

**Topic: The Situation of Afghan Refugees and Immigrants after 2021**

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## Abstract

Afghanistan has been dealing with an intensifying refugee crisis, underscored by an alarming political shift with the fall of the Afghan Republic's government in 2021. This research presents an in-depth study of the intensified Afghan refugee crisis post-collapse of the Afghan Republic Government in 2021 and Pakistan's policy shift towards forced deportation that further intensifies the situation. Combining archival analysis and secondary data, the research explores how Afghan refugees' socio-economic, legal, and human rights challenges are intensified. Changes in displacement demographics and trends are also examined. The study reveals an expanding humanitarian crisis with refugees facing restrictions in livelihood opportunities, legal protection, and basic services. The major shift in Pakistan's refugee policy, partially driven by resource constraints and security concerns, not only infringes upon human rights but escalates the displacement crisis. Key findings highlight that gender and child-sensitive strategies, increased security measures, and the international community's active role are crucial in the current situation. This comprehensive understanding of the Afghan refugee crisis is meant to inform policy-making and humanitarian actions accompanied by geopolitical shifts and escalating global refugee crises.



## The Situation of Afghan Refugees and Immigrants after 2021

### Introduction

In light of the government collapse in Afghanistan, the Afghan refugee crisis has reached a new height, presenting an intensified humanitarian challenge entangled in the political dynamics of Afghanistan and Pakistan. The abrupt withdrawal of international troops and the Taliban's return to power in 2021 have sparked a massive outpour of Afghans seeking refuge, particularly in Pakistan, a country known for its historical stance as an asylum for Afghan refugees (Delawar, 2022). The escalating difficulty of Afghan refugees in Pakistan and Afghanistan following the collapse of the Afghan Republic's government, together with recent trends in forced displacement, has resulted in an intensifying humanitarian crisis. This research will investigate the dynamics of these evolving conditions and challenges, and their compounded implications caused by forced deportation, ultimately calling for a more nuanced and comprehensive response to the Afghanistan refugee crisis.

Pakistan, being involved in hosting Afghan refugees for decades due to continual unrest in Afghanistan, has recently experienced security challenges attributed, in part, to the refugee population. These circumstances resulted in a policy shift, adding another dimension to the Afghan refugee crisis. The Pakistani government now urges the return of Afghan refugees, emphasizing voluntary departures or using persuasive tactics such as document control, limited service access, and clampdowns on undocumented Afghans (Barakat, 2010). In conjunction with security concerns, Pakistan's policy change also presents a way to support Afghanistan in reintegrating its displaced citizens. By deporting refugees, Pakistan hopes to foster sustainable crisis solutions and smooth reintegration of displaced individuals into their home communities. However, this measure amplifies humanitarian concerns, as many returning Afghan refugees confront grave challenges including insufficient infrastructure, economic opportunities, and safety measures in their homeland.

Therefore, the research objective is to dissect the outcomes of this policy shift and understand its impact on the humanitarian crisis. This study engages with the essence of the evolving Afghan refugee crisis, particularly within Pakistan, and the implications of newly emerged forced displacement. In response to the multinational complexity of the crisis, this research calls for a comprehensive and considerate approach, focusing on detailing the influences of the political instability on refugees, their legal problems, human rights issues, socio-economic obstacles, and harsh living conditions (Wood, 1989). As the global refugee problem intensifies, research of this nature becomes critical. In addition to throwing light on refugees' current state, it will also explore the socio-economic consequences on host countries like Pakistan. These insights are crucial for policy-making and planning within humanitarian bodies, governmental institutions, and social work practitioners. This research essentially bridges knowledge gaps about the Afghan refugee crisis and invites global involvement in fostering efficient and compassionate solutions for these escalating challenges.

### **Thesis Statement**

This study posits that the collapse of the Afghan Republic's government in 2021 has drastically intensified the hardships, challenges, and complexities faced by recently displaced Afghan refugees in Pakistan, marking a distinct departure from the experiences of those displaced prior to this political shift

### **Research Question**

This study aims to answer crucial questions regarding the Afghan refugee situation in Pakistan following the fall of the Afghan Republic's Government. By examining this issue in detail, we hope to attain a comprehensive understanding of the refugee situation that may inform better policymaking and humanitarian efforts.

The key research questions that this study seeks to address are:

- A. How do the experiences, challenges, and conditions of Afghan refugees displaced after the collapse of the Afghan Republic's government in 2021 compare to those who were displaced prior to these political changes?

### **Gap Analysis**

The principal objective of this section is to identify the areas within existing scholarly works related to Afghan refugees that have not been adequately covered, explored, or studied in-depth. This research seeks to offer a significant extension to current knowledge, explaining the fine differences that have been overlooked or not given due emphasis in past literature. One of the most evident gaps in the existing literature is the aftermath of the fall of the Afghan Republic government in 2021 for Afghan refugees, particularly those taking refuge in Pakistan (Borthakur, 2017). Most research done presently has focused on historical and chronic issues faced by Afghan refugees, covering topics such as forced displacement, human rights, sociopolitical complexities, and livelihood challenges. However, the sudden and recent political shift - the collapse of the Afghan government and the consequential geopolitical dynamics created - and its impact on the refugee population remains a largely untouched area in the research spectrum.

