Refugee and mixed migration displacement from Afghanistan

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Question

What evidence and key lessons exist regarding previous refugee and mixed migration displacement from Afghanistan to surrounding countries, especially concerning: a) refugee flow trends (places of origin/ethnicity and choice of destination, vulnerability/risk groups and coping capacities); b): host country policies and community acceptance; and c) the humanitarian response.

Contents

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1. Summary

This rapid literature review summarises evidence and key lessons that exist regarding previous refugee and mixed migration displacement from Afghanistan to surrounding countries. The review identified a diverse literature that explored past refugee and mixed migration, with a range of quantitative and qualitative studies identified. A complex and fluid picture is presented with waves of mixed migration (both outflow and inflow) associated with key events including the: Soviet–Afghan War (1979–1989); Afghan Civil War (1992–96); Taliban Rule (1996–2001); War in Afghanistan (2001–2021).

A contextual picture emerges of Afghans having a long history of using mobility as a survival strategy or as social, economic and political insurance for improving livelihoods or to escape conflict and natural disasters. Whilst violence has been a principal driver of population movements among Afghans, it is not the only cause. Migration has also been associated with natural disasters (primarily drought) which is considered a particular issue across much of the country – this is associated primarily with internal displacement. Further to this, COVID-19 is impacting upon and prompting migration to and from Afghanistan.

Data on refugee and mixed migration movement is diverse and at times contradictory given the fluidity and the blurring of boundaries between types of movements (i.e. forced and voluntary, permanent and circular, and internal and external). Further to this, 'official' figures for refugees and mixed migrants collated by national governments and bodies such as the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC), International Organisation for Migration (IOM) and the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA) can be politicised. Large numbers of those on the move are considered to be undocumented i.e. lacking legal documents and thus rights to remain. Various estimates exist for numbers of Afghanistan refugees globally. Since 2001, it is estimated 5.9 million Afghans have been either displaced internally or have fled the country. International movement has primarily been to Pakistan and Iran which are thought to host between 90-95% of Afghans. The top countries accepting the most Afghan refugees in 2020 were reported to be as follows (whilst acknowledging that the current crisis intersects with past movements, the focus of this report is broadly on past events):

- Pakistan   1,438,432
- Iran   780,000
- Turkey   302,000
- Germany   147,994
- Austria   40,096

It is also important to note that migratory flows are often fluid involving settlement in neighbouring countries, return to Afghanistan after a period of settlement, failed asylum bids, onward migration from the region and a significant proportion of undocumented mixed migration. In many countries, Afghani migrants and refugees face uncertain political situations and have, in recent years, been 'coerced' into returning to Afghanistan (particularly from Pakistan, Iran and Europe) with much discussion of a 'return bias' being evident in official policies.

The literature identified in this report (a mix of academic, humanitarian agency and NGO) is predominantly focused on Pakistan and Iran with a less established evidence base on the scale of Afghan refugee and migrant communities in other countries in the region.

- Section 2 provides a brief overview of Afghanistan's protracted crises, highlighting repeated phases of mixed migration both internally and externally. This section includes discussions of internal displacement (including the urbanisation of displacement), return migration (including the return bias of regional frameworks and pressure on those on Afghans in neighbouring countries) and onward migration to Europe (including qualitative studies of migratory routes).
- Section 3 explores mixed migration to key countries/areas including Iran, Pakistan, Central Asia and Europe. This section involves an overview of estimated numbers and locations of refugees and mixed migrants in particular countries as well as a reflection on policies in these countries.
- Section 4 provides a brief overview of vulnerable groups during crises and reflects on who may be vulnerable during displacement in Afghanistan. This includes those who are vulnerable due to age or ethnicity as well as those who may be vulnerable due to their engagement with foreign governments.
- Section 5 highlights two past documents that have detailed lessons learnt from engaging with the Taliban.

Profound political divisions, internal displacement, environmental degradation, urban deprivation and entrenched poverty all complicate efforts to address displacement, as do volatile regional dynamics and the emerging challenges presented by COVID-19.

It has been commented that Afghan life has been shaped by a 'culture of migration', where mobility rather than staying put is the norm and for some young men even a rite of passage. Sustained and widespread migration has created extensive networks and a rich repository of knowledge about migration routes, costs and destinations that prospective Afghan movers (migrants, asylum seekers etc.) can draw upon.

For decades Afghanistan's neighbours, especially Pakistan and Iran, have played a critical role in sheltering Afghans fleeing conflict. Together, Pakistan and Iran host 90% of globally registered Afghan refugees.

Whilst conflict has been a primary driver of displacement, it has intersected with drought conditions and poor adherence to COVID-19 mitigation protocols.

Past efforts to address displacement internationally have affirmed return as the primary objective in relation to durable solutions; practically, efforts promoted improved programming interventions towards creating conditions for sustainable return and achieving improved reintegration prospects for those already returned to Afghanistan.

2. Afghanistan's protracted crises

Snapshot of Afghanistan's Protracted Crises

- Afghanistan has experienced decades of sustained and protracted conflict and associated migratory movements.
- The country is riven by ethnic hostilities, afflicted by the effects of a weak state, a predatory political economy, ideological fragmentation, high levels of crime, poor infrastructure and services, inadequate institutional capacity and environmental degradation.
- Estimates vary but it has been reported that there are circa 2.5 million Afghan refugees in Iran and 2.9 million in Pakistan (including both documented and undocumented.
- Pakistan and Iran host 90% of globally registered Afghan refugees.
- the ousting of the Taliban from power and the signing of the Bonn Accord in 2001 opened the door to the return of an estimated 5.9 million Afghans mainly from Pakistan and Iran.
- 76% of Afghans having had some experience of displacement. Out of these, 41% were internally displaced while 42% were externally displaced, and 17% have lived both situations.

Phases of crises and migratory movements

Prior to the current crisis, Afghanistan has experienced decades of sustained and protracted conflict and associated migratory movements. The country is riven by ethnic hostilities, afflicted by the effects of a weak state, a predatory political economy, ideological fragmentation, high levels of crime, poor infrastructure and services, inadequate institutional capacity and environmental degradation (Lopez-Lucia, 2015). Previous waves of displacement have been prompted by the following events (Jazayery 2002; Schetter 2012; Lopez-Lucia, 2015; Agah, 2013; Poppelwell, 2007):

- **Communist rule and Soviet intervention**: Communist rule in Afghanistan (1978-89) and the Soviet intervention in 1979 prompted an exodus of Afghans predominantly to Pakistan and Iran but also to the Gulf region. Afghans also claimed political asylum in Europe, the US and Australia (Jazayery, 2002; Schetter, 2012).

- **Withdrawal of the Soviet Union and the takeover of the Mujahedeen**: Following the withdrawal of the Soviet Union in 1989 and the takeover of the Mujahedeen in 1992 a period of fluid movement of people fleeing and returning to Afghanistan and of internal displacement was reported. These movements were driven by insecurity and fighting between the Mujahedeen and the communist administration, followed by fighting between rival Mujahedeen groups (Jazayery, 2002; Schetter, 2012).

- **Emergence of the Taliban:** Between 1994 and 2001, three to five million Afghans were living outside of the country as a result of large scale massacres that intersected with a significant drought. At the same time, restrictions imposed by Pakistan and Iran on their borders meant that more people were internally displaced (Jazayery, 2002).

- **US military intervention:** In 2001 the US military intervention led to over 300,000 people becoming refugees (Schetter, 2012). However, the ousting of the Taliban from power and the signing of the Bonn Accord in 2001 opened the door to the return of an estimated 5.9 million Afghans mainly from Pakistan and Iran. A number of these returnees have been trying to migrate again (Agah, 2013; Poppelwell, 2007).

Schmeidl (2019) further elaborates on these broad periods and outlines seven phases of population movement (see Table 1 and Figure 1). Afghanistan has historically been one of the main countries of origin of refugees worldwide (Jackson 2009; Kuschminder et al. 2013). Estimates vary but it has been reported that there are circa 2.5 million Afghan refugees in Iran and 2.9 million in Pakistan – many of whom have been resident there for decades (these figures include documented and undocumented refugees). At least 100,000 Afghans are in Turkey, of which 80,000 are registered international protection applicants, with applications often remaining pending for years, and rarely leading to asylum being granted (EC, 2016: 1). Afghanistan also hosts an estimated 230,000 Pakistani refugees. Alongside these refugee populations, there are an estimated 1.1 million internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Afghanistan at any given time (EC, 2016: 3).

