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Population Movements in Afghanistan: A Historical Overview, Migration Trends under the Taliban Regime, and Future Outlooks

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Abstract

Afghanistan has experienced a major refugee crisis in the last four decades. The Afghan migration patterns are shaped by a mix of political, social, environmental, and economic factors, making it difficult to pinpoint Afghan migration decisions to a single determinant. This study reviews Afghanistan's population movements, taking into account a historical overview of migration flows, the refugee trends under the Taliban regime, and future prospects. According to available studies and projections, Afghanistan's migrant flow will continue, citing insecurity, economic crisis, natural disaster, a high population growth rate, and the Taliban's imposition of restrictions on social, cultural and economic events as key reasons. The Afghan government could face numerous obstacles, including brain drain, high skilled labor force shortages, IDPs management, and facilitating reintegration of returnees in the future. Particularly, in dealing with migration issues, the Taliban could be confronted with three major constraints: a lack of national and international legitimacy, a shortage of human capital and a scarcity of funds.

Keyword: Conflict, drought, poverty, refugees, IDPs, and Afghanistan

Introduction

Four decades of war, instability, economic impoverishment and violence have led millions of Afghans to leave their country of birth and pursue refugee status in the bordering countries and overseas (Kuschminder & Dora, 2009). In 1980s, more than 5 million Afghans fled to Iran and Pakistan; thousand families migrated to other nations such as India, the US and Europe. Furthermore, close to 2-3 million people are internally displaced (Rubin , 1996; Ruiz, 2001; Noor, 2006). The refugee and migration patterns in Afghanistan are shaped by a mix of political, environmental, social and economic factors. Hence, it is tough to describe the migration decisions of Afghans by a single determinant (Garrote-Sanchez, 2017). A recent report shows that Afghanistan, with 2.6 million documented and more than 2.5 million undocumented refugees, stands in third position after Syria and Venezuela as a major migration source country in the world (UNHCR, 2022a).

Today, Afghanistan is the central media attention due to three major issues, including the withdrawal of the USA and its allies, the taking of power by the Taliban and the current humanitarian and economic crisis. On 14th April 2021, President Biden announced that the USA would leave Afghanistan in September 2021 (Cordesman, 2021). Peace negotiation between Afghan government representatives and the Taliban group has been going in Doha since early 2020. The special envoy of the USA, Zalmay Khalilzad and Afghan government officials were informed that the Taliban would not operate in provincial capitals until both-sides reach a peace agreement. However, the Taliban increased their military operations across the country; as a result they took control of dozens of districts within several weeks. They captured the first provincial capital, Zaranj on 6th August 2021 (Reuters, 2021a). On 15th August 2021, the Taliban took control of Kabul, the capital of Afghanistan. (Herd, 2021).

Ten of thousands of people rushed to Hamed Karzai International Airport as panic and violence amplified with the Taliban capture of Kabul. Official reports reveal that from mid to the end of August 2021; over 124,000 Afghans were evacuated with the assistance of international forces from Kabul (Kessler, 2021). In addition, almost 600,000 people moved to Iran and Pakistan (NRC, 2021; Gul, 2021).

This paper reviews population movements in Afghanistan, considering the Afghan migration nexus into three periods. Firstly, we evaluate migration trends and factors prior to 1979 until 2021. Secondly, the population movements will be assessed under the Taliban regime. Lastly, this study analyses the factors that could be crucial for sustaining the refugee crisis in the future. In particular, this paper focuses on how the Taliban handles migration and displacement issues. The following research question is stated for a relevant result:

What constraints could the Taliban face when it comes to dealing with migration and displacement challenges?

A historical overview of the population movement

Migration of Afghans to Iran and Pakistan prior to 1979

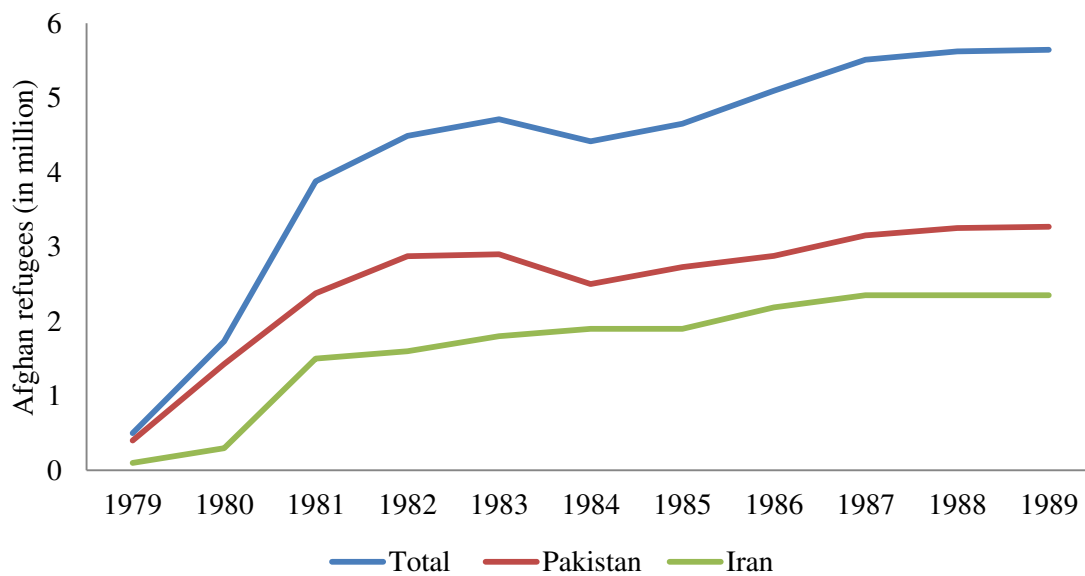
The population movement of Afghans to Iran and Pakistan has a long history. The primary factor for Afghans to choose these countries as a host has been ethnic ties. Pashtuns are divided on the border of Pakistan-Afghanistan; they compose one in fifth of population in Pakistan and close to one in third in Afghanistan. The border crossing of Pashtuns between Afghanistan and Pakistan has been a lifestyle (Monsutti, 2005). Likewise, the majority of Hazara refugees prefer to live in Quetta due to a strong connection with the Hazara tribes in this city (CSSR, 2005a). While, many Hazara Shia migrate to Iran (Kuschminder & Dora, 2009; Monsutti, 2005).