Secondly, although some literature discusses the general concerns of Afghan refugees, papers exploring the changing nature of these concerns in the evolving political landscape are limited. For instance, there is minimal data about the transformations in the socio-economic status of these refugees post-2021 or the shifting nuances in the challenges that the host country - Pakistan in this case - must deal with (Kaleem et al., 2023). This research aims to delve into this understudied domain, thereby filling an important gap. Thirdly, while there is a respectable amount of data reflecting trends related to Afghan refugees and forced displacement, a through-line that connects past trends to current instabilities induced by political change is missing (Borthakur, 2017). This research intends to offer a comprehensive

view of the continuity and change in trends, expanding beyond familiar territories of study to offer a more holistic understanding.

Lastly, the cross-border dynamics resulting from refugee displacement is an area often bypassed by many researchers, leading to a knowledge gap. This present study intends to take a step forward in this aspect, exploring the dynamics of refugee concerns at a regional level, especially covering their effects on Pakistan's socio-political climate. In a nutshell, the principal focus of our research is to cover these identified gaps in the existing literature – the alteration in the refugees' state post-2021, the varying nature of their concerns and challenges for the host country, altered trends in forced displacement, and the evolving cross-border dynamics. It is designed to contribute meaningful insights into the more recent and relatively unfamiliar territories of the Afghan refugee situation, providing a robust, comprehensive study that extends beyond existing knowledge boundaries.

### **Literature Review**

The complexity of the Afghan refugee narrative stems from issues of assimilation, displacement, and struggles to make a living. Emerging as a primary destination, Pakistan has become a haven for Afghan refugees seeking to flee the Soviet occupation, civil war, and Taliban insurgency that have plagued Afghanistan throughout history. To truly understand the dynamics behind these displacement waves, one must consider the country's historical context. Several existing studies have explored the plight of Afghan refugees in different aspects telling the tale of one of the longest, most protracted refugee situations in modern history. Rezaei and others (2021) discussed in their article that the recurring theme in many studies is the sociopolitical complexities facing Afghan refugees, including issues in integrating and settling in host nations, seeking gainful employment, and accessing quality education and health services (Rezaei et al., 2021). They also stated that the integration of former Afghan refugees into Pakistani society has indeed been noteworthy, but it is not



without a multitude of obstacles. Several challenges, namely employment, social connections, and socio-cultural issues, persist (Rezaei et al., 2021). Kavian and others (2020) also stated that the search for suitable employment represents a significant hurdle for Afghan refugees. Even with qualifications and expertise, many struggle in their quest for employment, and discrimination at the hands of employers only adds to the complexity of their situation. Meanwhile, building social connections is another issue that requires attention (Kavian et al., 2020). Social isolation is a common challenge faced by many former Afghan refugees as they struggle to form connections beyond their community. They also stated that factors such as cultural disparities and inadequate language skills can make it difficult to strike a connection with others (Kavian et al., 2020). Balancing their traditional Afghan norms with Pakistani values could prove to be challenging, as could experiencing cultural shock.

Similarly, the research done by Jami (2022) highlights some of these enduring challenges experienced by Afghan refugees during their time in Pakistan trying to negotiate their complex legal environment. Such a legal landscape, complete with numerous rules and laws, ends up violating their essential human rights. In his paper, Jami depicts some of the hardships endured by Afghan refugees: living conditions that are small and unsanitary, poor quality health care, and lack of access to water and sanitation (Jami, 2022). These dire situations are only worsened as the revenues are unstable and modest, leaving refugees prone to exploitation and economic insecurity (Jami, 2022). In addition, a permanent refugee is a great source of cultural-psychological pressure for Afghan refugees: it uproots established communities and traditions and creates psychological scars that do not heal with time. This research study sheds light on the dire necessity of a full and empathetic approach to tackle the multidimensional issues Afghan refugees face including their legal protection, necessities of life, decent earning means, and psychological wellbeing (Jami, 2022). Jamal and Maley (2023) found that the fall of the Afghan Republic government poses complex challenges for

Pakistan. These include managing a potential refugee influx, ensuring proper registration, providing education, healthcare, and social security, and addressing economic pressures and resource allocation in the host country. Managing infrastructural demands is also crucial. The economic challenges require strategic planning and allocation of resources to counter the effects of this upon the Pakistani economy. The challenge to carefully plan and manage is further aggravated by the need to manage the growing demands on existing infrastructural resources including residential and utility needs.

