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Refugee and Citizenship Crisis in Contemporary Afghanistan



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The Refugee and Citizenship Crisis in Contemporary Afghanistan

Tawafuddin Azimi

2024

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Tawafuddin Azimi *

Introduction

Afghan refugees constitute the third largest displaced population in the world today after Syrian and Ukrainian refugees (UNHCR, Afghanistan Refugee Crisis Explained 2024). Globally, nearly 10.9 million Afghans remained displaced, almost all within their country or neighboring countries and by the end of 2023, the number of Afghan refugees reported a global increase by 741,400 to reach 6.4 million (UNHCR, Global Trends Forced Displacement in 2023 2024, 9).

According to government estimates, Iran hosts at least 4.5 million Afghan refugees, 71% of whom are women and children, who have arrived since 2021- bringing the total number of Afghans in neighboring countries to 5.82 million (UNHCR, Figures at a glance 2024). Recurring natural disasters like earthquakes and droughts, chronic poverty, ethnic and religious persecution, and a state of perpetual war for the past forty years are the main factors that prompt Afghan citizens to seek refuge elsewhere. Refugee and migration movements have been commonplace in Afghanistan's history. The Taliban takeover of 2021 intensified these pre-existing problems, engendering a dramatic increase in the migration of Afghans (Human Rights Watch 2021).

Reports indicate that more than 80 percent of Afghans who have fled their country reside in Pakistan and Iran, while international migration to Western countries is much lower in contrast. Official estimates show as many as 1,425,500 registered Afghan migrants living in Pakistan in addition to one million unregistered migrants (U.S. News Staff 2021). The life of Afghan refugees in Pakistan is a matter of concern as many refugees experience injustice and discrimination in the host society.

The research delves into a crucial dimension of Afghan refugees and destination choices. Concomitantly, it examines the impact of changing the government on migration while considering how demographic factors, such as gender and ethnicity, influence migration decisions. This study is organized into several sections, starting with a literature review, followed by factors that influence Afghan migration, the demographics of migration, and finally, an exploration of the motivations behind Afghan migrants' selection of destination countries. This study takes into account narratives of Afghan refugees in Pakistan and Iran, two major host countries. The study is important for informing policy responses and humanitarian efforts by emphasizing the need for nuanced interventions that address the unique circumstances of diverse groups within the Afghan refugee population amidst ongoing instability and humanitarian crises.

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Literature Review

The refugee crisis in Afghanistan has produced significant academic interest, particularly in understanding the factors that influence migration decisions and the experiences of Afghan refugees in host countries. This literature review focuses on the intersectionality of gender, ethnicity, and economic status in shaping these migration patterns, particularly emphasizing major host countries such as Pakistan and Iran. Furthermore, it highlights the limited migration flows to neighboring countries of Afghanistan, that why Afghans are migrating mainly to two countries, Iran and Pakistan. Even though this country is bounded to the east and south by Pakistan (including those areas of Kashmir administered by Pakistan), to the west by Iran, and to the north by the Central Asian states of Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan, it also has a short border with Xinjiang, China, at the end of the long, narrow Wakhan in the extreme northeast (Marvin G. Weinbaum & Frank Raymond Allchin 2024).

There is ample research into the complex and dynamic stations of the Afghan refugee crisis in Iran and Pakistan countries. Drawing upon history, politics, and culture and despite the long-standing cordial relations with neighboring countries, most Afghan emigrants are clustered in Pakistan and Iran. However, the influx of Afghan refugees into neighboring countries like Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and China is small.

According to Matthew B. Fielden, the geopolitical interest and international aid provision interplay with Afghan refugees in Pakistan. The particular paper cites the refugee crisis within historical contexts, emphasizing how the politicization of aid during the Cold War continues to affect humanitarian efforts. It discusses that the motivations for aid are often dictated by shifting geopolitical priorities rather than the refugee population's needs, and highlighting these dynamics, he argues for understanding how external factors impact Afghan refugees' choices and experiences in host countries (Fielden 1998, 460).