In the 1960s and 1970s, thousands of Afghans moved to Iran to seek better economic opportunities. Particularly, industrialization did not provide sufficient job opportunities for educated and urban population in Afghanistan (Stigter, 2006). Furthermore, the oil boom in 1973 triggered an additional increasing figure of Afghans migrating to Iran and other Middle East countries to participate in labor market (Ashrafi & Moghissi, 2002; Abbasi-Shavazi & Glazebrook, 2006). A study shows that workers from northern Afghanistan travel to Karachi, Pakistan during winter (CSSR, 2005b). Iranian officials welcomed Afghan labor, as many of them engaged in constructions, brick factories and agriculture for lower compensation compared to Iranian workers (Ashrafi & Moghissi, 2002). Climate change, drought and crop failure also pushed many Afghans to move into Iran. In 1970s, a significant number of people crossed the border as a result of drought and crop failure in the north and north-west of Afghanistan (Abbasi-Shavazi & Glazebrook, 2006; Monsutti, Alessandro, 2005).

The first wave of forced population movement: 1979-1989

In April 1978, Nur Mohammad Taraki took power in Afghanistan and established a communist government. He brought a wide-range of reforms which were not tolerable to the native Afghans. As a result, a new political and military opposition encompassing mujahedeen, tribal groups and academics was formed in the country (Noor, 2006; CRS, 2007). The Soviet Union invaded in December 1979 on the appeal of Babrak Karmal, who had overthrown Taraki. The opposition parties, particularly mujahedeen were supported by the USA to fight against the soviet union and the socialist state in Afghanistan (Noor, 2006). This conflict took a decade and caused a massive outflow of Afghan refugees to Iran, Pakistan and beyond. Figure 1 depicts the number of Afghan refugees in Iran and Pakistan from 1979 to 1989.

Figure 1: Number of Afghan refugees under UNHCR’s mandate



Source: UNHCR, 2022b

Figure 1 demonstrates that population movement from Afghanistan to Iran and Pakistan began in 1979 and increased more or less steadily until 1989. The primary reason for migration was soviet invasion. However economic impoverishment, restricted access to education and healthcare, demolition of trade and industrial infrastructures and social factors also prompted refugee flows (Kuschminder & Dora, 2009; Stigter, 2006). During this decade, almost 2.9 million Afghans were documented as refugees in Iran (Majidi, 2008). Iran’s initial migration policy

for Afghans was entitled “open door”. The Iranian authorities welcomed the first wave of Afghan refugees who had fled the communist regime as Muslim brothers. The government took responsibility by offering identification cards, access to social services, permits for employment and a set of restricted freedoms in Iran (Monsutti, 2005; Abbasi-Shavazi & Glazebrook, 2006).

Weeks after the socialist coup in April 1978, Afghans began fleeing to Pakistan. The figure increased from 12,000 in November 1978 to more than 460,000 in January 1980 (Noor, 2006). Furthermore, at the peak of the battle during the 1980s, almost 3.5 million fled to Pakistan (Rubin , 1996). A study by the National Aliens’ Registration Agency (NARA) of Pakistan revealed that there are half a million Afghans in Karachi, while a significant number of them arrived in the 1980s (Monsutti, 2005). Pakistani officials also adopted an “openness and facilitation” policy for Afghan refugees due to a common religion. On 20 October 1979, the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) agreed on half a year supply of foodstuffs for 200,000 to 700,000 Afghan refugees in Pakistan (Dupree, 1988).

The second wave of forced population movement: 1989-1996

In February 1989, the Soviet Union withdrew from Afghanistan and Mohammad Najibullah remained in power. The conflict between Najibullah’s regime and the mujahedeen continued. As a result the number of Afghan refugees reached the highest level of 6.3 million in 1990 (UNHCR, 2022b). The United Nations (UN) attempted to sign a peace agreement between the mujahedeen and Mohammad Najibullah; however the UN efforts did not achieve a tangible result (Ruiz, 2001). In April 1992, the mujahedeen forces took control of Kabul, the capital city of Afghanistan. The mujahedeen triumph accelerated the repatriation process of Afghans from Iran and Pakistan. Around 1.5 million refugees returned voluntarily, without getting support from UNHCR (Ashrafi & Moghissi, 2002). Table 1 illustrates the number of Afghan refugees in Iran and Pakistan from 1989 to 1996.