On the other hand, Abbas (2023) suggested that while facing these hurdles, keeping law and order still counts among top priorities. At the same time for Afghan refugees, these challenges and worries multiply. Legal security and safeguards must be in place because many refugees do not have valid papers and proper legal status, which increases the risk of deportation, or unwelcome behavior due to this fact (Abbas, 2023). Their vulnerability is also heightened through external pressure to “repatriate” them to their country of origin (Abbas, 2023). One significant obstacle for Afghan refugees in Pakistan is limited access to jobs and basic amenities such as education, health care, and shelter (Abbas, 2023). These complications are worsened by the fact that they have an unstable economy, and this results in a downward spiral of poverty (Abbas, 2023). Without legal papers or the right to exist, refugees typically are not able to get traditional jobs or attend schools and hospitals. This has left many refugees dependent on the informal economy with little protection, preying upon their vulnerability in exacerbating the same condition of precarity they were fleeing from in the first place (Abbas, 2023). The fall of the Afghan government created a plethora of interlinked legal, social-economic, and humanitarian dimensions, needing multi-dimensional and reactive mechanisms to deal with the host countries as well as Afghans residing in Pakistan.



While talking about the cross-border dynamics Kaleem and others (2023) suggested that following the change of regime and current developments concerning the refugee question, we see important changes on the map of cross-border dynamics between Afghanistan and Pakistan (Kaleem et al., 2023). A diverse set of factors such as evolving border policies, an upsurge in political tensions, and the existing condition of bilateral relations between these two countries influence such dynamics (Kaleem et al., 2023). Concurrently, Pakistan, the primary destination for Afghans due to geographic proximity and shared cultural and historic bonds, has started experiencing security challenges, partly blamed on Afghan refugees. This has resulted in a significant shift in the country's refugee policy. Pakistan is now urging the deportation of these refugees either voluntarily or through rigid measures such as limitations on documents, access to services, and harsh actions against undocumented Afghans ("Afghan Refugees Fear as Pakistan Prepares for Deportations," 2023). Such a policy shift in Pakistan is not unique, as other nations in similar situations have also implemented repatriation strategies due to rising nationalistic sentiments, economic strains, and security issues. However, the implications of this transition in policy for an already marginalized Afghan refugee community remain underexplored. Insights into their readiness to leave their established lives, security concerns about returning to their conflict-ridden homeland, and the second-generation Afghan-Pakistani population's issues regarding identity and citizenship are yet to be thoroughly studied. Yet, it is important to highlight here that the existing research on this topic does not cover fully an analysis of such dynamics in the changing landscape of Afghan emigration to Pakistan after 2021. With regional implications, there has been a fundamental change in the political landscape of Afghanistan as a result of the collapse of the Afghan republic's government and the Taliban capture (Kaleem et al., 2023). Such a revolution has changed both the magnitude of Afghan

immigration to Pakistan as well as its demographic characterization, including the reason for migration and problems encountered by Afghan refugees (Kaleem et al., 2023).

Indeed, the available literature on Afghans does offer much about different aspects of their situation and experience because there is limited literature on this ongoing post-2021 context. While many studies have analyzed the pre-2021 periods, much remains to be understood about the present circumstances. This divide greatly hinders our understanding of how the collapse of government in Afghanistan is resonating in the broader refugee space. Such an abrupt power switch, accompanied by all sorts of difficulties arising from the new Taliban government probably has left Afghan refugees feeling even more vulnerable than before. These can include changes in their legal identity, access to basic services, sources of livelihood, and standards of living. It is important to take a close look at these transformations to understand how Afghan refugees will need help in the short and long term. Secondly, while there has been some analysis of the role of recent political changes, particularly those in 2021, these studies provide little insight into how these developments have affected the regional dynamic between Pakistan and Afghanistan. Such new geopolitical realities with Taliban re-emergence and pull out of international forces may lead to a change in the contours of cross-border displacement patterns.

It is important, however, to understand how Pakistan has adapted its policy regarding Afghan refugees as well as its broader foreign policy goals concerning the shifting landscape since 2014. It is also vital to understand how regional and global powers affect the status of Afghan refugees, which provides insight into how these dynamics may change within increasingly fluid geopolitics. Over time, these refugees have established lives in their host country, often having children who are born and raised away from their parents' homeland. The switch in Pakistan's policy urging deportation presents a new set of challenges. Like other global instances of refugee crises, willingness and safety of return are critical factors to

consider. The literature scarcely discusses the readiness of Afghan refugees residing in Pakistan to return home, especially concerning their worry over security, lack of infrastructure, and economic opportunities in their homeland. This is similar to cases like the Syrian refugees in Lebanon, where reluctance to return succeeded during concerns over safety, security, and livelihood. To truly grasp the complexities of the Afghan refugee crisis in Pakistan, it is crucial to fill the gaps in the literature. This will provide a detailed and current understanding of the challenges and opportunities faced by the refugees. Additionally, it will give policymakers, humanitarian organizations, and host countries the tools to create effective strategies and interventions, which can better support and protect this vulnerable population considering significant political and regional shifts. This paper endeavors to build on the bedrock of existing research while simultaneously infusing new perspectives on the Afghan refugee situation in Pakistan, given the recent geopolitical developments. By bridging the gaps in the current literature and presenting a holistic understanding of the changing refugee landscape, it seeks to contribute significantly to future policymaking and humanitarian planning.

### **Methodology**

Understanding the complex and multifaceted nature of the Afghan refugee crisis in Pakistan, particularly after the collapse of the Afghan Republic's government in 2021, demands a meticulous and holistic research method. This study incorporates a comprehensive methodological approach, primarily hinged on secondary research, to ensure an in-depth exploration of the issue (Hatch, 2023). The following sub-sections delve into the specifics of the adopted methodology.

