban backgrounds minimal. In ethnicity and language they differ from the local population, and migration paths between the two communities were insignificant. Geographically, the border remains permeable, but as one NGO official observed, “it’s not as porous as the Somali border because there is no need for it to be porous.”<sup>16</sup> In other words, the lack of trading and communication between the two countries has precluded the need for paths of migration.

The Somalis, who share a common ethnicity, language, religion, and history of trade routes with those Kenyans who live near the Somalia border, have been more successful at integrating. Many Somali refugees have relatives and/or friends in urban areas, and rely on social networks to both manipulate their access to resources inside of camps and to find ways of exiting the camps (Horst 2003). Some Somali refugees were traders, and this individual characteristic facilitated easier movement and economic opportunity within Kenya for the trader population. A 1997 report highlights the tension between the individual and the state, and recognizes the Somali refugee as the victor: “Urban Somali refugees have resisted moving to the eastern border camps, regarding them as desolate, dangerous, and devoid of economic opportunities.”<sup>17</sup>

Ethiopian refugees in Kenya have integrated at an even higher rate than have the Somalis, although their total numbers are far smaller.<sup>18</sup> Many Ethiopian refugees come from urban areas and are relatively well-off. For these refugees, their motivations for registering with UNHCR have everything to do with gaining refugee status for resettlement, and nothing to do with obtaining food or humanitarian aid. In 2001, internal UNHCR statistics show that of the approximately 14,000 persons of

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<sup>15</sup> This is not to suggest that all refugees who live in urban areas are wealthy, or live comfortably. Many refugees choose life in Nairobi because they prefer the relative freedom and anonymity it provides. Nevertheless, urban refugees in Kenya face abysmal conditions including challenges to their safety, health, and livelihoods (HRW November 2001 report).

<sup>16</sup> Telephone interview with Christophe Martin, Deputy Chief of Operations for the Horn of Africa, ICRC. August 11, 2003.

<sup>17</sup> USCR 1997, accessed at [<http://www.refugees.org/world/countryrpt/africa/1997/kenya.htm>].

<sup>18</sup> Their small numbers may explain why despite not sharing the same degree of social similarity as the Somalis, their percentage of integration is higher.

concern from Ethiopia in Kenya, almost 9,000 underwent status determination and were referred to refugee camps, but never turned up.<sup>19</sup>

Economic considerations are present in small measure in Kenya, but only to the extent that Kenyan authorities believe that the country needs no foreign labor, and thus have no incentive to allow integration. While a high percentage of Ethiopian refugees are urban and educated and have become students in Nairobi, employment opportunities for the hundreds of thousands of refugees from Somalia and Sudan are virtually nil.

Political and security factors have not been decisive in determining refugee integration. While Kenya wants to remain on good terms with its larger neighbor to the north, neither refugee policy nor the percentage of Ethiopians able to integrate has been affected by this relationship. Likewise, Kenya's tacit support of the SPLA has neither changed camp policy nor altered the percentage of Sudanese refugees who have been able to integrate outside of the camps.<sup>20</sup> And in Somalia, the lack of any government whatsoever precludes comment on Kenyan-Somali political relations.

For Kenya's "old" refugee population, *temporal* factors have secured an ability to integrate. More recent refugees in Kenya tell a different story. Ethiopian and Somali refugee populations demonstrate the power of the *individual* refugee. It is clear that despite Kenya's efforts to restrict its refugee population to camps, some integration has occurred. Thus, individual factors, related to *social* factors, take precedence in Kenya.

### **Synthesis: finding common (and uncommon) ground**

Nepal, Pakistan, and Kenya host refugees from different countries, conflicts, and time periods. No common factor has been shown to entirely explain variance in integration levels in all three cases. However, some patterns are evident.