Table 1: Afghan refugees in Pakistan and Iran

Year	Pakistan	Iran	Total
1989	3,272,290	2,350,000	5,622,290
1990	3,253,000	3,061,110	6,314,110

1991	3,098,000	3,186,616	6,284,616
1992	1,627,000	2,900,666	4,527,666
1993	1,476,876	1,850,000	3,326,876
1994	1,053,000	1,623,331	2,676,331
1995	1,200,000	1,429,038	2,629,038
1996	1,200,000	1,414,659	2,614,659

Source: UNHCR, 2022b

Table 1 shows that the stock of Afghan refugees increased in Iran and Pakistan during Najibullah’s regime from 1989 to 1991. A significant number of migrants were repatriated when the mujahedeen seized Kabul. Afghanistan jumped into a new war as the mujahedeen leaders did not sign a power-sharing agreement. Every leader wanted an excessive portion of power for themselves, their party and ethnic group (Amnesty International , 1994). Internal combat between the mujahedeen groups led to the second wave of population movement in Afghanistan (Majidi, 2008). Each group had its own standard for the application of Islamic rules. A number of human rights violations including illegitimate detention, torture, rape, disappearance and extrajudicial killings have been recorded within several months (Amnesty International , 1994).

Thousands of people have been killed and a massive number of people displaced as a result of civil war and prevalent human rights abuses. Because of the closure of the border by Pakistan in January 1994, the majority of the people were moved to Jalalabad. The report shows that 250,000 had been displaced to Jalalabad by the end of 1994 (Amnesty International , 1995). The Iranian authorities also changed their refugee policies from open door to highlighting repatriation; as a result a substantial proportion of new Afghan arrivals did not receive documents (Monsutti, 2005). In October 1994, Iranian officials separated Afghan refugees into three categories. Firstly, Afghan refugees with permanent residence permit, are calculated be to at 1,270,000 and they can live in Iran with no limitations. Secondly, Afghans with temporary residence permit, are estimated to be at 560,000. Lastly, Afghans who have no residence permit at all, their sum is between 50,000 to 60,000 (Amnesty International , 1995).

In late 1994, a new group emerged known as the “Taliban” in Kandahar, many of whom are alumni of Pakistani Islamic schools. They took control of Kandahar from the mujahedeen and moved on to Helmand, Khust and Wardak provinces. Of February 1995, 9 out of 30 prov-

inces had been captured by the Taliban (Amnesty International , 1995). By mid-1995, the Taliban had increased their military forces to more than 25,000 fighters and seized the majority of southern and western provinces in Afghanistan. The battle for controlling Kabul and the Northern provinces caused massive refugee flows. Most educated people, including government employees, doctors and academics fled to Pakistan. Additionally, thousands of people from minority ethnics such as the Hazara, in panic of discrimination by the Taliban, migrated (Ruiz, 2001).

The third wave of forced population movement: 1996-2001

The Taliban seized Kabul and Jalalabad in late 1996 and moved on to the Northern provinces. Finally, they took control of Mazar-e-Sharif in 1998 (Ruiz, 2001). The third wave of population movement happened through combat between the Taliban and the North Alliance. The number of Afghan refugees augmented from 2.6 to 3.8 million. The majority of people fled to Pakistan, and a smaller percentage to Iran (Garrote-Sanchez, 2017). In 1996, the Taliban battled against General Dostum's forces in Badghis province; as a result, 40-50,000 people were displaced (Amnesty International, 1999). Furthermore, new restrictions were imposed by the Taliban, which affected mass people including women, educated persons, political figures and religious factions (Noor, 2006).

In 1997, more than 90,000 people, mostly from the Tajik ethnic group were displaced to Kabul, in fear of fighting between the Taliban and the North Alliance in the Northern provinces (Amnesty International, 1999). Likewise, in July 1999, the Taliban launched a summer operation in Shamali, north of Kabul; almost 100,000 people were displaced. Interestingly, within a period of three days, more than 10,000 individuals had been headed to Kabul (Amnesty International, 1999). The number of Afghan asylum claims in the UK increased between 1997 and 2001 (Jones, 2010). A report by the UNHCR revealed that around 100,000 Afghans have submitted asylum applications to the European countries, close to 40,000 claims were accepted and the rest were rejected (Amnesty International, 1999).