Furthermore, Irteqa Khan, through his essay, rigorously investigates the roots, preparation and the Afghan refugee crisis; it also provides a nuanced discussion of the sociocultural experiences of Afghan refugees in Pakistan. The study emphasizes the diversity among Afghan refugees and argues against the oversimplified categorization of their identities. He advocates for tailored policy responses considering individual circumstances, including ethnic and regional affiliations. This perspective is vital when analyzing how different ethnic identities among Afghan refugees influence their migration destination choices, especially concerning the limited opportunities for resettlement in Uzbekistan and Tajikistan (Khan 2020, 3). Waris Badr et al. (2022) cite the socioeconomic dynamic of Afghan migration and its implications in the origin and host countries. He addresses the difference between refugee and economic migration by highlighting the criticism of their unique circumstances. The paper focuses on host countries like Pakistan and Iran, and the result shows how ethnic identity informs destination choices among Afghan migrants, particularly the hesitance to migrate to neighboring countries such as Uzbekistan and Tajikistan despite cultural similarities. Moreover, the study suggests that these migration patterns stem from historical ties and socio-economic considerations (Waris Badr, Ali Ahmad & Noorullah Aziz 2023, 249).

A study by Muhammad Suleman Malik et al. examines the critical aspect of the refugee experience in the disease status of Afghan refugees and migrants in Pakistan (2023). They examine health disparities among Afghan refugees in Pakistan, identifying prevalent health issues and the challenges posed by prolonged displacement. The authors highlight that health outcomes are significantly influenced by the socio-economic status and regional affiliations of refugees, affecting

their access to healthcare and overall well-being. Such health challenges complicate host countries' resettlement and integration processes (Muhammad Suleman Malik, Muhammad Afzal, Alveena Farid, Fati Ullah Khan, BushraMirza & MohammadTahirWaheed 2019). Furthermore, the limited migration to neighboring countries may reflect concerns over healthcare access and support systems.

A work that is a result of the staff of The World Bank with external contributions emphasizes the global implications of Afghan migration stemming from the NATO-led intervention from 2001 to 2021 (Nandini Krishnan, Xiayun Tan, Christina Wieser & Thea Yde-Jensen 2018, 3,6). This study critiques the conventional categorizations of migration, standing for a deeper understanding of the socio-political dimensions that drive Afghan migration, particularly the roles of gender and ethnicity. The report also evaluates the impact of German Official Development Assistance (ODA) on fostering inclusive societies, thereby aligning with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The study is a critical resource for understanding how socio-political factors intertwine with migration narratives in Afghanistan. Another report titled Patterns and Determinants of Cross-border Migration in Afghanistan prepared by scientists and research associates at Modern Scientist Global, identifies the main drivers and patterns of migration in Afghanistan. The report is based primarily on the year of 2021 Survey of the Afghan People (SAP) data. This report details the implications of political, economic, environmental, and social crises on the urgent need for migration. The report emphasizes tailoring policy responses that cater to the distinct needs of Afghan migrants, especially vulnerable groups such as women and girls (Adebisi Akande, Angelika Aziz, Sahil Gambhir, Sabah Husain, Carina Luo, Ramraj Rajakumar, Hadia Rafiqzad, Hana Tasic & Nadia Akseer Shinwari 2022, 3,10). The intersectional approach is glaringly highlighted here, pointing out how ethnic identities and unpredictable socio-economic statuses are pivotal in influencing migration decisions.

Subsequently, another study provides a comprehensive historical context for Afghan migration patterns, intensely under the Taliban power, by Barlas and Ahmad Walid (2022). They discuss the push factors and multifaceted motives for migration, including ongoing insecurities, economic issues, and adverse environmental conditions. Likewise, their study argues the challenge that the Taliban is facing in managing migration and displacement, noting their limitations in terms of legitimacy and skilled human resources (Barlas & Ahmad Walid 2022, 3,19). Ultimately, this study connects with the primary goal of looking at refugee and economic migration, focusing on how ethnic identities and socio-economic factors have influenced Afghan migration patterns. Study by Pierre Centlivres and Micheline Centlivres-Demont, 1998, the ambiguous identities of Afghan refugees in Pakistan are explored; both examine how refugees must navigate dual identities designated by the UN's definition and local cultural interpretations. The relationship between ethnic and cultural identities is highlighted, see-through its significance in understanding social dynamics and interactions with host communities (Pierre Centlivres & Micheline Centlivres-Demont 1998). This view vibrates with the leading research focus on how cultural contexts and ethnic identities influence destination choices, informing the need for differentiated policy responses for Afghan migrants.

