



Afghan Deportation from Iran “Pressure or Opportunity”

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Abstract

The mass deportation of Afghans from Iran and Pakistan in 2024–2025 has intensified one of the world’s most enduring migration crises. Decades of war, foreign intervention, and economic fragility have left Afghanistan ill-prepared to absorb the return of millions, many of whom were born and raised in exile. This article examines the socio-economic and political consequences of forced returns under the administration of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, with particular attention to housing shortages, unemployment, fragile livelihoods, food insecurity, and the vulnerability of women and children. It argues that the deportation surge constitutes both a humanitarian emergency and a governance challenge, further strained by sanctions and limited international support. At the same time, the study identifies opportunities: returnees bring skills, labor potential, and cross-border experiences that could contribute to reconstruction and economic resilience. Whether deportation is ultimately a source of crisis or a catalyst for recovery depends on coherent reintegration policies and sustained international cooperation.

Keywords: *Opportunity; Refugees; Returnees; Kabul Government; Policies*

Introduction

Afghanistan has experienced several up and downs in the last six decades. From 1979-1989 Afghans have witnessed the infest of Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) under the communist political party which was led by Noor Mohammad Taraki and his successors later. They communist party had started many social reforms; the consequences of such reforms were nothing but the continuation of enmity among the Afghan civilians. USSR signed an agreement in 1988, in Geneva, the Swiss capital. They pledged to withdraw its troops from Afghanistan. It would give end to the nine years of occupation by the Soviet Union, who intervened to prop-up the struggling communist government in Kabul. (Klass, June 1, 1988)

Over the course of ten-year of fighting that followed the soviet invasion, serious human rights abuses were reported as the soviet-backed Afghan government tried to suppress military and political

opposition to its rule, in towns and cities, students and teachers were arrested for suppressing opposition to government policies. (November, 11/16/99)

Letter on the Mujahedeen overthrew communist government in 1992 under the President Najibullah's leadership. The rival groups fought each-other to occupy the power and they spent the next four years under the civil wars till the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan took-over Kabul government in 1996. The Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, banned many activities based on the Islamic recitations and introduced the punishments such as amputation and stoning. (BBC, 1950-2005)

The consequence of USSR invasion, civil wars, chronic poverty, food insecurity and the invasion of the USA and its allies in 2001 were the main issues for the internally and externally immigration. Globally, it has been estimated that nearly 10.9 million Afghans have emigrated around the world. (UNHCR, 2024)

Following the September 11 attacks at New York of USA in 2001, the Kabul government under the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan refused to hand over Osama bin laden, who was considered to be responsible for the attacks. Afghanistan became the first victim of so-called war against terrorism.

As of October 2024, Pakistan hosts some 1.5 million Afghan refugees of different legal statuses. (UNHCR, 2025). The United Nations estimates that 3.7 million Afghans reside in Pakistan, while Pakistani authorities believe the number to be as high as 4.4 million. Of these, just 1.4 million Afghans hold the required documentation enabling them to legally stay in Pakistan. (October 36, 2023)

However, in the last five decades. Afghans have been experiencing different social, cultural, ethnical, and local behaviors which have affected their own culture, financial status, political and economic demands, social structure, the most important point is their look and behavior in relation to officials and governmental sectors.

After decades of war, insecurity, internal wars, and external invasions, Afghanistan has reached relative stability under the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan administration. In the last decade's most of the Afghans emigrated to safeguard their honor, lives, but now it's time for Afghans to come back to their routes, though such returnees are under pressure and confrontation of many challenges in respect to differentiations that the generation haven't seen or experienced yet. They were born and raised in the various social structure, political interventions and societal integrations as compare to their successors.

Now, they are here in Afghanistan forcefully. There is no other choice but to engage with the new rules, laws and circumstances under the ongoing government. The new returnees have to face many challenges that provide two different situations for both sides (government under the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan as a host and the refugees)

Question

How the deported and returnee Afghans can provide challenges and opportunities in the current situation of Afghanistan?

Research Purpose

Afghanistan had/has hosting deported and returnees in last decades. According to different reasons the force deportation and returns has accelerated in 2025 by the neighboring countries, specifically Iran and Pakistan.

Most of these Afghans that have returned or been forcibly deported carries experiences in vary sector, that can help the government by managing its polices for paving the way to attract and use them in different infrastructural and commercial sector, despite their promoting their interest to invest in Afghanistan.

Literature Review

There is not much research paper about the opportunities that the force deported individuals can provide. Many written articles have focused on the challenges promoted by the returnees. Though Afghanistan been officially part of the International Organization for Migration (IoM) but due to many reasons, Afghanistan is suffering instability (social, economic, political, cultural, and structural), legislation, and insecurity that has improved the logic for immigration in the last decades.