### **Research Design**

According to the type of research in question, a qualitative research method is recommended. Qualitative research involves the analysis and interpretation of observations,

interviews, and texts to discover meaningful patterns descriptive of a particular phenomenon. This type of research design is especially suited for issues where much data needs to be acquired and analyzed as in the case of the crisis faced by Afghan refugees (Ghufran, 2006). This was achieved through an exploratory approach that allowed for a detailed understanding of the present Afghan refugee situation in Pakistan while trend analysis on involuntary displacement was also highlighted (Hatch, 2023). This research has employed an Archival Analysis method, where relevant and published articles, reports, and surveys were scrutinized to gather pertinent information about the subject matter. In particular, these secondary sources were identified and collected systematically through a systematic review, following recommended guidelines for selecting the sources. These sources were mainly obtained from recognized Academic Databases and libraries. This approach was adopted to understand the depth of the issue, draw out patterns, suggest possible explanations, and fill gaps in existing literature. This offers an opportunity to conduct in-depth analyses with big data which might not have been accessible due to the lack of security and political environment in Afghanistan (Kronenfeld, 2008). The key component of this study's methodology is a thorough review of academic/scholarly articles (both qualitative & quantitative), books, government documents, and conference papers. In conducting a literature review the study provided an understanding of the concept which has given a thorough overview, further, scholarly debates were critically analyzed and gaps in previous research were identified.

Surveys, questionnaires, and interviews are the primary data typically and can offer new insights, but in this research, it was not easy to obtain data primary data due to turbulence in the country (Hatch, 2023). Moreover, the current situation in Afghanistan and the delicate nature of the Afghan refugee problem might create serious hurdles when adopting the primary data collection approaches (Abbas, 2023). Therefore, the principal method used in this research is secondary, which benefits from the wealth and richness of already-existing literature on the

subject. This study extensively uses scholarly articles, credible books, academic journals, and United Nations reports. These sources were instrumental in painting a detailed and nuanced picture of the refugee crisis. Scholarly articles provided rigorous, peer-reviewed insights into the subject and were instrumental in enhancing the study's academic robustness. Books and academic journals contributed depth to the research, often offering longitudinal analysis and diverse perspectives.

### ***The procedure of secondary research***

The first step involved assessing the research questions and identifying the relevant dimensions. Each research question necessitated exploring a different aspect of the refugee crisis, ranging from their current conditions to social, legal, or economic concerns. These directly affected the choice of secondary data sources. Next, data collection involved an extensive literature review. Notably, the methodology emphasized using the most recent and relevant literature to reflect the nuances of the most recent political shifts. Initially, the research used twenty resources but later, fifteen of them were finalized for data collection. This review process provided an extensive view of the refugee crisis from various angles: socio-political dynamics, host nation challenges, legal predicaments of refugees, human rights concerns, trend analysis, and so on.

### **Procedure for Collecting and Analyzing Data**

#### ***Data collection procedure***

The process of data collection involved screening, shortlisting, and referring academic papers, scholarly articles, books, and UN reports that could effectively answer the research questions. A range of databases and platforms were used during the data collection process including universities' digital libraries, Google Scholar, and JSTOR, among others. Although the internet was principally used to access these resources, printed books and reports were also used whenever required.



### ***Data analysis procedure***

Data analysis involved scrutinizing the gathered information (Hatch, 2023). Firstly, each source was read carefully to extract key points, findings, and interpretations. After collecting the data based on the research questions, it was then summarized, compared, and interpreted to answer the research questions effectively while shedding light on the broader aspects of the refugee crisis.

### **Ensuring the Reliability and Validity of Data Sources**

#### ***Reliability of data sources***

A paramount concern during secondary research involves the reliability of data sources (Hatch, 2023). The study ensured the reliability of the sources by only referring to peer-reviewed academic articles, authoritative books written by experts in the field, and UN reports which are known for their meticulous data collection methods and structure. Additionally, the relevancy of the sources was cross-verified by comparing the collected information across different sources with consistent findings indicating reliability.

#### ***Validity of data sources***

Alongside reliability, ensuring the validity of utilized sources was another crucial aspect (Hatch, 2023). To ensure validity, the research meticulously evaluated the background of the authors, the publication's reputation, and the depth of the sources' research methodology. Furthermore, UN reports and peer-reviewed academic articles generally undergo rigorous validation processes before being published, solidifying their validity.

Thus, by formulating a systematic and thorough methodology, this research study ensures a comprehensive understanding of the Afghan refugees' situation. Primarily grounded on secondary research, the study utilizes information from various reliable and valid sources.



This methodical approach allows the research to effectively address its key research questions and, in the process, contribute to the prevailing body of academic research.