2.4 The fourth wave of forced population movement: 2001-2021

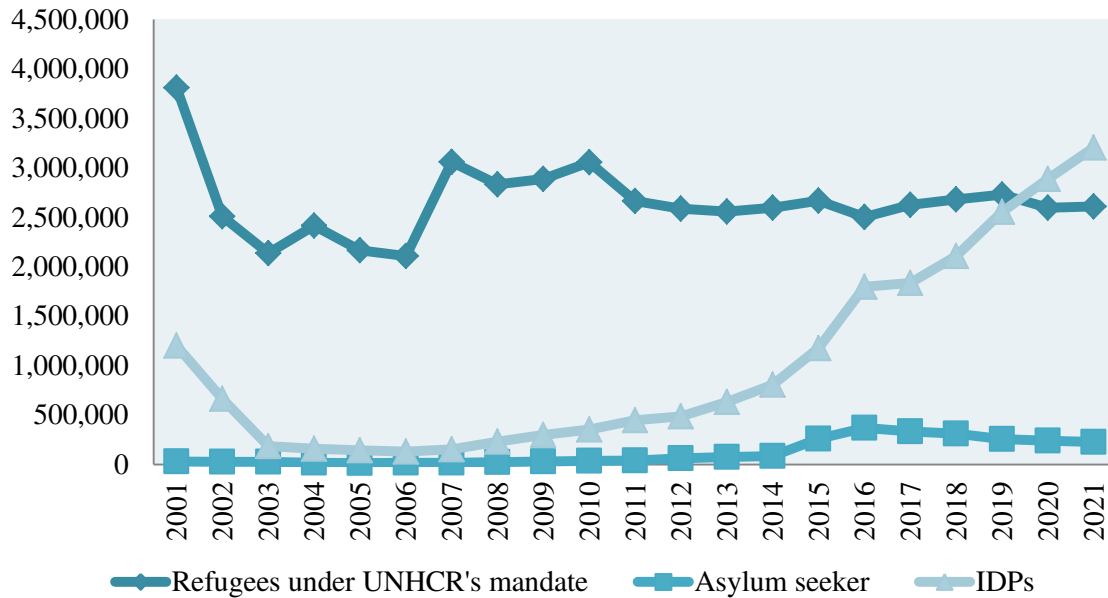
On October 2001, the international coalition, led by US forces invaded Afghanistan, resulting in the collapse of the Taliban in late 2001 and the formation of a new government in Kabul in 2001-2002 (Monsutti, 2008). This intervention caused the fourth wave of population movement in

Afghanistan, fleeing 200,000 to 300,000 people to neighboring countries and beyond (CRS, 2007). On December 2001, a group of Afghans with different backgrounds and ethnicities agreed to establish an interim government for 6 months, under the leadership of Hamed Karzai. These interim authorities would be responsible for convening a loya jirga for the establishment of a transitional government. The transitional government would lead Afghanistan for 2 years, hold a second loya jirga to draft a new constitution and assemble free and nondiscriminatory elections (Fields & Ahmed, 2011).

Four decades of conflict have caused massive damage to infrastructure, trade, industry and the whole economy in Afghanistan. The international communities have distributed an enormous amount of money for reconstruction and development of Afghanistan since 2002. According to the estimation of Karimi (2020), international donors were allocated over US\$ 73 billion as Official Development Assistance (ODA) and US\$ 70 billion as military assistance in Afghanistan from 2002 to 2018. The inflow of such a huge amount of money brought major changes in Afghanistan, in particular to economic indicators. For the first time, the Central Statistics Office (CSO) estimated the volume of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) to be at US\$ 4.05 billion in 2002/03 (ADBI, 2004). Furthermore, within one decade, the GDP volume increased from US\$ 4 billion in 2002 to close to US\$ 20 billion in 2012. The GDP per capita tripled from US\$ 179 in 2002 to US\$ 638 in 2012 (World Bank, 2022).

This economic boom motivated thousands of Afghan families in Iran and Pakistan to return to Afghanistan. The number of Afghan refugees under the UNHCR's mandate decreased from 4 million in 2001 to 2.1 million in 2006 (UNHCR, 2022b). In spite of mass returns, an Afghan refugee census in Pakistan was conducted by the Population Census Organization (PCO) in 2005. The findings exposed that 3 million Afghans currently reside in Pakistan. Over 2.5 million refugees have been repatriated to Afghanistan since 2002, which indicates that the number of Afghan refugees living in Pakistan was more than 5 million (PCO, 2005; Noor, 2006). Figure 2 presents number of Afghan refugees, asylum seekers and internal displaced people from 2001 to 2021.

Figure 2: Number of Afghan refugees, asylum seekers and IDPs



Source: UNHCR, 2022b

Figure 2 indicates that the volume of IDPs dramatically increased from 180,000 in 2003 to 3.2 million IDPs in 2021. A number of factors including conflict, drought, lack of economic opportunities and Covid-19 forced people to displacement. In 2018, drought accelerated the displacement crisis in Afghanistan, and added over 370,000 new IDPs. There was a shortage of rainfall and snow in north-western provinces of Afghanistan such as Ghor, Badghis and Herat for four years. As a result, thousands of families were moved from rural to urban areas, to seek better economic opportunities and humanitarian assistance (GRID, 2019). Similarly, the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (iDMC) estimated that 1.1 million people will be displaced by disaster in 2020 (iDMC, 2020). Another report by the UNHCR revealed that 700,000 Afghans were forced by conflict into displacement since January 2021 (UNHCR, 2022d).

Thousands of Afghans have submitted asylum applications to the EU countries annually. From 2000 to 2004, more than 16,000 asylum applications were received by Germany (Baraulina et al., 2007). Likewise, the Home Office reports that around 13,000 asylum applications were submitted by Afghan nationals from 2005 to 2009 (Jones, 2010). European countries experienced a major refugee and migration crisis in 2015. More than 1 million migrants, mainly from Syria, Afghanistan and Iraq have made asylum applications to those countries. The number of Afghan asylum claim increased from 23,000 in 2013 to 193,000 in 2015 (Pew Research Center, 2016).

Another report revealed that Germany received over 170,000 asylum claims from Afghans from 2015 to 2017. Following Germany, Sweden (46,000 applications) and Austria (41,000 applications) received the highest number of asylum claims (NOAS, 2018).