Afghanistan is thus one of the largest and most sustained refugee crises in history with estimates suggesting that 76% of Afghans having had some experience of displacement. Out of these, 41% were internally displaced while 42% were externally displaced, and 17% have lived both situations (Oxfam, 2009). Prior to the existing crisis, the deteriorating situation in Afghanistan, as well as pressure on Afghans in Pakistan and Iran, was considered to pose a high risk of further migratory flows to Europe. Afghan refugees in the region face restrictions on their integration into the labour market and society, rendering their situation precarious and without reliable long-term resolution (EC, 2016).
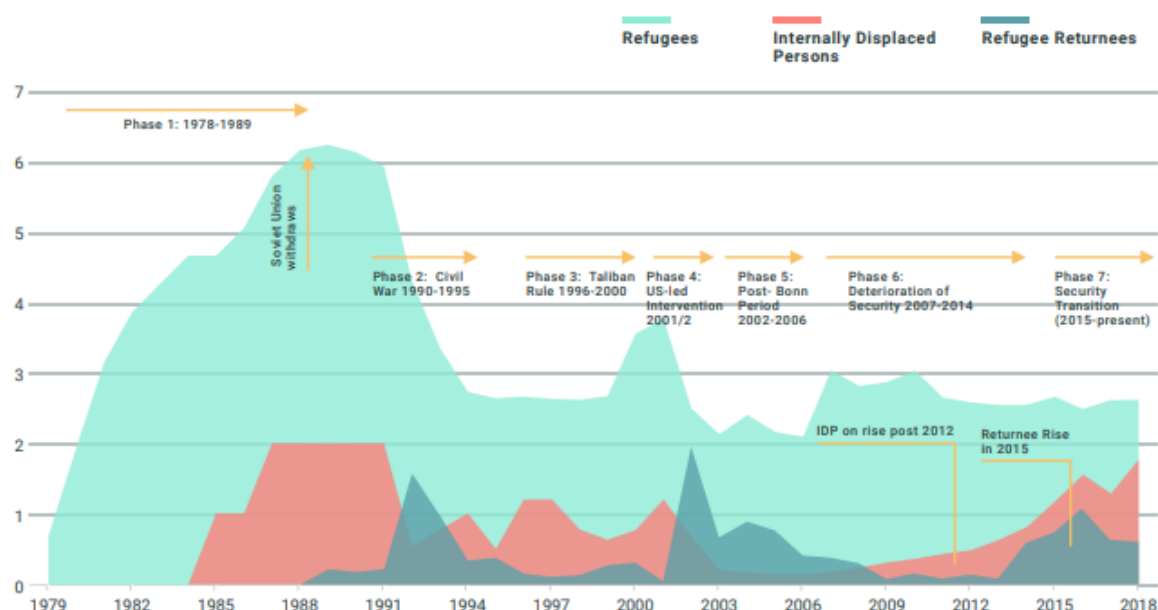
*Table 1: **Overview of Afghan Displacement Phases***

Time Period	Conflict Event	Migration Pattern
Baseline		Migration for jobs, both internally and externally. Both short-term seasonal as well as long-term.
Phase 1 (1978–1989)	Saur revolution bringing to power the People's Democratic Party (PDPA); subsequent war of Mujahideen against Soviet-backed government; withdrawal of Soviet Army (1989).	• Mass exodus abroad, steadily rising post 1979 and reaching its peak of over six million in 1989. • Internal displacement on the rise, starting in 1985.
Phase 2 (1990–1995)	Continued war against the Communist Government which is defeated in 1992. Civil war prompted by disagreement over power-sharing among Mujahideen parties and chaos in many parts of the country. Taliban join into	• First big refugee return-wave starting slowly in 1989 and peaking in 1992 when it is reported that about 1.2 million refugees returned home within a period of six months. About three million refugees returned to Afghanistan between 1989 and 1993: 2.5 million in 1992/3 alone. • Internal displacement rises again after 1993-94 as civil war rages (focusing on Afghanistan's cities, especially Kabul) and continues until the Taliban come to power in 1996. Much of the internal displacement (especially

	the war in 1994 making advances and conquest by 1995.	• within cities) is never reflected in IDP figures which stay constant at around one million for several years • New exodus abroad, though offset by returnee numbers.
Phase 3 (1996–2000)	Taliban seize control of Kabul in 1996, harsh Taliban rule follows.	• Renewed refugee return, though smaller in numbers (only about 900,000). • Internal displacement once again on the rise, and renewed exodus from the country (some Afghans leave for the first time). Internal displacement soared further in 2000, when the worst drought in thirty years hit Afghanistan, causing massive livestock losses among the nomadic Kuchi population, prompting many to shift to a more sedentary existence – often in Pakistan.
Phase 4 (2001–2002)	Post 9/11 bombing and US-led intervention to remove Taliban government; Northern Alliance takes Kabul.	• About 1.5 million Afghans flee within a few weeks due to US aerial bombing and ensuing ground combat. • Internal displacement of Pashtuns targeted in revenge attacks in North and West Afghanistan.
Phase 5 (2002–2006)	Bonn Peace agreement, transitional authority, new government.	• Largest UN-assisted refugee return in recorded history; about five million in total, mainly between 2002 and 2005. • At the same time, the majority of Afghanistan's 1.2 million IDPs also returned home, widely assumed to have satisfactorily reintegrated.
Phase 6 (2007–2014)	Government increasingly loses legitimacy, insurgency resurges, security situation deteriorates and violence on the rise.	• Refugee return slows, about one million still return between 2006-8, 'only' 427,561 did so between 2009-13. • Insufficient reintegration of refugees adds to growing internal displacement. UNHCR profiles IDP population first in 2008. By mid-2014 the IDP count had reached nearly 700,000, half were displaced since at least 2011, at a rate of about 100,000 per year. • Renewed exodus emerges.
Phase 7 (2015–present)	Political (elections) and security transition leads to a drastic deterioration of security as well as economic situation. Neighbouring countries Iran and Pakistan step up (refugee) return.	• External displacement on the rise again with 962,000 Afghans seeking asylum between 2015 and 2017. • Steady growth of internal displacement, estimated at about 1.8 million in 2018, with an average of about 450,000 a year. • About four million Afghans return (or are returned to Afghanistan), most from Pakistan and Iran (but also Europe).

Source: Schmeidl, 2019 reproduced under CC BY-NC-ND 3.0

*Figure 1: **Overview of Afghan Displacement Numbers in Millions***

*Figure 2: **Afghans outside of Afghanistan***

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https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/IRN%20Population%20movement%20snapshot%20Dec%202020.pdf

For decades Afghanistan's neighbours, especially Pakistan and Iran, have played a critical role in sheltering Afghans fleeing conflict. Together, Pakistan and Iran host 90% of globally registered Afghan refugees (see Figure 2 and Table 2): approximately 2.4 million people (Quie & Hakimi, 2020). These countries are also considered simultaneously sources of the conflict in Afghanistan.

*Table 2: **The 10 counties accepting the most Afghan refugees in 2020***

Country	War in Afghanistan (2001–present) – Present
Pakistan	1,438,432
Iran	780,000
Germany	147,994
Austria	40,096
France	31.546
Sweden	29,927
Greece	21,456
Switzerland	14,523
Italy	12,096
Australia	10,659

Source: Sajjad, 2020 reproduced under CC BY-ND 4.0

Internally displaced peoples

Snapshot of Internal Displacement in June 2021 (USAID, 2021)

- 18.4 Million People in Afghanistan Requiring Humanitarian Assistance in 2021
- 14.5 Million People Projected to Require Emergency Health Services in 2021
- 140,691 People Displaced by Conflict During 2021
- 24,091 People Affected by Natural Disasters During 2021
- 514,423 Total Undocumented Returnees to Afghanistan in 2021

Prior to the current crisis, ongoing and protracted conflict throughout 2020 and to early 2021 had displaced thousands of people and resulted in hundreds of civilian casualties. Armed clashes, improvised explosive device (IED) detonations, and targeted killings have resulted in civilian casualties, displacing populations, and disrupting humanitarian operations (USAID, 2021). From 1 January to 6 June 2021, conflict displaced nearly 140,700 people across Afghanistan, with notable increases in conflict and related displacement in May in Baghlan, Helmand, and Laghman provinces (USAID, 2021). The UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA)

recorded 573 civilian deaths and 1,210 civilian injuries in Afghanistan between January and March 2021. Total civilian casualties across the country from September 2020 to February 2021 were 38% higher than the total recorded during the same six-month period in 2019–2020[1].

Earlier estimates from the UNHCR suggested that that there are currently an estimated 2 million plus conflict induced and drought affected IDPs across Afghanistan in 2016/17 (new and protracted – see Figure 3) (UNHCR, 2018).

*Figure 3: **Internally Displaced People across Afghanistan***

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https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/67772.pdf

Source: UNHCR, 2018 16: 4

More recent estimates suggest that at the end of 2020, there were 2.9 million Afghans already displaced across the country. By mid-July 2021, this rose to 3.5 million. On 16 August 2021, the UNHCR said that 80% of the 250,000 Afghans who have fled their homes since the end of May are women and children. Nearly 120,000 arrived in Kabul (Loft, 2021). UNOCHA reports that of the 551,000 displaced from 1 January to 9 August 2021, assistance was provided to around 185,000. It states assistance has been delayed due to constraints on humanitarian access (UNOCHA, 2021).

Whilst conflict has been a primary driver of displacement, it has intersected with drought conditions and poor adherence to COVID-19 mitigation protocols.

Drought conditions. Approximately 9.5 million people across Afghanistan are projected to experience *Crisis* (IPC 3) or *Emergency* (IPC 4) levels of acute food insecurity and require urgent, life-saving food assistance over the next six months, according to the March 2021 IPC Acute Food Security Analysis (USAID, 2021).