## **Findings**

### **Current Status of Afghan Refugees in Pakistan**

#### ***Legal status and issues of protection***

Many Afghan refugees find themselves living in Pakistan with a vague legal status. This often results from the lack of a comprehensive refugee-specific framework in Pakistani law, leading to Afghan refugees' documentation processes being regulated by temporary arrangements and practices (Abbas, 2023). These informal measures, such as Proof of Registration (PoR) cards, directly impact their access to basic rights and services (Abbas, 2023). Many have their refugee status, but a significant number still reside unregistered, further making them vulnerable to exploitation, placement into indefinite detention, or deportation. The absence of a formal, legally sound refugee framework leads to protection issues, raising urgent and significant humanitarian concerns (Abbas, 2023). In 2018, UNHCR's initiatives in Pakistan involved collaborating with government bodies to ensure refugees can access healthcare and educational resources (Pakistan, 2023). Further endeavors included bolstering unity and shared community values between refugees and their local hosts. Furthermore, it included assisting those refugees who have independently chosen to return to their countries of origin.

#### ***Socio-economic and cultural challenges***

The research findings show that most Afghan refugees in Pakistan live under the national poverty line. They are primarily settled in the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Baluchistan provinces, which are amongst the poorest regions of Pakistan (Imam, 2023). Employment or livelihood opportunities are scarce and are often compounded by issues like wage

discrimination, mistreatment, or exploitation. The strained economic conditions only prevent their journey toward financial stability and cultural integration. Access to quality education and healthcare is also minimal. It is also suggested that poor literacy levels, language barriers, and the lack of appropriate social infrastructure add to their socio-economic struggles. Moreover, the worsening economic contagion due to COVID-19 presents fresh challenges, with many Afghan refugees losing their source of livelihood, thereby pushing them into deeper poverty. The study also shows that Afghan refugees often face cultural barriers in assimilating into the native Pakistani community and language remains a significant challenge, with many refugees unable to communicate in the host country's language (Imam, 2023). Cultural differences and social stigma contribute to their alienation. Additionally, compounded by themes of prejudice and discrimination, it hampers refugees' attempts to forge social connections outside of their community.

## **Emerging Trends in Refugee and Forced Displacement Situations**

### ***Trends in displacement***

The current situation regarding Afghan refugees in Pakistan is a complicated challenge filled with diplomatic and political complexities. The Pakistani government has been reported to intensify the deportation of Afghan refugees on the grounds of national security (“Afghan Refugees Fear as Pakistan Prepares for Deportations,” 2023). This enforced evacuation primarily stems from concerns regarding resource allocation, socio-economic strain, and the potential for causing domestic instability. Pakistan, which has been a host to Afghan refugees for decades, is grappling with its economic challenges (Imam, 2023). The increasing numbers of refugees have strained the country's resources, with the government unable to aptly accommodate and support such a large influx. Problems like unemployment, demand on infrastructures, and resource shortages reportedly got exacerbated.

Simultaneously, the complex security environment is another critical factor contributing to Pakistan's forceful repatriation policy. The Pakistani government maintains that the sprawling refugee population provides a breeding ground for criminal and militant activities, thereby jeopardizing border regions' security ("Afghan Refugees Fear as Pakistan Prepares for Deportations," 2023). Moreover, the lack of international assistance and difficulties with integrating Afghan refugees into Pakistani society has added to the government's decision to reinforce the pushback. The country's citizens have also shown a discriminatory attitude against the refugees, associating them with drug trafficking and other criminal activities, creating social and cultural tensions. Conclusively, the Pakistani government's policy towards forcibly deporting Afghan refugees seems driven by economic constraints, security concerns, and an array of socio-political complexities. However, the decision raises significant human rights concerns, particularly in the backdrop of Afghanistan's current volatile and uncertain scenario.

### ***Changes in displaced demographics***

The findings of the research show that the basic demographics of displaced populations have been transformed due to recent events, particularly the fall of the Afghan Republic's government, triggering a displacement crisis. Traditionally, young males dominated migration and displacement patterns in pursuit of shelter or economic prospects. Nonetheless, an evident transformation in the wake of political unrest in Afghanistan has brought about fresh waves of displacement, featuring an influx of complete families that include elderly individuals, children, and women. This demographic shift will significantly impact humanitarian aid and support systems. The findings also revealed that in contrast to previous migrations that were largely comprised of men, these current migrations consist of varied family groups and pose distinct obstacles and susceptibilities. This demographic transformation underscores the importance of adapting humanitarian responses to address the evolving composition of

displaced populations, recognizing that a one-size-fits-all approach may no longer be adequate in meeting the diverse needs of these vulnerable groups seeking refuge and safety.

### ***Weakening prospects of deportation***

With continuing political unrest and instability in Afghanistan, the chances for safe and durable repatriation have diminished greatly. Although undertakings were made years earlier, particularly the Tripartite Agreement reached among Afghanistan, Pakistan, and UNHCR for voluntary repatriation of Afghans, we now face an alarming prospect (Abbas, 2023). The research findings indicate that growing violence, worsening human rights situation, and the reemergence of the Taliban render returns increasingly dangerous and uncertain. Security conditions remain fragile throughout much of Afghanistan and violent episodes persist in many places, making it inherently uncertain for returnees even if they could return safely to resume their lives. Plus, there is much in flux around politics and governance, and that adds to the difficulty of successful repatriation (Jamal & Maley, 2023). In such a scenario, the already stiff challenge faced in successfully integrating back into society is further complicated because returning migrants must deal with a lack of access to essential services, no employment opportunities, and protection against possible harm. The stark reality is that without long-term international engagement and assistance, the displaced population will continue to face hardship, and the rights and well-being of those living as Afghan refugees will remain at risk until conditions in Afghanistan permit them to return to safety and with dignity.