Population movement after August 2021

On 15th August 2021, the Taliban took over Kabul, the capital of Afghanistan. Thousands of people rushed to Hamid Karzai International Airport as violence surged with the US withdrawal and the Taliban seizure of Kabul. The US forces and its allies launched their evacuation operations from Kabul on 14th August. This evacuation process was one of the major rescue operations in history. The US forces have evacuated more than 124,000 people on 387 military and 391 non-military flights within two weeks (Kessler, 2021). According to the reports, the majority of countries made efforts to facilitate the evacuation process and transfer their citizens and Afghans to a safe destination. Germany planned to evacuate 10,000 people including German citizens, Afghan local staff, journalists and human rights activities. However, they managed to transfer close to 5,350 people (Reuters, 2021b). Similarly, Britain evacuated 5,000 British nationals plus 8,000 Afghans and 2,000 children (BBC, 2021). Canada and Australia evacuated 3,700 and 4,100 people respectively (Reuters, 2021b).

Moreover, a significant number of inhabitants tried to cross into the neighboring countries like Iran, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and Pakistan through regular and irregular channels. The Norwegian Refugee Council reported that almost 300,000 Afghans have moved to Iran since the Taliban took power in August (NRC, 2021). The local Media of Iran claimed that 4,000-5,000 Afghan citizens arrive in Iran every day (ALJAZEERA, 2021b). At the same vein, Pakistani authorities exposed that more than 300,000 people displaced into Pakistan; including 105,000 entered on valid visas and 200,000 crossed the border without official documents (Gul, 2021). Some Afghans made efforts to enter into Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. Officials from Tajikistan revealed that around 200 Afghans moved into the country, however they only accepted 100 arrivals and the remaining were deported back to Afghanistan (Radio Free Europe/ Radio Liberty, 2021). Russian state media reported the acceptance of 400 Afghan refugees by Uzbekistan. They have transferred into a temporary residential camp near the Afghan border (Reuters, 2021c).

Voluntary and forced repatriation

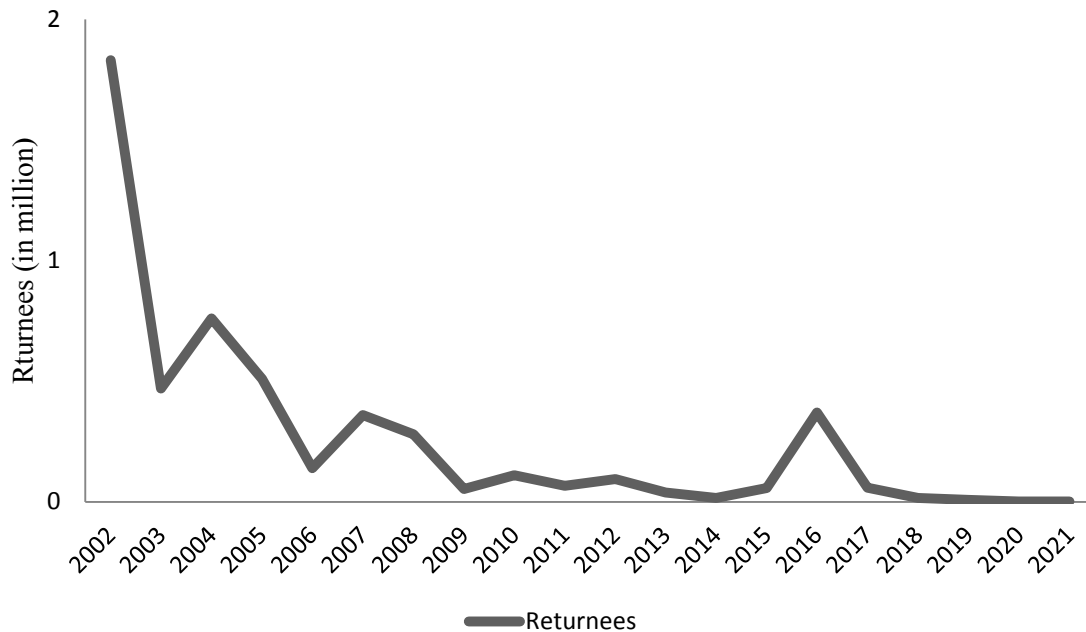
In 1992, a tripartite agreement was signed by Iran, Afghanistan and the UNHCR to launch a formal repatriation program for Afghan refugees in Iran. Until the end of 1993, over 300,000 Afghans returned to Afghanistan under this settlement and close to 300,000 others were repatriated without assistance (Adelkhah & Olszewska, 2007). When the mujahedeen took control of Kabul and several provinces in 1992, their leaders could not reach a power-sharing agreement. As a result, the battle started on the ground. The repatriation program was postponed until 1998. However, the Iranian authorities have called on all Afghans to leave the country (Adelkhah & Olszewska, 2007). Furthermore, the parliament passed a law in April 2000. Article 48 states that all foreigners who do not have a work permit have to leave the country by March 2001 (Turton & Marsden, 2002).