The refugee crisis after 2021 is complex, concerning many factors that affect people's experiences. Therefore, an intersectional approach helps us understand how issues like gender, ethnicity and culture influence Afghan refugee's decision to choose the countries. As the situation continues to change, it's crucial for future research to look closely at these various factors and focus on the actual experiences of the refugees. This will help shape better policies and humanitarian aid that meet the diverse needs of Afghan refugees. The literature points out that the current study is

supposed to consider the historical background, geopolitical influences, and challenges unique to various ethnicities in the Afghan refugee population.

Additionally, the impact of the Taliban's return to power, is crucial for understanding why people are fleeing from the country brutally. Policymakers and organizations working in this area need to consider the voices of Afghan refugees to ensure their basic rights and dignity are respected during processes like asylum and integration. So, by keeping these insights in concentration, we can propose more effective and compassionate solutions for displaced people and refugees, ensuring that their needs and perspectives are central to the ongoing conversation about their future.

Drivers of Afghan Migration

The factors that persuade its citizens to flee Afghanistan include a wide range of social, economic, political, demographic and environmental issues that have existed for long. These conditions were exacerbated as a consequence of the fall of the republican government on 15 August 2021. The Taliban is currently ruling the country without any legitimate recognition, triggering a dramatic increase in the number of refugees and migrants. The various measures adopted by the Taliban government has nullified the progress gained by Afghanistan in recent decades. Women and girls are the saddest affected as their rights to livelihood and education are severely reduced, with the Taliban imposing a total ban on girls' education and subjecting women to heavy restrictions in the workplace. Afghanistan has been ranked in The Global Peace Index among the world's three least peaceful countries for the last ten years (Institute for Economics & Peace Jun, 2021, 3).

In 2021, the Index ranked Afghanistan at the lowest, dubbing it the least peaceful country in the world, mired in wars, terrorism and internal conflict. In the Human Rights and Rule of Law Index 2021, Afghanistan ranked 44th out of 173 countries with index points 7.40 (Global Economy 2021). Afghanistan is marked by a history of conflict, which are interstate and intrastate, as well as non-state conflict. In particular, the increased resurgence of the Taliban in 2006 was accompanied by an increase in violence in the country. Combat-related deaths increased from 1,595 in 2005 to 29,940 in 2019. The internal conflict between the Taliban and the government has intensified since 2013 and was the deadliest conflict in the world in 2018. In addition, the Islamic State (IS) became active in the country in early 2015, leading to an increase in terrorist attacks, particularly in the capital Kabul. Between 2009 and 2018, the murder rate nearly doubled. The return of the Taliban could intensify the conflict between IS and the Taliban. There are already first signs of increased terrorist activity in the country.” (Clara Albrecht& Britta Rude& Tanja Stitteneder 2021, 51)

Afghanistan has historically been affected by ethnic conflict. Ethnic violence in Afghanistan reached unprecedented levels with the rise of the Pashtun-majority Taliban in the 1990s. According to the Irish Times, the Taliban espoused Pashtun Nationalism and carried out ethnic cleansing against other ethnic groups, particularly the Hazaras, Tajiks, and Uzbeks (The IrishTimes 2001); if the Taliban disagrees with such reports and studies, they can address all the issues that were raised during their first time in power. As per estimates, almost 50 percent of the population lived below the national poverty line in 2020. The country's Gini index or Gini ratio coefficient of 0.3 indicates a relatively equitable wealth distribution.