### **Analysis and Interpretation of These Findings**

Analyzing these numerous and layered challenges, it is undeniable that the situation of Afghan refugees in Pakistan is critical requiring urgent and recalibrated humanitarian responses. The fall of the Afghan Republic government has exacerbated the existing refugee predicament dramatically (Jamal & Maley, 2023). Overall the research conducted shows that as displacement numbers grow, it introduces further limitations in resource allocations,

livelihood opportunities, legal protection, and access to basic services, consequently preventing any solid progress toward secure living conditions. Shifting displacement demographics present unique challenges for aid responses. More women and children among the displaced mean aid strategies need to incorporate gender and child-sensitive approaches and measures fundamentally. Another key trend is the change in migration routes (Jamal & Maley, 2023). More Afghan refugees are choosing to cross unofficial borders, which presents new challenges for aid delivery, tracking, and protection against potential exploitation or trafficking. Such transit routes being screened with numerous, complex risks also raise grave concerns about these refugees' safety and well-being.

In light of such trends, it is apparent that Pakistan's forced deportation policy is not only adding to human rights concerns but also heightening the displacement crisis. Compelling refugees to return to a volatile homeland, intensifies the issue of displacement, fueling a cycle of instability. It is thus crucial for the international community to intervene effectively and share the responsibility, easing the socio-economic and humanitarian pressure faced by Pakistan due to the large influx of Afghan refugees. Government, aid agencies, and international community stakeholders are urged to have a more refined understanding of these displacement trends and tailor their response strategies accordingly. The response must incorporate gender and child-sensitive strategies and enhance security measures to safeguard Afghan refugees from potential risks and exploitation. At the same time, efforts must address Pakistan's legitimate economic restraints and security concerns, promoting a balanced, sustainable, and human rights-oriented approach to the Afghan refugee crisis.

Overall, the post-2021 Afghan refugee crisis in Pakistan is a complex, fluid, and critical reality demanding a comprehensive and proactive response from all parties in global humanitarian action. Effective and sustained solutions to this crisis are paramount in securing the rights, dignity, and futures of Afghan refugees.



## **Afghan Refugees In Pakistan: An In-Depth Overview**

### **Historical Trajectory of Afghan Refugees in Pakistan**

Afghan refugees in Pakistan are not an exception but rather provide the prime example of the persistence of complicity and the convoluted nature of the regional political, civil society, and humanitarian landscape over time (Kaleem et al., 2023). The tale traces many decades back; a sequence of pivotal moments in Afghanistan motivated Afghans to search for refuge in neighboring Pakistan. Waves of Afghan refugees came during critical periods in Afghanistan's history, such as the mid-80s with the Soviet intervention, post-tension when the country plunged into violence, and during the Taliban rule that emerged later (Abbas, 2023). During these times of crisis, many Afghans were pushed out of the country — and the most welcoming destination was Pakistan. In this recent cycle, the final chapter was the Taliban takeover of Afghanistan in 2021 and yet more refugees flooding into neighboring countries (Abbas, 2023). The past trajectory highlights how closely related to each other are Afghanistan and Pakistan as the movement of Afghani migrants into the state territory has been indistinguishably linked with the common heritage, geopolitical interests, and regional issues of both states. As such is a stark reminder of the persistent difficulties and humanitarian need that still define life for Afghan refugees in Pakistan.

### **Socioeconomic Paradigm and Challenges**

The lived experience of Afghan refugees in Pakistan is one of rooted poverty and institutional bias, which overwhelmingly shapes their existence (Ullah et al., 2023). Most refugees are concentrated in areas that are marked by widespread economic deprivation, scarce job opportunities, and an inherently unstable environment (Grare & Maley, 2011). This inherently harsh landscape presents a variety of formidable challenges for refugees, including pay discrepancies, significant barriers to employment, and pervasive economic instability (Kavian et al., 2020). The quality of their lives is further restricted by a severe lack of reliable



access to vital services like healthcare and educational support. In Pakistan, the Afghan refugee population is in dire need of assistance due to external factors like the COVID-19 pandemic, which has further heightened their vulnerable situation (Ullah et al., 2023). Thus, what is urgently required is a comprehensive support system that includes economic empowerment initiatives and social inclusion programs to uplift these communities and help them survive in these tough times. The current socioeconomic context highlights the significance of such measures and emphasizes the need for action.