First, temporal considerations contribute to refugee integration in all three countries. Nepal, Pakistan, and Kenya all demonstrate a strong trend: refugees integrated with more ease in past decades than they do today. As all three cases illustrate, profound geopolitical shifts generate different perceptions, and therefore treatment, of refugees. One UNHCR official has suggested that countries that previously embraced socialism and believed in sharing land have rejected such notions since the end of the Cold War, making local settlement and integration a less viable option for refugees.<sup>21</sup> Another possibility is that the advent of the international refugee regime has encouraged host countries to utilize NGOs and UNHCR with greater frequency, and, in so doing, control their refugee populations more directly and allow less integration.<sup>22</sup>

Time plays a critical role not only concerning when the conflict and refugee influx occurred in history, but also for what duration refugees remain as such. Particularly

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<sup>19</sup> Internal statistical UNHCR documentation.

<sup>20</sup> While there is an SPLA presence in the camps, no one this author spoke to mentioned this as a reason why the Sudanese were in camps in such high numbers.

<sup>21</sup> Interview with Yassin Hamid, Senior Desk Officer, UNHCR. August 7, 2003.

<sup>22</sup> To the author's knowledge, this controversial notion, repeatedly present in the research for this paper, has not been specifically studied with any methodological rigor. The relationship between UNHCR/NGO presence and refugee integration is suggested for further research.



in Nepal and Pakistan, and to a lesser extent in Kenya, the longer refugees have remained in the host country, the more likely they are to be integrated. All other factors being equal, refugees integrate over time. However, there is a caveat to this general statement: when the size of a refugee population increases over time (which is not infrequent as conflicts escalate), host communities are often overwhelmed and feel that their resources are threatened. Refugees may well be restricted to camps. Thus, time passes, numbers of refugees increase, and integration decreases.

Tightly interwoven with temporal factors are political ones. Since the time period when conflict and influx occurs has everything to do with the political atmosphere of the era, it should come as no surprise that political factors were strongly present in at least two of the three countries studied (Nepal and Pakistan).

In particular, the case of Pakistan reflects how host countries' relationships with their refugee populations are tied to the relationships with the sending countries from which the refugees have fled. During the Cold War, countries of opposing ideologies used refugees as political pawns to boast their own systems of governance or call attention to the plight of those from other systems (Chimni 1998, 2000). Post-Cold War, while host countries continue to view refugees through the context of the sending country from which they came, their political priorities have often changed, and so have the outcomes. Countries now build camps to highlight problems in sending countries or use the international community and refugee agencies as a platform for obtaining funds or media attention. Post-September 11, both asylum and settlement policy is driven by a fear of and attention to the possibility of harboring terrorism within a refugee population (see, for example, Troeller 2003).

Kenya's refugee population has made it clear that while government policy determining refugee integration is generally made on a national level, the actual experience of the refugee population may be different (Jacobsen 1996). That is, government policy tries to dictate where refugees are and what they are permitted to do, but to the extent that governments are unable to enforce their policies (or are willing to look the other way) refugees may not necessarily adhere to such policy.

Indeed, it is often on the local level that refugee integration becomes a reality. As in Pakistan and Kenya, social factors are often present. Social similarity with the host community eases the difficulty of communication, improves the likelihood of cultural exchange, and facilitates economic security. Host population attitudes toward refugees strongly influence refugees' ability to integrate, and many of these attitudes are colored by the presence or absence of social similarity.

A significant body of work traces the importance of linguistic/cultural similarity in migrant populations (Rogers 1978), the relationship between ethnic ties and integration in refugee populations, (Barrett 2003, Bakewell 2002) and the significance of historical trade routes (Sorenson 2000). While the link between ethnicity and integration has been well established (Loescher and Scanlan 1983, Voutira and Harrell-Bond 2000), the case of Nepal shows that social factors do not always play a role in determining integration levels.

As in Nepal, Pakistan, and Kenya, it is relatively easy to understand how the size of a refugee population determines how refugees fare, and under what conditions. When the numbers of refugees increase – particularly when at a threshold beyond which the

host country feels it cannot absorb refugees – size becomes a factor in switching from integration to a camp or settlement policy. In general, as the refugee population grows relative to the size of the host country population, resources are drained, host populations grow resentful, and cross-border incursions may occur with greater frequency, thus instigating the host government to further control and restrict the refugee population, lessening the chances for integration. As trickles of refugees turn into floods, host governments may modify their integration policies or even reverse such policies, as Ghana (Dick 2002) and Tanzania (Whitaker 2002) have done in the past 10 years.