Nevertheless, the return of the Taliban rule in 2021 aggravated poverty to such an alarming extent that 97 percent of Afghans are estimated to be at risk of extreme poverty -2022 (UNDP 2021). According to a World Food Program survey, nine out of ten respondents suffer from food shortages (FAO, IFAD, UNICEF, WFP &WHO 2021, 29). In addition, food prices are rising noticeably. There are reports that the prices of flour, oil, gas, and beans have increased by 63% in one month

(Save the Children 2021). Many public-sector employees have not received money for at least a month (Alarabiya News 2021), the United Nations warns of a humanitarian disaster (UN News 2024), and (Clara Albrecht& Britta Rude& Tanja Stitteneder 2021, 49).

Afghanistan is frequently exposed to disasters like droughts and earthquakes and is ill-equipped to deal with them. Afghanistan ranks at 175 in the ND-GAIN Index 2019 (ND-Gain 2022) and is calculated to be the 12th most vulnerable country to climate change disasters. The Afghan population is facing severe drought this year, similar to 2017 and 2018, with the last drought resulting in 13.5 million people suffering increased food shortages (Giriraj Amarnath, Surajit Ghosh & Niranga Alahacoon 2023).

Afghan refugees in Pakistan- The first significant influx of Afghan refugees to Pakistan corresponded with the Saur Revolution in 1978. Pakistan's current refugee population of 1,438,955 is almost entirely composed of Afghans. However, in recent years, Pakistan has been adopting policies that seek to restrain Afghan immigration. For example, between early 2017 and January 2022, the country reportedly fenced around 90 % of its border with Afghanistan, making formal and informal border crossings much more difficult. However, due to the 'porous' nature of the border, undocumented crossings continue to occur (AEAA 2022).

Despite constant protests by Afghan refugees in crisis, the authorities have failed to pay heed to their demands. The situation is more oppressive for families of more than four members as affordable rented housing is inaccessible. Furthermore, providing families with food and other necessities has become increasingly difficult as prices of essential commodities are soaring...The prevalence of corruption in the UN High Commission for Refugees administrative setup hinders asylum seekers from accessing appointments. For example, an appointment is possible with two hundred USD, but someone who lacks the money has to wait for months with no certainty of an appointment (Malikzada 2022).

Afghans seeking asylum in Pakistan are vulnerable to extreme poverty and insecurity. They face myriad problems, which include a lack of food and shelter, a lack of access to primary education and proper healthcare, and discrimination and harassment by local authorities. A constant risk of deportation looms large for undocumented migrants. A factor that worsens the plight of these refugees is the corruption and inefficiency of the UNHCR in Islamabad, which deters them from accessing welfare schemes.

According to the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, almost half of the Afghan refugees who are deprived of their rights to basic health and education are under 18 years of age, so 74 % of the 2.8 million Afghan refugees estimated to be currently residing in Pakistan were born in Pakistan; Afghan nationals residing in Pakistan on a special status (PoR or ACC cardholders) are not being offered a pathway to citizenship as well despite some of them having resided in Pakistan for more than 40 years or being born in Pakistan (Qaisrani & Ayesha 2023, 12).

Afghan refugees in Iran are facing severe challenges despite going through the process of socialization and close communication with the local community. Although many of these people were born in Iran and also have legal residency documents, despite all these, they face discrimination and social exclusion from the Iranian authority. For example, according to the report of the radio Azadi, "one of the Afghans who wished not to disclose his identity said that his father was arrested by police, even though they have legal documents for settlement in Iran." (RadioAzadi 2024)

The Taliban government issued a statement that pointed out their concerns about the "mistreatment of Afghans in Iran" and considered the forced deportation of refugees as a violation of Islamic, international and neighborly principles (Voice of America 2024). Unfortunately, while Afghan people are trying to achieve their rights and improve their living conditions in Iran, the legal

and social obstacles in front of them are still in place, and this issue requires serious attention and action from domestic and international institutions. Among the problems raised as a result of such policies are cases such as the issue of banning the sale of bread from bakeries to undocumented Afghan people in the city of Kerman province. Such decisions can increase social tensions and economic problems, affecting food security and social cohesion.