In order to avoid forced deportation, the UNHCR exchanged a repatriation plan with the Iranian Bureau of Aliens and Foreign Immigrant Affairs (BAFIA), more than 130,000 Afghans repatriated from Iran in 2000. Nevertheless, over 82,000 Afghan men and close to 8,300 families were forcibly deported to Afghanistan during the six months of 2001 (Human Rights Watch, 2002; Turton & Marsden, 2002). The government of Pakistan has also shifted its policy toward Afghan refugees since late 1990s. Most of Afghan refugees in Pakistan were not registered in those period. In November 2000, Pakistan closed its border to prevent new flow of refugees from Afghanistan (Turton & Marsden, 2002).

In 2002, Afghanistan, the UNHCR, Iran and Pakistan signed a new agreement to facilitate safe and voluntary repatriation of Afghans to the country. This agreement was for one year, and later on extended until March 2006 (Adelkhah & Olszewska, 2007; Abbasi-Shavazi & Glazebrook, 2006; CRS, 2007). From 2002 to 2006, the UNHCR assisted around 3.7 million Afghan refugees to return home from Iran and Pakistan. Additionally, over 1.1 million refugees have returned without getting assistance from the UNHCR, calculating the total number of returnees to 4.8 million. This was the largest assisted repatriation program in history (CRS, 2007). The characteristics of the repatriates from Iran show that 20% of them were single, and a significant proportion were undocumented (Stigter, 2006). In spite of massive repatriates, over 3.5 million documented and undocumented Afghan refugees stayed in Pakistan and Iran. The total number of Afghan refugees is estimated to be more than 8 million, much greater than the

prediction in 2002 of 3.5 million refugees (CRS, 2007). Figure 3 depicts the total number of Afghan returnees from 2002 to 2021.

Figure 3: Afghan returnees by year



Source: UNHCR, 2022c

Figure 3 presents that the repatriation trend was decreased overtime. The peak volume of returnees recorded close to 2 million people in 2002, while only 54,000 refugees were repatriated in 2009. Some countries began forced deportations in 2002 and 2003. The United Arab Emirates forcibly repatriated 1,000 Afghan refugees to home in 2002. Likewise, 55 rejected asylum applicants were involuntary deported from the UK in 2003 (Amnesty International, 2003). The countries in Western Europe are divided regarding forced deportation to Afghanistan. Ten countries including Norway, Sweden, Denmark, Germany, Austria, Belgium, Greece, the UK, the Netherlands and Switzerland are in favor of forced repatriation. Countries like Iceland, Luxembourg, Malta, Portugal, Italy and Cyprus are against forced deportation to Afghanistan. (NOAS, 2018). From 2015 to 2017, Norway, the UK and the Netherlands have the highest forced deportation of Afghans among Western Europe countries. (NOAS, 2018).

In October 2016, Afghanistan signed an agreement with the European Union called the Joint Way Forward (JWF). Within the framework of this agreement, both sides facilitate the rejected Afghan asylum seekers to return to Afghanistan by way of either forced deportation or assisted voluntary return (Pitonak & Beser, 2017; AHRDO, 2019). Voluntary returns are supported by the International Migration Organization (IOM), which offers financial and reintegration assistance for returnees. In 2016, 9,000 Afghans were repatriated to Afghanistan from the European Union and more than 60 percent of returnees used the IOM's assistance package (Pitonak & Beser, 2017). The International Organization for Migration reports that 4,158 Afghans were returned to Afghanistan with support of the Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration (AVRR) program. Turkey, Germany and Bulgaria were the top three host countries (IOM, 2018). A study compared the share of returnees from Iran, Pakistan and the EU between 2015 to 2017. The finding revealed that the number of repatriates coming from the EU is a minor portion (0.06%) to the total volume of returnees (OXFAM, 2018).

When the Taliban gained power on August 15, 2021, the EU countries conducted various meetings, including a ministers of foreign affairs meetings and an interior ministers meeting, to discuss the latest development in Afghanistan. According to a joint statement made by the US Department of State on August 15, 2021, more than 100 countries vowed to welcome Afghans fleeing Afghanistan when the Taliban assumed control of the country (US Department of State, 2021). On August 31, 2021, the EU released a new statement on the situation in Afghanistan, highlighting its priority of assisting Afghanistan's vulnerable population as well as displaced persons in neighboring countries such as Iran and Pakistan (Council of the EU, 2021). Despite mass threats and uncertain situation in Afghanistan, Iran forcefully returns Afghans back to the country. According to the recent figures published by the IOM, over 28,000 Afghan refugees were deported from Iran in the last week of October (France 24, 2021; ALJAZEERA, 2021c).