Natural disasters lead to recurrent displacement of circa 200,000 individuals per year (UNOCHA, 2021a). For example, UNOCHA reported that from 2 January to 8 October 2018 251,207 individuals had been displaced due to natural disasters (a majority by drought), affecting 27 out of 34 Afghan provinces (UNOCHA, 2018). Such displacements, however, are temporary with people often returning home once the situation is resolved.

In turn, the Famine Early Warning Systems Network (FEWS NET) projected that populations in all provinces of the country are likely facing *Stressed* (IPC 2) or *Crisis* (IPC 3) levels of acute food insecurity through September 2021. Key drivers of food insecurity in Afghanistan include conflict, resultant displacement, and associated livelihood disruptions; impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, including reduced employment opportunities, diminished income, and increased food

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[1] https://unama.unmissions.org/need-violence-end-order-stop-thousands-afghan-civilians-being-killed-and-injured-2021-un-report

prices; and below-average levels of precipitation during the 2020/2021 wet season, which limited water availability for agriculture and livestock[2].

FEWS NET and IPC report that precipitation deficits and high temperatures associated with the 2020/2021 La Niña weather event may result in drought-like conditions through June 2021, likely leading to below-average harvests and adversely affecting food security outcomes into the January–May 2022 lean season. Food security actors expect that 2021 wheat and livestock production will decrease by 31% and 30%, respectively, compared to 2020[3].

Poor adherence to COVID-19 mitigation protocols and vaccine misconceptions among the public had challenged efforts to slow the spread of the disease. Daily totals of confirmed COVID-19 cases in Afghanistan increased sharply in the weeks following the mid-May *Eid al-Fitr* holiday, surpassing peak figures recorded earlier in the country's outbreak. Health actors confirmed more than 5,000 new cases and nearly 8,500 new cases during the weeks of 18–24 May and 25–31 May (USAID, 2021). Prior to the current crisis, health agencies report continued risk of COVID-19 spread across the country due to insufficient adherence among the population to public health protocols, such as wearing masks and observing physical distancing measures (USAID, 2021).

Whilst internal displacement is reported across Afghanistan, a number of areas of the country are reported to host the majority of the internally displaced. This includes Kunduz district and areas around urban centres such as Kabul and Jalalabad (see Images 1 & 2).

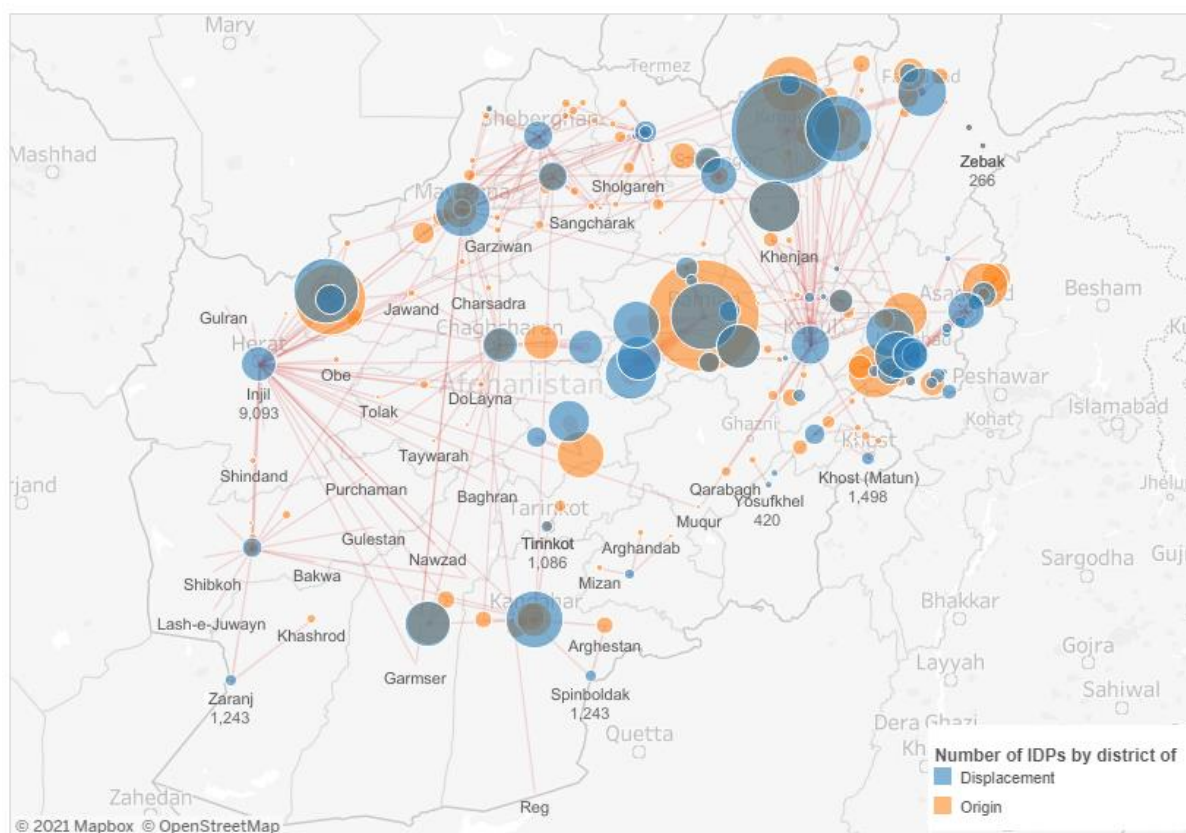*Image 1:* ***Internally Displaced People by Province of Arrival***

This Figure has Been removed for copyright reasons. The full figure can be viewed at https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/IRN%20Population%20movement%20snapshot%20Dec%202020.pdf

Source: UNHCR, 2020

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[2] https://fews.net/central-asia/afghanistan/food-security-outlook/february-2021

[3] https://fews.net/central-asia/afghanistan/food-security-outlook/february-2021

*Image 2: **Actual displacements between 1 January 2021 and 9 August 2021***

It is also important to note that Afghanistan also hosts a sizeable refugee population from Pakistan. Reports in 2019 estimated that Afghanistan hosted 76,000 Pakistani refugees who fled North Waziristan Agency (NWA) in 2014 due to military operations in their area. UNHCR has registered some 41,000 refugees in Khost province and verified over 35,000 refugees in Paktika province[4].

Urbanisation of Displacement

As with many settings, Afghanistan has witnessed the urbanisation of displacement. High levels of internal mobility and refugee return has contributed to the rapid growth of Afghanistan's cities. Kabul has absorbed nearly half (49%) of all internal migrants (CSO, 2016). Nangarhar province, at the Afghanistan-Pakistan border (particularly the state capital Jalalabad) is the second largest destination, especially for IDPs and recent returnees. Kandahar in Afghanistan's South has absorbed many people that were forced to leave Helmand and Uruzgan provinces during fighting in 2017 (Schmeidl, 2019).

The 2015 *State of Afghan Cities report* estimated that about eight million Afghans (one in four) live in cities, a figure expected to double by 2030 and reach 50% of the total population by 2060

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[4] https://reliefweb.int/report/afghanistan/afghanistan-multi-year-protection-and-solutions-strategy-2019-2021

(GIRoA, 2015). The majority of IDPs and returnees move into cities, increasing the Afghan urban population to close to 10 million (CSO, 2016).

Schmeidl and Tyler (2015) report that cities have struggled with absorbing the rapid inflow of rural-urban migrants, IDPs and refugee returnees, with an estimated 70% of people moving to cities ending up in informal settlements. Such settlements are afflicted by crowded conditions and lack adequate access to education, health care and employment (CSO, 2016).

Returnees

Despite a fragile security situation in many parts of Afghanistan, as well as a range of socio-economic and political challenges, over six million Afghans have returned to the country since 2002, including over 5.2 million registered refugees assisted by UNHCR with cash and other support to meet their immediate humanitarian needs. Refugee return had been reported to be rising prior to the current crisis, signalling that safe havens for Afghans in the region are shrinking. While Iran and Pakistan have historically hosted Afghans fleeing conflict or seeking employment, both countries have shown signs of "refugee fatigue" (Schmeidl, 2019).

After overall refugee return to Afghanistan slowed in 2006, Pakistan and Iran stepped up pressure on Afghan refugees to return home after 2014, though initially focusing on undocumented Afghan migrants only (see Figure 4). During 2016, the pressure from Pakistan mounted, forcing 373,000 registered refugees and 693,000 undocumented Afghans to leave the country. Another 610,000 returnees (60,000 registered refugees and 550,000 undocumented Afghans) joined in 2017 (IOM/UNHCR, 2017). According to Human Rights Watch, this forced return amounted to the world's largest unlawful mass forced return of refugees in recent times (HRW, 2017).