Forces that Shaped Human Movement

The migration of the people of Afghanistan has been ongoing for more than 40 years. In simpler terms, it's all about escaping from a situation that has never been desirable and has never created the motivation to stay. Those who have left the country long to revisit their homeland and return to the arms of the motherland. They post photos of the natural beauty of Afghanistan to calm the nostalgia hidden in their homesick minds. But those who remain inside and are trapped by the evil of the times and the hardships that weigh heavily on their shoulders will find a sense of pity when they see a few pictures of the outdoors; those inside the country feel a sense of regret while they are looking the images from outside the country.

However, the people who are inside the country and those who are outside of the country do not have the necessary peace of mind and mental stability. Those who live in Afghanistan live below the poverty line and live to find a place to live a peaceful and good quality life. The political situation is directly related to the economy and poor handicrafts. The political situation in Afghanistan remains unexpected and unpredictable. One the Soviet and American attacks and the other day's fall of the government, the arrival of the Taliban and the militant forces and suicide, every political change has made the poor lives of people worse. But those who have taken their bodies out of the sea have little tranquillity because of them, and they have not been in danger to reach the safe shore. The freezing, drowning and shooting from border forces to Afghan immigrants and refugees is the latest hot and great distress of the chain of sufferings and sorrows that indicate the level of danger and suffering of the refugees.

For those stuck in limbo in Indonesia for more than ten years, a large part of their life has been consumed, and they still have an unknown fate and a long way to safe shores and their final destination. For more than forty years, some people have made people's lives hell in order to go to heaven. In the name of Sharia, they have violated the fundamental rights of God's servants. And those who did not have a desire for heaven had no less share than these in making people's lives hellish. By exercising monopoly and tyranny of voting, corruption, embezzlement and looting of public assets and fuelling ethnic and linguistic discrimination and prejudice, they stole peace from people's souls and lives. It is natural that this mass breeding of migratory birds and the purchase of all the dangers of the path of misery imposed on our nation. This is the grief, the escape from the sorrow and sorrow that the shadow of every citizen's life has enveloped. The people of Afghanistan are either in pain or in sorrow and are mourning to survive.

This unfortunate situation invites all awake consciences to reflect and think, to do something and try to change the situation and lighten the grief and sorrow of the people. A few years ago, during the republic period, many young people chanted in their demonstrations that we are not Pashtuns, Hazaras, Tajiks or Uzbeks, but we are all unemployed and hungry. The message of this slogan was so clear and expressive that it did not need interpretation or research. Even today, the same sadness caused by injustice, oppression, and right killing destroys people's lives. The continuation of this situation leaves neither a place of honor for the Taliban nor a place of pride for yesterday's claimants of the republic nor the "Mujahideen" of the era of jihad and resistance. Time is

the time of collective work and continuous struggle to positively change this situation so that this land becomes a homeland for all.

Historical Background

In this context, four major historical events indicate the migration of Afghans to distant and nearby countries. The first of these events was the Soviet Union's invasion in 1979 (Adebisi Akande, Angelika Aziz, Sahil Gambhir, Sabah Husain, Carina Luo, Ramraj Rajakumar, Hadia Rafiqzad, Hana Tasic, & Nadia Akseer Shinwari. 2022). This incursion led to a mass exodus of over five million individuals to Iran and Pakistan. This migration occurred when Afghanistan's population stood at around 15 million (Khalidi 1982). A complicated group of reasons fuelled migration throughout the following decade, like internal conflict between the anti-communist party and the Afghan communist government till 1992 (Omar 2023). Afghanistan was engulfed in sectarian bloodshed due to the political unrest in Kabul and the power battles among rival militias; within 24 hours in August 1992, 3,000 residents of Kabul died in a barrage of rocket fire (Dorransoro 20007, 6). Therefore, the world's single largest internal refugee flow occurred, during which an estimated 700,000 people fled Kabul to neighboring countries (Tarzi 1993, 165). As a result, the number of internally displaced people (IDPs) increased, and camps housing some 400,000 people were established in the border regions (Refworld 2008, 12).

