

# **RETURNING AFGHAN MIGRANTS; A DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVE**

**On the Occasion of World Immigrant Day**

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# RETURNING AFGHAN MIGRANTS; A DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVE

## On the Occasion of World Immigrant Day



Immigration relates to the movement of peoples from one country into another. People migrates due to various causes such as poverty, lack of food, natural disasters, war, unemployment and insecurity. In addition, people also migrates to have access to better living standards, better education and income. The International migrants Day is annually held on 18<sup>th</sup> December. The day was proclaimed as the International migrants' day by the United Nations, taking into account the large and increasing number of migrants in the world. It is to show respect to the millions of people who abandoned their country with a hope for a better life. Every year, countries of the world celebrates the day and strives to discuss and overcome the obstacles facing immigrants.<sup>1</sup>

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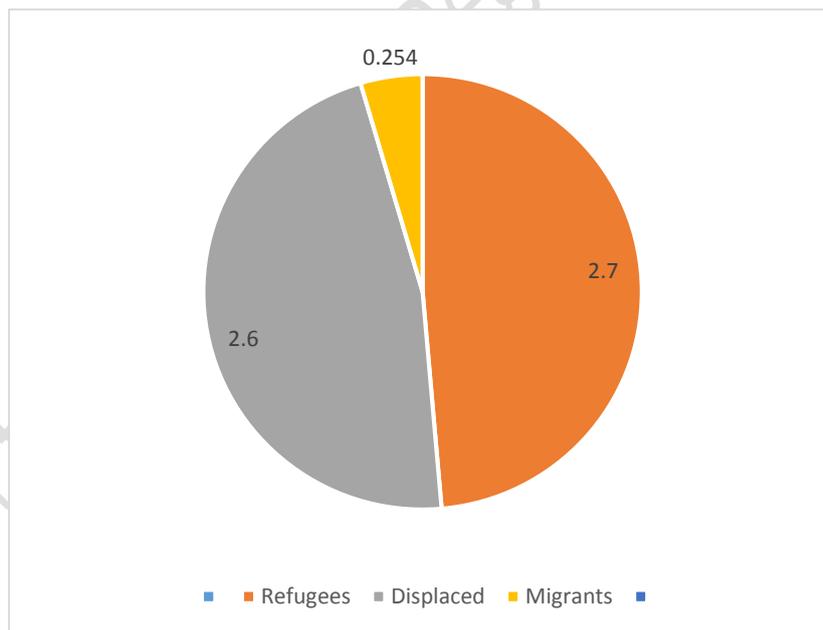
<sup>1</sup> [http://www.dailyafghanistan.com/opinion\\_detail.php?post\\_id=129391](http://www.dailyafghanistan.com/opinion_detail.php?post_id=129391)

## Immigration in the Lives of Afghans

Although immigration encompasses the past and future of humanity, but considering political, social, cultural and economic aspects of human life, the issue of immigration has recently become vast and more complex.

The lives of Afghan refugees have also been affected by similar aspects. They also have an economic aspect. Even before the commencement of three-decade lasting war, Afghans have migrated to foreign countries in search for better economic environment. The war of last three decades further triggered increase in immigration.

Presently, around 3 million Afghans live as refugees in various countries, especially in Iran and Pakistan. In addition, around 3 million other have been displaced from their homes within the country. It means that around 6 million people have left their homes due to precarious situation in Afghanistan. The following chart of UNHCR shows overall presence of Afghan refugees in various countries:<sup>2</sup>



Source: BBC Persian (Translated)

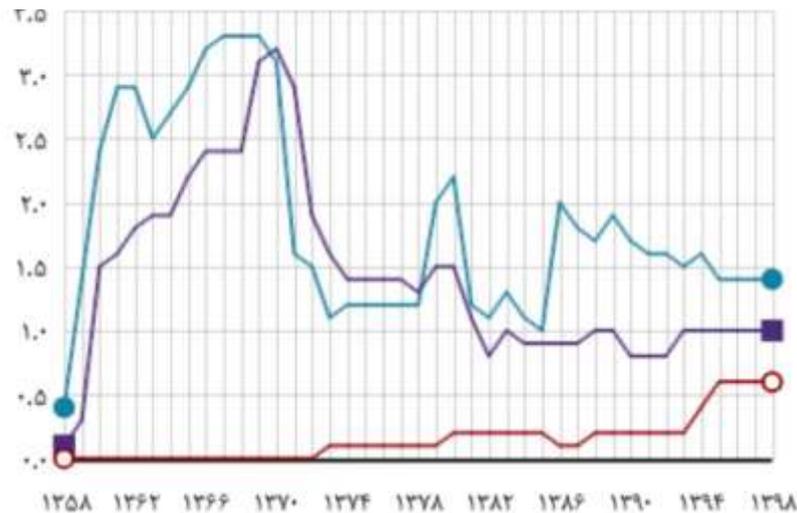
<sup>2</sup> <https://www.bbc.com/persian/afghanistan-53181636.amp>

## **Background; Afghan Immigrants**

Caused by war and insecurity since the Soviet Union invasion four decades ago, Afghanistan is among countries where a remarkably large number of people have migrated to other countries. In late 2019, around 251 thousand Afghans have requested asylum in foreign countries, while 2.7 million already lives as refugees. These numbers are not only of new immigrants, as they comprise people who migrated previously, or applied for immigration.