Figure 4: **Overview of the Return of Afghans from Pakistan and Iran in Millions**
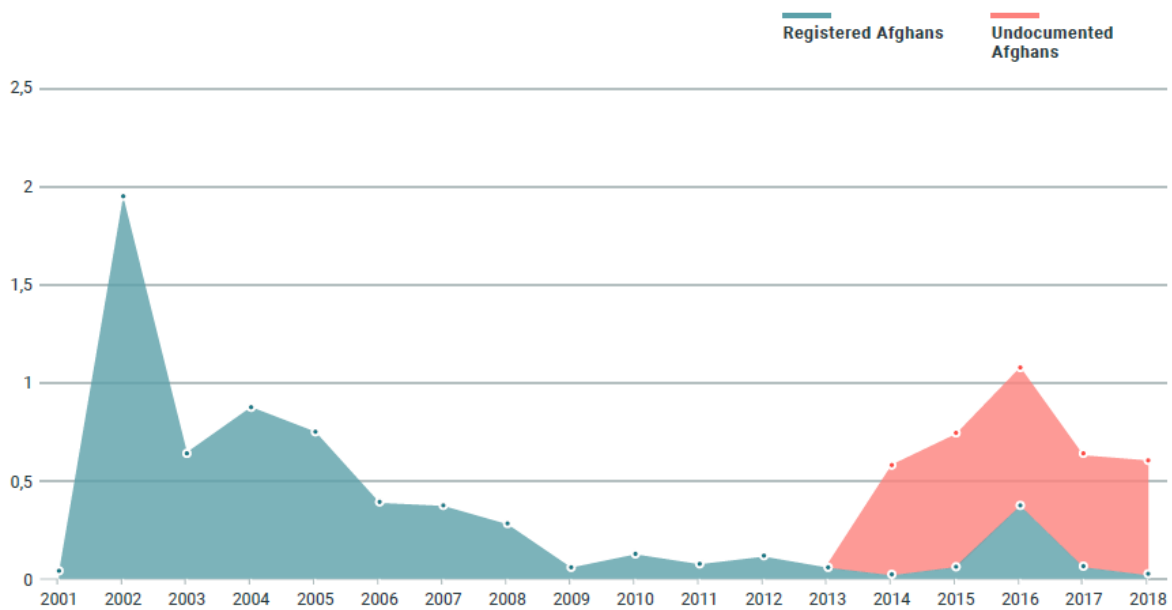
Source: Schmeidl, 2019 reproduced under CC BY-NC-ND 3.0

Pressure on Afghans to return to Afghanistan has also been on the rise in Europe (Schmeidl, 2019). European Council on Refugees and Exiles (ECRE) data indicates that the percentage of asylum recognitions for Afghans has been on the decline since 2015. Eurostat data indicates that for some countries, an average of 40% of Afghan asylum seekers have been denied in 2017. Some sources estimate that as many as 400,000 Afghans have been denied Asylum in Europe since 2015 (Constable, 2018). Although return statistics from the EU are questionable, Amnesty International estimates that about 3,300 Afghans were returned from Europe in 2015 and another 9,600 in 2016 (Amnesty International, 2017). In contrast, Quie and Hakimi, (2020) provide the following table that has been generated from official Afghan Government data.

Table 3: **Number of Afghan returnees by source location,**

This Figure has Been removed for copyright reasons. The full figure can be viewed at https://www.chathamhouse.org/sites/default/files/2020-11/2020-11-13-eu-migration-management-afghanistan-quie-et-al.pdf

Source: Quie & Hakimi, 2020

In 2016, a joint UNHCR and World Bank (2016) report on the consequences for returnees warned that additional returns from Pakistan, Iran, or Europe are likely to result in further secondary displacement, unemployment and instability in Afghanistan.

Policies focused on repatriation

The Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees to Support Voluntary Repatriation, Sustainable Reintegration and Assistance to Host Countries (SSAR) was the main regional framework for

joint interventions aimed at identification and implementation of lasting solutions and providing support to host countries. Developed by Afghanistan, Iran and Pakistan, with the support of UNHCR, the SSAR was endorsed by the international community in May 2012. It is structured around the following five key outcomes[5]:

- Support to voluntary repatriation
- Access to shelter and essential social services for refugees, returnees and host communities
- Improved and diversified livelihood opportunities and enhanced food security
- Social and environmental protection of refugees and returnees, as well as assistance and support to host communities
- Capacity development of national authorities, associations, organisations and communities concerned with refugees, returnees and host communities

This effort to facilitate a comprehensive strategy for addressing Afghan refugees has highlighted many of the challenges posed to achieving comprehensive and integrated approaches in a politicised and highly complex regional security environment. The SSAR represented an attempt to elaborate a response framework to address all facets of protracted displacement in the region. The strategy acknowledged that development and humanitarian issues remain mostly compartmentalised and that there is a level of trepidation from actors on both sides about engaging with each other (Tyler, 2014).

Politically, the SSAR framework reaffirmed return as the primary objective in relation to durable solutions; practically, it promoted improved programming interventions in all three countries towards creating conditions for sustainable return and achieving improved reintegration prospects for those already returned to Afghanistan (Tyler, 2014).

In Afghanistan, historically, the return bias is widely acknowledged to have had an adverse impact on development efforts. The return of more than five million refugees since 2002 has placed pressure on local communities. Furthermore, obstacles to repatriation remained, prior to the current crisis, for large segments of the returnee population owing to the weak absorptive capacity of the Afghan state, ongoing insecurity and the limited development dividends reaching large swathes of the country (Tyler, 2014).

According to Tyler (2014), negative aspects of SSAR included the ongoing return bias and the absence of genuine commitments by Iran and Pakistan to:

- include alternative stay arrangements for registered refugees as part of the package of durable solution options,
- adequately address the issue of unregistered/ undocumented refugee populations, and
- provide protection and assistance for vulnerable unregistered Afghan refugees.

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[5] https://ssar-platform.org/

Migratory routes

According to Schmeidl (2019) and Monsutti (2008), Afghans have a long history of using mobility as a survival strategy or as social, economic and political insurance for improving livelihoods or to escape conflict and natural disasters. Sections of the Afghan population have traditionally engaged in a nomadic lifestyle e.g. Hazara household migration to Iran. Similarly, Pashtun tribes moved between Pakistan and Afghanistan.

The political, security and economic transition that occurred in Afghanistan during 2014 accelerated internal and external displacement and migration (Schmeidl, 2019). The following three displacement trends can be observed since 2014:

- Acceleration of asylum seeker flows to Europe in 2015 and 2016 before slowing in 2017; refugee figures in Iran and Pakistan staying roughly constant;
- Steady-growth in internal displacement;
- A new wave of returns (not all voluntary) since late 2016, especially from Pakistan and Iran, but also from Europe.

Afghan life has thus been shaped by a 'culture of migration', where mobility rather than staying put is the norm and for some young men even a rite of passage (Monsutti, 2008). Sustained and widespread migration has created extensive networks and a rich repository of knowledge about migration routes, costs and destinations that prospective Afghan movers (migrants, asylum seekers etc.) can draw upon.

Migration within the region (i.e. to neighbouring countries) may be followed by onward migration. In a study undertaken by Reach Initiative (2017), it is reported that, on average, respondents travelled through six countries before reaching a final destination, be it desired or undesired. Cases exist of respondents only able to travel through three countries before being stopped in Greece. Other respondents have reported travelling through a total of 11 countries.

Reach Initiative (2017) continue that whilst the final destinations and the routes may differ, there exists a high degree of similarity. After leaving Afghanistan the majority of respondents entered either Iran or Pakistan and then Iran. From Iran, they travelled through Turkey and into Greece. Respondents often used multiple forms of transportation including: car, boat, plane, train, bus, and walking. Most respondents described having travelled from Afghanistan to Turkey by car or bus, crossing from Turkey to Greece via boat, and then travelling through Europe on foot and via hired car (Reach Initiative, 2017) – see Images 3 & 4 for examples of migration routes to Europe.

*Image 3: **Qais's migration route to Europe***

This Figure has Been removed for copyright reasons. The full figure can be viewed at https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/REACH_AFG_Report_MMP_Drivers-return-and-reintegration_October-2017.pdf

*Source: **Reach Initiative, 2017: 15***

*Image 4: **Jalal's migration route to Europe***

This Figure has Been removed for copyright reasons. The full figure can be viewed at https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/REACH_AFG_Report_MMP_Drivers-return-and-reintegration_October-2017.pdf

Source: ***Reach Initiative, 2017: 15***

3. Refugee and mixed migrant recipient countries/areas

Pakistan

Pakistan has historically been host to the largest number of Afghan refugees, sharing a 2,500 km border with Afghanistan. Pakistan has long been considered central to past and future engagements with the Taliban. According to Quie and Hakimi, (2020), Pakistan has traditionally preferred a weak, malleable government in Kabul and has covertly supported various Taliban factions as part of its policy of maintaining strategic depth against India.