The second critical event was from 1994 to 2001. During this period, the Taliban's emergence of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan resulted from chaos and civil wars in Afghanistan after the Soviet invasion (Bloch 2021). Many Afghans skipped the country and went to other countries during this time. With the rise of the Taliban regime in the beginning, major movements of Afghans to the Islamic Republic of Iran and Pakistan began again and continued until 2000. Between 1991 and 2000, over 300,000 Afghan refugees fled to Pakistan (Ruiz 2002). Moreover, the Taliban was removed from power by U.S. and NATO forces after the American invasion in 2001 (Stanford 2015). Over the following ten years, Afghanistan became one of the leading countries where people sought asylum abroad; in 2011 alone, more than 39,000 Afghans did so (Katrin Marchand, Melissa Siegel, Katie Kuschminder, Nassim Majidi, Michaela Vanore & Carla Buil 2016, 29).

The third period between 2001 and 2021 saw significant waves of migration among Afghan people, driven by a complex interplay of political, security, and humanitarian factors (China Global Television Network 2021). Millions of Afghans who had fled to nearby countries such as Pakistan and Iran for safety as the violence increased and the Taliban regime was overthrown returned in quest of safety and the chance to rebuild their country. However, the following years were marked by persistent insecurity, unpredictable politics, and limited economic opportunity. Afghans continued to flee their nation to seek safety and a better future for their family abroad, incredibly skilled professionals. Many Afghans moved to Europe, North America, and other locations. The main factor influencing migration during this time was the U.S.-led invasion of Afghanistan in 2001 in response to the 9/11 attacks.

Fast-forward to 2021, the fourth wave of migration was after the subsequent withdrawal of American forces from Afghanistan. The withdrawal of American forces from Afghanistan marked a significant turning point in the country's history, leading to a complex interplay of socio-economic and political dynamics. One of the immediate consequences of this withdrawal has been the surge in Afghan migration. This is usually pursued legally and illegally.

After the Taliban took power, roughly 1.5 million Afghans fled to Pakistan, and they numbered about five million immigrants. The Iranian minister of external affairs claims that there are approximately 5 million Afghan immigrants residing in Iran. Furthermore, roughly 2.5 million Afghans are residing in Europe and America. Consequently, the number of Afghan immigrants has exceeded 12.5 million worldwide (Masoud 2024).

Demographics and Migration

Significant shifts illustrate the demographics of Afghan migration due to ongoing conflicts, socio-economic factors, and the region's geopolitical landscape. A countable number of the Afghan refugee population is a mixture of women and children, with about 48% under 15 years old and 28% being women (Marschall & Tobias Christophe Michael 2023, 9). These groups face heightened vulnerabilities during migration, particularly women who often deal with cultural restrictions such as purdah (Hijab), limiting their independence and reliance on male family members or aid organizations.

The impact of age and gender on migration experiences is crucial. Vulnerable refugees include women, children, the elderly, and households without able-bodied males, each facing unique challenges. For instance, children need education and protection, while the elderly may encounter health and mobility issues. The decision to repatriate is influenced by security conditions in Afghanistan, with women and children at greater risk in conflict zones.

Afghan migration affects both home and host countries economically and socially, but the impact of migrating in the home country is more especially negative. It is because no matter whether the country has resources or unteachable resources, without human resources, a country will not be developed; this is the human resources that help and import for development.

While host countries benefit from the cheap labor of Afghan migrants, Afghanistan is losing educated individuals. However, the remittances from Iran and Pakistan migrants will not contribute much to the local economy. Thus, the loss of human capital amid ongoing instability presents substantial challenges to Afghanistan's recovery and development.

Destination Choices

Cross-border emigration is a perennial phenomenon in Afghanistan (Adebisi Akande, Angelika Aziz, Sahil Gambhir, Sabah Husain, Carina Luo, Ramraj Rajakumar, Hadia Rafiqzad, Hana Tasic, & Nadia Akseer Shinwari. 2022, 7). On the other hand, people's thoughts are scattered to other countries, and they perceive only passages of difficulties in leaving their homeland (Bizhan 2021).