Methodology

This research has been done using analytical and descriptive method, the method of data collecting is online articles, websites, and journals.

Afghanistan's migrants and New Administration

As mentioned above the decades of civil war and various life conditions compelled Afghans to migrate to the neighboring countries. Though many Afghanistan citizens have returned at various points of time by calculating the differs in basic societal promotion but soon been disappointed and hopes to migrate once again. "A shrinking protection space, a fragile economy, insufficient access to basic services, natural hazards and climate induced shocks, as well as regional political dynamics continue to undermine the ability of Afghans to recover from 40 years of conflict." (OCHA, December 2024)

Melinda Good said, "Afghanistan's economy is fragile, relies heavily on external support and its private sector is weak". (World Bank, October 3, 2023). On the one hand, the 2021 collusion and the withdrawal of foreign forces have affected different sectors in Afghanistan. On the other hand, the implementation of new policies in respect to deportation of Afghan from Iran and Pakistan has put the Kabul government on a hot break.

According to UNHCR reports as of 16 July (2025), some 1.25 million Afghans returned from Iran since 1 April and more than 1.57 million since the beginning of the year "2025". Between 10 and 16 July, daily average of returns exceeded 29600 people. Between 1 April and 16 July, 287,622 Afghans returned, including over 49,688 deportees (17%) Most were undocumented (69%), followed by Afghan Citizen Card (ACC) holders (27%) and Proof of Registration (PoR) card holders (14%). (UNHCR, 18 July 2025)

However, according to news channels during the 2025 the number of returnees has reached its peak. Everyday borders with Pakistan and Iran host our migrants with surrounded difficulties that many had never imagined due to not being in Afghanistan. Most of the new generation of these immigrants were born and raised in Iran and Pakistan. They have no-idea where they are and how hard it is to deal with rulers and Shariya laws of new administration. According to UNHCR "The experts expressed particular concern about the separation of families, including children, and specific risks for women, especially women-headed households and those without a mahram." "The situation is being exacerbated by the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan 's restrictions on women humanitarian workers," (OHCHR, July 18, 2025)

Migrant and New Challenges

Afghanistan has long absorbed the consequences of international decisions made elsewhere. The present crisis, driven by regional expulsion and global neglect, continues that pattern. (Imdad, 2025)

After decades of distance, being in motherland can affect spiritually and emotionally but soon many of those returnees remembered what they have suffered, should not be repeated by their youths. Soon they faced loses that had impact on their daily live, the long-time hazardous experience in the motherland that compelled them to migrate, had effective consequences on their practical earns during the decades of refuge, the earning of decade experience and their lives stability can be demolished soon. During their migration, most of them have been skilled and worked in different sectors as experts, but

now they have to start from zero in country that have nothing under new administration, especially after 2021, many sectors are facing its pernicious trends in economic sector.

The deportation of millions of Afghans from Iran and Pakistan have created significant pressure not only on the Kabul administration, but also on the returnees, and deported Afghans.

Most of the Afghan returnees have come-back almost with nothing. On the one hand, the rising daily costs, unemployment, seeking shelter, societal instability, racism based on Richard Bennet “UN representative on human right reports”, and limited economic opportunities for rebuilding medium life in Afghanistan, has intensified the struggle to recover their losses. On the other hand, the demand for basic services such as water, sanitation, health, nutrition, modern transportation, and urban disciplined life.

According to INTERSOS “the government’s ability to manage this massive influx is overwhelmed, and humanitarian organizations are stretched thin. The urgent need for food, water, shelter, health services, and protection at border points and in settlement areas is critical.” (INTEREOS, August 15, 2025)

Although the Islamic Emirate and international organization urged host states majorly Iran and Pakistan, to treat Afghan refugees with respect and refrain force deportation as Mawlawi Abdul Kabir, the political Affair administrator of the Islamic Emirate asked: “We request neighboring countries and the international community to allow Afghan refugees to live freely and not expel them forcibly”. (Qadiry, 2024)

Here we point out some most significant needs for returnees that has heighten the challenge for Afghanistan’s administration:

1. Shelter

The first and for-most necessary is the shelter, that have been changed to heighten challenge not only for the returnees but also for government. Though the authorities have welcomed the returnees rhetorically, but lack of management capacity, limited aid access, absence of national strategy for reintegration and inability of coordination between provincial and central government for providing shelter has remained a persistent feature of Kabul administration.