Various estimates exist for the numbers of Afghans in Pakistan, influenced by waves of inflows and outflows. UNHCR (2021) estimate that Pakistan hosts circa 1.5 million registered Afghan refugees and one million unregistered Afghans in 2021 (see Figure 5). Refugees to Pakistan have been a recurrent presence since 1979, as large numbers entered the country in the months leading up to the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. At a peak, there were more than four million Afghan refugees in Pakistan. In recent years, Amnesty International (2019) reports that those numbers have fallen as the Pakistani government has coerced Afghans into returning, often leveraging their presence as a political tool in disputes with the Afghanistan government.
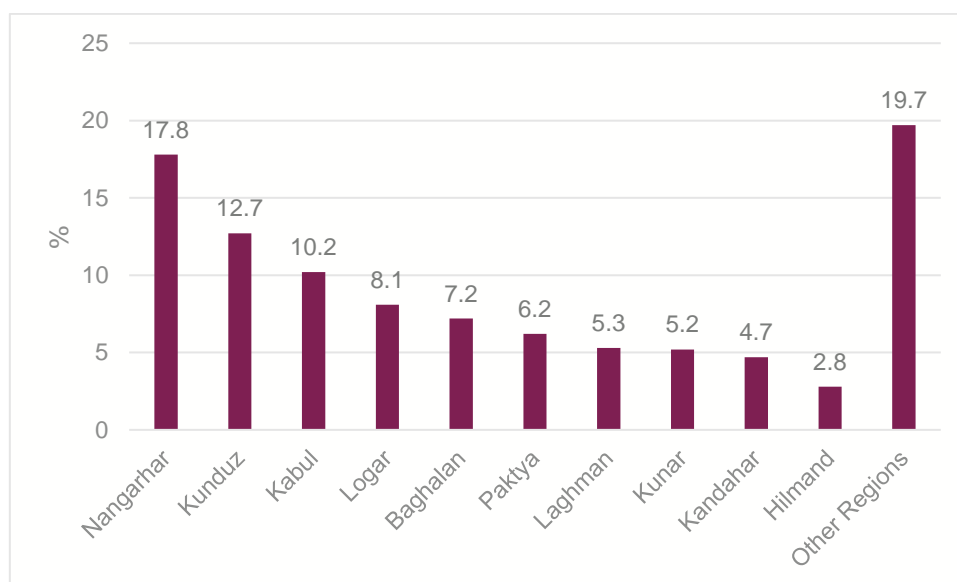
*Figure 5: **Afghan Refugee Population in Pakistan since 2002***
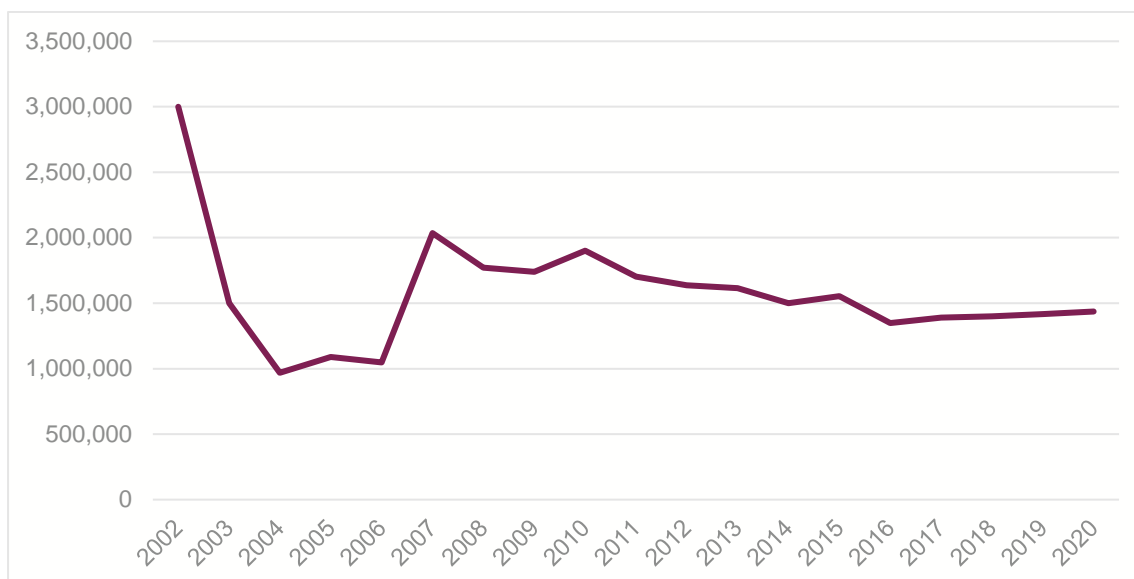
Source ***UNHCR, 2021 reproduced under CC BY 3.0 IGO***

While movement to Pakistan has been reported from across Afghanistan, circa 50% is reported to originate from Nangarhar, Kunduz, Kabul and Logar districts (see Figure 6).

*Figure 6: **Place of Origin (top 10)***

Source ***UNHCR, 2021 reproduced under CC BY 3.0 IGO***

The UNHCR reported in December 2020 that about 1.4 million registered Afghans still remained in Pakistan. Of this figure, 54.6% are male and 47.7% are aged 18-59 (53.3% are aged 0-17 or 60+ – see Figure 7). Registered Afghan Refugees in Pakistan (31/12/20) are 1,435,445[6].

*Figure 7: **Afghan Refugees by Age-Gender***
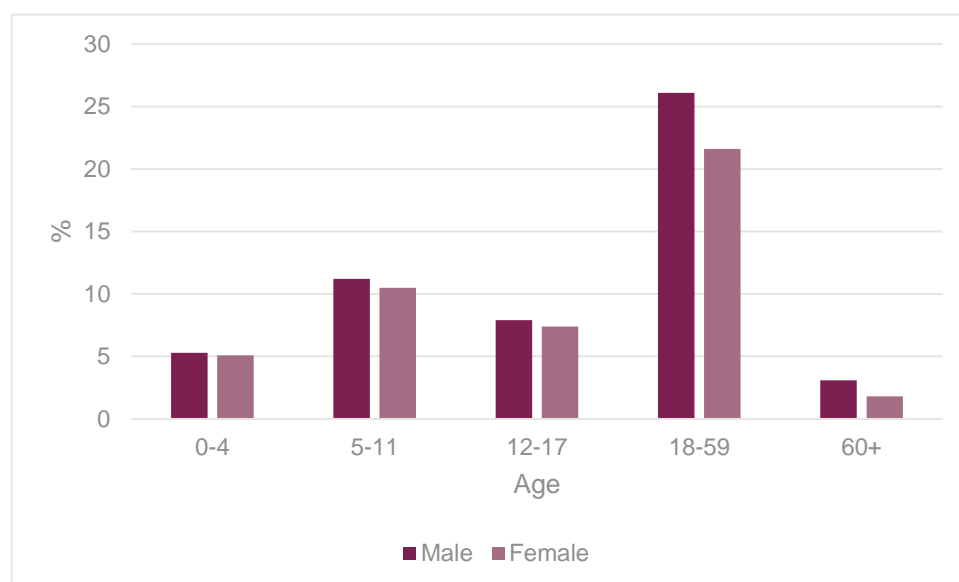
Source ***UNHCR, 2021 reproduced under CC BY 3.0 IGO***

Afghan refugee and mixed migrants to Pakistan have tended to gather in certain key provinces with the majority reported to be located in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (>800,000), and Balochistan (>327,247) – see Table 4 and Image 5 (this provides an update to July 2021).

*Table 4: **Afghan Refugees per Province (UNHCR, 2021)***
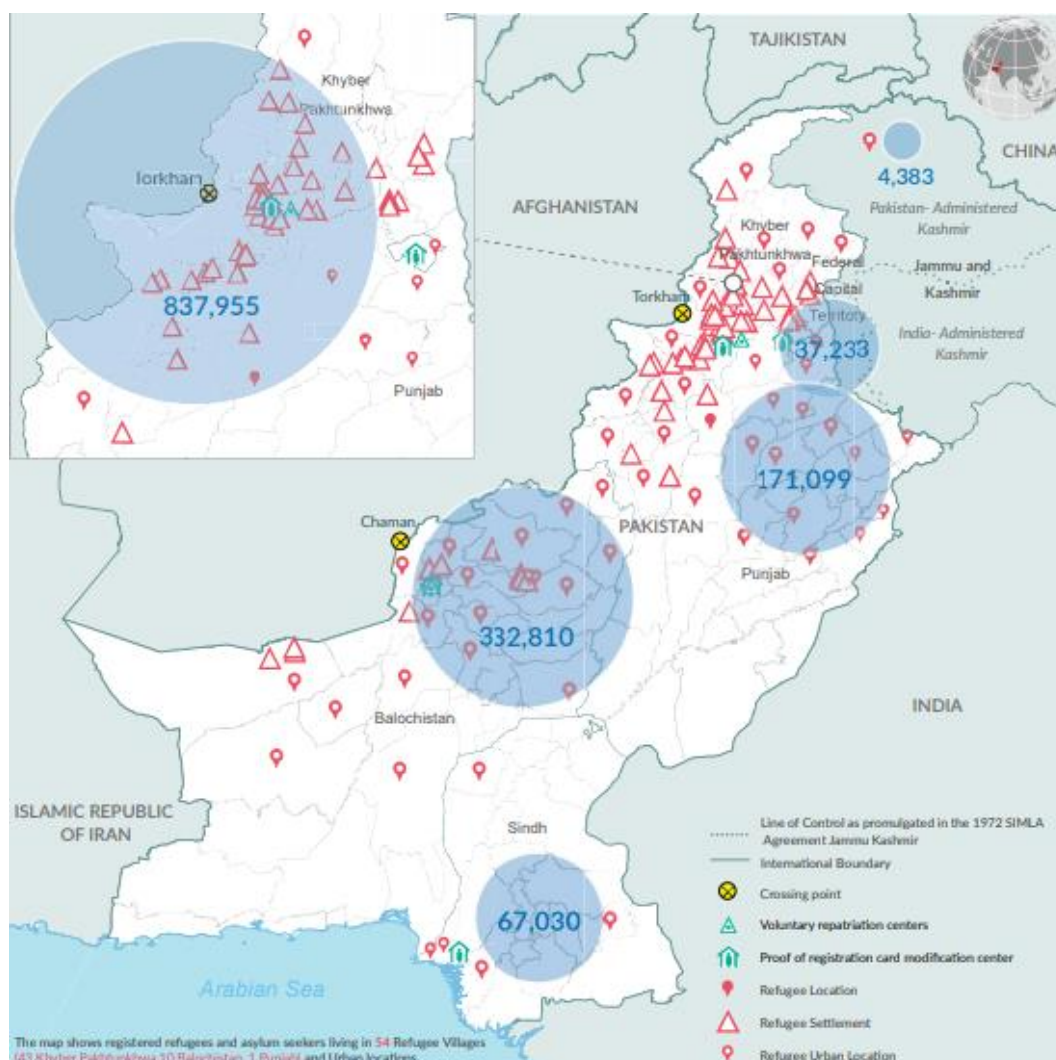
Location name	Population
Khyber Pakhtunkhwa	834,387
Balochistan	327,247
Punjab	168,351
Sindh	66,111
Islamabad	35,003

