
Stateless in Afghanistan

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A group of people in eastern Afghanistan – known to the authorities and others as Bangriwala or Vangawala in this area – have reported recently been forcibly relocated because of their lack of identity documents. These people lead a nomadic lifestyle, following economic and trading opportunities and are generally seen as culturally different from the rest of society, because women often go outside the house for work or to beg, while men stay at home. The high number of begging women in the bazaars in Jalalabad and Kandahar was reportedly bothering local citizens; it was eventually resolved that the so-called Bangriwala were not Afghans and that they should be removed to an unknown location, possibly neighbouring Pakistan.

Afghanistan's constitution states that all Afghan citizens should be treated equally, without discrimination. The citizenship law issued in 2000 rules that a person who has been living in the country for more than five years, has not committed any crimes and is aged over 18 can apply for citizenship; furthermore, it explicitly states that children born inside Afghanistan to parents with unclear citizenship status have the right to apply for citizenship.

The problem lies in how people have to apply for a *tazkera*, the document that proves citizenship of Afghanistan and allows access to education, health

care, legal representation, etc. A local elder – who has to be registered as an official representative of the community that the person claims to belong to – has to verify that the person is part of the community or the son/daughter of a community member who already has a *tazkera* and is registered. The practical problems for Bangriwala (or other nomadic populations) are two-fold. First of all, most of their local elders are not officially registered, which makes it impossible for them to vouch for *tazkeras*. Secondly, most Bangriwala have never been registered in the national archives and thus have left no bureaucratic trace, which makes it more difficult for their successors to register.

And without the *tazkera*, people deemed inconvenient by the authorities can be relocated or sent out of the country. Our researchers were told repeatedly that a large group of Bangriwala had been deported about a month previously: yet another cause of displacement in Afghanistan that requires a just and sustainable solution.

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See Stateless mini-feature in this issue and FMR issue 32 www.fmreview.org/statelessness