Remittances

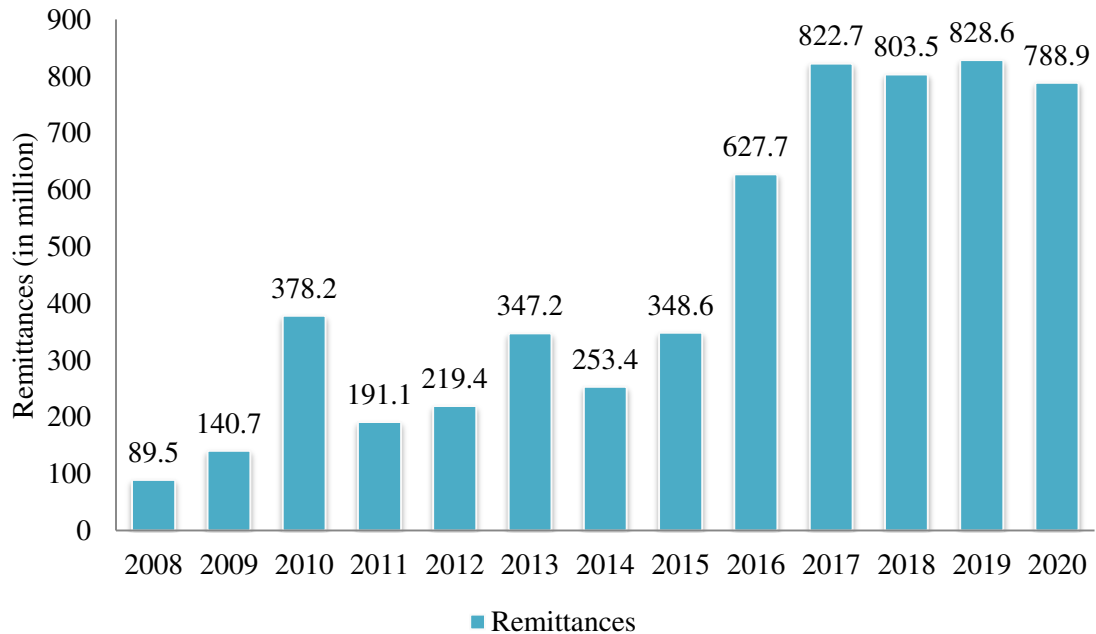
Afghan migrants send a substantial part of their earnings back to Afghanistan as remittance payments. However, it is tough to measure the flow of remittances into Afghanistan through unofficial channels. In particular, they transfer their money via the hawala system. For instance, a significant number of Afghan refugees and migrants in Iran, who wish to send their incomes back to Afghanistan, cannot use the official banking system due to lack of identification papers.

Instead, they remit through the hawala system (Monsutti, 2004). A study surveyed 450 households in Balkh, Samangan and Jawjaj province of Afghanistan. The finding revealed that 50 percent of the families used hawala system as transferring channel (Barlas, 2018). In the same way, more than 60 percent of the remittance receiving households in Samangan province confirmed that their migrants send money via hawala system (Barlas, 2017).

The hawala system has a long history in South Asian countries, including Afghanistan. In 1974, Maxwell Fry documented the hawala system in Afghanistan, describing that the dealers were Jewish in Kabul, Sikh and Hindu in Kandahar (Timberg, 2003). In 1995, a local trader confirmed that over US\$ 140,000 were transferred everyday from Quetta to a district of Afghanistan called Jaghori. According to this estimation, the annual volume is almost US\$ 50 million (Monsutti, 2004). The World Bank has conducted a comprehensive study on the hawala system in Afghanistan. They found that over 300 registered money exchange dealers operate in the market. While, the number of unregistered money exchange dealers could be estimated from 200 to 2,000 in Kabul and other provinces. Furthermore, the number of transactions via the hawala system has potentially increased since 2001. Almost US\$ 200 million has been transferred by NGOs through this channel (Maimbo, 2003).

In 2015, the Central Bank of Afghanistan predicted remittances inflow into Afghanistan at US\$ 342 million, equal to around 2 percent of GDP. The main source countries are Iran (US\$ 144 million) followed by Pakistan (US\$ 107 million), Saudi Arabia (US\$ 52 million), Germany (US\$ 13 million) and the United States (US\$ 7) (Garrote-Sanchez, 2017). Similarly, the World Bank recorded remittance flows through official channels into Afghanistan and it is presented in figure 4.

Figure 4: Remittances trend in Afghanistan



Source: Migration data portal, 2021

Figure 4 depicts that Afghan families receive millions of dollars as remittance payments annually. It could be even higher if we include unofficial remittance trends. For instance, the International Fund for Agriculture and Development (2013) estimated the remittance inflows into Afghanistan to be US\$ 3.2 billion, or more than 16% of GDP. This is 10 times greater than the World Bank estimates. Likewise, the Afghanistan Investment Support Agency (2004) found that the regular yearly remittance per Afghan refugee in the United States and Canada was US\$ 1,500, 14 times higher compared to the World Bank records (US\$ 110) (Garrote-Sanchez, 2017). According to the estimates by Monsutti (2004), more than 30 percent of Afghan migrants in Iran are males. They support their families back in Afghanistan, the total remittance flow from Iran to Afghanistan might be more than one billion dollars per year.

The Central Statistics Organization of Afghanistan conducted a living condition survey in 2016-17. They revealed that 10 percent of households receive remittances in Afghanistan (CSO, 2018). Another study in the northern provinces of Afghanistan exposed that total household income was contained from different sources including salary, remittances, agriculture, lease, retirement allowance and interest. Remittances are contributed close to one-third of total household income. Furthermore, remittances were the only income source for a number of households in this study area (Barlas, 2018).

Future outlooks

In recent decades, Afghanistan has faced a number of refugee and displacement crises. The facts and numbers show that similar population shifts will continue in the future. For sustained migration into and out of Afghanistan, five reasons may be crucial. For starters, conflict and insecurity are major factors driving population movement in Afghanistan. There are currently security worries in the country, implying that migration will continue in the future. The European Asylum Support Office (EASO) and the Home Office conducted an assessment of security situation in Afghanistan under the Taliban regime. Torture of Journalists and women's rights activists, abduction of advocates, restrictions on women's activities, and the disappearance of former government officials were all disclosed in their reports. In addition, they reference a number of sources, claiming the presence of the Islamic State in Khorasan Province (ISKP) in Afghanistan (EASO, 2021; Home Office, 2022). In the same vein, 280 youth in the provinces of Balkh and Samangan were polled in a recent study. The participant discussed their motivations for leaving the country, as well as their views on the present economic and security issues. The findings discovered that 91 percent of youth polled said, they had considered migrating to another country, citing insecurity as the key motivator (Barlas & Ammar, 2022).