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[6] https://data2.unhcr.org/en/country/pak

Azad Jammu & Kashmir	4,341
Gilgit-Baltistan	5

Source: *UNHCR, 2021 reproduced under CC BY 3.0 IGO*

Image 5: ***Afghan Refugees per Province***

Source ***UNHCR, 2021 reproduced under CC BY 3.0 IGO***

The experiences of Afghans in Pakistan has been profoundly influenced by regional events. For example in December 2014 after the massacre of schoolchildren in Peshawar, Pakistani authorities began cracking down on refugee camps. According to Amnesty International (2019) such locations have long been subject to routine harassment, including the solicitation of bribes. Refugees, in particular, have been made a focus for reprisals after the armed group that attacked the school was traced to Afghanistan.

In 2016, circa 365,000 refugees were forcibly returned to Afghanistan from Pakistan, in what Human Rights Watch (2017) described as the world's largest unlawful mass forced return of refugees in recent times.

Policies

Pakistan is not a signatory to the 1951 Refugee Convention or the 1967 Protocol, and has yet to enact national legislation underpinning the assessment or granting of protection to those seeking refuge. In the absence of internationally binding or national provisions, anyone seeking protection is treated under the Foreigners Act 1946[7].

In 1993 the Pakistani government agreed that UNHCR would conduct 'refugee status determination' under UNHCR's 1950 mandate. In effect, UNHCR has been responsible for deciding whether displaced Afghan people in Pakistan should be classified as refugees whilst Pakistan retains control over the privileges and rights of refugees (authorities can limit the duration of protection granted, impose exclusion orders in relation to movement e.g. prohibiting entry into Pakistan's border areas and special territories, such as the former Federally Administered Tribal Areas and restrict internal travel during curfews) (Quie & Hakimi, 2020).

Prior to 2006, Afghan refugees in Pakistan were not subject to mandatory registration process, either through UN agencies or Pakistani authorities. In 2004, the Pakistani government and UNHCR agreed to conduct a survey and census of Afghans who arrived in Pakistan after 1 December 1979. The aim was to devise a strategy to regulate Afghans living in the country and facilitate repatriation and reintegration in Afghanistan (Quie & Hakimi, 2020).

In 2007, Pakistan introduced a Proof of Registration (PoR) card for Afghans. This provided refugees with protections against arbitrary deportation and harassment by authorities. As of January 2020, there were 1.4 million Afghan refugees with PoR cards in Pakistan, comprising just over 210,000 households; of this cohort, 68% are reported to live in urban areas (Quie & Hakimi, 2020). Whilst the PoR scheme has given Afghan refugees a degree of security, uncertainties surrounding card issuance and renewal, and validity periods and extensions, have continued. Invalid cards can mean police harassment and coercion to return to Afghanistan.

In 2017 the Pakistani government launched the Afghan Citizen's Card (ACC) scheme to register undocumented Afghans. In contrast to PoR card-holders, ACC-holders are granted 'heavily

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[7]

https://www.unhcr.org/pk/protection#:~:text=Pakistan%20is%20not%20a%20party,international%20protection%20within%20its%20territory.

qualified protection', a goal of this policy being to connect them with the Afghan authorities and to encourage their 'voluntary repatriation' (Quie & Hakimi, 2020).

Despite the above schemes, Afghans in Pakistan remain vulnerable to maltreatment by authorities and wider society. Reports highlight that Afghans in Pakistan have been subject to reprisals for terrorist attacks perceived as associated with Afghanistan. Following an attack on the Army Public School in Pakistan's Pashtun-majority province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa in 2014 by Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP - 'Pakistani Taliban'), public opinion turned against Afghan refugees. This was despite the assurances of Pakistani officials that there was no evidence of registered Afghan refugees being involved in terrorism in Pakistan. In 2016, when Afghanistan signed the Joint Way Forward (JWF), around 365,000 Afghan refugees were forcibly returned to Afghanistan.

For those born in Pakistan, the Nationality Act entitles them to citizenship – but they have never been granted this right on the grounds that their parents were refugees. In 2019, Prime Minister Imran Khan announced that Afghan refugees would finally be granted citizenship, but the move was swiftly reversed, and the current PoR cards were extended.

Iran

The Islamic Republic of Iran shares a 921 Km border with Afghanistan, much of it is porous and located in remote areas. As noted, Iran is home to the second largest population of Afghan refugees, after Pakistan. According to the Government of Iran some 1,400-2,500 Afghans arrived in Iran daily – recent reports suggest an increase of daily movements to 4,000-5,000 (UNHCR, 2021c). Afghans who currently reside in Afghanistan have different statuses: some are refugees (Amayesh card holders), others are Afghans who possess a national passport, while others are undocumented. UNHCR Iran does not have access to border points and thus is unable to independently monitor arrivals or returns of Afghans (UNHCR, 2021c).

The main tool used by the Iranian authorities to regularise the influx of Afghan refugees and migrants is the Amayesh card which grants registered refugees conditional freedom of movement, temporary work permits, and access to the national education and healthcare systems. The situation of undocumented Afghans is in stark contrast to registered refugees, with extreme restrictions on livelihood opportunities and access to education or healthcare, and constant threat of deportation by Iranian authorities[8]. In recent years, policies have been introduced by the Iranian government to increase the provision and renewal of Amayesh cards (refugee identity cards). In terms of numbers of Afghanis in Iran, the following estimates are provided by a variety of sources and suggest the following broad figures (UNHCR, 2019)[9].

- **Amayesh Card Holders (Afghan Refugees) estimated at 951,000**: In 2001, the Government of Iran issued Amayesh cards to regularise the stay of Afghan Refugees in the country as refugees. Each year, refugees have to renew Amayesh cards. However, more recently arrived Afghans do not receive an Amayesh card. The Government of Iran

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[8] https://www.acaps.org/country/iran/crisis/afghan-refugees

[9] https://www.unhcr.org/ir/refugees-in-iran/

- **Undocumented Afghans estimated at 1,500,000-2,250,000**: Undocumented is an umbrella term used to describe various groups of foreign nationals residing in Iran including: those with an invalid passport and invalid Iranian visa; those who lost their Amayesh status for different reasons; those who hold a type of document, for example Tazkira[10], but no legal residence for Iran; and those who are not in possession of any type of document.

- **586,000 passport holders (including Afghans on student visas and others whose family visas have been extended)**: The Comprehensive Regularisation Plan (CRP) introduced in 2010 allowed undocumented Afghans to register with the government of Iran, and receive an Afghan passport and a visa ("family passport"). The visas of those participating in the CRP have been extended at different intervals since 2012, often following high level visits by Afghani officials.

An estimated 96% of Afghan refugees in Iran live in urban areas, while the other 4% live in approximately 20 refugee settlements across the country, 55% of the refugees live in the three provinces of Tehran, Isfahan, and Khorasan Razavi[11] (see Image 6).

*Image 6: **Afghan Refugee Resettlement in Iran in 2020[12]***

This Figure has Been removed for copyright reasons. The full figure can be viewed at
https://www.unhcr.org/ir/refugees-in-iran/

Source: UNHCR 2020

In recent years, Iran has been the source of the highest number of returns to Afghanistan. According to Amnesty International (2019), 2018 saw 770,000 Afghanis returned to Afghanistan from Iran. In 2017, the number of people returned to Afghanistan from Iran was 462,000. Amnesty International (2019) reports that a principal reason for rising numbers of returnees is political and economic issues in Iran. The impact of US sanctions on Iran in particular has affected Afghans employed in informal sectors of the Iranian economy. Forecasts suggested that there would be more than 570,000 returnees from Iran in 2019, a situation thought to exacerbate Afghanistan's own economic and humanitarian situation. More broadly, according to UNHCR (2020), a number of reasons have been reported as driving return to Afghanistan from Iran with reuniting with family members reported by 33% of respondents (see Figure 8).