The return of over a million Afghans in the space of months is more than a logistical or humanitarian challenge. It is a symptom of the region’s failure to develop a coordinated framework for post-conflict recovery and cross-border mobility. It is also a reminder that, in the absence of political will, humanitarian principles become negotiable. (Imdad, 2025)

2. Unemployment

The Afghanistan economy is fragile, and heavily dependent on foreign aids, and collapse of private sector have put Afghanistan among the worst states in respect to humanitarian crises. According to UN and NGOs active personal in Afghanistan in 2024, an estimated 23.7 million people are projected to require humanitarian assistance. (IOM, 2024)

The 2021 governmental collapse and the retake of Kabul government by the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan been pursued with the new USA and its allies’ sanctions such as developmental aid cutoff, freezing of Afghanistan reserve money by the United States Department of the Treasury, and etc. had a direct impact on private sector, banking system, and enormously the humanitarian needs that was already in the hot seat.

Before the returnees increase the challenges according to the statistic of the ministry of economy, about 69% of the country’s population is made up of people who have vulnerable jobs, of which nearly 700,000 people make a living through daily wage work. (Rahimi, December 2022)

The administration under the Emirate Islamic of Afghanistan is been pointed out above, already struggling with the international sanctions that has affected different sectors. Such impact has reduced the opportunities of progressive sectors to promote jobs and recruitment. Specifically, the private sector that have the major role in creating job offers around the country. Though Afghan returnees from Iran and Pakistan are mostly experts in vast sections, due to dependency on foreign aids and nearly collapse of private section, the chance for employment reach's zero for the new comers.

Abdul Latif Nazari, the deputy minister of Economy, also emphasized the importance of rebuilding Afghanistan's infrastructure and urged the international community to support Afghanistan through sustained humanitarian and developmental assistance. He also called on the USA to release Afghanistan's frozen assets and return the funds to the country's central bank. (ArianaNews, 2025)

3. Livelihood

Afghanistan has experienced one of its most recent challenges during its history. Worst surge in violence across the country specially from mid-2021 ahead that caused massive displacement, job losses, and business limitations. The government that majorly depended on foreign aids, collapsed on August 25, 2021. Most of the internal displaced persons had arrived to Urban, and some on the suburban areas, were looking for the chance to find jobs or seek assistance in labor markets. Beside the above points mentioned, another key stressor in Afghanistan has been prolonged nature drought, often attributed to climate change. (Orzala Nemat, Vidya Diwakar, Ihsanullah Ghafoori and Shukria Azadmanesh, 2022).

Afghans doesn't have many chances to work and have stable wage, mostly their jobs depend on seasonal works such as brick fields, construction market, harvest vegetables, NGOs, and private sector that are mostly stands for daily consumption. However, after the 2021 collapse many of sector mentioned are facing governmental limitations which has reduced the opportunities for earing. People preferred to immigrate in the neighboring countries mostly Iran and Pakistan. Now the forced deportation has increase pressure not only on the returnees but based on limited work chance, on the Kabul administration.

The Afghanistan's administrative inability for providing livelihood can be the key factor for re-immigration to those who been for away from their motherland. They will try the legal or illegal ways to reach their destiny in respect to earn and manage their livelihood.

According Ahmadullah Zahir and Enayatullah Hamdard "Addressing the challenges of hunger and malnutrition in Afghanistan necessitates a holistic strategy that integrates both national and international initiatives. A variety of initiatives and interventions have been proposed and executed to confront these challenges, drawing insights from successful models in other nations and adapting them to Afghanistan's distinct context." (Ahmadullah Zahir, Enayatullah Hamdard, 2025)

The inability to provide stable livelihood has increased pressure on both-sides, on the one hand Kabul administrators have put limitations on construction, and NGOs on the other hand, the increasing number of returnees can complicate the process of providing services, due to lack of policies and sources, the process of providing livelihood opportunity faces difficulty under the rush of demands.

the fiscal deterioration in the last years, specifically under the Emirate-e Islamic of Afghanistan, that routes to foreigner sanctions, have extremely increased the limitations in vary sectors. Including economy, Humanitarian crisis, internal infrastructure, social and protective services. According to different source reports returned individual and family members have lost almost everything that they may have collect and saved during the years of being aboard. They need the fundamental co-operations in respect to livelihood.