Afghan immigrants mostly travelled and settled in two countries, Pakistan and Iran. Iran attracted economic migration from Afghanistan. One of the reasons in the year 1972 was the starvation and famine in Northwestern, which pushed many people to migrate to Iran (Waris Badr, Ali Ahmad & Noorullah Aziz 2023, 249).

Ethnicity plays a significant role in the migration of Afghans to Iran, particularly for those who speak Dari, as they are not facing language barriers in that country. Over the past years, many political leaders from the Hazara, Tajik, and other communities have frequently traveled to Iran not only because of political duty purposes but because they have homes and family members residing there.

However, Afghanistan shares a long border with Iran, and due to weak security, human smugglers can easily facilitate the illegal crossing of individuals without legal documentation. This lax

border security does not reflect the vulnerabilities of the Iranian government; instead, it highlights Iran's need for labor, especially for cheap labor workers. Iranians can take advantage of the influx of inexpensive labor workers. Based on the experiences of many laborers, in every building in Iran that was constructed, one or two Afghan workers have fallen from the top of the building; some of them have died or become disabled. According to Ali-Akbar Raefipour, an Iranian political and social theorist, Afghans in Iran cannot have more than 14 jobs, which is a fact, and these are the jobs that Iranians are not ready to do even if you send them by force. He says the production cycle was disrupted when the immigrants started returning. The price of meat was increasing, and Iranians were unwilling to be shepherds. Even in some cities, migrants do not have any right to life there; if they are seen, they will be arrested and imprisoned (Raefipour 2023).

Since the Taliban regained power, many Afghans who had worked with international organizations have sought refuge in Iran and Pakistan. They are requesting assistance in completing their migration processes to third countries to ensure the safety of themselves and their loved ones. Therefore, Pakistan is another major host country for Afghan migration. Pakistan is a south-bordering country with the longest 2600 km border with Afghanistan than any other neighboring country. These borders were used for migration, and it is still being considered an option for Afghans to flee their homes. They both share ethnic identities; in fact, they don't recognize the border between them; they see themselves as one nation (Waris Badr, Ali Ahmad & Noorullah Aziz 2023, 249). A significant number of Hazara people also live in Quetta, Pakistan. This makes Quetta a significant and convenient place for them. However, the situation changed when they began displaying images of Ali Khamenei and other Hazara leaders in various ceremonies in Quetta. As a result, the government's attitude towards the Hazara immigrants changed, and they lost the comfort and support they once had.

The Afghan migrants in Pakistan, primarily Pashtuns, sought refuge in a territory inhabited by a population with whom they share language, culture, and values. This suggests that ethnic and cultural similarities can significantly influence the choice of destination, as refugees may prefer to settle in areas where they feel a sense of belonging and community (Pierre Centlivres & Micheline Centlivres-Demont 1998, 144). Additionally, the notion of being a "muhajir" (one who migrated for religious reasons) also reflects how religious and ethnic identities intersect. The Afghan migrants identified themselves not only as refugees in the UN sense but also as mohajer, which carries historical and religious significance. This dual identity may influence their choice of destination, as they seek places that align with their religious beliefs, and perceptions are another factor that is perceived to choose the destination country; this perception can affect their integration and acceptance.

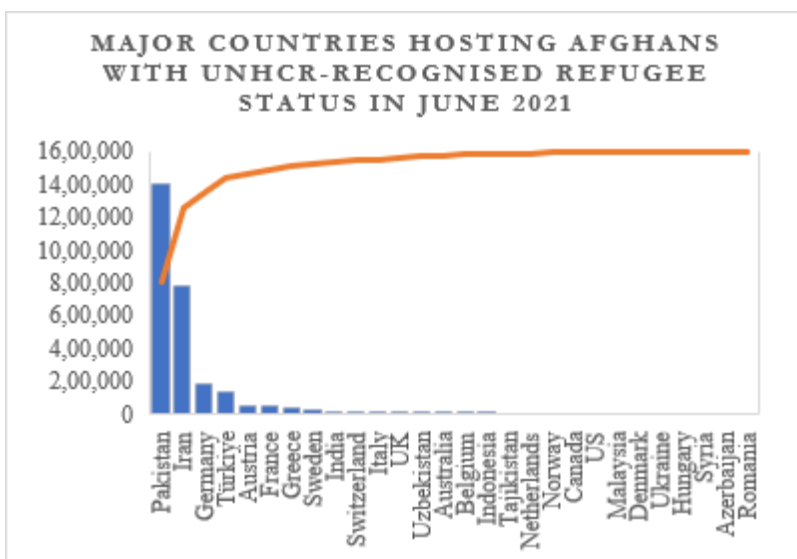
Apart from Iran and Pakistan, one of the biggest obstacles is the existence of closed borders and strict regulations imposed by neighboring countries. These conditions make it much more difficult for Afghans to enter neighboring countries. For example, suppose a person wants to immigrate to Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, or Turkmenistan. In that case, they will come across various issues, such as job opportunities for non-legal immigrants being severely limited and many Afghans being forced to continue living in very difficult conditions.