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[10] The Afghan identity card or Afghan Tazkira is a national identity document that is issued upon request to every Afghan citizen or national whether such individual resides inside or outside of Afghanistan. It serves as proof of identity and residency but more importantly Afghan nationality.

[11] https://www.unhcr.org/ir/refugees-in-iran/

[12] https://www.acaps.org/country/iran/crisis/afghan-refugees

*Figure 8: **Top reasons of return to Afghanistan (UNHCR, 2020)***

This Figure has Been removed for copyright reasons. The full figure can be viewed at https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/IRN%20Population%20movement%20snapshot%20Dec%202020.pdf

Source: UNHCR, 2020

COVID-19 has reportedly worsened living conditions of Afghans in Iran. It is estimated that more than 293,000 Afghans returned from Iran to Afghanistan between 1 January and 23 May 2020, driven by the pandemic and amid signs that Iran was becoming an epicentre for the disease (USAID, 2021). Given the porous borders between the two countries and poor record-keeping, this figure is probably an underestimate. Returnees have cited fear of infection, lack of access to healthcare (due to lack of documentation) and job losses as reasons for leaving Iran. Those suffering from the virus are among the most vulnerable segments of the population in Afghanistan (Quie & Hakimi, 2020).

Events in 2020 also highlighted the hostility Afghans face in Iran. In May, the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC) concluded that Iranian border guards had tortured and beaten a group of Afghan refugees, and had then forced them (allegedly at gunpoint) into the Harirud River. Several drowned. In June, three Afghan refugees were killed and others were injured when Iranian police opened fire on a vehicle. These incidents have drawn global condemnation and protests demanding humane treatment for Afghan refugees in Iran (Quie & Hakimi, 2020).

Policies

The Iranian government carried out a 'headcount exercise' targeting various groups of Afghans. Between 2016 and 2018, this resulted in the issuance of registration slips to 900,000 individuals who had been undocumented. Iran emphasises its close cultural, linguistic and religious ties with Afghanistan, and claims to spend $2 per day for each Afghan refugee. The government notes that around 500,000 Afghans are in Iranian schools; the number includes 125,000 people who are undocumented but still registered to study (Quie & Hakimi, 2020).

Amayesh cards must be renewed regularly and effectively offer proof of registration as a refugee. According to the Iranian government, the Amayesh scheme grants Afghans the right to residence, health insurance and free education for their children. They are also permitted to work, and enjoy limited property rights. Yet, as noted by human rights organisations, limited data availability and severe restrictions on access to information mean that it is unclear whether the Amayesh scheme has been extended to Afghan asylum seekers in recent years (UNHCR, 2019).

Central Asia

A smaller number of Afghanis seek refuge or migrate to other countries in Central Asia, principally Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan each of which borders Afghanistan. The Almaty Process is the only inter-governmental consultative platform for refugee protection and migration that focuses on Central Asia. Secretariat support is provided by IOM and UNHCR in

partnership with the rotating Chairmanship served by a Member State. Current Chair of the Almaty Process is Turkey. Member States are Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, the Kyrgyz Republic, Tajikistan, Turkey, and Turkmenistan. Observer States are Iran and Pakistan (UNHCR, 2021b).

Member States of the Almaty Process on Refugee Protection and International Migration are committed to enhancing regional cooperation, exchanging information and experiences in the management of mixed migratory flows. Reported numbers of asylum seekers and stateless persons across central Asian countries remains low – likely as a result of 'hostile environments' in these countries (see Figures 9 and 10 and sections on policies below).

*Figure 9: **Refugees and asylum seekers by country of asylum***

This Figure has Been removed for copyright reasons. The full figure can be viewed at https://reporting.unhcr.org/sites/default/files/UNHCR%20Central%20Asia%20fact%20sheet%20March%202021.pdf

Source: UNHCR, 2021b

*Figure 10: **Stateless persons by country of residence (UNHCR, 2021b)***

This Figure has Been removed for copyright reasons. The full figure can be viewed at https://reporting.unhcr.org/sites/default/files/UNHCR%20Central%20Asia%20fact%20sheet%20March%202021.pdf

Source: UNHCR, 2021b

Uzbekistan

It is estimated that nearly 8,000 Afghans live in Uzbekistan. Early arrivals were affiliated with the former regime of President Najibullah and arrived in Uzbekistan either before 1992 (i.e., during the Najibullah regime in Afghanistan) in order to study in Uzbekistan under the Soviet student exchange programmes or immediately after the overthrow of the regime. Another significant group arrived after Taliban forces captured the Mazar-i-Sharif area (bordering with Uzbekistan) in

August 1998. This group consisted mainly of persons connected to General Dostum. The majority of these Afghans live in urban areas, mainly in Tashkent, the capital (UNHCR, 2003).

Policies

Uzbekistan is neither a signatory to any international refugee instrument nor has it adopted any functioning national legislation for the protection of asylum seekers and refugees (UNHCR, 2003). The only references to the institution of asylum are contained in the Criminal Code of Uzbekistan of 1994 (Art. 223 exempts asylum seekers from visa and registration obligations) and in the Constitution of Uzbekistan, which was adopted in 1992 (empowering the President to grant asylum). However, since there is no asylum procedure, both provisions remain factually idle. In other words, Article 223 of the Criminal Code cannot be invoked, as the Constitution foresees neither a right to apply for asylum nor a procedure to file an application (UNHCR, 2003).

The official policy of Uzbekistan denies the presence of asylum seekers and refugees on its territory. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs has, in this context, repeatedly stated that the Republic of Uzbekistan has no reason to officially consider that there are refugees within the country and that the security forces are well equipped to prevent any refugees from entering Uzbek territory (UNHCR, 2003).

Tajikistan

The Tajik Government's perception of the Afghans as a destabilising factor for the economic, social and political security of Tajikistan contributed to the worsened asylum climate in Tajikistan (2000-2001), which has not significantly improved despite developments in Afghanistan. Government resolutions 323 and 325, restrict rights of refugees, and resolution 324 requesting payment for refugee certificates still exist, although assurances have been given that Resolution 325 will only be applied to asylum-seekers arriving after the date of the adoption of the resolution, 26 July 2000. At the same time, provisions of Resolution 323 (restricted access to the national asylum procedure) have been incorporated in the draft Law on Refugees (UNHCR, 2021d).

The Law on Refugees enacted before the adoption of the new Tajik Constitution (1996) was given as the excuse for the adoption of a new law, the draft of which violated the basic principles enshrined in the 1951 Refugee Convention. Concerted and consistent intervention by UNHCR have resulted in some amendments being made (UNHCR, 2021d).

The Government's reluctance in 2001 and 2002 to consider the admittance of approximately 10,000 Afghan displaced at the Afghan-Tajik border represented continued reluctance to accept refugees. According to UNHCR estimates, there are currently 5,573 Afghani refugees in Tajikistan (UNHCR, 2021d)

Policies

Tajikistan ratified the 1951 Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol and developed national asylum legislation and procedures. UNHCR is engaged in advocacy, technical support, and capacity-building activities with Government stakeholders to strengthen the quality of asylum

procedures and the overall protection environment through work plans developed with the Executive Apparatus of the President and the Office of the Ombudsman (UNHCR, 2021d).

Since 2014, UNHCR – in partnership with the Government of Tajikistan and civil society partners – has been carrying out a national project to address statelessness in Tajikistan. As of January 2021, 50,171 persons with undetermined nationality have been registered in three target regions (15 districts) of Sughd, Khatlon provinces and Districts of Republican Subordination (DRS) (UNHCR, 2021d).

Fulfilling one of its four pledges made during the High-Level Segment on Statelessness in Geneva of October 2019, the Government of Tajikistan in December 2019 adopted an Amnesty Law to legalise stateless persons and foreign nationals illegally residing in the country. UNHCR supports the Passport Registration Service of the Ministry of Internal Affairs in implementing the Amnesty Law through technical support, capacity building and the identification of potential beneficiaries (UNHCR, 2021d).

Turkmenistan

The majority of the asylum seekers and refugees in Turkmenistan are from Tajikistan and Afghanistan. Afghan refugees benefited from resettlement consideration, voluntary repatriation and local integration opportunities in 2003. In 2004, the Afghan refugee population of approximately 1,223 persons includes both 357 urban refugees and some 866 prima facie ethnic-Turkmen refugees, who came in 1994 via Iran without any documents and were accepted into the territory by Presidential Decree and settled mainly in rural areas (UNHCR, 2005).

In 2015, UNHCR (2015) estimated there to be a total of 7,137 persons of concern in Turkmenistan. Of these, 7,111 are considered to be stateless/of undetermined nationality with 18 being Afghans. Over 18,000 stateless persons have been granted citizenship in Turkmenistan between 2005-2015

Policies

Turkmenistan adopted a refugee law in 1997, acceded to the 1951 Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol, and signed a co-operation Agreement with UNHCR in 1998. During 2003, efforts continued to focus on encouraging the Government of Turkmenistan to develop its own refugee/asylum mechanisms and structures. Pending the full implementation of the refugee law, UNHCR continued to conduct refugee status determination, monitor the situation of refugees, and to promote durable solutions in their regard (UNHCR, 2005).