### **Legal Status and Rights**

Afghan refugees in Pakistan are facing a complex and multi-layered issue regarding their legal rights and status. Among them, some hold interim identification cards called Proof of Registration (PoR), but the vast majority remain unregistered or undocumented (Kaleem et al., 2023). This undocumented status only serves to further increase their vulnerability and expose them to a range of legal hurdles. Complicated by the lack of a tailored legal framework to address the unique status and rights of refugees, Pakistan's refugees exist at a precarious midpoint (Jami, 2022). Without legal recognition, they remain vulnerable to human rights violations, including deportation and exploitation (Jami, 2022). Consequently, there exists an urgent and compelling need for the development and implementation of a robust legislative framework that safeguards the rights and well-being of Afghan refugees in Pakistan, providing them with the legal protection and recognition they deserve.

### **Host Community Perspectives**

Amidst the considerable focus on Afghan refugees, it is also crucial to explore the perspectives and experiences of the host communities in Pakistan. The long-term and extensive presence of Afghan refugees has undoubtedly shaped the social, economic, and political facets of Pakistani society (Borthakur, 2017). Being one of the world's most generous refugee-hosting countries, Pakistan's experiences, perceptions, and responses to this refugee crisis are crucial

to understanding the wider context. The host community's perspective significantly shapes the lives of Afghan refugees in Pakistan (Borthakur, 2017). This reinforces the need for policies and programs that are mindful of the interests of host communities, ensuring their buy-in, and fostering harmonious coexistence between refugees and their hosts.

That is why the Afghan refugee crisis is not a simple problem it needs a complete solution that should know both sides of the story. Indeed, as home to perhaps the largest number of refugees in the world, Pakistan has played an essential part here. To develop successful strategies and humane approaches to help displaced Afghans living in Pakistan, it is paramount to understand their history, demography, socio-economic, and legal backgrounds. These refugees need a safe, decent, and sustainable future in the face of changing geopolitics.

### **Future Prospects And Policy Recommendations For Afghan Refugees In Pakistan After 2021**

The situation of Afghan refugees in Pakistan post-2021 presents a complex and challenging landscape with multiple possible scenarios, each with its unique implications.

#### **Possible Scenarios for Afghan Refugees and Displaced Persons**

Uncertainty clouds the future for Afghan refugees in Pakistan after 2021, with potential scenarios hanging over the horizon bearing their particular meanings. The more immediate and tangible option on the table is extended displacement. The continuing political turbulence, lack of security, and human displacement in Afghanistan mean many Afghan refugees in Pakistan will not be able to go back for the time being (Borthakur, 2017). It highlights the urgent requirement of continued humanitarian aid, access to basic services delivery, and protection measures for refugees during their extended stay in Nairobi city (Kavian et al., 2020). In brighter news, however, there are options for voluntary repatriation in certain situations. If peace, security, and the rule of law can be restored in Afghanistan, voluntary return might once

again be a possibility for Afghani refugees. However, the redeployment of refugees would require major international support for their safety and security and dealing with the root causes of displacement in Afghanistan.

One option is the resettlement to third countries, particularly for Afghan refugees who need immediate protection or have vulnerabilities (Jamal & Maley, 2023). The outcome of the above-given scenario depends on the readiness of refugee-receiving countries to accept more refugees and the resettlement program's ability to accommodate the refugees. This is one possible approach and one that would involve coordination between countries and international institutions to aid in the process of settling refugees (Jamal & Maley, 2023). In the longer term, lasting solutions could include local integration of those who cannot return or settle in a third country. Under this situation, the state has to build all-encompassing legislation that will cater to aspects such as citizenship rules, entry to literacy programs, job prospects, community outreach, etc. Integration at the local level would be possible through determined measures for providing decent living conditions to the Afghans who have taken refuge in Pakistan and to enable them to contribute positively to the host communities.

### **Short-Term And Long-Term Policy Recommendations**

For now, immediate relief services should be provided to Afghan refugees in Pakistan. The topmost need is humanitarian aid as the refugees require shelters, food, clean water supplies, medical care services, and schools (Kavian et al., 2020). It includes the necessities needed for survival and to maintain their well-being. At the same time, clear safeguarding measures need to be implemented to ensure security for Afghans being resettled — focusing especially on at-risk populations like women, children, and disabled people, among others. To reduce those risks, they need to be protected. Secondly, granting legal status to Afghan refugees in Pakistan through regularization is an immediate need. By giving refugees legally recognized documents and allowing them the right to register for work and education, they could secure

better jobs; their chances of being dependent would decrease, and their opportunities for self-reliant development would increase.

Long-term, this is a complex issue that demands a comprehensive strategy when dealing with Afghan refugees in Pakistan. Long-term policies should prioritize durable solutions and the varying degrees of refugee situations. They involve supporting voluntary repatriation to Afghanistan when circumstances allow, resettlement to third countries for the vulnerable, and integration within the region for those choosing to stay in Pakistan. The ability to adjust policy decisions in response to shifting circumstances is key. Another promising strategy for the long term is to invest in education and skills training programs for Afghan refugees (Borthakur, 2017). Such programs could enable refugees to access the required skills, resources, and information to become self-reliant as well as more involved in their new home societies. To make sure that refugee children are not left behind, education — particularly formal and non-formal education systems — is vital for giving them access to high-quality learning opportunities, which could alter the course of their lives forever (Jami, 2022). Self-reliance and social cohesion should be supported through livelihoods becoming long-term policy priorities. Supporting small businesses, job creation, or vocational training, can be beneficial to both Afghan refugees as well as the host communities. They generate income for the local refugees, and in turn, foster their regional economic development as well.