Second, according to the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), 50% of the population (22.8 million people) will be food insecure by 2022. All female-headed households, in particular, are facing food scarcity (OCHA, 2022a). Furthermore, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) predicts that by mid-2022, over 95 percent of Afghans would be poor (UNDP, 2021). Poverty, unemployment, and humanitarian crises are all key predictors of future population mobility, according to these numbers. As a result, in quest of better economic prospects, disadvantaged people will migrate from rural to metropolitan areas or to other countries.

Thirdly, drought and flooding could be other significant causes of population displacement in Afghanistan. According to a recent report by OCHA (2022b), close to 80 percent of the population is suffering from drought. The World Bank analyzed the disaster situation in Afghanistan and published a comprehensive report in 2017. They found that 6.5 million residences have been affected by drought since 2000. Extreme drought destroys US\$ 3 million in farming products, and leads to serious food scarcity in the country. Furthermore, flooding is

another natural hazard, damaging around US\$ 55 million annually. They predict that flooding and drought could increase in the future (World Bank, 2017).

Fourthly, the Taliban imposed restrictions on women's activities, minority ethnicities and religions, men's beards, universities' curricula and other social and cultural events. Several studies investigated migration patterns under the Taliban regime in the late 1990s. They found that a huge number of people fled to Pakistan, as a result of the Taliban's restrictions from 1996 to 2001 (Noor, 2006). Hence, these guidelines and rules could also cause mass migration of people to other countries. In particular, women, minority religious, professional figures, politicians and former government affiliates will be the most affected factions.

Lastly, the United Nations forecasts that the population of Afghanistan will increase to 97.3 million by 2050 (Stigter & Monsutti, 2005). Agriculture has the highest contribution to Afghanistan's economy, and this sector is already overpopulated in rural areas. Population growth specifies that the countryside communities will not provide economic opportunities for additional labor forces, resulting in an acceleration of urbanization in Afghanistan (Kuschminder & Dora, 2009). The UN DESA estimates that the share of the urban population will rise from 23 percent in 2010 to over 43 percent in 2050 (Sanchez, 2018).

Migration outflow from a developing country like Afghanistan will produce many challenges in the country, including brain drain, shortage of high skilled labor force in the market and the possibility of declining economic growth rate (Docquier, 2014). Furthermore, there will be also major concern regarding the repatriation and reintegration of these migrants in the future. Several studies on current Afghan refugees and migrants in Iran and Pakistan indicate that the return of all Afghan refugees and migrants is not possible to Afghanistan. Abbasi-Shavazi and Glazebrook (2006) interviewed a significant number of Afghan refugees in Tehran, Mashhad and Zahedan provinces. The majority of respondents confirmed that they do not expect to repatriate to Afghanistan in the medium term. Likewise, the PCO conducted a census on Afghan refugees in Pakistan in 2005. The findings of this census exposed that 3 million Afghans currently live in Pakistan. Over 2.5 million of these refugees and migrants do not plan to return to Afghanistan, bringing lack of economic opportunities, absence of housing and existence of threat as key reasons (Noor, 2006).

Conclusion

Four decades of confrontation and war caused a massive population movement within Afghanistan and beyond. Facts and figures indicate that the migration flow will sustain in the future, quoting insecurity, economic crisis, drought and flooding, restrictions and high population growth rate as main causes. Currently, the interim cabinet of the Taliban is responsible for deal with issues in Afghanistan, including migration, returnees, and IDPs. They should look for durable solutions in response to those concerns. Because they are the most vulnerable people who need immediate assistance. The Taliban may confront three major constraints in dealing with these challenges.

To begin with, the Taliban took control of the country through war and conflict, and as a result, they currently lack of national and international legitimacy. Managing migration and refugee issues requires regional and international cooperation. The Taliban, in particular, must sit at the negotiating table and sign official documents about Afghan refugee status with major host countries such as Iran, Pakistan, and Turkey on behalf of a recognized government. Therefore, without international recognition, it appears impossible to launch and effective and successful regional collaboration.

Furthermore, weeks after their victory, the Taliban appointed acting ministers and deputy ministers to their interim cabinet. The majority of them are religious school graduates with no formal university degrees. Migration and displacement management requires a set of technical and professional abilities, which the recently named acting and deputy ministers lack of those skills. This implies that the Taliban may face a shortage of high-skilled human resources at the top management level when it comes to dealing with the migration issues.

Lastly, international donors postponed their humanitarian and development assistance in Afghanistan when the Taliban took power. The U.S also decided to freeze Afghan reserves in US financial institutions. As a result, the Taliban were confronted with a scarcity of cash within the country. They could not pay ordinary government expenses such as employees' salaries for several months. Dealing with migration and displacement challenges needs a comprehensive program, as well as huge amounts of money financing those projects. The Taliban may attempt to handle migration and displacement issues but lack of funds could make their attempts fail.

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