Europe

Afghanistan is a key country of origin for asylum seekers in Europe, and a significant recipient of EU development assistance. It was one of the first nations to conclude a migration partnership agreement with the EU, in 2016 (Quie & Hakimi, 2020). Implementation has been thwarted, however, by the challenges of developing a holistic response to migration amid ongoing war and violence. Profound political divisions, internal displacement, environmental degradation, urban deprivation and entrenched poverty all complicate policymaking in Afghanistan, as do volatile regional dynamics and the emerging challenges presented by COVID-19 (Quie & Hakimi, 2020).

In 2015, irregular migration of Afghan origin to the EU reached an unprecedented level of around 213,000 persons, making Afghans the second largest group of migrants and asylum-seekers to the EU, after Syrians, followed by Iraqis (EC, 2016). Main countries of destination have historically been Germany and Sweden. Many are unaccompanied minors. An important share of these migrants do not come directly from Afghanistan but were previously in Iran or Pakistan. The main route to reach Europe is from Turkey, via Greece and subsequently through Western Balkans (EC, 2016: 2) – see section on Migration Routes.

In 2015, there were 176.900 asylum applications to EU countries, which is double the number of 2014 (EC, 2016: 2). Afghans represent 21% of the over one million refugees who have fled to Europe since January 2015 (IRC, 2016)

Arrivals into Europe include Afghan groups particularly vulnerable to violence and persecution. Of the 90,000 unaccompanied children who made their way into Europe in 2015, half were from Afghanistan, and most were boys (IRC, 2016). IRC staff working with unaccompanied children from Afghanistan state that these boys have often been exposed to sexual violence and other forms of exploitation (IRC, 2016). Furthermore, 44% of Afghan arrivals into Greece were of Hazara ethnicity, an ethnic group that has been consistently persecuted as targets of massacres and human rights violations by the Taliban, al-Qaeda and most recently by ISIS (IRC, 2016). As of 2020, Afghans constitute the second-largest group of asylum seekers arriving in Europe.

Policies

Since 2015, the EU has sought to control irregular migration more closely. It has used wide-ranging agreements to tackle the 'root causes' of irregular migration, and to deter migrants who arrive in Europe through unofficial channels[13].

In 2016, the EU concluded an agreement on migration and returns with Afghanistan's National Unity Government (NUG) known as the 'Joint Way Forward on Migration Issues' (JWF). The JWF aims to foster cooperation in two areas: the prevention of irregular migration and the return (both voluntary and involuntary) to Afghanistan of irregular migrants, particularly those who do not fulfil conditions for residence in Europe. The EU underlined its commitment to using accelerated economic development, in tandem with humanitarian responses to displacement, to tackle the 'root causes' of migration (EC & Government of Afghanistan, 2016).

The JWF made continued development assistance contingent upon the return to Afghanistan of Afghans refused protection or settlement in the EU. New measures have included (EC & Government of Afghanistan, 2016):

- the reinforcement of European territorial borders;
- the externalisation of arrangements for processing asylum claims;
- the introduction of more stringent visa requirements;
- the increased use of detention and deportation;

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[13] https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/what-we-do/policies/irregular-migration-return-policy_en

- the establishment of bilateral and multilateral pacts linking development aid to migration control.

Within Europe, such changes have proved expedient for right leaning politicians in promoting policy narratives centred around reducing migrant numbers, enhancing security, tackling crime, protecting a vaguely defined 'European way of life' and developing interventions that purport to be responsible. The JWF gives the Afghan authorities two weeks to verify evidence on the status of irregular migrants, and – where applicable – to issue passports or travel documents for their return (EC & Government of Afghanistan, 2016).

Critics of this approach argued that it blurred the lines between aid and development, and that balancing European migration objectives against those of countries of origin is difficult. The EU's increasing focus on repatriation and returns is especially contentious (Quie & Hakimi, 2020; ECRE, 2020).

A substantial literature points to the harmful dimensions of Europe's migration policies (Quie & Hakimi, 2020; ECRE, 2020), particularly their inconsistent protection of the human rights of vulnerable people on the move. This contradicts the EU's public position, which stresses the importance of working towards what the JWF has framed as safe, orderly and predictable migration to ensure the security of all involved.

4. Vulnerable groups

Groups more likely to experience adverse outcomes in during periods of mixed migration include (DeYoung, 2021):

- ethnic and racial minorities,
- people considered to be low caste,
- women, children, infants,
- sexual minorities,
- religious minorities,
- elders,
- immigrants and refugees.

In the Afghan context, certain groups may be more vulnerable to becoming refugees and to be more vulnerable during movement.

Internally Displace Groups: Displacement and relocation are associated with specific increases in exposure to food insecurity, human trafficking, and reduced access to reproductive care. Contextual factors are also related to the severity of the adverse outcomes these groups experience in crisis. These factors include access to healthcare, access to education, and economic status.

Those with including medical or cognitive impairments: There are also unique groups whose needs, social systems, and cultural factors increase barriers to evacuation, accessing warning information, or accessing safe sheltering. These groups include persons with functional and

access needs including medical or cognitive impairments, elderly individuals, people with companion animals, and people with mental illness (DeYoung, 2021),

Women and Girls: Women continue to suffer abuse, persecution and discrimination in Afghanistan; for example, 40% are married under the age of 18. Females may be vulnerable to becoming refugees and of being vulnerable during movement.

Young people: It is estimated that up to 50% of refugees are children and this is the case in Afghanistan.

Returnees: obstacles to repatriation remained, prior to the current crisis, for large segments of the returnee population owing to the weak absorptive capacity of the Afghan state, ongoing insecurity and the limited development dividends reaching large swathes of the country

Refugees from Pakistan: May be vulnerable

Those associated with international actors:

Minority groups: Minority ethnic and religious minorities may be particularly vulnerable to targeted attack. Afghanistan is home to a number of minority groups this includes the following:

- Shia Muslims represent 9.7% of the population
- Other religious groups represent 0.3% of the population and include Hindus and Sikhs
- Tribal Groups. The population of the country consists of numerous ethnolinguistic groups: Pashtun, Tajik, Hazara, Uzbek, Aimaq, Turkmen, Baloch, Pashai, Nuristani, Gujjar, Arab, Brahui, Qizilbash, Pamiri, Kyrgyz, Sadat and others.

Reports have identified sustained targeting of the Hazaras buy successive Afghanistan regimes (see Hasrat, 2019[14]). The Hazara group are also predominantly Shia Muslims.

5. Negotiating with the Taliban

Donini, A. (2007). Negotiating with the Taliban in Larry Minear and Hazel Smith (eds), Humanitarian Diplomacy: Practitioners and their Craft, United Nations University Press.
https://collections.unu.edu/view/UNU:2476

This chapter explores the UNs efforts to negotiate humanitarian access and space with the Taliban from 1996 -2001 and the innovative attempts by humanitarian actors to operate in a more coherent and principled manner than in other crisis countries.

Donini shows how this more unitary approach initially strengthened the hand of the UN in its negotiations with the Taliban but led to a stalemate later on. Conversely, Donini highlights that ad hoc or uncoordinated negotiations allowed the Taliban to manipulate the relationship with the aid community to their advantage. Some lessons of wider relevance are identified:

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[14] https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/Racism/SR/Call/mhhasrat.pdf

- the advantages of having a clear negotiating posture and strategy
- the structural limitations of negotiating with an abusive regime whose ideological and practical frames of reference were at loggerheads with those of the United Nations and the international community.

The chapter shows the advantages of quiet diplomacy over public posturing and of ''duck-and-weave'' approaches over direct confrontation. Finally, Donini highlights the tension between local and HQ-driven negotiations and argues that the latter often fail because too much static – political issues with no direct relevance to the negotiation at hand – interferes in the communication between the parties.

see also Donini, A. Between a rock and a hard place: integration or independence of humanitarian action? International Review of the Red Cross. Volume 93 Number 881. https://international-review.icrc.org/sites/default/files/irrc-881-donini.pdf

Leader, N. (2001). Negotiation and Engagement in Afghanistan. UN.

This report, commissioned by the UN Coordinators office, explores the issue of principled negotiation in the context of Afghanistan in 2001. Leader concludes that a number of issues deserve attention:

- Improving political data collection and analysis to provide to negotiators
- Developing clear UN targets and monitoring 'principle indicators' along with the Health Information System so that principled engagement can be monitored and managed more systemically by Heads of Agencies.
- Greater coordination between agencies, in particular enhancing the role of the RCO and DRCO and better coordination in engagement with the authorities over projects and issues such as female engagement.
- Training of negotiators, both national and international in 'principled flexibility.
- Improve induction of new staff to give them better knowledge of Afghanistan and of the humanitarian system here. This could be developed as a single package for all agencies, including NGOs, along the lines of OLS in South Sudan. It could be managed by the analyst post mentioned above.

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About this report

This report is based on six days of desk-based research. The K4D research helpdesk provides rapid syntheses of a selection of recent relevant literature and international expert thinking in response to specific questions relating to international development. For any enquiries, contact helpdesk@k4d.info.