4. Raising Population

According to the www.worldometers.info as of 25/8/2025 demography of Afghanistan show increase in its population. As mention in the below table 1 the raise of population in based on two main factors:

Population of Afghanistan (2025 and historical)											
Year	Population	Yearly % Change	Yearly Change	Migrants (net)	Median Age	Fertility Rate	Density (P/Km ²)	Urban Pop %	Urban Population	Country's Share of World Pop	World Population
2025	43,844,111	2.81%	1,196,619	-74,404	17.3	4.66	67	26.70%	11,704,638	0.53%	8,231,613,070
2024	42,647,492	2.88%	1,192,731	-44,089	17.1	4.76	65	26.50%	11,320,521	0.52%	8,161,972,572
2023	41,454,761	2.16%	875,919	-48,958	16.9	4.84	63	26.40%	10,948,055	0.51%	8,091,734,930
2022	40,578,842	1.91%	754,932	-647,402	16.8	4.93	62	26.10%	10,587,583	0.51%	8,021,407,192
table 1 worldometers.info											

First; reason is based on partners who are mostly unaware of the long-term reasons of bringing children. Second; the parents insist on maternity under the internal cultures which is considered to increase the number of sons instead of female children due to agricultural needs and societal demands. Traditionally, in Afghanistan men, are the economic base of a family, women are the nurturers and the teacher for vital lessons such as cultural values, religious teaching, and tutor for social norms to their children. The female also plays the major role to integrates family, and granting the continuation of family roots. “I was always put under mental pressure by my father-in-law, my mother-in-law and other family members,” she said. “After my daughters were born, my husband also gave me a lot of trouble and sorrow. (especially) after the birth of my second daughter, all the family started ignoring me and treating me badly, then my husband told me that he was going to marry another girl.” (Fahimullah, January 30, 20217)

Due to such perspectives most children struggle crisis. As reported by Save the Children, in Afghanistan “about 420 health facilities have closed in Afghanistan due to aid project suspensions and terminations, meaning about three million people no longer have access to primary healthcare.” (SavetheChildren, June 5, 2025)

Beside the traditional and insists of family member to newly married couples in respect to bring children, the sexual unawareness has also affected the process of raising population in Afghanistan in the last years.

Opportunity for Kabul government

The immediate effect of returnees under the current situation, are mostly negative, due to the issues mentioned above but If the Kabul administration create significant and feasible policies these deported individuals possess skills and most of them are experts in different courses, which has direct relation to their long time in abroad. They are potential labor force that can help Afghanistan's economic and infrastructural sectors that are mostly relevant to their experience.

The policies such as Land Allocation Scheme “LAS” that was based on the Afghanistan's presidential decree 104, which was passed in December 2005 “these scheme – consists of over 30 sites in Afghanistan – aimed to solve the problem of the landlessness of returning refugees.”(Majidi, 2013)

Despite the challenges, there is two main opportunities for the Kabul government in relation to deported Afghans.

First; the deported Afghans, provide the chance for the Kabul admins to promote their relation with the international community in respect to help the returnees for resettlement, reintegration, and find entrepreneurship to pave way for start-up business, and promote economic resilience with the collaboration of international community. Like RADA supported by IOM: the RADA project that provide help in “sustainable reintegration, capacity strengthening, reception assistance and Knowledge development. (IOM, 2017 -2025)

Second: the cooperation with the international community such as IoM, UNHCR, and others can improve reliability, with trust that can improve the chance of international recognition for the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan. The Kabul government has always insisted on foreign investment that can potentially create jobs and attracted the international entrepreneurs. As written by the UK parliament in a report “recognition has been informally tied to the fulfilment of certain conditions by the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan authorities related to inclusive government, mitigating the threats from terrorist organizations operating from Afghanistan and respect for human rights, in particular the rights of women and girls. While those conditions on recognition largely remain, diplomatic engagement with the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan is steadily increasing.” (Claire Mills, Philip Loft, John Curtis, March 18, 2025)

However, beside the pressures on the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan the returnees, carry essential expertise that can directly affect the Afghanistan’s economy and its infrastructure. They also can be the opportunity for the Kabul administration to accelerate its international relations for paving the way for recognition.

Conclusion

Under the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, the international sanction and limitation have surrounded this country. Already the steady challenges were applied that all Afghans were/is scrimmaging with, Afghanistan is suffering from the different sectors such as “livelihood, shelter, infrastructure, unemployment and etc.) on the one hand, the absence of particular and faceable policies to cover the weakness mentioned are not available in the governmental course. on the other hand, without the foreign aids the Kabul administration can’t overcome the ongoing challenges. the assistance provides by the international like NGOs, UNHCR, and others can build reliable trust for both sides (International community and Islamic Emirate) to cooperate in different sectors.

Though the ongoing conditions declines opportunities but the long term abroad lives, have built many capacities and experts in vast fields that are useful to be used in essential and productive courses of the country.

Most of the returnees are carrying professional experience in respect to construction and factory works. They can be use in such sector if the Kabul administration provide the chance by attracting national and international investments.

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