Additionally, the numbers are only of those immigrants who have been registered with UN related agencies. Refugees who are living in various countries without being registered with UN agencies are not included. They also do not include those who are living in foreign countries with work visa or for other purposes. It is possible for immigrants to become a permanent resident of host country after a certain time. Such right is only given in developed countries. Countries with large number of refugees such as Iran and Pakistan do not give rights of permanent residency. The following chart indicates overall destination of refuge of Afghans. The numbers are not entirely new, since they include number of previous years.

### Iran, Pakistan



Source: BBC Persian

After the Soviet invasion in December, 1979, Iran and Pakistan were the main immigration destination countries for Afghans. Recently however, immigration to European countries has increased significantly. The above graph indicates destination countries of Afghans' immigration. In late 2019, around half of Afghan immigrants were in Pakistan, Iran had close to one-third (950 thousand), and other countries had around 600 thousand Afghan refugees. This means that, in 2019, around 80% of Afghan refugees were living in Iran and Pakistan, and the remaining 20% were in other countries. If Pakistan and Iran are excluded for the equation, around 70% of the refugees that have not moved to the neighboring countries, have migrated to 6 European countries (including Turkey). Presently, Germany hosts 188 thousand Afghan migrants.

In this regard, Turkey is considered the second largest asylum destination for Afghans after Germany, since refugees are registered there in UN offices. In late 2019, 118 thousand Afghan refugees are registered in Turkey. On the other hand,

Austria, Greece and Sweden are also among the key destination countries for Afghan refugees.<sup>3</sup>

### **Current Condition of Afghan Refugees**

Despite establishment of the new government and billions of dollars of spending, returning opportunities for Afghan migrants have not been facilitated due to persisting war and insecurities. Although countries of the world proclaim new rights and support for immigrants, but horrifying condition of the lives of Afghan refugees still bleeds heart. Almost all countries reject asylum requests of Afghans.

Afghan immigrants are not respected and valued as common immigrants usually are. Rights of refugees that are accepted by Islam and international organizations and that should be given without consideration of race, religion, nationality are: right to live, right of education, freedom of travel, and equality.

Right of living and education are considered as the foundations of human rights and are given to all humanity by the Almighty Allah. As these rights are recognized by all religions, their recognition is obligation of every human. The right of living is a gift of the Almighty, based on which all people related to any religion, race and origin, underdeveloped and developed, value and locality, literacy and illiteracy are considered equal. A proclamation of the Human Rights Watch in 1949 and UNHCR in 1951 and the Protocol of 1967 also recognize the right and state "All people has the right of living, freedom and safety".<sup>4</sup>

Hosting countries such as Iran and Pakistan have requested the Afghan government to sense its responsibility regarding Afghan refugees and provide

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.bbc.com/persian/afghanistan.amp>

<sup>4</sup> [http://dailyafghanistan.com/opinion\\_detail.php?post\\_id=146208](http://dailyafghanistan.com/opinion_detail.php?post_id=146208)

returning opportunities for them. Therefore, considering previous experiences, the government should work on a comprehensive national strategy for returning immigrants. Unfortunately, the government was incapable to take such actions in last two decades, neither it had a true intention of doing so.

### **Need for Developing New Policies**

The Afghan government considers refugees as burden over its shoulder and thinks of their return as a challenge. Conversely, with an organized plan, returning immigrants can contribute to development of the country. In this regard, the following points should be considered:

#### ***1. Change in Perception about Refugees***

Afghan migrants who have migrated to neighboring or other countries do not have the same traditional thoughts about needs and necessities and are not limited to physical needs. With limited resources and opportunities, some of them have become experts in certain fields and some are experienced investors and educated individuals. In addition, some have specialized in investment and other professions. Most of them do not need humanitarian assistance. But conversely, the government needs their expertise for development of the country. Their return can lead to better governance and future political stability of Afghanistan. Therefore, the government and the AGEs should put an end to the ongoing war and facilitate a peaceful environment, so that migrants can find courage to return back to their homeland.

#### ***2. Organized Plan for Returning Refugees***

The plan was being implemented by the International Refugee Organization with certain limitations. However, it needs further planning and expansion. Return of

expert Afghan refugees has many benefits. Firstly, with return of expert refugees, their families can also return to their homeland, or at least be able to visit their country. Secondly, with absorption of these experts in governmental and non-governmental bodies, capacity building of staff will also hasten. Thirdly, experts will open doors for further entrepreneurship opportunities. Lastly, their return will reduce need for foreign experts who work in various sector while attaining high earnings, causing cash outflow of a large number of international donations.

### ***3. Attraction of Investment and Physical Resources of Refugees***

Most of Afghan refugees owns extensive wealth and have investment experiences. Attraction of their investment can contribute to national income and can consequently lead to development of the country.

In order to do so, development of an effective mechanism for attracting investment of Afghan refugees and provision of a peaceful environment for developmental works should among the key priorities of the Afghan government. On the other hand, international organizations allocate a considerable amount of budget for Afghan refugees. These budgets are mostly for short-term and humanitarian purposes. Conversely, they should encompass developmental and infrastructural aspects of migrants related matters. In addition to attraction of refugees' investment, luring private investment is also necessary.

### ***4. Accurate Awareness***

The Afghan government and refugees-related international organizations should undertake awareness project in order to inform refugees about the current opportunities in Afghanistan. Also, those who have intentions of migrating to foreign countries should be made aware of difficulties and challenges facing

refugee abroad, so that the ideas of fleeing of individuals and investments are prevented.

In addition to all possible opportunities, security and stability have fundamental roles in development process of the country. As long as insecurity persist, it will be impossible to convince individuals to invest or return to their homeland.

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