Finally, while most clearly present in Kenya, individual factors affect integration levels in all three countries. The small number of Bhutanese outside camps, the hundreds of thousands of Afghan refugees who continue to integrate, and the unknown numbers of refugees who integrate under the legal radar in almost every country to which refugees flee prove the power of the individual refugee. Refugees are not simply victims of persecution and recipients of aid, but thinking individuals with survival strategies and coping abilities (Kok 1989, Kauffer Michel 2002, Jacobsen 2003).

Much of the recent work on refugee livelihoods recognizes this importance of the agency of the refugee individual. Almost without exception, refugees with greater resources or more education are those found in urban areas, rather than in camps. There is evidence that rates of urban settlement, for example, simply mirror rates of refugees coming from urban areas, a fact that would mitigate political considerations.<sup>23</sup> Refugee camps have long been considered the destination for those with no other resources (Hansen 1979), thus implying that those refugees able to obtain the funds and connections will make their way to urban areas or find other means for survival after crossing the border.

Legal factors yielded surprising results in the three cases studied. In Nepal, official legal status had the opposite effect of what we might have expected, and Bhutanese refugees with official refugee status were required to live in camps. In Pakistan, legal factors were difficult to discern given that legal protection was absent, and in Kenya, it was the very refugees who snubbed their possible status that were able to integrate. It is commonly argued that higher assignments of legal rights will grant refugees improved access to land, education, services, and the market, and these elements which affect their ability toward self-reliance and integration (for example, Crisp 2002). While legal status may improve the lives of refugees who will remain in the host country forever, in the intermediate term, legal status has not improved integration levels in Nepal, Pakistan, or Kenya.

While security and economic factors were both mentioned in the original list of possibilities for affecting integration levels, neither on their own appeared to play important roles.

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<sup>23</sup> Interview with Yassin Hamid, Senior Desk Officer, UNHCR. August 7, 2003.

## Conclusion

Integration in the intermediate term remains a hope for millions of refugees who would prefer to sustain themselves rather than relying entirely on aid from outside sources. Determining the criteria for and the factors that facilitate integration, however, is a challenging task. Integration cannot be measured easily by dividing refugees into camp/non camp residents. Variance within host countries is high. Yet, understanding refugee integration is less about the when and where than about the *how* – how does the refugee live? Restricted or freely? Legally or illegally? Dependent or self-sufficient?

This paper set out to understand the *how* – the ways in which governments, laws, economies, geographies, ethnic groups, and individuals influence refugee integration in the intermediate term.

It discovered that the measurement of refugee integration cannot easily be determined by classifying refugees in camps or otherwise, as has been UNHCR's strategy for the past decade. Any further research on refugee integration would be greatly enhanced by improved statistical information on refugee integration, rather than destination in a camp or noncamp.

The paper defined specific measures of integration, and then listed several possible factors that might influence levels of refugee integration. Using the cases of Nepal, Pakistan, and Kenya, the paper found that the most consistent indicator for integration was temporal – that is, refugees who arrived further in the past and have remained longer as refugees were far more likely to integrate. The size of a refugee population, political contexts and social dimensions were powerful indicators. Legal, security, and economic factors did not play as significant a role. Individual refugee action and agency was found to play a role in possibilities for integration. How individuals may overcome political and temporal factors is a point that requires further study.

The paper further found evidence that the factors may work against each other. For example, while social factors might allow for easier integration, political factors may lessen such integration. While physical factors (such as increasing numbers of refugees) may lead to an expectation of lower integration, a population of refugees with high urban/education rates may individually find their way to cities. This phenomenon – conflicting determinants of integration – contributes to the difficulty of disaggregating the effects of one variable from another.

The ability to alter the direction, destination, and treatment of refugee populations has no one single factor. As durable conflicts defer the need for durable solutions, it is critical that we understand the reasons behind, and the causes of, intermediate refugee integration.



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