Finally, promoting the social integration of Afghan refugees with their respective societies will be key to any sustainable solutions (Jami, 2022). For example, efforts like public education campaigns, intercultural exchanges, or even intra-community dialogue can be essential for creating trust and fostering an understanding among all the communities involved. These programs break down social divides and work towards an integrated society, one that is accessible and inclusive. Consequently, short and long-term policy prescriptions are of utmost importance to address the multidimensional issues of Afghan refugees in Pakistan after 2021.

Quick provision of both humanitarian assistance as well as of protection measures is crucial to respond to their most urgent needs and secure their safety.

### **Implications for host countries and the international community**

The impacts of facilitating Afghan refugee settlement in Pakistan would not be limited to its own country but also hold substantial significance for the international community. On one important dimension, this means burden-sharing, for which host countries such as Pakistan bear a tremendous responsibility (Kaleem et al., 2023). The host nations should also provide financial and logistical aid to ensure the safety and self-respect of Afghan Refugees. Funding, relocation schemes, and emergency aid are vital for their survival and access to necessities. For both moral and practical reasons, we need to ensure we share the responsibility of these refugees via international cooperation so as not to place an added strain on the countries they flee to (Kaleem et al., 2023). In addition to this, global diplomatic maneuvers should be stepped up to bring about peace and stability in Afghanistan. An Afghanistan at peace also provides the conditions for Afghan refugees who wish to return home voluntarily and lessen the pressure on host nations. Mediation, negotiations, and supporting peaceful solutions to the conflict will be key to building an environment conducive to the refugees going back to their country safely and with dignity (Kaleem et al., 2023). Advocating for human rights is another significant element in response, and while human rights organizations are certainly on high alert to ensure the well-being of Afghans within Pakistan and other host nations, there is much that can still be done (Kaleem et al., 2023). Demand that they are protected as individuals, as people with inherent dignity and worth. International monitoring makes the state more responsible toward refugees and ensures the legalization of issues such as legal status, discrimination, and exploitation (Kaleem et al., 2023). In addition, interregional collaboration between the countries that host Afghan refugees is critical. They have faced similar challenges as well as



shared experiences from managing the refugee crisis. By working together, you share the load with countries of origin and the host country, improving the response.

### **Conclusion**

After in-depth research and analysis, the crisis of Afghan refugees and post fall of the Afghan Republic Government in 2021 Pakistan have been explored. The results from this research highlight a dynamic and shifting terrain with numerous hurdles, trends, and worrying issues. Secondly, this study reveals the prolonged displacement of those who were originally from Afghanistan as well as showing continued political instability, insecurity, and humanitarian challenges still present within Afghanistan. As a consequence, this led a large number of Afghan refugees to migrate to Pakistan destined to stay far away from their Motherland. The demographic shifts among the displaced population have been notable. Historically, young men have been the typical population among forced displacements but recently families with young kids and older people (women included) have started to arrive as well. This changing demographic requires a sophisticated grasp of the issue as well as specific support for vulnerable communities. Furthermore, due to increased cross-border movement as a result of political instability has led to an increase in irregular migration, making it difficult to follow, monitor, and assist such migrants. Finally, the chances of a voluntary and dignified return to Afghanistan remain slim due to increasing violence on home grounds and a worsening human rights environment, narrowing down the options for effective returns. The consequences of such results are huge for both Afghan Refugees and the Pakistani Government. Forced to flee their homeland, Afghan refugees experience poor social circumstances as they have limited opportunities for employment, gender-based wage inequality at workplaces, inadequate access to education, and poor health services. Furthermore, the influx of Afghan refugees has led to extensive pressure on Pakistan's resources and socio-political balances. This has engendered a policy shift urging deportation, adding new dimensions and raising global concerns over the



refugee crisis. An analysis of emerging trends highlights the changing demographics, routes, and implications of forced displacement. These transformations place further strain on existing humanitarian resources while simultaneously requiring multi-faceted adaptive responses.

This research paper presents policymakers with an important set of policy options and underscores the importance of further empirical work in the intricate terrain of Afghan refugees in Pakistan after 2021. Secondly, measures must be taken to regularize their legal statuses to minimize fragility and provide access to better education and job opportunities. They require long-term plans incorporating sustainable solutions, such as education and skills development, job creation, self-reliance initiatives, and community integration measures aimed at fostering social cohesion and coexistence in hosting societies. The changing dimensions of Afghan refugees in Pakistan must be studied further after 2021 to analyze the long-term influences of displacement on both refugee communities and their host societies. To make informed policy decisions and to implement effective long-term solutions it is essential to comprehend the complexities of the multifarious political, economic, and societal variables at play. Overall, this research stresses the urgency of developing holistic policies and regional cooperation initiatives to overcome the obstacles ahead by Afghan refugees in efforts to ameliorate conditions and enhance stability and cohesion within the region.

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