These Central Asian countries, those bordering Afghanistan, are concerned about radicalization and hesitate to accept refugees for security reasons. Furthermore, all three countries have increased the number of soldiers stationed at the border and improved border security. Uzbekistan has stated that it can only temporarily accept refugees for transfer to third countries. While ethnic Uzbeks in Afghanistan are likely to immigrate back to the country. Although the leaders of the Taliban give the message of an inclusive government, it is impossible to convince the Shiite

Hazaras and the Tajik. Tajikistan has announced that it will accept 100,000 refugees temporarily as a transit country. Tajikistan's Gorno-Badakhshan autonomous region announced that it would accept 10,000 Afghan refugees. Turkmenistan has stated that it will not allow fleeing Afghan soldiers or ethnic Turkmen living on the border to enter the country (Erdoğan 2021).

In addition, other countries, such as China, are not a suitable option for Afghans due to the difficulties in the immigration process. As a significant barrier, the Chinese language makes it much more difficult for Afghans. Almost 99% of Afghans are unfamiliar with this language, which negatively affects their job opportunities and reduces their motivation to immigrate to these countries. Other factors, such as the high price of visas and the cost of living in other countries, also add to these problems, and due to these factors, considering moving there is not suitable.

Moreover, In June 2021, a significant concentration of Afghan refugees with UNHCR-recognized status was observed in various host countries, primarily in Pakistan, which alone accommodated over 1.4 million individuals. This figure dwarfs the numbers in other nations, such as Germany, Turkey, and France, hosting less than 200,000 refugees. The stark disparity in numbers highlights not only Pakistan's geographic and historical role in the region but also the broader challenges faced by Afghan refugees seeking safety (UNHCR, Global Trends Report 2022). The data underscores the need for targeted international support and solutions to address the pressing humanitarian needs of these populations in various host countries.



Source: www.unhcr.org/refugee-statistics

Conclusion

This study argued that the refugee and citizenship crisis in Afghanistan is not only a humanitarian or citizenship crisis but also a socio-political crisis that needs a global response urgently. After decades of repeated warfare, economic collapse and internal ethnic conflicts, as well as the withdrawal of NATO forces in 2021, Afghan refugees have created one of the largest groups of displaced people across the globe. In this situation, the plight of Afghan women and children, who form a larger section of this population, speaks volumes of the multi-faceted vulnerabilities that are not only worsened by cultural, ethnic, and gender inequalities.

Additionally, the study highlighted the profound challenges faced by Afghan refugees. Beyond the obvious hardship of being physically displaced, many struggle with a sense of identity and the erosion of their citizenship rights as host countries often resist their integration. Iran and Pakistan impose restrictive immigration policies or limit access to essential resources, making it even harder for refugees to find safety and maintain their dignity. Thus, it shows that this crisis reveals the urgent need for a comprehensive approach to international policy and humanitarian efforts—one

that addresses not just the immediate needs of these individuals but also the deeper issues that lead to displacement. Ultimately, the governments and policymakers of Iran and Pakistan should consider migration as a cultural aspect of the Afghan people and the next step they could think about managing these movements. Of course, it should not be forgotten that this management will not be very effective without the support and assistance of the Afghan society and transnational networks.

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